

Dreamer

by Mengde

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A Long-Expected Meeting

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimers are such dreary things. With that out of the way, I'm Mengde, and it's good to be here.

As this is listed under the Potions Under Duress category, I daresay we're all here for SSHG and know what we want. Therefore, there's no need for me to issue a warning on the "esoteric" nature of the pairing because we're all fans already. Onward!

Some notes. I'm rating this story NC-17 because I cannot guarantee what kind of sexual content will appear in later chapters, but I CAN guarantee that I will not skimp on details. My ideas of violence and debauchery are graphic enough that I think the rating is called for. Just a friendly warning.

As I mentioned in the previous paragraph, this fiction is indeed taking into account the events of Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince. If, for whatever reason, you have not read this book I strongly advise you to do so and warn you that there will be spoilers for it and most of the other books in the series, in this fiction. I cannot be held accountable if I spoil something for you; rest assured it is not intentional.

With all that out of the way, thank you for reading through this rather lengthy author note. Without further ado, I give you:

Dreamer

A Harry Potter Fan Fiction by Mengde

For Pen Against Sword: My Inspiration and My Lovely Guide.

Chapter I

A Long-Expected Meeting Another Meeting, Not Quite As Expected

The Dark Lord Voldemort is unhappy.

To be precise, he is always unhappy, at least recently. The prophecy that attempted so strenuously to get at it is forever beyond his reach – an old failure that still rankles him. Even Dumbledore's death, pleasing as it was those months ago, ceases to lift the high dudgeon Voldemort often finds himself in.

Certainly, he is unhappy with the Order of the Phoenix, and he is even unhappier with Harry Potter, whose threat level continues to escalate wildly now that he has abandoned Hogwarts, but of late, he has been especially unhappy with his Death Eaters. One would think that a group of highly trained and potent Dark Wizards would be able to successfully take on a group of willful children... a presumption that, time and time again, they have managed to disprove.

Well. If all goes as anticipated, this particular problem should resolve itself in short order. *I lack capable Death Eaters, apparently*, Voldemort had said to their gathered ranks, *so I will call in someone whom I can depend on not to be so disgustingly incompetent.*

Oh, they had felt his displeasure. Their Marks had burned, and their masks could not hide their intense discomfort. Voldemort does not smile at the memory; mere rumination does not stir him as it once did. To any observer, he is simply sitting, poised, in his lair – indeed, he has a lair, for Lord Voldemort does not *live*, but instead *lairs* in the keenest sense of the word.

It is a dark place, a dreary place, one that no Muggle or wizard in their right mind would willingly enter unless they had business within. Voldemort's throne is carved from a dark, nameless stone and is deathly cold to the touch. It sits in a great hall, where people can come and make proper obeisance to him. Where this lair is located is not relevant to our story; all one need know is that it is situated so that a lone figure, wrapped in a dark cloak to protect him against the howling wind and rain, can walk a long, winding path up to the dark edifice before him, where his meeting awaits.

The door, as befits a door of its importance, has a guard. He sees the figure winding its way towards the lair and prepares himself, knowing that any who dare approach Lord Voldemort's sanctum have good reason to do so.

As the figure draws close to him, the guard feels a sense of impending panic, but this is normal, this is to be expected; he is always panicking, after all. He did not ask for this assignment, keeping unwanted visitors away and announcing those who are expected. One might think that a seasoned Death Eater like this guard would find the assignment easy, even tedious...

...but if one did indeed think that, one would obviously be uninformed as to the *nature* of most of Lord Voldemort's houseguests.

Lord Voldemort ceases his musings as the entrance to his hall cracks open, admitting the door guard. He opens red, slitted eyes and stares at the black-cloaked Death Eater, the look on his face suggesting that the man hurry and announce the visitor or suffer more than a mild panic attack.

"Brother Langueroix is here to see you, My Lord," the guard forces out.

"Langueroix," a voice snarls from outside, audible even within the hall.

The guard jumps as though he has been electrocuted. "Pardon, Brother?"

