

Meant to Be... Enemies?

by Lady Whitehart

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King's Cross Station

Chapter 1 of 6

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A/N: This is a continuation of my recently completed story "Eileen's Hope." I have several chapters ready for posting and several more in various stages of completion. I don't know how close to canon I'll be, but I've decided to post it as it's been written so far and if it doesn't match canon oh well. It's canon compliant up to Book 6, and, yes, I have issues with calling it AU.

Also please note that it does not take into consideration the dates on the Black Family Tree. This story was started prior to the release of that document, and quite frankly I lump it in there with the author's interviews.

So read, enjoy and hopefully review. Constructive criticism is always appreciated; I only bite vicious flammers.

King's Cross Station

It was the last day of August, and King's Cross Station was bursting with activity as families crowded into the station to see their children off to school. The heaviest foot traffic seemed to be centered around platforms nine and ten. The bustling crowds, however, did not seem to take notice that people somehow managed to vanish near the barrier. One such pair was a tall, black-haired man with a hooked nose and a young boy with stringy black hair and a nose that was in the process of becoming just as beaky. William Prince coldly ushered his nephew, Severus Snape, toward the barrier.

"Hurry up, Severus! I don't want you to miss the school train," the man said with a slight touch of impatience in his voice.

"I'm trying, Uncle, but one of the wheels on my trunk keeps sticking," the boy replied, frustration edging his words.

The tall man looked down at his nephew. Chin-length, jet-black hair framed the boy's pallid face. His bright, black eyes darted back and forth, trying to take everything in at once. The scrawny boy struggled along as he hauled his trunk behind him. Yet, for everything the boy lacked in the physical realm, he more than made up for it with his sharp and clever mind. A mind that would have been wasted had the child remained in Spinner's End. How fortunate the boy was to have an uncle who had been able to sponsor his education, paying for his school supplies. Prince only hoped that the boy's status as a half-blood wouldn't keep him out of the only worthwhile House at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

William's much younger sister, Eileen, had married a Muggle a little over twelve years ago, even though their parents could have found a match for her. But the family decided that since she could not carry on the Prince name, it would matter very little in the end. Much to William's dismay, the family actually took to the Muggle and even gave them their blessing. Besides, Eileen couldn't pass on the family name, and it would matter very little in the long run. William was the eldest of four sons, so there

would be plenty of chances to keep the family name alive. Unfortunately, Fate had other ideas. It seemed that there would be no Princes left to carry on the bloodline, let alone the name. Two of his brothers had died childless, one was not interested in women, and William only had daughters.

Several years ago, William had found himself in need of a male heir to secure a future business deal. Since his younger daughter had been born, his wife had been too ill to have any more. Eileen had given birth to a son—a half-blood, but still a Prince. His only option was to take on his sister's son as his ward. William had decided to meet with her during the day while her Muggle husband would be at his pitiful foreman's job. He had hoped to settle the matter without involving his brother-in-law. Eileen, he'd discovered, had decided to renounce the magical world to please her husband and had no intention of telling Severus anything about his heritage. William, seeing his nephew mostly as an asset to be exploited, had been infuriated. The two had argued bitterly over what was in the child's best interest.

Unable to change her mind, William had lost his temper and had threatened to take Severus away from her if she didn't reconsider. The threat had been enough to make his sister cower in fear. The worst part had been that Severus, barely over five years old at the time, had crept in to eavesdrop at some point and had witnessed the whole hideous mess. William had stopped shouting at his sister when he had noticed the poor boy. He had realized that having the boy terrified of him was only going to make things more difficult. Once emotions had calmed, William had persuaded his sister to at least consider the offer.

By the time he had sent the owl, the couple had accepted his offer. Eileen had explained the matter to her husband, saying that her family had agreed to pay for the boy's education. Shortly after Severus's ninth birthday, William had suggested that his nephew should come to stay with him for part of the summer to learn proper wizarding etiquette and for tutoring in the magical arts. During the last three summers, Severus had learned how to behave like any other pure-blood young wizard. William and his wife had taken it upon themselves to refine his manners, which were passable enough, and had worked to rid him of his appalling accent. Now the boy at least could speak and behave the part they needed him to play.

Last summer, William had discovered his nephew's natural talent for potions. Severus had been fascinated as he watched his aunt brewing various potions for household use. To keep him occupied, his aunt had taught him how to prepare ingredients. Severus had been meticulous in the preparation of ingredients and had possessed an innate sense of timing during the preparations. William had been sure that this was going to be the boy's area of expertise. Without delay, he had begun instructing the boy in the exact art and subtle science of potion-making.

The boy's knack for potions had paled in comparison to his proficiency with a wand. William had started the boy off with basic hexes and jinxes, allowing Severus to use his grandfather's old wand to avoid detection by the Ministry. The child had mastered them easily, and William saw no real harm in arming his nephew with the means to defend himself. This past summer, he'd taught the boy several curses. Besides, having a background in the Dark Arts would more than likely impress such high-born people as the Blacks and Malfoys. Making the child even more useful to the advancement of the Prince family.

William was actually rather proud of his nephew. He was a very bright lad who wasn't afraid of hard work. In fact, young Severus seemed to thrive on it. He became easily engrossed in his studies and retained nearly all of what he had learned. In spite of Severus's half-blood status, he would be a decent catch for any young witch who wasn't overly concerned about her future husband's looks. Thinking about his nephew's appearance suddenly made William very much aware of the fact that the boy was slouching and shuffling his feet as he walked.

"Stand up straight, Severus," he commanded sharply, "and remember everything your aunt and I have been teaching you. I want you to be indistinguishable from a pure-blood. Your heritage and ambition will help you go far. Don't tell anyone that your father was a Muggle, unless you are asked directly. I'm sure that it probably won't make a difference, since you are such a clever young man, but I do not want to take that chance. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Uncle, I understand perfectly," Severus said, carefully enunciating his words as he continued to struggle with his trunk.

"Very good, Severus. We may not be a wealthy family, but the Princes are very proud," his uncle said as they walked. "We embody all the best of Slytherin House: cunning, ambition, intelligence. You have much to live up to, Severus."

The boy looked up at his uncle; determination was etched on his young face. "I will not let you down, Uncle."

William Prince smiled briefly at his nephew, a hint of pride in his voice. "I have no doubts that you will ever be anything short of excellent. Now, this is where we go through the barrier. Once on the other side, you can pull your school robes on over your other clothes. Just lean against the barrier, and you will slip right through."

On the other side of the barrier, the Severus Snape's dark eyes opened wide and his mouth dropped at the sight of so many other witches and wizards, but especially the huge, bright-red steam engine. He had often gone with his uncle to Diagon Alley, which had always been an adventure, but somehow this seemed even more amazing that there could be a wizarding train platform right on top of the Muggle one!

"Severus, do close your mouth. I would like to introduce you to some old friends of the family; however, I would prefer not to do so when you look like a codfish," William said sternly, handing the boy a plain black school robe that he had been carrying draped over his arm. "Here, put on your robe, Severus. I want you to make a good first impression."

"I'm, I mean, I am sorry, Uncle." Severus covered his astonishment with an expression of casual boredom as he pulled his slightly-faded black school robe on over his street clothes.

He followed his uncle over to a group of well-dressed people. A tall girl of about seventeen watched him, as if trying to decide whether or not he was worth acknowledging. Severus thought she was beautiful, but there was something cruel about her whole demeanor. Severus was so captivated by her that he stumbled and fell against someone.

"Watch where you're going!" snapped a messy-haired, bespectacled boy, who was standing next to a new-looking leather trunk, which had an Appleby Arrows logo emblazoned on one side and was surrounded by several signatures. The boy was smartly dressed in a pristine, white cotton, button-down shirt and neatly pressed, charcoal gray trousers under his unbuttoned, black school robe. The boy looked Severus up and down, taking in the worn-but-clean appearance of his secondhand robe.

Severus muttered an apology before scrambling to catch up with his uncle, dragging his own battered trunk behind him. The boy had to be about Severus's own age. Severus figured that the boy must be from one of those wealthy families to have an autographed Arrows trunk. No wonder the boy didn't want anything to do with Severus. Well, there wasn't any time to worry about it now; his uncle was getting ready to introduce him to the Blacks. The boy bowed gracefully: low enough to be polite, but not so low that he would seem like a servant.

"So, this is Eileen's son? I'm assuming that you have adopted him then, William? He must be worth something, for I know that you and your sister were never particularly close," said a tall man, whose dark hair was streaked with silver. "So, what special talents does he possess?"

"Intelligence is his gift: brilliant with Potions and spells. I have been tutoring him the last few summers. I expect him to be taken under Professor Slughorn's wing before Halloween." Prince smiled. "Bellatrix has grown into a lovely young woman. Have you found a match for her yet?"

"Nothing that we are ready to announce." Black watched his daughter fondly as she walked off to chat with a group of Slytherin students. "My cousin's eldest son will be starting at Hogwarts this year as well. He and Severus will most likely be House mates. Ah, there they are now with the Malfoys."

Severus stood up straight and endured another round of formal introductions. He shook hands with the boy, hoping to make a friend before he got on the train. Sirius was a very handsome young man. He was a bit taller and more filled out than Severus, and he had thick, black hair, and his eyes were a rather stormy shade of gray. Like the haughty boy with the glasses, Sirius took in Severus's appearance with a bit of disdain. Severus began to get the impression that his uncle wasn't as close to the Blacks as he let on.

