

# A Different Perspective

*by sylvanawood*

What goes on in the hearts and minds of Dumbledore and Snape? Conversations between those two key players shed a new light on the events in HBP.

## 1. Part I: In the Summer

*Chapter 1 of 2*

What goes on in the hearts and minds of Dumbledore and Snape? Conversations between those two key players shed a new light on the events in HBP.

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

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*Tuesday, July 2nd 1996*

The tall, thin man strode through the dark, deserted corridors of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, his black robes billowing and the heels of his boots clicking on the castle's stone floor with every hurried step. When he reached the statue of a gargoyle at the end of the corridor, the dim light of candles revealed a hooked nose and a sallow face, greasy black hair and piercing black eyes.

"Acid pops," the man murmured and jumped onto the moving and winding staircase that had been concealed by the gargoyle. When the rotating stairs came to a halt, he knocked on the door at the top of the stairs.

"Come in, Severus," a voice called from within. When he entered the room, the man called Severus Snape nodded curtly to the Headmaster of Hogwarts, Albus Dumbledore, who was standing at a large window and was looking out into the mist.

"What is it, Severus, what happened? You look like a ghost!" The old wizard rushed over to his visitor and ushered him down into an armchair by the fire.

"It's the boy. Draco. He was at the meeting tonight."

Dumbledore's eyes widened. "So soon? Has he been initiated?"

Snape rubbed his eyes and took a deep breath. "I don't know. The Dark Lord took him aside and talked to him. The boy seemed eager. He looked self-important. But there was no ceremony."

"Maybe it isn't too late then. Maybe we still can prevent this."

"How?" The younger wizard sounded weary. His hands gripped the rests of the armchair. His eyes were fixed on the fireplace. Dumbledore filled a glass with firewhisky and handed it to him. Snape downed the whisky in one long swallow.

The old wizard sat down at his desk and said, "We need to know what this is about. You have to find out what Voldemort wants from the boy..."

"Isn't it obvious?" Snape spat. "Lucius is in disgrace. He failed at the attack, the prophecy was destroyed and the Dark Lord wasn't pleased."

Dumbledore sighed. "Yes, it seems obvious that Draco is being called to redeem the family's worth in their master's eyes. But how?" His fingers drummed a restless beat on the polished wood. "Severus, I must ask you once again to be very careful, but we must find out what Voldemort wants with Draco."

Snape's head snapped up. "I need to look after the boy, Headmaster. You know this. Even with Lucius' views you know what they are. Lucius is my friend. I cannot totally betray him and his family."

"I know, Severus, but you must not compromise yourself. Voldemort must keep his trust in you. Even if..."

"Even at the cost of another Slytherin boy becoming a Death Eater. Yes, I know what you are implying, Headmaster." Snape jumped out of his chair and started to stride back and forth in the office.

"I will not pretend that I help the Malfoys out of altruistic motives alone, Severus." Dumbledore stared at Snape through his half-moon glasses. Snape stopped pacing and stared back, his arms folded and his lips curled in a sneer.

"How disillusioning, Headmaster. Sometimes it is easy to forget that not all your intentions stem from pure kindness. I should try harder to remember that it's usually Gryffindors who are the beneficiaries of your, ah, interpretation of impartiality. That would help keep my thoughts on the matter clear."

The Headmaster frowned. "I see that you have your humour back, Severus, but there is no need to get into that discussion yet again. I care for all the students, in all houses. You know that. And you also know that house rivalries and old grudges have no place in this fight, as justified and entertaining as they may have been in the past. Believe me or not, I am genuinely worried about Draco, and I care for the boy. Just as I cared for you at that age."

Snape snorted. "I failed to notice it at that time."

Dumbledore sighed. "I know I've wronged you, Severus. And I tried to explain... but nevertheless, we need to get back to the point. Draco is too young to fully understand what it is he makes a commitment to. And he is horribly spoiled, which is partly your fault. He is also ambitious, mean, cunning and clever. In a sense he reminds me of you. No, hear me out..." Dumbledore raised a hand to stop Snape's angry protest. "He is a bully, and he doesn't have your brilliance. Unlike you, he has led a sheltered and pampered life, but be that as it may, I will not repeat the mistakes with him that I have made with you, Severus. He needs to know that there is an alternative. It is our duty to give him that choice."

"So now you conveniently combine duty and benevolence with cunning, manipulation and scheming." Snape's eyes gleamed.

Dumbledore chuckled. "Of course. Only saints act out of pure unselfishness, and I haven't met a single one in my long life."

The expression on Snape's face had subtly changed from his familiar smirk to a more respectful half-smile. "I was of the opinion that I might have met someone who came close," he said softly.

The Headmaster smiled, eyes twinkling. "Thank you, Severus," he said gently. He took a sip of his firewhisky, and his expression became solemn again. "But back to the point. What is it that Voldemort wants from Draco?"

"I suspect he will have to go after Potter. Or after you." Snape resumed his pacing.

"So the Death Eaters are free to murder Harry now? Voldemort doesn't want to confront him himself any more?" asked Dumbledore.

"I am not certain," Snape replied thoughtfully. "He might, still. It seems to give him pleasure to deal with the worthier adversaries himself only, as you know, I did my best to make the boy appear mediocre in the Dark Lord's eyes."

"That could still be to our advantage, Severus. However, Harry must be protected at all costs. Let them come after me, but Harry must be spared for a while longer. We must find out what Voldemort is planning."

"I will confront Draco and interrogate him as soon as the occasion arises, Headmaster."

Dumbledore nodded his assent. "Please do that, Severus. And now, go and get some rest. Good night!"

"Headmaster." With a polite bow of his head, Severus Snape swept out of the room.

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*Friday, July 5th 1996*

"Sorry I'm late, I came here at once after I got your Patronus, Headmaster, why... Headmaster! What happened?" Severus Snape rushed to the old man who had collapsed on the floor of his private chambers.

"A curse... Severus..."

"Hold still!" Snape stared at the blackened hand and arm of Albus Dumbledore, which seeped blood and fluid from the burnt flesh and emitted wisps of smoke from some spots on the skin. "An Incendium Nervalis, I presume?"

"Not sure... not cast... object..." the Headmaster croaked, his face twisted in pain.

"Merlin help you, any lesser wizard would be dead," muttered Snape and started to move his wand over the injury while he spoke an incantation that sounded like a song.

Many long moments later, the blood had stopped flowing and the smoke had vanished. The pain seemed to have lessened as well, since Albus Dumbledore took a deep, shaky breath and smiled at the younger man, the familiar twinkle back in his eyes.

"I think that was a bit close, even for me, Severus. But thank you; I feel much better now!"

"You must get into bed. I will call Madam Pomfrey. You call Fawkes; his tears will help you, too. And I will give you a potion." Snape started to rise but Dumbledore put a hand on his sleeve to stop him.

"Poppy has already left for the summer, Severus. I don't really need her. You are still here; that is enough."

Snape shook his head. "You know that I will have to leave soon. Let me take you to your home and instruct the house-elves. You will need more rest and time for healing."

Dumbledore smiled. "I'm not going home this summer. There is too much at stake."

"Headmaster! You must rest!" Snape helped the old man up from the floor and led him to his bed where the old wizard sat down, clearly exhausted. After helping the Headmaster to lie down, Snape left the rooms. He returned a few minutes later with a vial in his hand. "Drink this!"

The Headmaster drank the potion and sank back on his pillow with a sigh. "I will be all right, Severus. You have healed me. I will recover in no time."