"You do not say the ex," the visitor says, his voice still a snarl. "It is a silent letter."

"O-of course." Swallowing quite loudly, the guard repeats, "Brother Langueroix is here to see you, My Lord."

"Send him in," Voldemort says. His tone is even, betraying nothing of his thoughts – nothing of his anger.

Happy to be given leave to step outside and leave the Dark Lord to deal with the visitor, the guard nods and steps out the door, motioning the one called Langueroix inside. Voldemort straightens slightly on his throne, and his visitor enters.

Langueroix stands three centimeters shy of two meters, a height he aspired to in his boyhood but never achieved. His cloak hangs on him as it would upon a rack; his frame is thin, very thin, but not skeletal, for there is wiry muscle on his bones, giving his movements a confident and decidedly lethal fluidity. His face is hidden, but by the shadow of his cloak's hood – this man wears no Death Eater mask. All that is visible of his body are his hands – two deathly pale hands, long-fingered, smooth, bearing no calluses. They are much like the Dark Lord's hands, though the digits are not as elongated.

Movements hinting at an ancestry more feline than simian, Langueroix crosses the length of Voldemort's hall and kneels before the Dark Lord's throne. "My Lord."

Voldemort says nothing for several long minutes, letting the silence speak eloquently for him. He merely stares at the man kneeling in front of him, runs his eyes along the hard lines of Langueroix's figure visible through his cloak. *He's gotten thinner, but his form has not atrophied.*

"You have grievously disappointed me, Langueroix," he finally hisses.

"It is not my intent to disappoint, My Lord."

"I imagine not. Pray tell me, Langueroix – what, then, was your intent, ignoring my summons? It has been two and a half years, now, since I reassumed my form and my place in the world. An entire two and a half years, and only now do you think to offer me your continued obedience."

Langueroix is silent.

"What have you been doing that is more important than my summons, Langueroix?" Voldemort continues. "I would very much like to know. If it is interesting enough, I may be persuaded to spare your life."

The Dark Lord is unsurprised when Langueroix's answer comes in the form of a sudden pull of his wand – twelve and a half inches, oak, dragon heartstring core, as Voldemort well knows – and a flash of light.

Voldemort is out of his throne, leaping through the air over Langueroix, his throne has been cut square in half along its back.

Langueroix whirls, swinging his wand around as though he is wielding a sword.

"*PROTEGO!*" Voldemort thunders, the shield forms in front of him and the arcing beam of light extending from the tip of Langueroix's wand rebounds from it.

The Death Eater flicks his wand and sends the beam flashing back at Voldemort, and it is very clear now that it is not a projectile or a blade, but instead a whip, a long, sinuous whip of silvery-white.

"*AVADA KEDAVRA!*"

Voldemort's wand spits green fire. The bolt shoots towards Langueroix, the sound of its coming like a rushing, unstoppable force...

Immediately, Langueroix pulls his wand arm back and twirls. The silvery-white whip curls around the incoming fatal curse, trapping it within luminescent folds, and the Death Eater gives a flick of the wrist.

The whip explodes, scattering sparks and particles everywhere. Voices boom out, foreign sounds come from nowhere, and images flash through the space between Langueroix and the now-descending Voldemort, but soon the sounds quiet and the images fade.

Voldemort touches down softly, like a feather coming to a rest after floating through the air. His red eyes narrow, and his thin lips curve in what approximates a smile. "Is *that* what you've been doing, then, Langueroix?"

"You destroyed it," Langueroix says, sounding irritated a tone that the Dark Lord does not appreciate. "I have many more, of course, but that was a particularly fine one."