He did notice that the tall, patrician-looking young man with the white-blond hair, Lucius Malfoy, was studying him carefully. Severus caught sight of a shiny silver and green badge on his school robes. He remembered seeing his aunt's old prefect badge. Young Lucius Malfoy was a prefect, definitely someone worth getting in good with.

Severus felt the cold gray eyes snake over him, and he was tired of being looked down upon. Severus stared right back, meeting the gaze, determined not to blink or look away. After a moment or two, Lucius raised an eyebrow and smiled slightly at him.

"Come, Severus, it's nearly time to get on the train," his uncle said as he turned from the Blacks and Malfoys. His pleasant attitude shifted once they were out of earshot. "Haughty bastards! They think that they are so much better than we are, just because they have more gold than brains. They wouldn't have any of it if it wasn't for hard-working people such as myself, making sure that the goblins at Gringotts didn't rip them off. Severus, you are to study extra hard just so you can put them all in their place. Make sure that Lucius Malfoy and Bellatrix Black see how adept you are already with magic. If they see you as a person of ability, your station won't matter."

His uncle glanced around, grumbling still. "There are the Potters. As much as I hate putting on this sycophantic act, I must stop and give an obligatory greeting to them as well. Another old family, the Potters are. Sadly, they were all in Gryffindor and are a batch of Muggle-lovers to boot, but they are wealthy, important clients of mine. I suppose it will be good for business to chat with them. Do not mention the Dark Arts in front of them; they just don't understand the usefulness of Dark magic. Remember: it *always* pays to keep up appearances. And of course, the Lupins are there as well, though they have no right to even be seen with such high-born people. I believe that Mrs. Lupin was a Muggle-born. Yes, I suppose their son Remus, or maybe it's Romulus, would be in your year. Sickly looking child."

Severus was first introduced to the Potters, who looked old enough to be his grandparents. They greeted him with kind smiles, and Mrs. Potter remarked on his 'lovely, old-fashioned manners.' Severus lifted his chin, pleased with the compliment. He was introduced to the Lupins, another nice couple, who shook his hand readily. The sickly-looking boy with light brown hair grinned at him and shook his hand with a friendly smile on his pinched and peaked face. Severus felt a surge of hope in his chest; perhaps they would sit together on the train.

Severus and his uncle were about to leave when a dark-haired boy bounded up to them and began pestering his father for sweets money. Mr. Potter had the youngster address Severus, who felt horrified to be staring straight into the face of the boy he had bumped into earlier. The boy with glasses was James Potter, the only child of the elderly Mr. and Mrs. Potter.

"Hello, my name is Severus, Severus Snape." He smiled politely. "I am sorry about bumping into you before--"

"Snape? That isn't a wizarding name I'm familiar with," James interrupted.

"James Potter!" gasped the older woman. "There is no need to be rude. You should be ashamed of yourself. Now apologize!"

James grudgingly did so. Severus hadn't intended to get the boy in trouble with his mother. This wasn't going well at all.

"Are you coming, Remus? We won't be able to get a compartment if we don't hurry," James said pleasantly to the other boy while he flatly ignored Severus.

"In a minute. Coming with us, Severus?" Remus asked with a friendly smile.

Before Severus could reply, James said hastily, "There won't be enough room. We already have four people."

"Sorry, Severus, maybe some other time," Remus said as he headed to the train with James. The two were almost immediately engrossed in a conversation about Quidditch.

Severus was so disappointed that he barely heard his uncle urging him to go on ahead while the older man chatted with Mr. Potter, who stood talking to the man with a stiff, forced smile on his face. Even though Mr. Potter continued his polite discussion with William, he had a distinct air of wanting to be somewhere else. As young as he was, Severus could tell that Mr. Potter was far from pleased that William Prince was continuing to inflict himself upon him.

Severus hauled his trunk and started shoving it up into the train compartment. He almost had it when it slipped and landed on the top of his foot. He hopped about, tears of pain leaking out of his eyes. That had really hurt!

"What's the matter with you?" It was James. "What are you sniveling about, Severus Snape?"

"Dare you to say it ten times fast, James." Sirius Black was standing next to James, laughing.

"I'll take that dare!" James snorted, grinning viciously. He was on the third "sniveling Severus Snape," when his tongue went wonky, and he blurted out: "Snivellus Snape!"

James and Sirius nearly collapsed on the platform, laughing.

"Stop it!" shouted a voice. The voice belonged to a very pretty girl with thick, red hair and bright green, almond-shaped eyes. She stood with her fists on her hips, glaring at the two boys.

James grinned at her. "I beg your pardon, miss, but I didn't get your name."

"And you won't either. Now, go on with you!" The girl stood her ground, refusing to seem intimidated by them.

Remus stuck his head out of one of the windows. "James! Sirius! I found a compartment. Hurry up already!"

James and Sirius made faces at Severus before hurrying off to join Remus on the train.

"What awful boys!" the girl exclaimed, shaking her head in disgust. She turned to Severus; her face was kind as she smiled sweetly at him. "Did you hurt yourself badly? That trunk looks so very heavy. My name is Lily, Lily Evans. I know! If you help me with my trunk, I'll help you with yours."

Stunned into unthinking stupidity, Severus mutely followed the girl to the next door on the car and reached out to take the handle on her trunk. Between the two of them, they manhandled the trunk into the train car.

"Would you care to sit with me?" Lily asked. "If you want to, that is."

Sit with a girl? Well, it certainly was better than sitting by himself.

"SEVERUS!" His uncle was beckoning to him. Severus excused himself and went immediately to his uncle.

His uncle glared at him. "What do you think you are doing, Severus?"

"I was helping that girl with her trunk, Uncle. It was too heavy for her to lift, and then she was going to help me with my trunk. I was only trying to be friendly."

"That girl is a Muggle-born. If you are trying to make a favorable impression on Lucius Malfoy and Bellatrix Black, it would not behoove you to be seen with a filthy, little Mudblood. Severus, on no account are you to speak with that girl, or any others of her kind. Do you understand?" William asked, puffing up in anger.

"Yes, Uncle," Severus said softly, looking at his shoes. The girl had two Muggle parents; he had one Muggle parent. Dear Merlin, being a half-blood made him only one step away from being a Mudblood himself!

The train whistle blasted, signaling the final boarding. Severus darted to the train, and his uncle helped him lift up his trunk. Uncle William wished him a good term as the train began to chug slowly down the track. Parents and students waved to each other, calling out their good-byes.

The Journey to Hogwarts

Chapter 2 of 6

Friends and foes are made on the Hogwarts Express.

A/N: I wasn't sure if I wanted to continue this and make it compliant with Book 7 canon or finish it the way I had originally planned. Anyway if you recognize it, Rowling wrote it. Everything else was squeezed from my own braincells. Feedback is greatly appreciated.

Part Two: The Journey to Hogwarts

All of the compartments were occupied. Severus walked down the narrow hallway again, dragging his trunk behind him. He had to find a place to sit. He couldn't spend the entire train ride wandering up and down the corridor. Finally, he decided the next compartment with remotely friendly occupants was going to be where he would sit for the duration of the trip.

Happy shouts and merry conversations rang out from all of the compartments. Severus paused outside one that was occupied by four boys: James Potter, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin and a chubby boy, who was stuffing his mouth with sweets. No, he couldn't go in there; Potter and Black had made it very clear they were not interested in being friends with him. With a sigh, he wistfully listened to their conversation, standing so that he could see a little bit into their compartment.

"... had the whole team sign my trunk!" James bragged loudly enough to ensure that his voice would carry into the corridor.

"I haven't been able to get to any professional Quidditch games yet," Remus said with touch of envy in his voice. "Anyone up for a game of Exploding Snap?"

"Maybe you can come with us over the summer, Remus. We usually get Arrows season tickets. It'll be fun," Sirius offered.

"I don't think your family would want me to come to your house, Sirius." Remus was standing on the seat, rummaging through his bag, looking for his cards.

James spoke up. "You can stay with me. My parents don't make a fuss over blood issues."

"You could stay with me, Remus," said the chubby boy. "My mum would love it. She loves to cook and bake--"

"What house do you think you'll be in? I know I'll be in Gryffindor," James interrupted.

"I'd like Gryffindor or maybe Ravenclaw, like my mother," Remus said brightly, pulling out a pack of Exploding Snap cards.

"I want to be in Gryffindor, too," chimed in the fourth boy.

"Shut up, Peter," James said nastily. "You'll likely end up in Hufflepuff, same as your parents."

"Yeah, well, if you get sorted by where your parents were, I'll be stuck in Slytherin for sure," grumbled Sirius.

James snorted with suppressed laughter. "You'll have to spend the next seven years of your life rooming with that Snively Snape. I'd rather bunk in the kitchen with the house-elves. OW! That hurt, Sirius!"

"My father and mother will have a fit if I'm not in Slytherin. Every Black going back for--forever has been there. I don't want to be in Slytherin and be under my cousin Bella's thumb until she finishes school. Andromeda's fine, Cissy ignores me, but Bella's a real bitch."

"And you'll be stuck with Snively," James added. Laughter echoed out into the corridor.

"Really, James, he isn't that bad," Remus protested mildly. "He seemed very polite."

