

Professor Snape's Address

by Sigune

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Some twelve students stood huddled together at the office door, shivering. It was early autumn, and the day's temperature had been pleasant; but down in the dungeons it was so cold they could see their breath in small clouds. One of their number, a plump brown-haired girl, knocked.

"Enter," they heard and went in swiftly.

Despite it being past midnight, Professor Snape was seated at his desk, quill in hand, apparently absorbed in the essays he was correcting. He left the students standing there without acknowledging their presence. Several minutes went by; the only sounds were the scratching of the quill on a piece of parchment and, once, a nervous cough from a boy near the door. In a corner of the room, a small silver cauldron placed on a spindly-legged table emitted shimmering wafts of lizard-green fume, hissing at short intervals.

The office was gloomy. The only light came from an antique pewter oil lamp on the professor's desk; its softly flickering flame was reflected by the hundreds of glass jars that stood on the shelves lining the grey stone walls. There was a fireplace, but its grate was empty. Unconsciously, the students moved closer together for warmth. From inside the jars, slimy things pickled in fluids of different colours stared at them with misty, dead eyes.

The Slytherins for all present belonged to Slytherin House were not disturbed by their Head of House's apparent indifference. On the contrary, it worked rather reassuringly: if Professor Snape had thought they were out of bounds, he would long have made that very clear indeed. His silence was probably as close a thing as they could expect to a sign of approval. The students looked at each other. They had no leader, and were uncertain as to who should speak for all and explain their presence in the office at this time of night; but then again Snape's indulgence likely meant that no explanation was necessary. There could, in fact, be little doubt as to what had provided the impetus for this nocturnal gathering.

On the evening of the first of September 1996, right after the Sorting Ceremony and the start of term feast, Professor Snape had come striding into the Slytherin common room. This was most irregular, as like the other Heads he only ever intruded upon the privacy of the students' quarters when absolutely necessary. He had walked over to the ornately carved fireplace, silence following in his wake, and, clasping his hands while leaning his left elbow on the mantelpiece, had addressed them with a quaint little speech.

"Welcome," he had begun in that low voice of his, "to another year in Slytherin. You who have been newly sorted are about to find out what it means to be shunned and looked at with suspicion. Your fellow students can testify to the fact that the ways of this house, as set down by its noble founder, have always met with adversity in the rest of Hogwarts School. And this year, worse is to come.

"It cannot have escaped your attention that the wizard whose power is so awe-inspiring that most dare not even speak his name is back among us, as strong as he was

before his defeat sixteen years ago, in days you are too young to remember. In the light of this event, which is bound to shake the foundations of our community for better or for worse, I feel that it is my duty to raise your awareness of the consequences of the Dark Lord's return. The wizarding world is at war. It is beyond doubt that this fact will have its impact on life in Slytherin House.

"You will all be forced to make choices, and whatever anyone may say, there is nothing easy about that. To Slytherins such as yourselves, things are not nearly as straightforward as they may seem according to the simplistic views of many who belong to other houses. Most of you are tangled up in allegiances that are not of your own making. But as your Head of House, I am here to help you.

"My general advice to you all is to honour the spirit of Salazar Slytherin and stay true to his principles. Be cunning. Be ambitious. Be true to your blood. You will achieve that which you crave, and no harm will come to you.

"If, however, you find you have made mistakes, whether or not of your own volition, I advise you to come straight to me. There are situations in which an apology or a confession is in place; but you should always make sure to apologise or confess to the right person that is the secret of salvation. I am here to help you out of any such quandaries as you may find yourselves in; I will understand."

After these words, delivered wryly in the cold, stern tone characteristic of him, Professor Snape had surveyed the Slytherins in silence. When no one ventured a reaction, he had swept around and stalked out of the common room, his black cloak billowing behind him in bat-like fashion.