"How tragic for you. *CRUCIO!*"

Langueroix bends double, sinks to his knees, lets out a short bark of a scream. His wand clatters to the floor, dropped from fingers that feel as though they've been set aflame. Voldemort maintains the spell for a moment longer, just to let the man feel it, then breaks it off. "*Accio Wand.*"

The Death Eater's wand flies to Voldemort's hand, and he rolls it between his fingers, contemplating it. "You will *never* speak so disrespectfully to me again," the Dark Lord finally spits. "I do not tolerate insubordination of any sort, Langueroix. Your freedom has obviously given you a... *backbone.*"

"Yes, My Lord," Langueroix replies. He is still on his knees, but he is motionless, displaying no trembling or whimpering. Anyone with half a brain can tell that Langueroix is no stranger to the lovely embrace of the Cruciatus Curse.

"However, Langueroix... This backbone, this spine that you have grown, may prove useful." Voldemort begins to pace, circling around Langueroix, his own wand in his right hand, the Death Eater's in his left. "Do you know what I have been trying to do for the past two and a half years now?"

"No," Langueroix replies.

Voldemort feels the lie, but he knows he is supposed to: Langueroix has done this purposefully. The man is an Occlumens, and if he lets the Dark Lord feel the lie, it is not a mistake. Langueroix is speaking to Voldemort: *I know much about what you've been doing, even if I've been away.*

Still, Voldemort does not appreciate being lied to, even if it is meant as a message. Without looking, Voldemort points Langueroix's wand and says, "*Crucio.*"

Another short scream before Langueroix gets himself under control again, even as the Curse wracks him with pain. Voldemort does not let the frown show, but it is there, just beneath the surface. This is a poor method of discipline, the Cruciatus Curse, when its target is so familiar with its use that he has actually cast it upon himself to experiment with what causes the most pain.

A flick of the wand and the curse stops. Langueroix begins to breathe again, and Voldemort continues his pacing.

"Do you know why I am not aware of the full prophecy concerning me and Harry Potter, Langueroix?"

"To my knowledge," Langueroix says, "the boy shattered it in the midst of a fight, so that none of the Death Eaters present could hear it properly."

Close. Close, but still wrong. "*Crucio.*" The Dark Lord waits, lets the pain subside. "Incorrect, Langueroix. I would have thought you better informed. You make it sound as though Potter was actually clever enough to do that of his own accord. It was an accident, a blunder, on his part. I am not so concerned about that, however, as I am about the performance of my own Death Eaters. You might think, Langueroix, that ten of them could stop six students and keep the prophecy intact. Would you think thus?"

Langueroix replies, "Knowing your Death Eaters, My Lord...*no.*"

Such insubordination. "You're displaying far too much of a backbone, Langueroix. I think we ought to examine it more closely what say you to that? No, allow me. *Accio backbone.*"

Voldemort makes no comment as Langueroix is dragged, thrashing, across the floor, by a spinal cord that suddenly does not want to stay put.

After another moment of silence following the Death Eater's halt at his feet, the Dark Lord says, "But this is what is truly disturbing, Langueroix you're actually correct. My Death Eaters, even if there are ten of them, apparently cannot stop six students. That is not the last time they disappointed me, either. You obviously know that Dumbledore is dead, our enemy struck a blow, but I am still angry with my underlings. Do you know why, Langueroix?"

"Because," Langueroix gasps, even his iron-hard control off-balanced by unexpected spinal movements, "they have... *no...backbone.*"

"Excellent. *Flagrate.*" Both the wands Voldemort holds begin to burn at their tips and spit white-hot sparks. Again giving what approximates a smile, Voldemort crouches down next to Langueroix and says, "You've done quite well, Langueroix, quite well indeed. Bare your Mark."

Knowing what is coming, the Death Eater obeys, pulling his robe back from his right forearm and showing the Mark there, a vivid red in the dim, pale magical light that suffuses the hall. Langueroix's forearm is just as pale as the hand it is attached to: an unnatural, fishbelly pale that defies the idea of pigmentation.

"Marvelous," Voldemort breathes. "I think, however, that it's a tad faded. You've been out of touch for so long, Langueroix, you really have."

"Yes, My Lord."

Still giving a pseudo-smile, Voldemort presses the smoldering tips of both wands to opposite ends of Langueroix's Dark Mark, then begins to drag them down its length until they meet in its center, leaving lines of black, charred flesh behind them.