"Remus, let me tell you something. I've heard my dad talk about his uncle. The whole family is very interested in the Dark Arts. They're nothing but trouble," James said, lowering his voice. "Besides, if you want to be friends with Sirius and me, you can't be friends with the likes of Snively. Not that you'd really want to."

Severus had heard enough. If he didn't think he would get into trouble, he'd use one of his hexes on that stuck-up Potter boy. He bit back angry tears. It just wasn't fair! He was sure that Remus would have probably been friends with him, but he was too worried about what Potter thought. Remus was just a stupid sodding coward; Severus didn't want to be friends with such a weakling! The Princes were clever and shrewd and deserved to be surrounded by powerful people like the Malfoys and the Blacks. Maybe after they were dorm mates, Black would change his mind about him.

He looked up to see a witch pushing the food trolley towards him. Severus had to find a compartment at least to allow her to pass. He ducked through the door two compartments down from Potter and his pals. He only hoped the occupants were a bit more friendly.

"Oh, hi!" Severus was greeted by a pretty, smiling face. He had stumbled into Lily Evans's compartment. How did he manage to miss her before? "I wondered where you had got to. I thought maybe you'd decided to sit with someone else. Have you been in the corridor the whole time? Er... I'm sorry. I can't think of your name."

"Sniv--Severus, Severus Snape," he introduced himself, feeling his face turn red. He sounded like such an idiot.

Lily only beamed more brightly at him. "Pleased to meet you. Please, sit down. I really haven't had a chance to make any friends yet. You see, I didn't know I was a witch until my letter arrived. I don't really know much about the wizarding world."

"So you really are a Mud--I mean, a Muggle-born?" He mentally kicked himself. *You nearly insulted her, you dunderhead! Well, Uncle William won't be pleased that I sat with her on the train. But she seems so nice. Anything is better than walking up and down the corridor the whole way to Scotland.*

She looked at him oddly. "Is there something wrong with being a Muggle-born?"

Severus had to think fast. "I don't think so, but some wizards, like those boys who were making fun of me, tend to look down on them."

"Are you from one of those old wizarding families? What was it like growing up with magic?" Her eyes were shining with excited interest.

"Well, I..." Severus was interrupted by the opening of the compartment door.

"Anything off the trolley, dears?" asked the matronly-looking witch pushing the snack trolley.

"We'll have..." Severus pulled his coin purse out of his pocket. He only had one Galleon, eight Sickles and ten Knuts to last him until the Christmas holiday. He quickly calculated in his head. "Two cauldron cakes and a small box of Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans, please, ma'am."

He handed over a Sickle and four Knuts. Not much, but he felt it was a chivalrous effort on his part. Lily took the cake with a beaming smile. Out of her satchel, she pulled a wrapped sandwich, a package of crisps, and a container of milk. Sharing the drink with only one straw seemed a little too awkward, so Lily returned it to her bag. Soon they were talking and laughing like old friends as the countryside flew swiftly by.

"So, these are just jelly beans?" Lily asked, picking up the box of Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans.

Severus grinned. "Well, you have the usual flavors, like strawberry and chocolate, but there is also grass, soap and dirt. Just be careful."

Lily carefully picked up a red one, eyeing it cautiously. It looked harmless enough. It was more than likely just cherry or tomato. What else could it be? She went to pop it into her mouth, but changed her mind, handing it to Severus.

It's probably nothing too dangerous, he thought, popping it into his mouth and chewing it. That was a big mistake because within seconds his mouth was burning so badly that he thought he would be able to breath fire. Severus felt his face turn red, and his eyes began to water. Surely he was going to burst into flames!

"It's hot!" Severus choked out, fanning his burning mouth. "I need something to drink!"

Lily dug furiously through her satchel, trying to find the container of milk to give to him.

Surely this is considered a matter of life or death, he thought as his pulled out his wand, trying to think of a spell that would help, but none were coming to mind.

Lily shoved the milk container into his hand, and he quickly drank the whole thing. Slowly, the fiery torture began to fade. Now the only problem was that the combination of chili pepper and milk was making him feel horribly sick to his stomach. He leaned back against the seat, concentrating on forcing his unruly guts to behave.

"Are you all right, Severus?" Lily asked, sitting next to him, a worried look on her face.

"I think I will be fine," he muttered tightly between his teeth. *God, she must think I'm a complete arse! Of all the ruddy stupid things to have happen...*

"Can I get you anything?"

He shook his head slightly. Just when Severus thought things couldn't get any worse, the compartment door slid open. Staring at him with malicious looks on their faces were James Potter and Sirius Black. The two boys took in his offish appearance, and grins were exchanged.

"Looking a bit peaky there, Snivellus," James taunted. "Suffering from a bit of motion sickness, I see. Is the swaying starting to get to you?"

"Can't stand that back and forth and back and forth feeling, can you?" Sirius asked snidely, exaggerating the back and forth.

Severus was now forced to think about the rocking motion of the train car, and it made him feel even worse. He stood up to open the compartment window to allow some fresh air in. Sirius roughly shoved him back into the seat. The sudden movement sloshed the bile up higher in his throat. Surely he was going to vomit!

"Leave him alone!" Lily commanded, shoving Sirius back. "He wasn't bothering you."

"So Snively needs to have a *girl* fight his battles," Sirius snapped.

"I told you to leave him alone!"

Sirius looked like he was going to shove Lily, and Severus couldn't allow her to get hurt on his account. He waved his wand, flicking it towards Sirius's face and shouting, "*Surculus Saeta!*"

Suddenly, Sirius's eyebrows began to thicken and grow rapidly down over his eyes. He started yowling in surprise. All too soon, the noise attracted some very unwanted attention.

"What is all this racket about?" Prefect Lucius Malfoy was standing in the doorway with Bellatrix Black at his elbow.

"Sirius Black, how dare you embarrass me by picking a fight on the school train?" Bella demanded, yanking Sirius back by his ever-lengthening eyebrows.

"Leave me alone, Bella!"

"Better watch it, Sirius," she hissed angrily. "I'll write your father and tell him you have been associating with trash and Mudbloods."

Sick or not, Severus wasn't going to let that hoity-toity snob insult him like that. He whipped out his wand and barely had an incantation in mind when Malfoy yanked his wand from his hand.

"You really don't want to cause any trouble now, do you? You could wind up expelled even before you get to school." He looked appraisingly at Severus. Pointing his own wand at Sirius, he muttered, "Finite Incantatum."

Severus stood up defiantly, swallowing back the sick feeling that was threatening to escape his stomach. "Give me back my wand. Now!"

The older boy raised an eyebrow. "I suppose you are going to try and make me."

"Damn right, I am," Severus snarled, reaching for his wand.

Malfoy handed it back to him, an amused smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. "I think that I will need to watch you closely. Bella, escort your idiot cousin back to our compartment. I think we need to have a little chat with him."

As the two older students ushered Sirius out of the compartment, James turned to Severus, hatred blazing in his eyes. "I hope you're pleased with yourself, Snivellus. Do you have any idea how much trouble they'll make for him? I'm going to get you back for that if it's the last thing I do." He turned to Lily. "You might want to find a new friend before something terrible happens to you. He has the wrong sort interested in him now."

James exited the compartment, slamming the door behind him. Lily and Severus sat in a very awkward silence. He drew his knees up to his chest and wrapped his arms around his legs. He rested his head on his knees, too embarrassed to look at Lily. Either she was going to think that he was some kind of nancy-boy who couldn't fight his own battles or else that he was an evil, uncontrolled monster. Surely she wouldn't want to have anything to do with him now. He swallowed hard, feeling his anger settle uneasily in the vicinity of his still-churning stomach.

After what seemed to be a very uncomfortable eternity, Lily broke the silence by asking, "Severus, what's a Mudblood?"

He didn't dare meet her eyes; instead he mumbled against his knees. "It's a really rude term for a Muggle-born. It means 'dirty blood.' It was probably the most insulting thing that girl could have said to you."

"Oh..." Lily looked out the window, a frown pulling down the corners of her mouth.

His heart sank. "Please, don't worry, Lily. I would never call anyone that, especially not you."

Severus had no idea what he was supposed to do. He had absolutely no experience with girls, especially sad ones. He had the instinctive feeling, however, that if he did or said the wrong thing, she would never speak to him again. He lowered his voice to a whisper. "Lily, can you keep a secret?"

When she nodded, he continued. "I'm really not much better off than you are. I'm what they call a half-blood; my mother is a witch, but my father is a Muggle. My parents are dirt poor, and the only reason that I'm even on this train is because my uncle is paying for my education expenses. Only he isn't exactly a very well-liked person, so people like Malfoy and Black are just going to figure that I'm pretty much worthless, too."

"But you stood up for me! Those two boys could have really hurt you--because there were two of them," she hastily added. "I don't think you're worthless; I think you're great."

He felt his chest swell with pride at her praise and the possibility of having her as a friend. The knots in his stomach loosened a bit, and he grinned at her. "I promise to be your friend, no matter what happens."

"Even if we aren't in the same House at school?"

"No matter what," he reiterated.

They spent the last of the train ride sitting side-by-side on the seat, their heads bent low over the book *Potions: Basics for Beginners*. He gave her a few tips that his uncle had taught him about preparing ingredients. She wrote them carefully in the margins of her textbook. Outside, the scenery was becoming lost in the deepening shadows of the setting sun.