"I have done no such thing," Snape spat hoarsely. "If this was indeed the Incendium Nervalis, then there is no cure, as you well know. I can only slow down the degenerative process and ease the symptoms for a while."

The Headmaster looked grave. "I do know, and it is likely that it was the Incendium. But you bought me time, didn't you? At least a year? Maybe more?"

"Maybe five years; ten if you are lucky. It depends on the care you get and how well you look after yourself." Snape jumped up from the chair beside Dumbledore's bed and strode to one of the windows. "With phoenix tears helping you to heal, there may be more years still. In any case, you need as much strength back as possible. The stronger you are, the slower the progress. But any new major injury, and the degeneration will proceed rapidly again."

"And in the end I will lose my mind, won't I, Severus?" The Headmaster sounded worried.

Snape whirled around to face him. "Yes, I am afraid you will. And before that you will slowly lose the feeling in your extremities. What did you do, Headmaster?"

Dumbledore closed his eyes. "I am sorry, I cannot tell you. So, I will basically end up in a helpless, vegetative state?"

Snape moved back to the bed again. "Yes, Headmaster, I..."

"Don't, Severus," Dumbledore interrupted, "Don't say you're sorry. If you cannot heal me, no one can. I had a long and good life; I am not afraid. But there are still things I have to do." He grabbed Snape's arm once again. "Severus, I want you to promise me something."

"What is it?"

"Promise you will help me when the time comes."

Snape considered that for a moment and raised an eyebrow. "I am a bit surprised that one of the finest Potions brewers of our time should feel the need to ask that of me instead of making it himself. But then prerogative of the Headmaster, I suppose?" He frowned. "You know that there is a potion. I can make it for you. When you feel you must, you could take it."

Dumbledore grabbed Snape's sleeve with both hands now, sounding almost pleading. "But if, for some reason, I cannot help myself, and get to the stage where I am not myself any longer... You would know, you would see it in my mind. Would you help me die? Severus, please, you know I don't ask this lightly."

Snape stared down at the old man, a vein in his temples throbbing agitatedly. "How... How could I... no..." Snape's face was very pale. "Why me? Why not Madam Pomfrey? What else do I have to do before..." His voice trailed off.

"Why you? Because I trust you." The Headmaster looked into Snape's bottomless black eyes. "This has nothing to do with what you have to do or think you still have to do to redeem yourself. This is a personal favour I am asking of you."

Snape stared back at the Headmaster, long and hard. Then he took a deep breath, scowled and said through gritted teeth, "I gave you a promise many years ago. I gave you my word to obey you, whatever it is you ask of me. I gave you that promise because I knew that you never ask more of people than what you would be willing to do yourself and now you ask me this?"

"Because I know that you can do it, Severus. You are one of the few who understand that an expression of compassion sometimes looks exactly like the opposite."

Snape scowled. "Maybe you take too much for granted, Headmaster. Why not ask your brother or someone like Lupin. He shares your sentimental outlook on life."

"Aberforth couldn't do it, you know that, and Remus would break if I asked this of him. So would many others. You won't. Please, Severus."

"I still stand by my promise, but how can you be so certain that I won't break?"

"You know about the power, Severus. Even if you don't want to admit it. Don't deny it, not tonight. It is the same power that made you come to your senses. The same power that brought you to my door 16 years ago. The same power that helped you stay alive." Dumbledore chuckled softly. "The power that kept you from strangling Harry and his friends in all these years."

Snape rolled his eyes. "That is because I heeded your wishes, Headmaster, not because of the power," he said. "But I won't deny its strength, even if I fail to fully grasp its significance."

"You have shown on more than one occasion that you understand it more deeply than many, even if that may be on an unconscious level." Dumbledore's eyes twinkled. "But we can discuss this some other time, I am very tired. I think I will sleep now."

"Good night, Headmaster."

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*Monday, July 8th 1996*

"Headmaster, have you heard?" Severus Snape stepped out of the fireplace in the Headmaster's office, not caring about the soot on his robes. Albus Dumbledore looked up in alarm.

"What is it, Severus?"

"The Brockdale Bridge in London. He destroyed it! Muggles were killed. There was nothing I could do." Once again Snape started to pace in the office up and down.

"Merlin, he moves fast. You said he wants to take over the Ministry now?" Dumbledore had risen from his chair at the desk and joined Snape in his pacing.

"It appears so. I knew that he was blackmailing Fudge, but he did not reveal to me how soon he was planning to act. So much for his trust in me." Snape took the armchair by the fire and sank down into it, his face buried in his hands.

"Don't blame yourself, Severus. We cannot prevent every atrocity he commits, try as we might." Dumbledore stopped by the chair and laid a hand on Snape's shoulders. "But we must act now. We cannot let ourselves be driven into a defensive position again..."

Snape looked up. "What do you suggest?"

"We need you to get closer to him still. We need you to be even more trusted, to know more about his plans, to manipulate..." Dumbledore resumed his pacing. "How about you suggest another raid something spectacular, somewhere away from London? We will have more control that way. You could suggest it, and we can make sure that the Muggles in the area are taken care of. A successful raid should increase your status greatly."

Snape considered that for a moment. Then he nodded slowly. "Yes, I think I can do that. Will we proceed as usual when we protect the Muggles?"

"Naturally. But let me think..." Dumbledore stopped at Fawkes' perch, and softly stroked the wings of his phoenix.

Snape raised an eyebrow inquiringly. "You think there is something else I can do?"

"Yes, I believe there is, Severus." Dumbledore turned around to face the Potions master. "How would you feel about finally being given the Defence Against the Dark Arts position?"

Snape stared at him in bewilderment. "You think things will come to a conclusion this year, then? But Potter isn't ready yet..."

"No, it may take longer. But it will prove how weak I have become and how much I trust you. Voldemort will be pleased about this, I'm certain. He will have first-hand knowledge of the students' of Harry's abilities in that area." The Headmaster continued to stroke Fawkes' feathers.

"And the jinx?"

Dumbledore turned to face him again. "Maybe he will finally take the jinx off the position. And if we are mistaken, and things don't proceed as fast as we think, you can always go back to teaching Potions. However, if it should be necessary to leave, why not end your employment here with something that shows how loyal you are to him? Something that shows how successfully you've made me overcome my distrust of your abilities and weaknesses." The Headmaster walked to his desk and sat down. "You will have to end the double spy game soon, Severus. We need you firmly established at Voldemort's side when the time comes, and Harry has to face him."

Snape's eyes were cold when he looked at the Headmaster. "I see. I will be prepared to leave. But what about my Slytherins?"

"They will be looked after. I have thought about that for some time. I will ask Slughorn. I would like to have him safe at Hogwarts for several reasons. If Horace agrees to come back and teach Potions, then he can look after your Slytherins if the need arises. Is that agreeable with you?"

"Yes. Yes, it is, Headmaster. I will do as you say then."

"Very good. Good night, Severus."

"Good night."

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*Tuesday, July 9th 1996*

"Severus! Amelia Bones!" The Headmaster rushed into Snape's office, his midnight blue hat askew, his face slightly flushed.

"Yes, I just heard. I was organizing the raid in Somerset. He gave me no indication that he was going after Madam Bones." The former Potions master was putting a hooded cloak and a mask into a cabinet behind his desk.

Dumbledore sank down on the stiff-backed chair opposite Snape's desk and breathed deeply to regain his calm. "He killed her himself. What a loss, what a loss; if only we had known... We cannot afford to lose so many good people again..." He took off his half-moon glasses and covered his eyes with his left hand.