After his departure, the dungeons had filled with murmurs. The first years, as yet unacquainted with the customs of Slytherin House, had simply assumed a start of term speech to be an annually recurring tradition; they could only find it odd that their début should have been made on such a menacing note. But the older students had started avid discussions on the meaning of Professor Snape's address and his possible motives for delivering it at all. Draco Malfoy had shouted, "Enemies of the Heir, beware!" at the top of his voice to grim laughter from his friends, telling whoever wanted to listen that he had always acted according to Slytherin's spirit, and that they would soon see the last of those filthy Mudbloods infesting the school. His words were greeted with loud cheers from a group of people gathered around him in a half-circle, and several newcomers looked impressed with his boldness.

But in a corner of the common room, half-hidden behind a pair of carved wooden chairs, Daphne Greengrass had been conducting a whispered conversation with her best friend Tracey Davis, the two of them casting, from time to time, sceptical looks in Malfoy's direction. Nor were they the only ones. Adrian Pucey could be seen playing distractedly with a set of Gobstones, muttering something about the freedom of interpretation, and Graham Pritchard, a second year, had kicked his little sister for applauding Draco's words.

When, the next day, Blaise Zabini went to the library to borrow *Salazar Slytherin His Theorie of Magick*, he had found that Theo Nott had checked it out only minutes before; and a skinny third year girl by the name of Eleanor Mulciber had managed to snatch away *Serpent-Tongue: The Definitive Biography* from right under his nose. Fortunately, he had been able to wrestle a copy of *The Fourth Founder* from little Malcolm Baddock. Madam Pince's little lists of borrowers in the library books became the primary means for the dissidents, as they thought of themselves, to find out each other's names, for those who loudly proclaimed their allegiance to Salazar Slytherin seemed not to care to read up on him to begin with.

Gradually, tentatively at first, the Slytherin dissenters had started to sound out those fellow students whom they thought might be sympathetic. There were whisperings in dark corners and little notes on strips of charmed parchment passed from hand to hand in the corridors. About a fortnight later, they had established their number as twelve and decided to keep Professor Snape to his promise of help and guidance, as their reading had only increased the confusion his speech had started. They thought it best to go after midnight, when their fellow Slytherins were asleep; they knew their Head of House kept long nights, working or skulking around the castle and sleeping only a scanty four hours between two and six.

And so they had gathered at the entrance of the darkened common room, a little nervous yet quietly excited. Tabitha Holden was first to arrive. She had taken the precaution of putting on a woollen winter cloak. Next had come Theo Nott, a sixth year, and little Graham Pritchard, who was no older than twelve. Then there was Tabitha's friend Tracey Davis and her younger sister Dorothy, whom everybody called Dot, and Daphne Greengrass and Blaise Zabini, both sixth years. Malcolm Baddock, a second year, had come scurrying over, nearly stumbling over an edge of the tapestry; Karen McRae, a tall and taciturn seventh year, had only just been able to prevent him from upsetting one of the large, carved chairs near the fire and waking everybody up. Adrian Pucey was there, and Eleanor Mulciber. At a quarter past midnight, with the arrival of Barnaby Brocklehurst, a freckled fourth year, they were complete and stepped through the secret passageway that led through the blank wall of the Slytherin common room into the icy, grey stone corridor.

And here they were now, facing their Head of House in his underground office. Professor Snape laid down his quill, carefully closed the inkpot he had been using and put the pile of essays aside. He folded his hands on his desk, and only then looked up at the students in front of him. His cold black eyes glided over each in turn, from left to right and back again. He gave a curt nod and then waved his wand, conjuring up a simple wooden chair for each of them. He made them sit down with a sign of his hand and stood up.

It was not in the nature of the average Slytherin to lightly bestow their trust. Neither was loyalty a very easy matter with most. But Professor Snape, however unpleasant a man, and however shady his past, had somehow managed to win both. He was arguably the least popular member of Hogwarts' teaching staff, loved by none and hated by many; but the Slytherins felt, if no actual affection, at least great respect for him. Severe, sarcastic and sinister-looking, he was their staunch ally at school, trying to make up for his colleagues' indifference or downright dislike by his unrelenting defence of Slytherin House and its members, regardless of right or wrong. It was common knowledge among Slytherins that he had, since his appointment now fifteen years ago, done everything within his power to resurrect Slytherin House out of the ruins left by his predecessor, Professor Slughorn.