It was dark by the time the Hogwarts Express chugged up to the platform at Hogsmeade Station. The students all clambered off of the train, and an enormous, hairy-faced man greeted the first-years and led them to the lake. A fleet of small rowboats was waiting for them, and they were instructed to ride no more than four to a boat. Lily hesitated at the sight of the small watercraft.

"What is the matter?" Severus asked when he noticed that she was shaking.

Her face turned red. "I'm afraid of boats. I fell out of one when I was little. Nothing happened, but it was still scary."

"I promise not to let anything happen to you," Severus said, trying to reassure her. "You can keep your eyes closed the whole time if it will make you feel better."

"If she's stuck with you, I don't blame her for keeping her eyes shut," growled Sirius as he shoved past Severus and Lily.

Severus glared at him, noting a red, hand-shaped mark on the side of the handsome boy's face. Apparently, James hadn't been joking when he said Bella and Lucius would 'make trouble' for him. Well, it was his own fault for coming into the compartment in the first place. As Sirius walked by on the dock, Severus furtively pointed his wand at the boy and muttered the incantation for the Trip Jinx. Sirius stumbled and fell off of the dock and into the lake. Severus cringed slightly. He had only wanted him to land on his arrogant arse, not fall into the lake! It was a bit too obvious that he had been hexed.

When Hagrid reached down to pull the dripping wet boy from the water, James took advantage of the situation and attacked. James drew his wand, but Severus was too quick with the Leg-Locker Curse. James bunny-hopped for a moment before crashing to the dock.

"Tha's enough now, yeh two!" the gamekeeper bellowed, standing between Severus and James. "In ter the boats with yeh."

Severus and James reluctantly did as they were told. The children settled into the little boats for their trip across the lake. Severus and Lily shared a boat with two boys while James, a soggy Sirius, Lupin and the chubby boy took a boat together. As they set out, Lily clenched her eyes tightly closed and grabbed Severus's hand with a bone-crushing grip. The boy felt a curiously happy feeling flood him as he squeezed her hand back. He felt incredibly special sitting next to a girl, a pretty girl, who was holding his hand. Severus almost felt as if he would be able to float across the lake without a boat.

He looked out of the corner of his eye to see James Potter staring at him, jealousy etched on his face. James Potter, wealthy pure-blood with an autographed Appleby Arrows trunk, was jealous of him? No one had ever been jealous of dirt-poor, half-blooded Severus Snape, who was coming to school with used textbooks and secondhand school robes. Looking at the girl beside him, with her thick, red hair and green eyes, Severus realized now he finally had something--no, someone--in his life to inspire envy in others. It was an oddly satisfying feeling.

As the tiny fleet cleared the trees, the first-years were finally able to see the majestic castle rising out of the mist. The sight was awe-inspiring. Severus stared at it in wonder, taking in every detail of what was to be his home for the next seven years.

"Open your eyes, Lily," he whispered, not wanting her to miss the hauntingly magical sight that was Hogwarts castle.

Lily first opened one eye and then the other, clutching Severus's hand tighter than ever. She whispered back, "It's so beautiful."

In spite of the fact that he was sure half of the bones in his hand were broken, he enjoyed the feel of her hand in his. It was a comforting feeling--friendly. Severus didn't care that James and Sirius wanted nothing to do with him. Lily had accepted him without a second thought. She didn't care that his robes were faded or that his books were old and worn in. He decided that the castle wasn't the only thing that was beautiful.

Already in Trouble

Chapter 3 of 6

The firsties arrive at Hogwarts, and the hexes fly.

A/N: I've been thinking about this, and I've come to the decision not to make this bend to strictly fit DH canon. There are several chapters already completed, and this was

made to be a continuation of *Eileen's Hope*, which has already been semi-shafted by the new canon. Hope you don't mind. Read and enjoy. Reviewing is desired but not required.

Part 3: Already In Trouble

The boats bumped up against the dock on the far side of the lake at the base of the castle. One of the boys behind Severus jumped onto the dock and steadied the boat so the others could climb out. Severus went to step onto the dock when his legs suddenly became weak and went out from under him. He landed with a painful thud on his bum. His legs must be numb from the boat ride.

"Are you all right, Severus?" Lily asked as she scrambled out of the boat.

"I'm fine," he lied, rubbing his legs. He realized that he had been hit with a Jelly-Legs Jinx. He looked to one side to see James Potter bending over, pretending to tie his shoe. Sirius was looking around with a look of mock innocence on his face. One of them had cast the spell; Severus was sure of that. He just *had* to get them back!

Severus tried to remember the countercurse as he pointed his wand at his legs. Thankfully the jinx was weak and was beginning to wear off by itself. He rose to his feet and followed the rest of the first-years up the winding path to the castle. He kept his eyes on James and Sirius as the two laughed and joked with Remus and Peter. Severus envied their friendship until he realized that Lily was at his elbow, telling him about her parents' reaction to her letter. He wanted to kick himself: he did have a friend and a really good one at that.

"How do they decide what House to put you in, Severus?" Lily asked, curiosity and anxiety evident in her voice.

"My uncle said one of the school relics decides, but he didn't tell me anything else," Severus replied, trying to reassure her.

"So I won't have to do any magic or anything like that, will I?"

"Probably not," Severus mumbled, keeping his eyes on James and Sirius, looking for an opportunity to hex them. Lily seemed to relax a bit.

Before long they were walking into the entry hall of Hogwarts. They were greeted by a stern-faced witch wearing dark brown robes trimmed in plaid. The woman had a very commanding way about her. Her sharp eyes carefully looked the group of first years over. Severus knew right away that she was someone who was not to be trifled with.

She raised her eyebrows at the sight of Sirius Black's wet robes. Hagrid ambled over to her, and they started speaking in hushed tones. The witch's lips immediately formed a thin, angry line.

"You, you and you," she commanded without preamble, pointing at Severus, James, and Sirius in turn. "Follow me."

The three boys followed her obediently. James and Sirius glanced at each other, then at Severus.

Severus kept his head up and his eyes fixed straight ahead. They were just as guilty as he was. He knew that his uncle wouldn't mind him getting into trouble for hexing those two, but his mother would be very disappointed if he managed to receive a detention, or worse, before classes even started. Still, what he had done on the train was self-defense. The incident on the dock would be a little more difficult to explain.

"Now, who are you, and why are your robes dripping wet, young man?" She wheeled around to face them, asking Sirius the first question.

"I'm Sirius Black, Professor." Sirius pointed at Severus. "It's all his fault! He used a Trip Jinx on me at the dock, and I fell in the lake. If Mr. Hagrid hadn't pulled me out, I could have drowned!"

"I see." Her eyebrows contracted. "And your name is?"

"Severus Snape, Professor. One of them used a Jelly-Legs Jinx on me when we got to the castle," Severus quickly added, trying to diffuse some of the blame onto the other boys.

"Only after you used a Leg-Locker Curse on me!" James said abruptly, snapping his mouth shut as the witch glared at him for speaking out of turn. "Sorry, Professor."

"When I want your input, I will ask for it." She spoke so sharply to James that he winced as if he had been physically slapped. "And you are?"

"James Potter, Professor," James whispered, hanging his head contritely.

"Need I remind you that each of you is underage and therefore not allowed to do magic outside of school unless it is under very exacting circumstances. Even though you were technically on school property at the time, you are not to hex another student for any reason. Have I made myself clear?"

"Yes, Professor," they chorused gloomily.

"For your punishment, Mr. Potter, you will lose five points for whichever House you are sorted into," she said harshly. Severus felt a grin breaking across his face. He suppressed it a bit too late. "You, Mr. Snape, will cost your future House ten points, five for each hex. You will also be doing a detention with me; I don't approve of students who find the punishments of another student amusing. Now, back to the group you go."

Severus couldn't believe it -- ten points *and* a detention. It just wasn't fair! She never asked why he would bother to hex them in the first place. If she had known about the incident on the train, perhaps the punishments would have been handed out more equally. Well, maybe it was for the best that she didn't know about what had transpired on the train. He at least was getting away with casting the Hair-Growing Hex on Sirius. Ten points was less than fifteen points. Still, losing points before he was even sorted wasn't going to endear him to his new House mates, even if they were mildly impressed that a first year knew how to cast curses.

James and Sirius turned to walk away, Sirius's wet robes clinging to his shivering form. The witch stopped the two boys and dried the dripping robes and cast a Warming Charm on them. They were still a bit messy-looking, but they were now warm and dry.

Severus walked moodily in the witch's wake, trying not to think of what a terrible impression he was making already. He wasn't paying attention to where he was going and walked right into her when she stopped.

"For goodness sake, Mr. Snape! Please keep your mind on where you are going. I do have one question before you rejoin your peers." She watched him in a way similar to how hawk would observe its prey. "How does a young wizard learn so many curses even before his first year?"

Severus returned her gaze without flinching. "My uncle taught me, Professor, so I wouldn't get bullied much."

"I see. You do realize, Mr. Snape, that there are ways to solve one's problems other than resorting to the use of curses?" the professor asked pointedly.

Severus stiffened. "Yes, I do, Professor."

"See that you remember that in the future." With a final nod she ushered the grumpy boy back to the group.

The Sorting

Chapter 4 of 6

The ickle firsties meet the Sorting hat.