Snape moved to a side table, filled two goblets with mead and handed one to Dumbledore. "He wants to scare the Muggles and mock the Ministry. I don't think he really is after the Ministry position..."

"Neither do I. Confusing. Killing. Terrorizing. That is his plan. When anarchy ensues, then he will be ready to take over." The Headmaster considered Snape over the rim of his goblet for a moment before he emptied it, rose from his chair and moved to the door. "We will have to move faster, Severus!"

"Did you talk to Madam Vance yet?"

"Yes I did, and she is agreeable. You can proceed as planned."

"Very well."

"Good night, Severus."

"Good night, Headmaster."

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*Thursday, July 11th 1996*

Albus Dumbledore stood at the edge of the grounds of Hogwarts and stared into the Dark Forest. When he heard a slight crack, he moved to meet Severus Snape, who had just Apparated. "Are you all right, Severus?"

"Yes, I'm fine. But they are getting jealous now, Headmaster. They always were distrustful, but now they are clearly jealous. He has graced me with a few private meetings as of late." Both men started to walk past Hagrid's hut, back to the castle.

"You keep telling them all how weak and old I am?" the Headmaster asked.

"Yes."

"Very good. How is Emmeline?"

"She is well; everything went according to plan. She is making herself useful. The place is getting really comfortable now. She is very good at Potions and medical magic, too." Snape followed the Headmaster up the steep steps to the castle's front doors.

Dumbledore opened the doors with a flick of his wand. "Good! We will need the Underground group, if we want to succeed. And even more so if we don't succeed."

"It would seem so, Professor." Snape followed the Headmaster into the castle. "I hear Fudge has resigned at last, to give way to Scrimgeour?"

Dumbledore smiled grimly. "Yes, he has. And Rufus hasn't wasted any time in contacting me and demanding Harry's collaboration. We had quite the fight. You will find it in the Prophet tomorrow."

Snape sneered. "I should think a close collaboration with the Ministry would just be the right thing for Potter's big head."

"Severus, when will you finally learn to see the boy for what he really is?" Dumbledore pursed his lips. "He is not conceited, and he has no more wish to provide the Ministry with positive publicity than I have. Did you forget what he was put through by the Ministry last year? Did you forget Umbridge?"

Snape shrugged. "How could I? But Scrimgeour is different. His tough 'get to work and no-nonsense' approach would appeal to the boy, surely?"

"Perhaps. But Harry isn't that easily fooled, and the events that led to Sirius' death will have given him even more cause to be cautious."

They had arrived at the staircase that led down to the dungeons, and stopped. Snape glanced at the Headmaster sceptically. "If you say so, Headmaster. Either way, I

suspect Emmeline Vance's, ah, murder right under the nose of the Muggle Prime Minister will have shocked the Ministry more than anything. They need results now. I understand the Prime Minister has been put under special protection?"

Dumbledore nodded. "Yes, Kingsley Shacklebolt is a capable man, as you know. And there is more, which I cannot disclose to you now, as I am certain you will understand."

"Yes, yes. I cannot reveal under torture what I don't know. And this is something I don't need to know." Snape looked irritated. "However, it is a relief to see that some of our actions finally did yield results, if only to force the Ministry into action." He turned towards the stairs.

"Absolutely, Severus. Our strategy requires a lot of patience. But we will succeed, you will see." The Headmaster's smile was bright and reassuring.

"I am certain that you are right, Headmaster. Good night."

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*Saturday, July 13th 1996*

"I need to talk to you, Professor. It is rather urgent." Severus Snape's head had appeared in the fire of Albus Dumbledore's office in the early hours of Saturday morning.

"Do come over, Severus. What happened?"

Snape stepped out of the fireplace, looking tired and worn. "I had visitors last night. Narcissa Malfoy and Bellatrix Lestrange."

The Headmaster raised an eyebrow and looked inquiringly at Snape. "What did they want?"

"In a few words? I made an Unbreakable Vow to Narcissa Malfoy where I essentially promised to kill you." Snape sank down onto the comfortable chair by the fireplace.

"How remarkable! Do you care to enlighten me about the details?" Dumbledore asked quietly.

"Certainly. Narcissa came to ask me for help. She was desperate, that much was plain to see. I had an idea that this had to be about Draco and it turned out I was right. She was forbidden to tell anyone, and Bellatrix was quite upset that she trusted me with the information. It was rather amusing."

Dumbledore conjured a pot of tea and two cups out of thin air, and offered one of the cups to Snape. "I know that you were enjoying this, Severus, but in any case, could you get to the point, please?"

Snape sipped at his tea. "Well, after Bellatrix had confronted me with the usual issues for why my dear Death Eater peers distrust me, I gave her the usual answers. Bellatrix had followed Narcissa. She wanted to prevent Narcissa from telling me what the Dark Lord wants from Draco. Naturally, Narcissa wasn't allowed to reveal this to anyone, but, much to Bellatrix's outrage, I managed to make her believe that I was in on the secret. As you know, that isn't entirely untrue." Snape looked up at the Headmaster, an ironic smile curling his thin lips.

"Yes, you told me that he hinted at a plan, and we have been aware of Draco's predicament for some time now. Continue, please." The Headmaster patiently examined his blackened hand.

"Well, in short, Narcissa is convinced that the Dark Lord wants revenge for Lucius' failure at the Ministry and therefore gave Draco a suicide mission. I am not one hundred percent certain, but from what I saw in Narcissa's mind when she cried all over me they are after you, and not Potter."

Dumbledore looked up, eyes beaming. "Oh, very good. Go on."

"Bellatrix, on the other hand, continued to taunt me. She tried to convince her sister that I was not to be trusted and always stayed out of dangerous assignments. So I promised Narcissa that I would try to help and protect Draco. That was when she asked me for the Vow. You should have seen Bellatrix's face when I accepted it. Nevertheless, Narcissa tricked me."

"How so?"

Snape's smirk had vanished, his expression turning serious. "She let me swear to help Draco fulfil the Dark Lord's wishes and, to the best of my ability, protect him from harm. I swore that willingly, of course. But her third condition was to carry out the deed if it seemed that Draco would fail. I had no choice but to concede. A denial of the third condition would have been a disaster at that point. So I completed the Vow."

"I see. Yes, I see how you had no other choice at that point. There was some quick thinking involved there, Severus. I'm impressed." The Headmaster gingerly rubbed at a sore spot on his withered, blackened hand.

"Thank you, Headmaster, but..."

Dumbledore raised his hand. "Wait please let me think this through."

Snape rose from his chair and strode towards the window. "I will not fulfil the third condition, Headmaster. I never intended to," he whispered.

"I will not let you sacrifice yourself for me, Severus. You are needed; we cannot do without you. We both know that my life will end soon anyway. But we need to find out when that deed can be done to our fullest advantage." Dumbledore had risen as well and joined the younger wizard at the window.

"I was thinking that the wording of the third condition could give us some leeway, Headmaster. Narcissa said 'if it seems that Draco will fail' I was hoping that this could gain us some time. We simply cannot allow Draco to 'seem to fail'. If we could stage a spectacular duel, where I 'kill' you before Draco gets the chance to prove himself, then he will not have failed or seemed to have failed. The Death Eaters will despise me more than ever for wanting the glory all for myself, but the Dark Lord will be pleased. And you can head the Underground while I go into hiding," Snape murmured in a low voice. "I will be hunted by the Aurors and the Order after that." He turned to look at the Headmaster, who stared into the mist. A pink hue in the east announced the approaching sunrise.