Although he had nothing of the sportsman in him, Professor Snape had devoted himself with characteristic thoroughness to the study of Quidditch rules and tactics in order to bring the then hopelessly failing Slytherin team up to scratch. His involvement had been such that he eventually found himself qualified to referee matches; and the fact that Slytherin playing the finals provided the only occasions at which he was ever to be seen donning green robes instead of his favoured black, could serve as further illustration of his dedication. It was even rumoured that, true to the spirit of the house he represented, he had managed to lay hands on the secret list of seven hundred Quidditch fouls and had brooded over all possible ways to commit a few useful ones cunningly and unnoticed. None of the students in the office knew if there was any truth in this story, but they did know that every new captain was summoned for a private meeting with Snape previous to the start of the Quidditch season, and the team had certainly regained its old renown.

Indeed, this was true for Slytherin House in its entirety. With Severus Snape's appointment, there had at long last arrived a teacher at Hogwarts who actively favoured a house that had fallen into disrepute since the terrible events that took place in the 1940s and had since been referred to as 'Slytherin's curse'. The how and why of his remarkable zeal, beyond a strong sense of responsibility, were not immediately clear; but Professor Snape invested time and energy in the house allotted to him as though his life depended on its successes. And his efforts had borne fruit, culminating in seven years' uninterrupted victories in the race for both the Quidditch and House Cups.

Although, much to the regret of every single Slytherin, their period of glory had abruptly come to an end with the arrival at Hogwarts of Harry Potter, so that now only the seventh years remembered the spirit of triumph and buoyancy that had reigned the house during those blissful days of absolute supremacy, the younger Slytherins shared their elders' regard for Professor Snape. They sensed that their frustrations were his; a slight to either party was keenly felt by the other; their failures were shared. There was a curious sense of complicity between the Head and the House, a bond that was stronger than in Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff or Gryffindor.

Severus Snape walked slowly to the front of his desk, his hands clasped together. He seemed to be pondering something. Finally, he leant against the desk and crossed his arms.

"So," he said softly, "my little speech seems to have raised some questions after all. I was beginning to despair of it... Despite my being a confirmed misanthropist, I was quite exasperated to think that *all* my charges might turn out to be equally dim-witted, and that my endless efforts of the past years should have been even more wasted than I already believed them to be." He curled his lip. "But here you are, a full dozen students in actual possession of a brain in working order. I feel bound to say that twelve is a very attractive number, and one that rather exceeds my expectations."

If this greeting would have appeared less than cordial to other students, the Slytherins were undaunted by it. They were too well-acquainted with Professor Snape's acidity

to allow it to upset them, and some actually chuckled at his words. In fact, coming from Snape the welcome was positively gushing.

"Well," the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher resumed, "since you have taken the pains to come and visit me, I think it might be wise to make use of the occasion and ask whatever it was you wanted to hear my opinion on."

Because no-one felt like assuming leadership, the Slytherins all began to talk at once.

"Well you see, Professor, after your speech we started wondering..."

"We began to read..."

"Everything we could find, really..."

"History."

"Biography."

"Philosophy."

"Magical Theory."

"Everything. Just just about everything."

"And we talked. I mean, not to everybody. Among ourselves. Because Draco Malfoy "

" And his gang "

"Yeah, well they'd call us traitors or something."

"Which we have no intention of being. We only want to know what to think, because you made us realise we'd... we'd become a bit fixed, sort of, on the wrong things, maybe. So we read."

"And discussed our findings."

"Covertly."

"Yes."

One withering look from Snape put an abrupt end to the sudden outburst of chatter. "The unusual circumstances of this gathering," he said quietly, but with an unmistakable edge to his voice, "are no excuse for a display of total anarchy. There will be order and quiet, or you shall all return to your common room. Do I make myself clear?"

"Well then," he resumed, taking in the subdued expressions on the students' faces, "you did your homework. And what, pray, were the results? Miss McRae?"

"To be quite frank, Professor," Karen answered her languid, drawling voice, "we ended up with more questions than answers. First of all, the sources contradicted each other, and second, some things simply didn't make sense. Take, for example, what we know about Salazar Slytherin. He built the Chamber of Secrets with that monster inside..."