Part 4: The Sorting

Severus stood with the rest of the first years in a small room off of the Great Hall, waiting to go in. His stomach had settled for the most part, and now he was quite starving. Lily stood next to him, shaking from either nervousness or excitement. Every now and then, she would reach out and grab his hand, squeezing it tightly. Each time she did this, his pale cheeks would turn a brilliant shade of red.

He really didn't mind her friendly gestures, although it was starting to get a bit annoying, but he was worried that the stern-faced witch -- who had just introduced herself as Professor McGonagall, the deputy headmistress and the head of Gryffindor House -- would notice and deduct more points from him. Lily, thankfully, had stopped grabbing his hand and now was bouncing up and down on the balls of her feet.

Professor McGonagall was telling them that their House was going to be something like their family while they were at school. Something about earning and losing points was mentioned as she shot pointed looks at Severus, James and Sirius. Severus thought about the fact that he had already lost points for his future House, but then again, so had James and Sirius.

His mind was busy with thoughts about becoming a member of Slytherin House. If the hat refused to put him in there because he was a half-blood, then he was hoping for a place in Ravenclaw. Gryffindor was not an option, and Hufflepuff was even less appealing. Besides, he was sure if he ended up in either Gryffindor or Hufflepuff, his uncle might refuse to pay one Knut towards his expenses.

The doors to the Great Hall swung open, and Professor McGonagall was commanding them to follow her. The first-years filed in behind the deputy headmistress. The sight before them was so wondrous that even Severus found himself staring open-mouthed. The ceiling had been bewitched to look like the clear night sky, just like the one outside. Four long tables ran the length of the room, and across the front was the staff table. A tall man with a waist-length white beard introduced himself as Professor Dumbledore, Headmaster. He welcomed the first-years warmly as Professor McGonagall brought out a stool and a ratty old hat. To his surprise, it immediately broke into song.

*Long, long ago
when I was new,
were four close friends
with talent true.
A wizarding school
was their great desire:
a place to teach,
shelter, inspire.
Now they're gone,
but what does remain
is a House bearing
each founder's name.
Each House is unique
as you will learn.
Listen, as I describe
them each in turn.
The first is Slytherin,
where you will find
those of ambition and
cunning mind.
Next is Hufflepuff,
the salt of the earth,
where fairness and toil
have the most worth.*

*In Ravenclaw reigns
wisdom and lore,
scholarship and
knowledge pure.
Gryffindor takes only
the bravest ones:
daring daughters and
courageous sons.
It's now my task
to sort each student.
My methods are both
time-honored and prudent.
A look at your thoughts
and I will know,
into which house
you ought to go.
One final thought
I give to you:
always be loyal,
always be true.
Hogwarts is now
your family.
Try to live in
peace and harmony.
Now place me upon
your darling head.
There's nothing to fear,
nothing to dread.
The process should only
take a minute.
That's right, step up,
and let's begin it!*

First, a girl was sorted into Ravenclaw and two boys went to Hufflepuff. Sirius Black was the fourth student to be sorted. The hat took its time trying to decide where best to put the young Mr. Black. Finally the word "Gryffindor" rang out, and the Slytherin table hissed with a smattering of whispers. Severus dared to glance at Bellatrix Black and Lucius Malfoy. Both of them seemed to be deep in conversation. Bella glared with contempt at her younger cousin as he returned her look defiantly.

Severus missed the next few sortings as he tried to determine why Black would want to be in another House. Surely the hat should have shouted out Slytherin before it even touched his head!

"Evans, Lily!"

Severus gave his traveling companion an encouraging grin as she climbed up onto the stool. The hat took only a few seconds to make the decision to put her in Gryffindor. Severus felt his stomach drop to his knees. Suddenly, he was overcome with a surge of defiance. For a brief instant, he wanted nothing more than to become a member of Gryffindor. Then his senses started coming back: he had no choice but to be in Slytherin if he wanted to receive a magical education.

Several other students were sorted before the Lupin boy made his way to the stool. The skinny boy's face looked positively green with anxiety. The Sorting Hat took only a moment to decide that Lupin should be a Gryffindor.

"Pettigrew, Peter!" The round boy stumbled going up the step, falling flat on his face. A Hufflepuff spot seemed to be guaranteed to him. Surprised mumbling broke out when he was announced as a Gryffindor.

"Potter, James!" The hat didn't even touch his head before it shouted, "Gryffindor!"

"Rosier, Evan!" The boy swaggered up to take his place on the stool. He joined the Slytherin table.

"Sinistra, Aurora!" A pretty, dark-haired girl walked past Severus; she, too, was sorted into Slytherin.

"Snape, Severus!" The boy felt his knees go weak as he made his way to the stool. The hat fell down over his eyes.

"Oh my, what an interesting combination we have here! Courage aplenty, a very brilliant mind, cunning to be sure, ambition, and a strong sense of loyalty. Where to put you?" The hat's voice echoed strangely in Severus's head.

Slytherin, Severus thought firmly.

Are you sure? it asked. A mind like yours would be right at home in Ravenclaw, I think.

No, *Slytherin*, I have to be in *Slytherin*.

But you have a lot of courage, my little friend. You already have one friend in Gryffindor; you could eventually have more.

Lily and I can still be friends. Just put me in *Slytherin* already, Severus demanded.

I see I wasn't wrong about the strong sense of loyalty. Definitely not afraid of hard work. Perhaps Hufflepuff would be a good place for you.

Severus was on the verge of ripping the hat from his head, thinking furiously, Don't you even **dare** consider sticking me in there with those duffers! Now say 'Slytherin,' and let me go!

Obviously, with a nasty temper like that, Hufflepuff wouldn't work out. Please, consider Gryffindor. You have so many of the fine qualities that embody that House.

Don't you understand? I want to become somebody important, to do something phenomenal, and the only way I can do that is to be in *Slytherin*!

Ambitious and persistent, the hat said finally. If you are sure, my dear boy, then I will place you as you ask.

Get on with it then.

"Slytherin!" the hat shouted to the student body. Relief flooded his mind as Severus pulled the irritating hat off of his head. He glanced briefly at the Gryffindor table, only to see Lily's disappointed face looking at him. He tried to convince himself that it didn't matter; they could still be friends. Yet, out of the corner of his eye, he saw the Potter boy tossing him a look of deepest hatred.

Glaring back at him, Severus made his way to the Slytherin table. Evan Rosier grudgingly made a space for him. He turned up his nose at the sight of Severus's worn and faded school robe. Severus tossed his hair back out of his face, refusing to be intimidated. He waited out the rest of the Sorting with his stomach growling. When the last few students had been sorted, every kind of food imaginable appeared on the tables. Severus joined his peers in the amazing feast.

At the end of the meal, Severus staggered to his feet, feeling full and sleepy. He dutifully followed along with the others as Lucius Malfoy readied to lead them to the Slytherin dormitory. As they exited the Great Hall, he craned his neck, looking for Lily. Severus wasn't paying attention and walked into the person in front of him.

"Watch where you are going, *Severus*!" snarled one of the Lestrangle brothers, brushing at his robes as if the younger boy had contaminated them.

"My name is *Severus*," he snarled back. "As in the Roman emperor, Lucius Septimius Severus, who reconstructed Hadrian's wall."

"I highly doubt," began Bellatrix Black, tossing back her thick, dark hair, "your *Muggle* father would be that clever."

Mother of Merlin, how did she find out? Had she just overheard a bit of family gossip or... Potter! Potter must have been listening outside the compartment door when he had been telling Lily about his family on the train. He had then, more than likely, told Black, who in turn had told Bella and Lucius just to get back at him. If those boys wanted to ensure that he was never accepted in Slytherin, then making his parentage known would be the way to do it. His face turned red with anger, and he blurted out, "Unlike your cousin, I'm clever enough to be in Slytherin."

"How dare you, you filthy little snot!" Bella sputtered in fury. Apparently, Severus had struck a nerve with the girl.

"Enough, Bella," Lucius said firmly, taking hold of her shoulders and turning to the younger boy. "I think little Severus here may be of some use to us. I loved the Hair-Growing Hex you used on Sirius. I hear you managed to tip him into the lake as well, and you got that little brat, Potter, also. Mind you, I don't appreciate 'ickle firsties' who cause Slytherin to lose points, so watch your step from now on."

"I will," Severus said, grinning slightly. A compliment from Malfoy could only mean that the prefect was impressed with him.

They were at the foot of the main staircase when the Gryffindor prefects came by with their first years in tow. Severus caught sight of Lily Evans and waved slightly, trying to reassure her that he still wanted to be friends. Her face lit up with a smile when she noticed him in the crowd.

Somehow the two groups became intermingled as they passed each other. Severus hoped to get close enough to Lily that she might squeeze his hand just one more time. He also wanted to reassure her that the fact that they were in two different Houses was in no way going to affect their newfound friendship. Instead he found himself confronted by Potter and Black. The two boys were threateningly close to him, wands in hand, ready to jinx Severus at the least bit of provocation.

Potter spoke in a tone that would have been menacing if his voice wasn't so high pitched. "Keep away from her, Snivellus, she's a Gryffindor."

"She's going to figure out sooner or later that you're nothing but trouble. We'll make sure of it," Black said, shoving him with his shoulder.

Severus moved to whip out his wand when he felt a very firm hand on his shoulder. It was the headmaster, peering down at him with very serious blue eyes. Severus had the oddest sensation, almost as if the old man *knew* what he was thinking.

"Is there a problem, gentlemen?" he asked, looking at each of them in turn.