Dumbledore leaned his head against the window pane, his eyes closed, and his brows creased in deep concentration. "This is still very risky, Severus, but it is as good a plan as any other, under the circumstances. I can see no other way to get you out of this and stay alive myself."

Snape nodded. "The Vow doesn't have a time limit on it, so I can still protect Draco to the best of my ability and fulfil part of the Vow. If he doesn't know that you still live, he cannot fail. And because I promised to help you when your time comes, I even have the genuine intent to kill you eventually. I am certain that this will suffice to prevent the Vow from killing me, for the time being."

Dumbledore shook his head slightly and sighed. "I wish I could be as certain as you, but let's hope for the best."

Snape shrugged. "If we weren't willing to take risks, both of us, then we wouldn't have this conversation. We'd both be dead by now, more likely."

"Very true. Well then, let us abide by your plan for now. To be honest, I am quite looking forward to joining the Underground. I will start teaching again. Dead people need an education, too." Dumbledore's eyes twinkled.

"This is not funny, Headmaster!"

"Come now, Severus. You enjoyed mocking Bellatrix, I know you did. Let me have a chuckle about my own demise. Now let's hope that Draco will take a long time to come up with a plan. There are some things I must finish while I am still 'alive'. You will have to find out what his plan is, Severus."

Snape rubbed his temples. "That will be my first priority. However, Professor, we don't only have to prevent him from failing, we must prevent him from succeeding. We both agreed that we don't want to see him become a Death Eater. And you would be too sorely missed if he did succeed. You are needed - as a commander and as a friend."

Dumbledore smiled gently. "This is a part of the problem, Severus. I tried to convince you of that in the past. I am needed far too much; capable people rely too much on me. The Order has to learn to function without me. Harry has to complete his task no, don't ask he has to do what he must without me. However, he needs me for a while yet. But don't worry; Draco won't succeed."

Snape slowly shook his head. "I wouldn't be so certain. Draco is quite resourceful and not stupid. And fairly soon he will understand that his family is in real danger and that this whole affair isn't some grand adventure to set him above his peers."

Dumbledore turned away from the window and faced Snape. "True enough. But what can he do, really? We will have everything checked and searched that comes into the castle. All the students, all their belongings, all visitors and all the goods that are delivered will be screened with Secrecy Sensors. Moreover, Draco will have to work alone. There is no danger of a Death Eater attack in Hogwarts."

"Hopefully not, Headmaster. I am merely warning you not to underestimate Draco."

"I won't underestimate him. We will be prepared. However, you will forgive me for not losing any sleep over Draco's plan. This is a concern that I will gladly leave in your hands." Dumbledore sat down behind his desk again and gave Snape another thoughtful stare. "Basically, this isn't all bad news, Severus. We now know what Voldemort wants from Draco, and you may have eased some of Bellatrix's suspicions."

"I doubt it. She is jealous of me. She guards her position as the Dark Lord's most trusted minion. She will do everything she can to present me in a bad light."

The Headmaster nodded thoughtful. "Hmm, yes it was to be expected that envy and shifting loyalties would undermine Voldemort's force, but I didn't expect it so soon..."

"Don't get your hopes up too high, Headmaster," Snape snapped. "The Dark Lord knows how to deal with that. He is a master of manipulation. Threats and promises. Punishment and rewards that's how he keeps them in line. And then there are those who are like Bellatrix, those who drink his words as if they were nectar, who willingly kiss his feet, who would clean his arse with..."

"Severus!"

Snape's face had twisted into a mask of disgust. "Isn't it true? They are few, but they are the ones to be most feared. You cannot argue with the likes of them, or predict their actions. They haven't a rational thought left."

"I know. And it is good to know that the Malfoys aren't among them. I have suspected for some time that Lucius Malfoy is more of an opportunist than a devoted follower. To have him and his family indebted to our cause might turn out to be an advantage. We have to think beyond Voldemort..."

"Don't expect them to have any love for you or the Order, though. Narcissa would rejoice in your death if it weren't for the danger Draco is in. If we succeed in saving Draco, we will have to hide him and his mother, which will not be an easy task for the Underground. Lucius should be safe for now," Snape said quietly.

"Yes. But first we must find out what Draco plans. As I said, I will leave that to you, Severus. I have other things on my mind now, things that cannot wait, especially in the light of the new developments."

"What kind of things?" Snape inquired. "More important things than your own premeditated murder?"

"Much more important, but I cannot tell you the details," the Headmaster said calmly. "However, what I can tell you is that I was able to ensure that Horace Slughorn will take up the Potions position this year."

"Very good."

"Indeed. But you look tired, Severus. Try to catch some sleep now."

"You don't really think I could sleep now, do you?"

"No. Probably not. And maybe neither of us should be alone right now. Perhaps I can persuade you to a large and early breakfast, Severus?"

"Hm. Yes, that sounds tempting."

"Very good. Let's go to the kitchens then."

\* \* \*

*Friday, August 2nd 1996*

"Professor Dumbledore, I did not expect to see you here!" Severus Snape closed the door to the Potions classroom behind him and turned to face the Headmaster, who had been moving books and cauldrons from Snape's private stores to the classroom.

"I was starting to look through a few things, in preparation for Horace's arrival."

Snape looked annoyed. "You most definitely do not need to clean up here, Headmaster. I came back to do just that and to look through the store cupboard. I wanted to make sure that it is well stocked with the necessary ingredients." He raised his wand and cast the 'Muffliato' spell on the door and the portraits in the room.

"I didn't have any doubts about that, Severus, but still with Peter living at your house I didn't think that you could get away easily without raising suspicions. You reminded me yourself the other day that I do know my way around here." Dumbledore chuckled.

"You certainly do." Snape snorted. "You know, Wormtail may be a bit daft, but even he understands that I do have to make some preparations for my successor."

"All the better, then," Dumbledore said. "There are some things we need to discuss."

"There are indeed. I have news, but it isn't good." Snape had started to look through the Potions ingredients and make a list for those that were running low.

"Are you referring to Karkaroff's death? I knew that already," Dumbledore said while checking cauldrons and vials.

"No, it's not that." Snape looked at Dumbledore with a blank expression. "It's Draco, again. He was initiated last week. He was part of the Death Eater group that raided Diagon Alley, celebrating."

"I see," said Dumbledore sadly. "Too bad that you couldn't prevent it."

"I never had a chance to talk to the boy; he has been avoiding me since the end of classes. With Lucius gone, I have less reason to visit the Malfoy residence. I did go

several times to offer Narcissa my support, but each time I was there, Bellatrix was there too. She was hovering over the boy like an anxious mother hen."

"Well, we cannot change this now; let's hope that Draco will come to his senses soon. You will have more control over him when school starts again."

"I hope so, but he isn't a little boy any longer. He has grown up considerably, and he is getting rebellious. However, I know what I have to do." Snape looked up from his supply list. "But not all the news is bad news. Florean Fortescue and Mr. Ollivander were both safely rescued before the raid started. We even managed to get the raw materials and some of the wands out of the store. Most wands were taken by the Death Eaters though. The Dark Lord wasn't too pleased that Mr. Ollivander didn't 'survive' his kidnapping, but he was somewhat placated by having so many new wands at his disposal."

"This really is good news!" Dumbledore beamed. "Our 'dead people' will be supplied with new Ollivander wands, and they will be unregistered, too. Not to forget Florean's delicious ice cream. Oh, Severus, I don't know what we would do without you!" he exclaimed.

"Someone else should learn how to control the transfigured Inferi; then you would know what to do without me." Snape smirked. "However, you'd need another Dark Wizard you could trust, as this is rather advanced Dark Magic. None of the more experienced wizards would want to risk learning it for fear of being corrupted and seduced by the big Evil."