"Yes, how irresponsible was that? I mean, how could he know it was only going to kill Mud... Muggleborns? This basilisk, you know, it's quite as deadly to Purebloods "

"Shut up a minute, Barnaby, I was talking," Karen snapped, backed up by a glare from the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. "You see, Professor, I asked myself why Slytherin did not set that Basilisk loose himself if he felt it was a necessary measure. Why would he delegate the task to his last descendant? There is something weird about that story."

"Not to mention," said Daphne Greengrass, "that whereas the blood question was apparently important enough for Slytherin to leave Hogwarts, I was sorted into Slytherin House despite the fact that my mother is a Muggle."

"And when you come to think of it," Blaise Zabini added, "if only pure-bloods were allowed in, Slytherin would be considerably smaller than the other houses, and over time it would cease to exist. It seems a bit stupid to set down a criterion that leads to the extinction of your house."

"And it is a bit questionable anyway, isn't it?" Barnaby Brocklehurst interjected. "Our House got stuck with Crabbe and Goyle, I mean, no offence meant, but er, there's no nice way of saying it, is there? they're as thick as two planks, whereas Granger, who's a Mud... Muggleborn, is, well, something of a genius." He cleared his throat, nervously looking around. "It's not like I'm happy about it," he added apologetically.

"I was struck by something else," Eleanor Mulciber mused. "The friendship between the Founders. They were close, all four of them. And when they had their disagreement about blood, the others didn't exactly throw Slytherin out, did they? He went away. And do you remember the Sorting Hat's song last year? It said Slytherin left them quite downhearted. They weren't at all happy about his departure. They can't have hated him as some would have us believe. And there used to be a special bond between Slytherin and Gryffindor, which is hard to believe now."

"But the fact remains," Theo Nott said slowly, "that the Dark Lord is Slytherin's Heir." Tracey Davis nodded.

"That doesn't mean he preaches Slytherin's gospel," Karen remarked lazily. They had clearly had this discussion before.

"I agree," Blaise put in. "There are about one thousand years between Salazar Slytherin and He Who Must Not Be Named; it is not as if he would know any more about his ancestor than we do. And it is not because he has Slytherin's blood in his veins that he is better qualified than anybody else to interpret his theories."

"He could open the Chamber of Secrets," Theo insisted. "He did so, twice. Only the true Heir could have managed."

"We're not disputing that he is the Heir," Karen said impatiently. "All we are saying is that his descent does not mean he embodies the true spirit of Slytherin. Slytherin never did anything remotely like what You Know Who deals in. He was interested in education, not power per se."

"Still, if you think Slytherin's philosophy through all the things he set store by..."

"Oh no," Graham Pritchard moaned. "They're at it again. Please, sir, won't you interfere? We came here so you could put a stop to this. We don't seem to be able to reach a conclusion on our own."

Professor Snape, who had been following the discussion with barely concealed amusement, shook his head slightly.

"The art of potion making," he said softly, and the students went quiet, "is an exact science. The art of life is not. The questions you are considering belong to the sphere of life, and as such it is impossible for me to provide you with anything like a clear-cut answer.

"If I did stimulate you to think similar matters over, it is because I perceive my responsibility as your teacher to stretch further than simply making sure you exit from this school filled with a thorough knowledge of the more common defensive spells. The main object of the teaching profession, undervalued as it is, consists in waging a fierce

battle against dunderheadedness of any kind, arming and readying you to confront the harsh realities and heavy burdens of adult life." His thin lips settled in a sneer. "All of this, I can assure you, is not a labour of love, as some sentimentalists might claim, but a grave and grievous task, which I have, however, pledged myself to fulfil with strength and determination. But I digress.

"The Dark Lord's return to power has the unfortunate consequence of bringing the realities of life painfully close, and rather sooner than is generally deemed desirable. You will be called upon to consider your positions, and you must not be found unprepared. That you have been sorted into this house means that you have things in common – namely, the qualities esteemed by Salazar Slytherin. I have encouraged you to search for their meaning in order to facilitate your choices. They may lead you anywhere. I do not intend to force you in any direction. But I would offer up my own ponderings for you to reflect on."