There was a mumbled chorus of "No, sir," as Black and Potter scurried off to join their House.

"Is there anything you wish to tell me, Mr. Snape?" the headmaster asked, his eyes twinkling as he watched Severus.

"No, sir."

"Professor McGonagall has spoken with me about the incident at the dock. Remember that your choices are just as important as your abilities. Do you understand?" The blue eyes seemed to look right through him, causing Severus to shiver.

"I understand, sir." He nodded.

"Very good." The headmaster raised his voice. "Mr. Malfoy! You seemed to have misplaced one of your charges in the shuffle. I would hate for him to get lost on his way to the dormitory."

Malfoy beckoned to him. "You there, come along."

Severus hurried to catch up with the group of Slytherins as they headed down to the dungeons. He had the oddest feeling that he was being stared at. When he looked back over his shoulder, he saw Headmaster Dumbledore watching him with an intense look on his lined, old face. The look was similar to the one his mother had had on her face when he had left with his uncle earlier that morning. With a slight shrug of his shoulders, Severus turned to follow Malfoy and the others to his new home in the dungeons of Hogwarts.

Lessons to Learn

Chapter 5 of 6

The first-years learn to fly.

Disclaimer: I will say it again: I'm not JK Rowling; I'm just a humble fic writer who would love to be given the supreme honor of writing the official prequel. But seriously, what are the odds of that happening?

A/N: Thank you to my wonderful, loyal readers; you make this worth my while. Thanks also to my friend and beta, Verity, who keeps me reasonably sane.

Chapter 5: Lessons to Learn

It wasn't until Wednesday afternoon of the first week of classes that Severus finally had a spare moment to write his letters home. He flopped down on his bed with a quill, ink, and two pieces of parchment. First, he wrote to his uncle, telling him that he had been sorted into Slytherin. He was starting on his letter to his parents when the other boys came into the dormitory. Severus continued with his letter writing, doing his best to ignore them as they went on and on about Quidditch.

"What are you doing, Snape? That isn't homework already, is it?" Rosier asked, nodding at the parchments on the bed.

The pale boy barely glanced up at him. "Just letters home."

"Miss your mum so soon?" one of the other boys asked snidely.

"Not his 'mum,' Wilkes, more likely his 'mam'." Rosier went to snatch the letter out of Severus's hand.

Reflexively, Severus drew his wand and shouted, "*Petrificus Totalus!*"

Rosier's arms and legs snapped together. He keeled over as stiff as a board, lying helplessly on the floor, blinking furiously. Severus hopped off his bed and glared down at the other boy. To hide how much the remark had stung, he raised his wand threateningly. "Don't you *ever* make fun of me again. Do you understand?"

The immobile figure on the dark green rug stared indignantly up at him. With a satisfied nod, Severus ended the curse. Just because all of the other boys were much bigger than he was didn't mean that he was going to allow them to bully him. As Rosier scrambled in an undignified manner to his feet, Wilkes and Flint looked at Severus with a newfound air of respect. Without a word, Severus went back to his letters.

The first week of classes wore on, and Severus hurried to Transfiguration class. He was looking forward to this class if for no other reason than Lily was also in it. Every now and then, he caught a glimpse of her in the corridors or in the Great Hall, but he hadn't been able to talk to her. Either she was with a crowd of Gryffindors or he was being watched by Lucius Malfoy and Bellatrix Black. He realized that he actually missed her company. Hoping to have a moment to talk to her before class, he was one of the first students to arrive at the door before class started.

"Severus!" a delighted voice sang out behind him.

He turned to see Lily and some of the girls from her House heading over to wait by the door. The red-haired girl smiled at him, and Severus felt a grin spread across his face.

"Hi!" she called, waving to him.

"How are your classes going so far?" he asked, ignoring the unkind looks that the other girls were casting in his direction.

He and Lily chatted until the other first-years came along. One look from the other Slytherins gave him the impression that remaining Lily's friend was going to be more difficult than he had originally thought. At the same time, Potter and Black were coming up the other end of the corridor with Lupin and Pettigrew in tow. The four of them stopped short at the sight of one of their own holding a conversation with a Slytherin.

"Hey, Evans!" James called, walking over to them. "What are you doing talking to him?"

"There are plenty of Gryffindors to talk to; you don't need to waste your breath on a Slytherin," Sirius added, standing beside James Potter.

Lily lifted her chin defiantly. "I thought you wouldn't want to be bothered with a Muggle-born."

"Now how did you get that idea? You're a Gryffindor, same as us." James had a puzzled look on his face.

"We might be in the same House, but I'm nothing like you," she said coldly.

"Well, you're even less like Snivellus." James grinned, slipping his hand inside the pocket of his robe and sizing up Severus.

Severus felt his temper flare. He was positive it was his wand that Potter was reaching for. He stuck his hand into his own pocket and wrapped his fingers tightly around his own wand. There was no way he was going to allow Potter to get the upper hand on him ever again. Before either of them could do anything, the heavy classroom door swung open, and Professor McGonagall stepped out into the corridor. Her eyes narrowed at the sight of the crowd of first-years.

"Is there a problem, Mr. Potter?" she asked, the lenses of her spectacles flashing in the torch light.

James shook his head. "No, Professor."

"Very well," the tall witch said in a tone that clearly conveyed she was not to be trifled with. "Into the classroom then."

They filed silently into the Transfiguration classroom. Severus took a seat by himself on the Slytherin side of the classroom, directly behind the dark-haired girl and one of her friends. He pulled out a roll of parchment, a jar of ink, and fine gray goose quill. Professor McGonagall gave them the strictest of warnings: there would be no fooling around in her class. Severus sat up straighter as she began her lecture, determined to improve upon the wretched first impression he had made.

The first thing they were asked to do was to transfigure a toothpick into a needle. He concentrated so hard he broke out into a sweat, his fine, lank hair plastered to his forehead. Finally on the fourth attempt, he noticed that the little sliver of wood was at least pointy and metallic. He wiped his forehead on the sleeve of his robe, a satisfied smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. Glancing around, he realized that none of the other students had had any luck yet. Professor McGonagall paused at his desk, nodding her approval as the bell rang, signaling the end of class.

"Very good, first-years. It seems that we have a few students who have been able to make some change in their toothpicks. Good work, Mr. Snape, Miss Evans, Mr. Potter, and Mr. Black. You all have earned a point for your Houses. For homework, write a fourteen-inch essay on the correct technique for the spell and read the first half of chapter two. You are dismissed."

Severus quickly packed his books into his school bag, hoping to enjoy a bit of fresh air in the courtyard before his next class, Astronomy lecture. He was turning to leave when Rosier, Wilkes, and Flint beckoned to him. Curious as to what they could possibly want, Severus joined them.

"Hey, Severus, my brother lent me his Fanged Frisbee. Want to join us at break?" Sebastian Flint asked, patting the side of his school bag, which emitted a muffled snarl.

"I s'pose so."

"Great!" said Rosier. "By the way, how is your essay for History of Magic coming?"

Severus had finished most of it last night and was planning to recopy it that evening. He talked about it briefly, and his dorm mates seemed impressed. He grinned a little. Maybe they were finally realizing that he wasn't just some scruffy idiot. Perhaps they would become friends after all. Wilkes offered him some Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans from the small bag he had hidden in the pocket of his robes. After the bad experience he'd had with them on the train, Severus declined the offer politely.

The next morning there was a notice on the common room board announcing that there would be flying lessons for the first-years on the following Thursday. Severus wrinkled his forehead. He had only been on a broom a few times this past summer at his uncle's. While he was a decent flyer, meaning he felt confident that he wouldn't fall off and break his neck, he was by no means good at it. Well, surely there were plenty of first-years who had never ridden at all. He wasn't likely to be the worst at it. Besides, flying was something that he would only tolerate until he was old enough to Apparate.

At the end of classes on the following Thursday, Severus marched down to the Quidditch pitch with the rest of the first-year class. Some of them were nervous, some were excited, and a few were scared. The first person he ran into was James Potter. The dark-haired, bespectacled boy wore a confident expression on his face, and Severus was sure that James was already a really good flyer.

Suddenly, he felt someone shove him from behind. Severus staggered and nearly lost his balance. When he turned around, Sirius Black was standing behind him, followed closely by Remus Lupin and Peter Pettigrew. He glared at them.

"Sorry, didn't see you there, Snivellus," Sirius said, walking around him.

Remus passed him silently, looking both embarrassed and apologetic. Peter scurried behind both of them, a nasty grin on his round face.

"They are so awful," whispered a voice at his side. Lily was standing next to him, her eyes flashing with anger. "I'll say something to--"

"Don't!" he squeaked in alarm, his voice jumping two octaves. He cleared his throat. "I mean, it doesn't matter."

"Severus, Remus isn't like them at all. I've gotten to know him a little bit better. He really is very nice," she said softly.

She's making friends with them! Oh bloody brilliant! How long before she decides that a friendship with me isn't worth it! Severus thought in a panic. He frowned slightly. "If Remus goes along with them, then he's just as bad as they are. So much for Gryffindor courage."

Lily stepped back, looking hurt. "Well, you won't let a *girl* stick up for you!"

The first chance he had to speak to her since their Transfiguration class last Thursday, and he was arguing with her. He quickly changed the subject. "Are you looking forward to flying?"