Dumbledore looked at him earnestly. "It is not likely that we can recruit another wizard who is experienced with the Dark Arts, Severus. We are extremely lucky to have you, for more than one reason. You are needed for more than controlling Inferi, you are needed as a friend, too." The Headmaster smiled when Snape grimaced. "However, if something should happen to you heaven forbid we would have to work without the Inferi. And don't laugh about 'the big Evil'. You of all people do know about the seductive draw of Dark Magic. Please, don't call yourself a Dark Wizard."

"I am what I am and I cannot change that now. I would have preferred to know more about the lure of the Dark before I got drawn into it, but we don't need to get into this discussion again, Headmaster." Snape had finished his list and started to clean up.

"Is there anyone who can help you with your modified Polyjuice Potion?" Dumbledore asked while moving stacks of cauldrons back to Snape's private store with a skilled 'Locomotor cauldrons'.

"Emmeline Vance has been brewing it successfully; she is reliable with the basic formula. I am still experimenting with it from time to time. If I can find a way to make it applicable to a body's surface instead of having to be ingested, it could be used without anyone having to control the body. Together with your permanent Transfiguration Spell, it would still be possible to switch the dead people with the ones you want to rescue."

"Very good. Severus, this is going better than I thought."

"Indeed, the Underground group is doing well. We will need more room soon, if this goes on," Snape said.

"Room should not be too much of a problem. But now you should get back to Spinner's End, Severus. I will see you in September."

"Very well; until September then. Good bye, Headmaster."

## Part II: The Schoolyear

### Chapter 2 of 2

What goes on in the hearts and minds of Dumbledore and Snape? Conversations between those two key players shed a new light on the events in HBP.

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

A heartfelt Thank You goes out to my wonderful beta, Mouse, who isn't only thorough, critical and constructive but also incredibly encouraging and supportive.

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### A Different Perspective

#### Part II: The Schoolyear

September 1st, 1996

"Severus, do you have a moment?" Albus Dumbledore stood at the open door of Snape's office.

"Do come in, Headmaster, I have been expecting you. I suppose you want to know about Potter?" Severus Snape looked up from his desk, which was covered with lesson plans.

"Yes. What happened? Why didn't he arrive with the other students?"

"He must have been in a fight. There was blood on his face when I picked him up from the gates."

"Couldn't you find out any details?" the Headmaster inquired.

"No," replied Snape. "He wouldn't have told me the truth had I asked him. And surprisingly enough, he didn't rise to my taunts. I expected him to yell the whole story at me, but he didn't." He smirked. "I couldn't read it in his mind either, because he was so full of hatred and anger. You know how that clouds everything else. I didn't encounter any resistance, mind you; it's not as if last year's Occlumency lessons taught him anything."

Dumbledore sighed. "And yet, you use the anger yourself, Severus, to help with your own Occlumency."

"Certainly," sneered Snape, "but unlike Potter I know what I'm doing, and use the emotions when they suit me. Potter in his arrogance oozes his emotions like a leaky cauldron seeps its contents. His hatred of me is so blatant the boy simply has no subtlety."

"I wish you didn't hate him so," Dumbledore said sadly. "He has a pure heart and a good head on his shoulders."

"If you say so," Snape spat. "I certainly don't hate him more than he hates me. He just is too much like Black or like his father to make anything else possible."

"Rubbish," Dumbledore thundered, a furious gleam in his eyes. "You let yourself be blinded by old grudges and prejudice again, Severus. That's a dangerous habit. You certainly didn't make an effort to be on better terms with the boy."

"His head was big enough already when he came here; he didn't need me to make it bigger."

"That's not true, Severus, and you know it." Dumbledore gave his Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher an annoyed look. "You have settled down comfortably with your hatred for James and now for his son as if that were an invariable constant in your life. What a disservice you are doing to yourself and to the boy. Harry doesn't deserve this. Remember, he isn't only his father's son."

Snape looked down on his hands. "As if I could forget it," he said quietly, "each time I look into those eyes..." His voice trailed off.

"Yes," said Dumbledore gently. "And he has more than the eyes from her. I am often reminded of her warm heart and of her cheek when I'm talking to him." The Headmaster smiled.

"Well, I'm not," Snape snarled. "I only see the same arrogance, carelessness and disregard for rules his father had. And he is proud of this. He wants to be like his father, and he is like his father."

"Yes," Dumbledore admitted, "he is a lot like James, too. None of us can deny where we came from; like it or not, we always find more of our parents in ourselves than we would like. Even you, Severus."

Snape scowled. "I'm nothing like my father."

"Severus, when I look at you, I see a man who did everything he could to not be like his father. And then you fall into a fit of hot and violent anger, just like him. But unlike your father, you have learned how to manage this anger. You tamed it. You use it; it's not using you. You have learned to control yourself." Dumbledore looked affectionately at Snape.

"This brings us full circle," Snape murmured. "Potter needs to learn to control his emotions. He almost broadcasts them just like you do, incidentally, but you only do that when you want to. However, with someone like Nymphadora Tonks around, he doesn't have the best of role models where control of emotions is concerned. Merlin, what a pathetic appearance she gave today."

"You are being too hard, Severus. She is in great emotional distress. She needs a bit of time to come to terms with that."

"Oh no," Snape spat. "Not when she is working as an Auror, when she is here to protect the students! Her magic is affected; haven't you seen her recently? She can't transform her appearance. And her Patronus changed. Pathetic!"

"I have full confidence in her, and she is up to her job. I cannot see any lack in her defensive abilities."

"I hope you are right, Headmaster," Snape whispered. "I hope you are right."

"Well, that was an interesting conversation, Severus; thank you for that." Dumbledore rose from his chair. "I shall leave you to your lesson plans now. Maybe you can think about some of the things we discussed tonight. Maybe you can bring yourself to continue watching over Harry without hating him so much."

"I promised you to watch over him, and I keep my promises. I don't see why I have to like him," Snape said.

"Because the two of you would have a lot to give to each other," Dumbledore said sadly. "But never mind. I had better go now. Good night, Severus."

"Good night, Headmaster."

\* \* \*

*October 19th, 1996*

"That was close, Headmaster!" Severus Snape breathed a sigh of relief as he watched Katie Bell being taken away to St. Mungo's through the Floo network.

"Indeed," Dumbledore said. "Thank you, Severus; that was hard work. You saved her life."

"She was very lucky," Snape replied. "If just a bit more of her skin had been exposed, I couldn't have saved her." He massaged his neck.

"We will have to find out who gave her that necklace, and why," Dumbledore said quietly.

"Headmaster," Snape frowned, "this was meant for you. I am certain that Draco was behind it."

"You are probably right, Severus, but Draco had detention with Minerva. He wasn't in Hogsmeade at all. We will have to interrogate Katie's friend. Maybe she knows who gave her that package."

"Yes, although I doubt that we will find out anything." Snape glared at Dumbledore. "Headmaster, this has gone too far. We need to stop this."

"We can't, Severus. Think of Draco; think of your Vow..."

"If this really was him, then he has already failed at his first attempt. Remember, we must not let him fail completely. Let me confront him, Headmaster. Let him be expelled."

"I doubt that we can prove anything, Severus. How can I expel him without proof? And how can you protect him when he's not here?"

"I don't like this at all," Snape scowled. "Draco doesn't seem to care about hurting other people. If this was his first attempt, it was very clumsy and careless. You have to stop this, Headmaster."

"I can't, Severus," Dumbledore repeated. "I will not risk your life by sending Draco away."