He scanned their faces; his students looked up at him expectantly.

"Sooner or later," Professor Snape continued, "the Dark Lord's return will affect your lives, if it has not already done so. The walls of Hogwarts will not ward off his influence and interference. And there is no denying that you, Slytherins, will be most susceptible to him. Indeed, you are very likely to be the Dark Lord's prime targets. Many of his followers, as he, himself, are former members of Slytherin House, and there is little doubt that he will attempt to coax you to his side, especially now that many of his Death Eaters have been arrested and put in prison."

There was a short pause, during which Professor Snape observed his audience keenly. His matter-of-fact approach had taken them somewhat by surprise; but it was spot-on, and he knew it. Theo Nott looked somewhat uneasy and shuffled his feet. Tabitha Holden studied her patent leather boots, and Tracey Davis had a faint blush on her cheeks.

Something that looked vaguely like a smile flitted across Professor Snape's face. "I know that his offer is tempting," he said in a voice that was barely more than a whisper. Some students glanced furtively at each other.

Snape began to trace the line of his mouth with one long, pale finger and continued quietly:

"Some twenty years ago, your parents' generation – my generation – were faced with the same situation as you now find yourselves in. Then, as now, Slytherin stood apart from the other Hogwarts houses. Then, as now, the other houses, at the particular instigation of a small group of Gryffindors, shunned it and scoffed at it for its close affiliation with the Dark Arts. The Dark Lord's influence divided the school. Slytherin students felt like outcasts, and he promised them a new sense of belonging.

"Many of us made unwise decisions, mostly because lack of information did not allow us to sufficiently think things through. There was no one to guide us. But this time there are no excuses. We know what is happening because it has happened before; at least, some of us do, and of those I am one. I consider it my duty as your teacher to impart my knowledge to you. It is said that one only learns through one's own mistakes, but in this case mistakes are likely to be fatal, which compels me to try and keep you from making them at all. I have no desire to see you butchered – despite what the sixth years may think after receiving the abominable results of yesterday's test on Dementors," he added in an aside, apparently unable to resist a barb at their poor academic performance. "You have been entrusted to my care, and I intend to see you safely out of this... mess."

He scanned their expressions until satisfied that they were all bearing with him. If they did so quite easily, it was because the urgency Snape sketched was very real to them, and because his words sanctioned the doubts they had felt, but of which family and peer pressure had made them feel slightly ashamed. Their Head of House now gave them the approval they had longed for, and though they would rather have received it from someone closer to them, they were grateful for it.

"They say," Snape went on, "that the qualities associated with Slytherin House are of such a kind that they almost automatically lead you towards allegiance with the Dark Lord. Do not allow yourselves to be fooled. It is not true. People who suggest such things are either ignorant of the essence of Slytherin, or of the nature of the Dark Lord. You are not predestined to anything. You are free. Think, Slytherins; use your brains in the manner I have come to expect of you.

"You were sorted into this house because you are ambitious. There are those who believe that siding with the Dark Lord will bring rewards – power; a high social position; personal fulfilment. They are wrong. The Dark Lord does not share; the favours he occasionally hands out are trifles. He does not help you on your way to success. On the contrary: he fears competitors. He crushes anyone he deems too ambitious, too clever, too independent. He wants servants, not equals; people who nod in assent and blindly follow his orders. Beware of a leader who does not want his followers to think for themselves.

"The Sorting Hat has selected you on cunning. If that is the case, you must possess a quantity of shrewdness sufficient to realise the dangers of binding yourselves to a master who demands absolute submission and from whose service it is impossible to resign.

"There are those who say that the Dark Lord is a Slytherin's natural ally. But I tell you that a Slytherin has *no* natural allies. You have only yourselves. And indeed that should suffice you.

"Some of you," Professor Snape's cold eyes darted around the group and rested for a moment on Theo Nott, then on Eleanor Mulciber, "have family and friends who are of a different persuasion. You are doubtless under pressure to follow their lead, whether out of affection, under paternal authority or by force. But if that is the case, maybe this is the time to start healthily questioning your parents' judgment. True, you are perhaps a little young to do so; but this is, regrettably, a war we find ourselves in; and whether or not on my instigation, you will all be forced to grow up more quickly than you would have done in peaceful circumstances. It will, I fear, be necessary for your survival.