A flick of both wands stops their ends' smoldering, and Voldemort runs a long finger across the Mark. Its crimson etchings light up, bringing it out in sharp contrast to the blackened skin of the Death Eater's forearm.

"There, Langueroix. I think it's easier to see now, don't you?"

"Yes, My Lord." Langueroix has not flinched or made a sound during this entire process. The Cruciatus Curse is, of course, far worse.

Standing, the Dark Lord hands Langueroix back his wand. "I have still not forgiven you for your long absence, Langueroix. Lucius was bad enough such a loyal supporter, suddenly so distant and repentant after my fall. At least he, however, had the good grace to respond immediately to my summons upon my return."

"Yes, My Lord."

"I have a task for you, however, Langueroix. There is one other Death Eater that I have some, shall I say, *vested interest* in. One other Death Eater that has... *backbone.*"

Langueroix merely stares at Voldemort. The Dark Lord narrows his eyes; there are few that can meet his crimson gaze for long.

"Have you heard me, Langueroix?"

"I have, My Lord. You wish me to seek out this other Death Eater with backbone?"

"Quite right, Langueroix." Voldemort strides back over to his throne. "*Reparo.*" The large slab of the throne's back that Langueroix's whip severed settles itself back in its proper place. Moving almost languidly, the Dark Lord seats himself and returns his wand to his sleeve.

"For your penance, Langueroix," Lord Voldemort says, "I want you to find this Death Eater... and I want you to kill him."

Knockturn Alley is another example of a dark, dreary place that no Muggle or wizard would enter unless they had business there. Unlike Voldemort's lair, however, which a very persistent Muggle could conceivably reach a possibility allowed to exist to provide the door guard with entertainment, however rare no Muggle can be found in Knockturn Alley.

There are wizards here, though, and witches, most of them up to no good. They peddle Dark wares or go in search of them, or they pass unsavory information or seek it out, or look to avoid pursuers or seek those they need to find. Many of them are also waiting, perhaps impatiently, for contacts to show up and meetings to commence.

None, however, are waiting quite as impatiently or nervously as the occupant of an upstairs room in what passes for an inn. Indeed, this person is quite tired of waiting, has been doing so for the last hour, and knows that if the wrong person should enter, word could spread, word would *indeed* spread, that such-and-such saw, with their own two or possibly less or more eyes...

This person knows that this is a delusion, however, because if the wrong person were indeed to enter, they would have to die. Secrets are so very hard to keep.

Running a hand through greasy black hair, aquiline nose not quite pressed against the window of the room due to the glass's dinginess and the fact that it is cold for the snow outside, wand close at hand where it can be drawn quickly, Severus Snape waits.

And waits.

He is not here because he *wants* to be. Far from it; if he had his way, he would be at home, doing something useful with his time. Even his house is a fairer sight than this pit. His contact is going to pay for arranging their meeting here.

"Comfortable, Severus?"

Immediately, Snape whirls, wand in hand, a hundred hexes and curses on the tip of his tongue, fire burning in his black eyes. He clears his mind, brings forth the proper images, knows that he must be in the correct mental state or he could give himself away.

"I was, Bellatrix, until you asked me to meet you in this... *establishment*," Snape sneers. "If, however, you intended your inquiry to pertain to my current state of being, no, I am not *comfortable*."

Bellatrix Lestrange, standing in the doorway, gives Snape a cold glare. "Don't play games with me, Severus. I called you here for a reason, after all." Her civil tone is thin, barely stretched over a violent and unpleasant nature.

"Yes, Merlin forbid that you should summon me to a secret meeting in Knockturn Alley, when every agent of the Ministry is looking for me, because of a passing fancy." Snape lets his wand drop and matches Bellatrix's glare. "Get to the point, Bellatrix, or I am leaving."

Her glower only increasing in its intensity, Bellatrix says, "Fine. Tell me, Severus, when was the last time you went on holiday?"