"So instead you risk your own and that of everyone else here?" Snape's eyes narrowed.

"We are always at risk, all of us. Katie's involvement was tragic; it teaches us to be even more careful in the future. She wouldn't have gotten past Filch anyway," Dumbledore said quietly.

"Maybe and then we would have had a dead caretaker on our hands..."

"I can't change this, Severus. We will have to live with that risk," Dumbledore said sternly. "Expelling Draco would reveal that I suspect him, and thus compromise you. Voldemort would know immediately why I suspect Draco. No, we will try to be more vigilant in the future."

Snape shook his head. "You are hopeless, Headmaster."



"No, I am hopeful." Dumbledore smiled. "Go and get some rest now, Severus, you did some strong magic tonight; you look exhausted."

"Very well. Good evening, Headmaster."

\* \* \*

*December 22nd, 1996*

"Severus, do you have a moment?"

"Certainly, Headmaster."

Albus Dumbledore directed the Defence Against the Dark Arts professor towards his office. They both sat down in the office, and the Headmaster offered his usual sweets.

"Is there a problem?" Snape asked while accepting some chocolate.

"Not really," Dumbledore replied, "but I wanted to know if you will stay at Hogwarts this Christmas, or if you need to go to Spinner's End."

"I will go for a few hours tomorrow, but I will be here over the holidays," Snape replied. "Since I have spent every Christmas here since I started teaching, there is no reason that I should change my behaviour now."

"Good," Dumbledore said. He frowned. "Is there any news about Draco and his plans, Severus?"

"Not as much as I would like," Snape said. "I met Draco at Slughorn's party yesterday. He was caught by Filch after curfew when he was wandering in one of the upstairs corridors, close to the Room of Requirement. Draco has been avoiding me; he didn't come to my office when told to, and next to giving him detention, I have no way of talking to him alone. And I didn't think it wise to give him detention. I never have in the past."

"Understandable," Dumbledore agreed. "So what did you find out?"

"Not much. The boy is using Occlumency. Bellatrix must have taught him. You know that I'm a strong Legilimens, but not powerful enough, as it seems. I couldn't get past his barriers." Snape scowled. "For the first time I wished that Draco were more like Potter."

"Interesting," Dumbledore said. "Please continue."

"Well, obviously Draco has been indoctrinated by his aunt not to trust me. I chided him for that clumsy attempt with the necklace. I offered him help. I reminded him of the Unbreakable Vow all to no avail. He is convinced that I will use his plan for my own benefit, for my own glory. The fool! He claims to have help, not to be alone in this, and that's about all I could find out. I am very sorry, Headmaster."

"This is more difficult than I thought." The Headmaster frowned. "Maybe you can find out who helps him and get some information from them?"

"The ones I know about are Crabbe and Goyle and they don't know much about Draco's plan. He seems to go to the Room of Requirement rather frequently. They are his lookouts, but they don't know what he is doing in there."

"That doesn't get us anywhere," Dumbledore said. "We must find out how this necklace got to Katie."

"Draco must have an accomplice in Hogsmeade," Snape pondered.

"Possibly," said Dumbledore, "but it is just as likely that he has more helpers among the Slytherins. You must make more inquiries in your House, Severus."

"I will do that," Snape agreed. "But remember that Slytherins can be very loyal when one of their own is under scrutiny."

"I do remember that," Dumbledore said with a smile. "Maybe it is time to remind them that their Head of House deserves some loyalty, too."

Snape raised an eyebrow. "Maybe you should put me on probation and conduct the investigation yourself. That way you could indeed elicit some loyalty towards me."

"I think we've had enough probations to last us for a few years," Dumbledore replied. "I think I will pass, and leave the investigation in your capable hands, Severus."

"Very well. Is there more you wanted to talk about?"

"No, that was all," Dumbledore said and Snape rose from his chair. "I shall see you at Christmas. Good night."

"Good night, Headmaster"

\* \* \*

*February 27th, 1997*

Albus Dumbledore stood at the gates to the Forbidden Forest and waited for the familiar popping sound of a wizard Apparating. When the sound came, the Headmaster hurried over to the black-clad and slightly slumped figure that had appeared just outside the borders of the Hogwarts grounds. "Severus, are you hurt?"

The Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher straightened and looked at the Headmaster. "No, I'm all right."

"So how did it go, did Voldemort tell you anything?"

"It wasn't a good idea. It was all in vain." Snape looked angry. "I asked, I wheedled and you know how I hate this. I was sly, tried subtlety and in the end asked openly for the plan he didn't tell me. He mocked me about my friendship with the Malfoys and told me to keep out of it for now." Snape sank down on a log, his head in his hands. "This is taking too long, Headmaster. This is getting too dangerous, we need to get on with our own plan."

"We can't, not yet," said Dumbledore quietly.

"Why not, what are you waiting for?" Snape said agitatedly.

Dumbledore's voice was calm. "I am waiting for some extremely important information. It is crucial that I get this information."

"Well, then hurry up and go and get it!" Snape snarled.

"Calm down, Severus." Dumbledore looked annoyed. "I will get this information. Harry will obtain it for me."

"Potter?" Snape lost all composure. "We have to wait to get you to safety because you wait for something from Potter?" he yelled. "You can wait forever, then! Potter is far too busy with important Potter affairs to bother with the tasks he is told to do!"

"Not this argument again, Severus." Dumbledore's voice got louder, too. "I trust the boy. He will get this information for me, and then I will have to go and find something. When that is achieved, we can carry out our plan, but not earlier."

Snape mutinously shook his head. "I don't like it a bit," he hissed. "The more we wait, the more likely it'll be that Draco succeeds with his plan."

"I don't think so," Dumbledore said in a placating tone. "Look, Draco hasn't really done anything since the necklace affair. That's been months. I know he is in distress, but I'm not certain at all that he told you the truth about having a plan and outside help. What can he do, really? Maybe he doesn't even have a plan."

Snape jumped up from the log. "Maybe?" he yelled. "Maybe you take too much for granted, Headmaster. Maybe I don't want to do it any more."

"Do what?" Dumbledore asked, annoyed again. "Go ahead with our own plan? Find out what Draco is up to? Work for the Order? What don't you want to do any more?"

Snape took a few deep breaths to calm himself. "Most of this. Tiptoeing around Draco, waiting for Potter, postponing our own plan endlessly; that's what I don't want to do any more," Snape whispered. "I want to have you safely in the Underground. I don't want to see Draco carry out his plan and succeed. And Merlin knows that I don't really want to kill you, pretended or otherwise."

Dumbledore stared through his half-moon glasses. "You agreed to do it, and that's all there is to it," he said in a firm voice. "And if you're so convinced that Draco has a plan, then make some more investigations in your own House."

Snape closed his eyes and sank back down onto the log again. He shook his head and muttered, "As if I hadn't done that already..."

"Compose yourself, Severus," Dumbledore chided. "Let's go to my office and you can continue your report there. I think I saw Hagrid come this way. We don't want to be overheard."

"I'm too featherlegged to think straight," Snape murmured, but rose from the log, and both men walked towards the castle in silence.

When they arrived in Dumbledore's study, the Headmaster conjured a big cup of hot chocolate and handed it to Snape. Snape accepted and drained half of it in one go.

"Shall I get you something to eat, or will the chocolate suffice?" Dumbledore asked.

"The hot chocolate will do," Snape said and emptied the cup. Dumbledore filled it again and sat down behind his desk.

"Headmaster, this charade has to end," Snape started again. "I really don't want to do this anymore." He stared at his hands.