"Some of you may think that you have nothing to fear from the Dark Lord because you are pure-bloods, or stem from rich and powerful families. That is a delicate bubble of fancy I feel obliged to prick. The Dark Lord respects no one. He has no friends and no favourites. In his view, the world consists only of the useful and the useless. If he judges you useless, he will kill you without any further ado when you cross his path. If he considers you useful, he will make you his tool and eliminate you when you have served your purpose. In both cases you lose. Do not think you can manipulate or escape him. He is, very simply, the most powerful wizard born this century. Mr Nott?"

"I can't help wondering, sir – is there nothing to be learned from the Dark Lord? In terms of Dark Arts, I mean? The atmosphere at Hogwarts is rather repressive in that respect and – where should anyone turn to study them?"

"Ah," Snape said. "I like that speculation. But I am afraid I must disappoint you, Mr Nott. It is a grave mistake to think that the Dark Lord is interested in instructing his followers in the Dark Arts. I can assure you that the fee is very high and the tutorials lamentable. They are limited to practical Dark magic, with the main focus on the Unforgivable curses – nothing, in other words, that either I or indeed any Dark wizard of your acquaintance could not teach you. Only the sadists among you might find some satisfaction under the Dark Lord's tutelage, but then again there are better, more risk-free ways of indulging in your irrepressible desire to torment people. One option is, for example, to become a teacher, which has for added benefits that your vicious pleasures are sanctioned by the law and that you receive payment for them."

Some sniggering and giggling followed this excellent suggestion, to be interrupted by Adrian's once more raising his hand.

"Please, sir – you seem anxious to have us on the good side. Why is that?"

"You disappoint me, Mr Pucey, by displaying a decided lack of precision," Professor Snape said smoothly, raising his eyebrows. "I do not recall ever mentioning 'good' or 'bad' sides. I am anxious to have you on *your* side – the only side you should care about."

"But, Professor," Eleanor ventured, "disavowing the Dark Lord practically means setting up a league with Professor Dumbledore, doesn't it, which means we'd work together with..."

"Potter," Blaise and Theo finished with obvious distaste.

"I know," Snape said. "Life isn't perfect. But it is important for Slytherin not to lag behind the rest of the school."

"The rest of the school?"

"Yes. Certain Gryffindors, I happen to know, have set up an inter-House group who have dubbed themselves Dumbledore's Army and train in practical Defence against the Dark Arts. You, of course, have not been invited to join, on account of their historical animosity towards the whole of Slytherin House."

The Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher frowned. "There is a persistent rumour that every wizard or witch who ever ... walked a shady path, once belonged to this house. That is blatantly untrue. To name but one prominent example, the notorious mass-murderer Sirius Black" here he paused a second, and there appeared a glint in his black eyes that the students found hard to interpret "springs from Gryffindor. Things like these are not widely known, and the result is that you carry the burden of prejudice. The bad reputation of Slytherin House has proved an obstacle on its way to success. Because of it, you have had to endure the enmity, the contempt even, of your fellow students, and unjust treatment from several of my colleagues. I have had my share of these unpleasant experiences. You shall have to ignore them, as I do.

"However," Snape said emphatically, "there is no need to go and run with those who like to draw attention to themselves. I have always considered subtlety an important and quite essential Slytherin attribute. It does not do to wear one's heart on one's sleeve. I do not care what your opinions are; only do not flaunt them. If you are clever, you will only voice them in the company of the right people, and then quietly. It is wise to stay out of the limelight. Just keep your eyes and ears open. Be there in the shadows, and strike quickly and efficiently when necessary. Use your wits.

"The path I suggest to you will be difficult. But difficulty has never stopped a Slytherin from attaining the goal they have set for themselves. As far as I am concerned, you are Slytherin's best and brightest Slytherin's Army, if you like. You will represent your house in the events to come. I advise you not to disappoint me. You would suffer my severe displeasure."