For a long moment, Snape says nothing, but instead simply stares at the Death Eater as though she's lost her mind which is not too far from reality while she regards him with an expectant look. Finally, he says, "Never. Good day, Bellatrix."

He moves to walk past her and out the door, but she snarls at him and says, "We are not finished. I told you not to play games."

"Unless," Snape hisses, "you have an order from the Dark Lord himself, telling me to divulge to you the entire scope of my holiday activities, past and present, I do not think this is worth having wasted an hour of my time waiting for. Fugitives do not go on holiday, Bellatrix. Good *day*."

"Have you ever been to Paris, Severus?" Bellatrix demands, stepping in front of Snape as he attempts to pass her.

"No. I said good day."

"Stop trying to leave, you churl, I'm not finished!"

"Well, I *am*."

"You have a task," Bellatrix blurts out.

Immediately, Snape turns on his heel, crosses the room, and moves to stand by the window again. "Finally we come to the point, Bellatrix. Tell me what the Dark Lord would have me do and may he help you if it has nothing to do with whether or not I have visited Paris."

Fuming, Bellatrix takes a moment to simply glare at Snape until she finally says, "We had some... dealings... with a French wizard. He owed Lucius a great deal of money from a previous association, and Lucius, having let the debt go long enough, wanted to collect, as all the Malfoy family assets at Gringotts have been frozen."

"A lot of good the funds will do him in Azkaban," Snape observes dryly. "Though I imagine that he could always buy his way into a game of cards with the Dementors."

"You know they're on our side now, Severus."

"You show a remarkable appreciation for the intricacies of sarcasm, Bellatrix."

"Stuff it," she snarls, hand jerking towards her wand before she brings herself back under control. "Lucius asked me and Rodolphus to go and collect for him, and we received the Dark Lord's permission or, rather, we were told not to bother him with such trivial matters and that he had no current use for us because he was unconvinced of our ability to do anything right."

"Merely unconvinced? I'd have thought him positively dispossessed of belief by now."

Bellatrix plows on, her only response to Snape's observations being another glower. "We arrived in Paris, made contact. The wizard swore that he had none of the money he owed Lucius, so we thought we might extract it from him in another fashion. Even before we began in earnest, however, he told us that he had an alternative information."

"And you were so thickheaded as to actually barter away Lucius's debt in exchange for information that you easily could torture out of this man?"

Now Bellatrix smiles wickedly. "Oh, there was no thickheadedness involved, Severus. We just thought that Lucius is rich enough, and this wizard was so willing to cooperate..."

Snape merely sneers again. "Come to the point, Bellatrix. What was this information?"

"The wizard told us that he had seen a young student in Paris, apparently on holiday he recognized the student from articles about goings-on at Hogwarts." She spits after she says the name, then continues. "Thinking the information might be useful, he followed the family back to their place of residence, a Muggle hotel in the inner city. We directed him to take us there, and that night, we struck."

"The *point*. Now, if you please."

Bellatrix strides to the decrepit hearth set into the far wall of the room, draws her wand, and with a flick lights a fire within. She withdraws some Floo powder from her robe's sleeve, mutters a destination that Snape can't hear, throws in the Floo powder, and sticks her head into the flame. A moment later she withdraws from the fire and, with another flick of her wand, extinguishes it.

Snape just taps his foot and waits.

"Rodolphus will be coming with our guest by Portkey; transporting prisoners along Floo lines is, after all, risky as you well know."

One moment, there is nothing. In the next, the room has suddenly gotten much smaller. In its center are two people, both clutching a loaf of French bread that has obviously been turned into the Portkey that Bellatrix was speaking of. Snape smirks at the sight of the bread being used in such an unorthodox fashion, and then the expression is replaced by one of barely concealed shock when he sees who is gripping the unfortunate baguette.

The first person is, obviously, Rodolphus Lestrage, a thin, nervous-looking man whose fidgety manner belies the deadly brutality and love of pain present within his black soul.

The second, the source of Snape's dismay, is none other than a Stupefied, blindfolded, and trussed Hermione Granger.