"Want to do?" The Headmaster's eyes gleamed furiously. "Do you think I want to do what I have to do? Do you think I want to send Harry into a fight he is ill prepared for? Do you think I want to endanger his friends? Do you think I wanted to send Rubeus and Olympe on those dangerous missions? Do I want to send Remus to face Fenrir Greyback? And do you really think I want to send you to your almost certain death?"

Snape's head snapped up.

"Don't protest," Dumbledore said, calm again. "I am well aware that the mission I sent you on could also be called a suicide mission. If you had gone to Azkaban after you turned yourself in, you'd be free by now. Instead you agreed to spy for me and thus are in constant danger of being found out, tortured and murdered. And if that doesn't happen, you're likely to die when Harry faces Voldemort and you show your true colours. Do you really think I wanted to do all these things?" He took a deep breath. "I do these things because I have to do them. I send people to do what only they can achieve. I had to harden myself towards the fact that I send them into grave danger." The Headmaster's eyes glistened treacherously.

Snape's lips curled into a slight smile. "Nonsense, Professor," he said. "If you had turned me over to the Aurors after I came to you all those years ago, I'd be dead now. The Dark Lord would have known that I betrayed him and would have killed me by now. Look at what happened to Karkaroff. I was surprised that he lasted that long."

"Maybe and maybe not," Dumbledore sighed. "Your sentence would have been short and you would be free now."

"I'd never be free that way," Snape said quietly. "You did more than give me a second chance, Headmaster. You gave me a choice. You gave me my life back. My pride, my self-respect. And you gave me hope for a future free of remorse. All of that would have been missing had I been sentenced to Azkaban. Chances are that I wouldn't have survived the time there. I was in such a state of shock and guilt just the right combination to set the Dementors off." He smirked. "A suicide mission? Don't worry, I have no intentions of dying anytime soon. I may not be able to survive when Potter faces the Dark Lord, but we're in a war, Professor. We're in danger of being killed all the time. This is not suicide but the reality of battle."

Dumbledore looked at Snape gently and smiled. "I see that the old Severus is back; very good."

"Yes," Snape said softly. "Many say that I got off easy and without punishment when your testimony kept me out of Azkaban. Little do they know how severely I am being punished by the torture of your Dumbledorian benevolence."

"Well, my benevolence has been torturing you enough for today. Go and get some rest, Severus, and then continue your investigations in Slytherin House. Draco must have other helpers, apart from Crabbe and Goyle."

Snape rose from his chair. "I will continue with that, Headmaster, good night."

"Sleep well, Severus."

\* \* \*

*March 1st, 1997*

When Severus Snape entered the staff room, all members of staff were already assembled. He took a seat opposite the Headmaster and waited for the meeting to start. Professor McGonagall rose from her chair and greeted the staff. Then she went on to tell them about the poisoning of Ronald Weasley, and the timely action of Harry Potter. Horace Slughorn confirmed and enthusiastically commented on her statements, praising Harry and his talent at Potions. Snape looked questioningly at Professor Dumbledore.

The Headmaster looked at him in a way that suggested he wanted to tell Snape something important.

*"Legilimens!"*

*"Legilimens!"*

Without breaking eye contact, both wizards had cast the nonverbal version of the spell almost simultaneously. While aware of the Headmaster's gentle presence in his head, Snape carefully probed the outer layers of the Headmaster's complex mind.

*"Go ahead; say it, Severus."*

Snape smirked. *"You know I was right. Just yesterday I warned you, and now? That was meant for you; there is no doubt about that any longer."*

*"True." The Headmaster's friendly smile didn't waver. "But this wasn't a new attack, Severus. It must have been planned around the same time the necklace was given to Katie, or shortly thereafter. You heard Minerva, Horace wanted to give the mead to me as a Christmas present."*

"Yes, but he didn't. And Draco couldn't have foreseen this. This is puzzling. What makes me wonder even more is how Draco could know this. Much to his annoyance, his connections currently aren't good enough for Slughorn to make him a member of the club."

"You are right, Severus; this is indeed puzzling. The only thing I can come up with is the old idea that Draco has more help in your House than just Crabbe and Goyle."

"Crabbe and Goyle were in detention most weekends, including Hogsmeade weekends. I want them to get at least a few OWLs. I haven't much hope for their intellectual development, but if there is a life after the Dark Lord, they will need every qualification they can get."

Both men's thoughts were interrupted when Minerva McGonagall asked the Headmaster a question. After answering it politely and briefly showering the room with his twinkly-eyed benevolence, he returned his gaze to Snape.

"Legilimens!"

"Legilimens!"

"Where were we? Oh yes who helped Draco? No, not Crabbe and Goyle. It isn't very likely that Horace told them what he planned to give me for Christmas."

"That's right. But whom did he tell, Headmaster? Someone on the staff who passed it on unthinkingly perhaps? Some of the students? During one of his parties?"

"I think the latter is the most likely. Draco's helper must be a member of the Slug Club."

Snape's eyes widened and at the same time he saw realization dawn in the Headmaster's eyes.

"Blaise Zabini."

"Blaise Zabini."

"If there were something like a telepathic choir, the two of us should think a duet." The Headmaster's mental chuckles reverberated through Snape's head while the face of Professor Dumbledore still showed his quiet, friendly expression.

"That's not a laughing matter." Snape scowled but still held eye contact with the Headmaster while the other teachers' voices filled the background of his thoughts.

"Well, at least now you have a new clue where to proceed with your investigation. You should focus on Zabini. I doubt that he has learned Occlumency."

"Yes, that's what I will do."

Both men broke eye contact and focused on the discussion between the other teachers.

\* \* \*

May 22nd, 1997

"Headmaster, a word, if you please." Severus Snape and Albus Dumbledore left the staff room together after Snape had told the other teachers about Harry Potter's use of a Dark spell and the injury he inflicted on Draco Malfoy.

"Let's go to your office, Severus." Both men walked quietly towards the dungeons although Snape's face showed signs of barely restrained fury. His eyes were narrowed and a vein at his temple throbbed angrily. When they arrived, Snape offered a seat to the Headmaster and ordered tea from the kitchens. Then he sat down opposite Dumbledore.

"So," he hissed, "the boy with the pure heart is using Dark spells to defend himself. The boy with the pure heart is using MY Dark spells, to be precise." His eyes bored aggressively into the Headmaster's. "The boy with the pure heart was learning these spells from an old Potions book. My very own old Potions book." He paused for effect. "And now, Headmaster, I would very much like to know just how the boy with the pure heart got hold of MY old Potions book. I wonder if you can enlighten me?"

"Don't try to play your games with me, Severus." The Headmaster looked slightly annoyed. "You know very well that it was I who arranged for the book to get into Harry's hands. I wanted him to have it."

"I should have known that your visit to the Potions classroom last summer wasn't caused by the unselfish desire of wanting to help," Snape spat.

"Well, not solely," Dumbledore admitted calmly. "But apart from that sinister motive, yes, I did genuinely want to help you."

"But why did you want him to have that old book?" Snape looked bewildered. "I didn't even know you still had it."

"I wanted him to learn something about you. To develop some feelings towards you other than hatred. Even if he doesn't know at the moment that it was you who owned that book," the Headmaster said quietly.

"I don't understand," Snape frowned.

"I want this hatred to stop," Dumbledore said firmly. "Harry has learned all about the best friends of his father, but he never learned about the best friend of his mother. This book gives him an idea what you were like, back then."

"What would that matter?" Snape asked, even more bewildered. "His father and his friends hated me back then, and the boy hates me now. What difference should it make?"