"No." She shook her head, her red hair blowing in the breeze. "Have you flown before?"

"A little bit. Just don't let the broom sense that you're nervous, and you should be all right."

"I only hope I don't make a fool of myself." She chewed on her lower lip.

That makes two of us, he thought. "Well, good luck."

"Same," she said, giving his hand a quick squeeze before she hurried to catch up with her girl friends.

Ten minutes later, he stood beside one of the decrepit-looking school brooms, eyeing it apprehensively. He listened to the instructor, a youngish-looking woman with short dark hair, streaked lightly with gray, as she gave them some basic pointers. "... hover for a moment and touch back down. Ready now, first-years? Call up your brooms."

A chorus of 'up' echoed on the pitch as Severus and his classmates attempted to get the brooms to obey them. Severus looked around, noting that James and Sirius and a few others were already straddling their brooms. He glanced over at Lily; her broom was still on the ground. To his relief, his broom finally rose up and into his outstretched hand.

When he went to swing his leg over the handle, the broom suddenly started bucking. Beside him, the pretty, dark-haired girl from his House started laughing at sight of him half on and half off the misbehaving broom. Furious that someone from Slytherin would make fun of him, Severus was determined to make the broom bend to his will. He tried several times to mount the broom and received a few bruises on his inner thigh for his efforts. Then, just as suddenly as it had started, the broom stopped trying to buck him off and calmed down. At least he finally got it to mind!

He went to kick off as instructed when things went horribly wrong. The broom began to shudder and shake again. Trying to get it more under control, Severus hooked his feet at the ankles and leaned forward. He realized too late that this was the one of the worst things that he could have done. The broom started to lurch even more violently than before. Severus clung onto it for dear life as the broom rose higher and higher in the air. From there he noticed James and Sirius elbowing each other and laughing, and Sirius had his wand in his hand. All around him, he heard the laughter of his classmates.

The broom whipped up, hitting him sharply in the nose. He grabbed at his face with both hands and fell heavily to the ground. On impact he felt the air being forced from his lungs. Rolling onto his side, he clutched his nose, which was bleeding and swelling, and drew a shallow, painful breath through his mouth. A whistle blew, and the laughter died away.

"There now, Mr. Snape, don't move. I've sent for Madam Pomfrey," he heard the instructor say. "Bad bit of business with that broom. Just had the wind knock out of you,

that's all."

"Severus, are you all right?" Lily was hunched next to him.

Wanting to reassure her that he was fine, Severus tried to speak, only to have the metallic taste of blood fill his mouth. His insides heaved in protest. He made an effort to empty his mouth without emptying his stomach. He managed to sputter, "I think my nose is broken."

He took one of his hands away from his face and caught sight of the sticky, red blood on his hand. The sight of so much blood--his blood--made him fall back into a suffocating, swirling darkness.

Severus's eyes fluttered open, and he noticed the crimson and orange light fading into purple in the nearest window. Sunset? There were no windows in the Slytherin dormitory. He must be in the hospital wing. He let out a groan at the memory of the event that landed him here. There is a special brand of humiliation that comes from fainting in front of about forty people. How was he going to live this down?

"Ah, I see you're finally awake," said Madam Pomfrey, the school nurse, as she smiled at him. She placed a covered tray on the cabinet next to his bed. "Excellent bit of diagnosis you did on yourself. You were correct: Your nose was broken. Well, I healed as best as I could, but there was so much swelling I may not have been able to get it exactly as it was before. You also had suffered a mild concussion."

Maybe my nose will be a bit smaller, he thought hopefully.

"Anyway, eat up. I'm going to keep you here overnight; you may return to your common room first thing in the morning. Oh, and your visitor left you a note." With one last warm smile, the nurse left him to his meal.

Severus gingerly felt his still-swollen nose, noting that it now seemed to be twice the size it was before. Maybe, just maybe, that was only the swelling. He inspected the meal on the tray: chicken legs, mashed potatoes, mushy peas, and a small slice of chocolate cake. He polished it off quickly and picked up a note that was propped up against a water jug. He unfolded the square of parchment and read it carefully.

Severus,

Madam Pomfrey says that you'll be fine. But if you need to stay in hospital another day, I will be more than happy to bring my books for you to borrow so you don't get behind in your classes.

Lily

The boy grinned, which caused his nose to throb painfully. She must have been *really* worried about him if she came up to look in on him and left him a note. He sank back into the pillow, watching the sun as it finished setting.

Carving a Niche

Chapter 6 of 6

Lucius Malfoy decides Severus may be useful after all.

Chapter 6: Carving a Niche

Severus soon discovered that he had been mistaken about Rosier and Wilkes finally accepting him as a Slytherin. They turned out to be fair weather friends, inviting him in on their evening chats only when it involved a difficult piece of homework that he could help them with. Most of the time, he was beneath their notice. Sebastian Flint, on the other hand, was decidedly loyal. The two soon became friends and spent most of their free time in the library. Flint was a slow learner, but he studied lessons and practiced spells with a dogged determination that Severus admired.

The rest of the fall term sped by in a whirlwind of classes, homework, Quidditch, scrapes with Potter and Black, House points lost and gained, and a detention. More than once Severus rushed to class only to have his school bag split along a seam, dumping its contents in the corridor. Each time it caused him to be late and cost Slytherin points. At first he had brushed it off as merely a coincidence; the bag was old, and his wizarding school supplies and books were much heavier than the ones from his Muggle school had been. But then he noticed that it only happened right before the classes he had with the Gryffindors, and most often it was right before Transfiguration.

One morning--after his bag had split, yet again, in the corridor-- he came stumbling barely on time into Transfiguration. Before slipping into his seat at the back of the room, he was aware that Potter and Black looked rather disappointed. Severus now felt fairly certain they had been the ones jinxing his bag. He angrily tried to figure out why Potter and Black had decided to make him the major target of their pranks.

"Hand in your homework assignments, please," McGonagall called from the front of the room.

Severus grabbed his copy of *Standard Book of Spells* from his bag, only to discover that his bottle of ink had leaked all over the book and his essay. He stared down in horror at the ruined book and homework. He swore rather foully under his breath--or so he thought.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Snape?" Professor McGonagall was towering over him, her lips a thin furious line. "Such language will not be tolerated in my classroom."

He knew he was in for it. "I'm sorry, Professor; it just slipped out. My ink bottle leaked all over my book and homework."

She looked down at him and the dripping book and parchment. A flash of something that vaguely resembled sympathy flickered across her stern features. She waved her wand, siphoning the ink off of his things. The textbook was fine, but the essay was smudged so badly in several places that it was illegible. "Since you have never failed to hand in an assignment before, and you obviously did complete the homework, Mr. Snape, I will allow you to turn it in at the end of the day without penalty. However, I suggest you pack your things a bit more carefully in the future."

He cast his eyes down, feeling both grateful and humiliated. "Yes, Professor."

Several times during class, he caught Potter and Black casting nasty looks at him. Severus felt his face burn with resentment, and he was so distracted that he managed to cause his teacup to crack when he tried to transfigure it. This, of course, drew snickers from his neighboring classmates. With ten minutes left before the bell, he was ready

to give up. It was pointless to keep trying until he was calmer. Finally the bell rang, and he gathered his property and stood up to head for the door.

"A word with you before you leave, Mr. Snape," McGonagall said, and he hung back as the other students filed out of the classroom, whispering among themselves about his possible fate. When the door closed behind them, the Head of Gryffindor House spoke in her usual brisk tone, "I have noticed you have been tardy for this class six times so far this term, young man. Why is that?"

"My school bag keeps splitting, Professor." He wanted to accuse Potter and Black of the crime, but he felt it would be useless so speak against them to their Head.

The Transfiguration mistress took the bag for inspection. "Have you been sewing it yourself?"

He nodded. When he had been smaller, he had watched his paternal grandmother as she mended clothing in the evening. Nana Snape had taught him how to do simple mending stitches, even though she had told him that boys really didn't need to learn such things. He answered, with a hint of pride in his voice, "I used the needle I transfigured from a toothpick in class, Professor."

The corners of McGonagall's mouth twitched almost into a smile, but the older woman seemed to catch herself. "Well, at least one of my students has decided to *apply* what they have learned in class. However, a Mending Charm would be a better solution, I think." With a wave of her wand, she repaired the bag and handed it back to him. "Now, remember your assignment needs to be in my office before curfew, Mr. Snape."

"Yes, Professor, and thank you." He quickly and carefully packed his newly-mended bag and trotted off to lunch.

As the end of the winter term drew near, the betrothal of Bellatrix Black to Rodolphus Lestrange was announced in the Daily Prophet. While the older Slytherin students...especially the girls...were thrown into a whirl of excitement, Severus couldn't have cared less. It seemed that young Miss Black shared his lack of interest in the upcoming wedding. She refused to tolerate Lestrange's courtly overtures, which caused a few nasty scenes in the common room. Having more important things to do, Severus kept out of the complicated romantic entanglements of the seventh-year students.

He continued to maintain his friendship with Lily Evans--a task that was more difficult than he ever imagined it would be. Their conversations were reduced to brief exchanges in the library, where they could frequently pass each other as they pretended to search for books on the seemingly endless rows of shelves. One evening they were in the far corner of the stacks, discussing plans for the upcoming holidays.

"Going home for the Easter holiday, Severus?"

"Yes, and you?"