There was silence after these words, and Professor Snape looked around the semicircle. "Is there anyone who does not feel up to the task?" he asked suddenly.

Theo Nott shook his head. "I suppose we are all in," he said, and nobody objected.

But Daphne Greengrass wiggled nervously in her chair.

"Sir..."

"Yes, Miss Greengrass?"

"I was thinking..." She intertwined her fingers and then undid them again. "I don't want to sound superstitious, but when twelve people set out to do something together, there usually turns out to be a traitor among them."

"The thought has occurred to me," Snape said. "I therefore propose, if you will all agree to it, to bind you by a Perjurium Charm."

"What's that?" Blaise asked somewhat suspiciously, and more than one student seemed to share his discomfort.

"It is an obscure Dark charm," the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher explained, "developed, as it happens, by Salazar Slytherin himself, which keeps a fixed number of wizards oath-bound to each other and marks anyone who breaks the bond."

"Marks them how exactly?" Dot Davis squeaked in alarm.

"It basically sets them alight," Snape replied with a smirk. He obviously took delight in the thought. "Potential traitors are strongly advised to keep large quantities of water at hand."

"Well..." Malcolm Baddock said hesitantly after a few uncomfortable seconds, "it does sound quite effective, doesn't it?"

"Let's do it." Tracey resolutely cut the knot. "If we want to forge a pact, it had better be a powerful one, and in this way we will all feel secure. Anyone who wants to back out can do so now."

The Slytherins looked at each other, then at Snape, and after several minutes of quiet reflection, all murmured their assent. They were not sure whether they were doing something reckless, or the exact opposite. But from the moment they had taken the first step away from their fellow students, they had done so in the realisation that they must be prepared to take the next also and so they did.

A solemn silence reigned in the underground office as a golden pin was handed around and the students, following their teacher's example, one by one offered a drop of their blood to be collected in a golden goblet. They were asked to point their wands at the cup, and, prompted by the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, thrice chanted the words, *Promitto. Propono. Voto!* Eyes closed, Snape muttered an incantation they did not understand, at which the contents of the goblet dissolved in a ribbon of glittering green light that rose up in the air and slowly swivelled around the gathered wizards and witches, until it seemed to become absorbed in them. They shivered collectively as the charm took effect.

When the spell had been accomplished and the first tingling sensation of the magic had subsided, the Slytherins were, rather to their surprise, left with a strange feeling of elation. Even Snape seemed a bit flushed, though they could not tell for sure by the uncertain light. They could have sworn he looked pleased.

Next week some began to doubt their earlier assessment of the professor's mood. On Tuesday Snape visibly enjoyed embarrassing shy and studious Tabitha Holden by asking pointedly if she could really think of no better use for the Foe-Glass they were studying than to contemplate her physical attractions in its surface; and on Thursday Blaise Zabini received detention for no other reason (or so Blaise claimed) than that the ex-Potions master's provisions of dragon bile needed decanting and he obviously did not want the smell to stick to *him* for three days. Theo Nott, who somehow always managed to escape Snape's unpleasantness, declared with a straight face that he admired their Head of House's skill in keeping their pact a secret.

Those who might have entertained the hope that the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher would reveal himself to be kinder and more cordial to the students who had confided in him were sadly disappointed. But even they acknowledged that Snape had presented them with a precious gift: that of self-esteem. And on being bullied by the Malfoy clan, or given the cold shoulder by those from other houses, the Slytherin dissidents no longer exchanged weary looks, but triumphant little smiles instead.

Author's Notes:

This story owes a lot to the help of my faithful betas, **todayiamadaisy** and **Elfie**.

Professor Snape's Address was inspired by Potioncat's and Siriusly Snapey Susan's posts on HPfGU - it is therefore dedicated to them.

Professor Snape's Address was actually written well before the publication of HBP, so the similarities between the Perjurium Charm and the Unbreakable Vow are entirely coincidental. I kept the Charm, however, because in my humble opinion the Vow is just a little too deadly for Snape to inflict on his students.

I made a few changes to the original text, substituting Slughorn's name for the one I had invented myself and DADA teacher for Potions master, and finally changing Zabini from half-blood into pure-blood.