"Harry and you do have many things in common. The fact that he held on to that old book instead of taking the new one shows you that. He must have been fascinated and delighted by your notes and spells. And although he resembles him, he is not James. Don't make the same mistake Sirius did."

Snape frowned. "He used the book to cheat in Potions. I never did that."

"Cheating isn't exactly what I would call it," Dumbledore replied. "A less, ah, biased teacher than Horace would have noticed that Harry isn't the Potions genius he appeared to be when he used your instructions to brew his own potions. However, you have to admit that he did that successfully, not in itself an easy feat with Advanced Potions."

"Agreed, he seems to have finally learned to follow instructions, after all these years," Snape sneered. "But I still fail to see what that has to do with me and my friendship with his mother."

"Everything, Severus," the Headmaster said softly. "Don't you think it's about time that the boy knew more about his past and that of his parents? You are the only one who can give him that. Hardly anyone knew about how close you two were, or understood that friendship. It could be a lesson, for both of you. If you could work with his mother, you should be able to work with her son."

"Lily was so different. She was smart, brilliant even. And so full of eagerness to learn, to explore. Half of the spells in that book are her ideas. Do you really think that your

pure-hearted Potter could ever come up with something like that?"

"Can't you let go of that 'pure heart' comment I made a while back? You know exactly what I meant with that. Well-meaning people make mistakes, too. And I believe that Harry's horror and sorrow are genuine. He was very foolish when he used a spell he didn't know, but he had no intent of hurting Draco so badly or of endangering his life."

"Oh I surmise you said 'well-meaning' people as opposed to, say, 'sly, cunning' people who are expected to make mistakes? People like me? Slytherins?" Snape's fury had returned. His face was very white, his voice cold. "Whether you're inadvertently killed by a well-meaning person or someone with an agenda it doesn't make much of a difference when you're dead, don't you think?" Snape hissed. "Maybe it's a consolation to be killed by someone with a pure heart, but I very much doubt it. It never was a consolation to me that the boy who tried to kill me at the age of sixteen was a pure-hearted Gryffindor. When will you stop seeing all those people with rose-colored glasses, Headmaster? Being Gryffindors doesn't automatically make them good. All this House nonsense is clouding people's judgement, including yours."

"Hardly, Severus, you are jumping to conclusions. I am well aware of the shortcomings of the sorting, and the typecasting. Peter Pettigrew was, after all, in Gryffindor House." Dumbledore smiled sadly. "And you are the best example that some Slytherins can be just as good, brave and heroic as some Gryffindors."

Snape snorted.

"And this is exactly the lesson I want to give Harry," Dumbledore continued. "Harry will need you when I'm 'dead'. The two of you should at least be relaxed enough with each other that he can and will ask you for help when he needs it."

"How likely is that?" Snape snarled. "When you're 'dead', I will have 'killed' you. Don't you think he will hate me more than ever, after that? And I will be on the run anyway; there won't be many occasions to help him."

"Harry can be trusted with a secret, Severus," Dumbledore said. "I will not tell him about our plan, but I will leave something for him to see after my 'death', something to make him trust you without revealing the truth to him. I cannot tell him about the Underground; this knowledge could be wrestled from his mind too easily."

"What will you show him?" Snape was curious despite his anger.

"I will leave him the memory of how you saved my life last summer." Dumbledore looked at Snape. "You couldn't see yourself then, but you were so dedicated, so determined to help me and you did. After seeing that, he cannot for a moment believe that you would kill me to gain glory and good standing with Voldemort. If you had wanted that, you could have let me die then and there."

"And you think that will make him trust me?"

"Maybe not trust entirely, but hopefully ease the hatred enough to be willing to listen to you, learn from you. Eventually I want you to tell him that the book was your book and about your past with Lily."

"He will have heard the twisted version from Black already. That man had no concept of love beyond the romantic aspect of it."

"I very much doubt it. I doubt that any one of the Marauders, even James, knew how close you and Lily were until..." The Headmaster stopped and looked at Snape.

"Until I threw my life away and joined the Dark Lord's ranks. Why don't you say it?" Snape whispered.

"Well, you paid for it. And you won your life back the day you rejoined our side. Lily would have been so proud, had she known."

"Yes, she would have been." Snape's eyes had lost some of their furious and icy glimmer. "She might even have forgiven me."

"Of course she would have. She was devastated when you went; you know that. She would have been the first to renew your friendship."

"Likely, because I wouldn't have dared to approach her. But Potter wouldn't have liked it, and it's all moot anyway because she's dead because of me and my idiocy, she's dead." Snape's face was stony, his black eyes bottomless.

The Headmaster leaned forward and put his hands on Snape's shoulders. "You didn't want her dead, you didn't know that it was Harry whom Voldemort wanted to kill. You did everything you could to save her. Remember, they went into hiding because of the timely information you gave us. They might still live if it hadn't been for Peter Pettigrew's betrayal. Never forget that, Severus. We all have to face the ghosts of our past, but blame has to be laid where it is due. Don't blame yourself for more than you've done."

"I know. But I can't..." Snape shook his head. "I will do what you say though. I will help Potter when he needs me. It won't be easy."

"I trust that you will manage somehow, Severus. And now, I had better go; it's late."

"Good night, Headmaster."

"Good night, Severus."

\* \* \*

*June 7th, 1997*

"Severus, do you have a moment?" Albus Dumbledore's head appeared in the fireplace of Severus Snape's office.

"What is it, Headmaster? Do you want me to come to your study?"

"That's not necessary, Severus. I don't have much time. I will be leaving in a few minutes and taking Harry with me."

Snape nodded. "Yes. I will wait for you here in my office."

"You can go to sleep, just, please, stay in your rooms. We may need you after we return. It is very important. Unless there is an emergency, don't go anywhere."

"Very well then," Snape said. "I will wait in my office. Be careful, Headmaster."

"Don't worry, Severus. I will see you later." With a smile the Headmaster's head disappeared from the flames.

\* \* \*

*Later that night*

Severus Snape opened the door to the ramparts on the Astronomy Tower and stood there, his wand clutched in his hand as his black eyes swept the scene, from Dumbledore slumped against the wall, to four Death Eaters, including an enraged Fenrir Greyback, and Malfoy.

"We've got a problem, Snape," said one of the Death Eaters, whose eyes and wand were fixed alike upon Dumbledore, "the boy doesn't seem able "

But somebody else had spoken Snape's name, quite softly. "Severus..."

"*Legilimens!*" Snape cast the nonverbal spell and probed the Headmaster's mind.

"*Severus Harry is here. You must save the boys! You must save yourself, save the Underground! Too late for me I drank a poison tonight, and I am weak. The old curse is active again; I can't feel my arms and legs. Help me, before I lose my mind!*"

Snape gazed at Dumbledore, and there was revulsion and hatred etched in the harsh lines of his face.

"*Severus, my friend, you must do it. Do it NOW. KILL ME!*"

"Severus, please..."

Snape raised his wand and pointed it directly at Dumbledore. "*Avada Kedavra.*"

The End

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A/N: Azazello wrote a very convincing essay in her LiveJournal about the location of Spinner's End. I adopted that notion. Thus, Snape in my Snapeyverse is a Yorkshireman. It is said that they know how to hold grudges. I have since been made aware of other good essays that point to other possible locations for Spinner's End. Still, for me, he's a Yorkshireman.

Trying to write Yorkshire dialect would be presumptuous, but I couldn't resist inserting one little gem I found on a dialect homepage. It's "featherlegged" which means tired.