Lily nodded. "I can't believe there is only one more term after this. What are you going to do over the summer?"

"Stay at my uncle's for most of it, I suppose." He flipped a few more pages of his book, thinking about the long hot afternoons of studying that would be occupying most of his time. "You?"

"Oh, nothing much, just swimming lessons, and spending time with family. I can't wait to see the look on Petunia's face when I get home." Lily's face suddenly sobered. "I don't have much in common with my old friends. I'll miss you, Severus. We could write to each other. I can give you my address if you like."

Severus hesitated. He really didn't want Lily to know where he lived. He turned and pretended to look for a title among the many books in front of him, taking one off the shelf and flipping through it. "I'm not sure if I'll be able to write once I'm at my uncle's; he doesn't have an address that can be reached by Muggle post. I might not get my letters until after I get back."

Lily paged through her own book before putting it back on the shelf. "Does he have an owl?"

Of course he did, but Severus doubted that he would let the owl be used for corresponding with a Muggle-born. "I don't know."

"Well, it's only two months. I'll just see you when we come back," Lily said. She looked up suddenly. "Uh-oh, Malfoy. 'bye, Severus."

Severus scowled at her retreating back, more because of Malfoy's appearance than Lily's behavior. He looked up at the prefect defiantly. Lucius stared down at the dark-haired boy, sneering. "Doing a little homework, Snape? I never realized that first years could take *Mudblood Studies*."

Severus knew better than to admit he had actually been speaking with Lily. He snapped shut the largish book he was looking at. "I'm doing some research for Defense Against the Dark Arts. That girl was looking for a book."

"If you want to be accepted in Slytherin, I suggest you keep away from trash like that," Lucius said disdainfully. "It's bad enough you were raised by a blood-traitor and Muggle filth."

White-hot anger flared up in the younger Slytherin. How dare Malfoy insult him and his parents like that! The boy drew his wand, keeping it partially concealed under his sleeve.

"Put that away before you hurt yourself," Lucius ordered in a harsh whisper.

Severus glared at him, refusing to lower his wand. "I could hex you so badly that it would take Madam Pomfrey a week to sort you out, and you know it."

"If you hex a prefect," he hissed, pushing Severus's wand out of the way in exasperation, "you will find your scrawny, half-blood arse on the next train home."

Knowing that Malfoy would make good on the threat, Severus grudgingly pocketed his wand. One of these days, he would get Malfoy back for treating him like nothing. He would show the sneering toff that in spite of his heritage he was not going to be some groveling toady that could be pushed around on a whim.

"Now there's a bright lad." The prefect gave him a frosty smile. "I have been keeping an eye on you, Severus. If you learn to control that wretched temper of yours, I may find ways that you can be useful to me--ways that will help you earn the respect of your peers."

Still clutching the wand in his pocket like a talisman, Severus narrowed his eyes suspiciously at the arrogant face before him. He had been well aware of Lucius Malfoy's gaze following him at mealtimes, in the common room, and in the hallways between classes. Once or twice after he had managed to hex Potter or Black undetected, Malfoy had given him an appraising look. His uncle had spoken frequently of the Malfoy family, and Severus had gotten the impression that they were more than the equals of the Blacks. If Lucius had decided he was worth the effort to notice...

"What do you mean there might be ways I can be useful?"

With a cryptic smile, Lucius said, "Meet me in the common room after midnight and keep your mouth shut about it."

Severus watched the prefect sweep away from him, drawing appreciative glances from several girls and envious ones from several of the older boys. As soon as Malfoy was out of sight, Severus went to search for Lily. She was sitting at her usual table with Remus Lupin and some Gryffindor girls. With a disgruntled scowl, he headed off to another table to scribble down some notes.

As he lay wide awake in his bed, it seemed to take hours for his dorm mates to go to sleep, but finally, Flint's breathing changed to a snore. Severus counted to fifty before

climbing out of bed fully-dressed, with his shoes in one hand and his wand in the other. He exited the dormitory, taking care not to make a single sound.

His feet were freezing, and he quickly headed to the common room so he could put his shoes on. As he rounded the corner, he could hear whispered voices. Stepping into the common room, he saw the shadowy outlines of several older students in the faint firelight. He made his way across the common room; just as he was about to speak, five lighted wands were pointed in his face. Severus stumbled backwards with a little yelp of surprise as his backside connected with the cold stone floor.

"What are you doing here?" a deep voice demanded, and a strong hand yanked him to his feet.

Severus glared up at Rodolphus Lestrangle and rubbed his arm, answering, "I'm coming with you."

"The hell you are!" Rodolphus snapped in a harsh whisper, and Rabastan, his brother, kicked Severus's shoe across the room.

Bellatrix Black pointed her wand at Severus. "How did you--"

"I asked him to come," Lucius interrupted coolly as he entered the common room, Summoning Severus's shoe.

Bellatrix's beautiful face was twisted into a scowl. "You did what, Lucius?"

"You heard me. I believe that young Severus has many worthwhile talents, so I invited him to join us."

"You're a fool to trust half-blood riffraff, Lucius," Rodolphus said, shaking his head.

"Go back to bed!" Bellatrix ordered Severus in a threatening whisper. "We have no time for little boys who want to tag along."

Lucius stepped between Severus and Bellatrix. "He will be joining us, Bella."

"He isn't old enough." There was a stubborn set to her jaw.

"He has a decent amount of power and ambition; that's all I care about." Lucius stood his ground. "Severus is coming with us."

"I don't take orders from you, Lucius," she said haughtily.

"You need to learn to do what you're told, Bella!" Rodolphus said, grabbing hold of her arm. "The first thing I intend to teach you --"

A sharp slap echoed in the common room as her hand shot out and connected with the young man's face. Rodolphus let go of her arm, and Bella hissed at him, "Don't think that you will ever lord over me, Rodolphus. If you're so eager to have a doormat for a wife, you would be much better off with one of my sisters. If he gets us caught, Lucius, I'll kill you both."

"You'll do no such thing," Lucius snarled, pressing the tip of his wand to Bellatrix throat. "No one will get caught if you remember to keep your wits, Bella. You need to learn to temper your zealous nature and think with your head first." He shoved her away and, without taking his eyes from the young witch, said to Severus, "Follow me, Snape, and keep your mouth shut no matter what."

Bella slipped out of the common room with the Lestrangle brothers close behind her. Severus followed Lucius, and the two other sixth year boys, Crabbe and Goyle, brought up the rear. The small group silently made their way to the main floor of the castle, constantly on the lookout for Mr. Filch and his cat, Mrs. Norris. There was a close call when Goyle bumped into one of the large decorative vases, causing it to wobble precariously. Cursing Goyle's name, Rabastan righted the huge piece of pottery. They slipped out through one of the house-elf service entrances and made their way to the edge of the Forbidden Forest.

Once they were clear of the wards, Bella turned to Severus and asked in a mocking voice, "Do you know how to Apparate, little boy?"

He felt his cheeks flame. Of course he didn't know how! Of all the things his uncle wouldn't let him try, Apparition had been one of them. "No."

"Too bad." Bella spun on her heel and vanished with a sharp crack. The Lestrangle brothers laughed at him and disappeared. Crabbe and Goyle followed suit with a sound nearly as loud as a canon blast.

"Idiots," Lucius grumbled, shaking his head. "Have you ever done side-along Apparition?"

"Yes," Severus answered.

"Good, take my elbow and don't let go."

Making himself relax, Severus exhaled to minimize the squished feeling during the Apparition process. A pop signaled the end of the journey. The boy opened his eyes and looked around. They were in what seemed to be a torch-lit cavern. Severus could smell a slight saltiness to the air and hear the rumbling of waves.

He looked up at Malfoy and asked, "Where are we?"

"I can't tell you that, but we come here to train and perfect our use of curses... Dark curses." Malfoy's face became stern. "You can't breathe a word of anything that happens while you're with us. If you do, you may not live long enough to regret it. Do you understand?"

"I understand," Severus answered solemnly, the back of his neck tingling with a mixture of excitement and fear.

"Nice to see you didn't lose your little leech on the way." The look of disgust on Bella's face strongly suggested that she was disappointed that he hadn't been lost along the way. Bella and the Lestrangle brothers had made it abundantly clear that they considered him to be less than a servant. It had been obvious that they didn't like him. Without Lucius Malfoy's support, Severus was certain that he would have been ostracized by the older students or worse. A shiver ran through the younger boy. Had that been the intention: to make him vanish without a trace?

A jet of red light shot from the end of Bella's wand and narrowly missed Severus's shoulder. Caught off guard, he threw himself to the ground.

"Damn it, Bella!" Lucius snapped returning fire. "If anything happens to him, it will be too easy to connect it to us. We were told no one was to learn about our activities."

"Don't worry, Lucius, I won't let your precious little poppet come to any harm," Bella called with a laugh. "Let's see what the wee lad is made of."

Lucius helped Severus to his feet. "You heard her. Let's see if I was right to bring you along. Just don't use anything that leaves an obvious injury or there isn't a counter for. We want to avoid any trips to Pomfrey's infirmary."

The younger boy nodded. While Lucius turned to spar with Bellatrix, Severus watched the others. They were sending hexes and curses at each other, causing their opponents to freeze on the spot and fall over. Crabbe and Goyle had managed to cause their feet to stick to the ground. The older Lestrangle brother had trapped the younger on the ground in a Full-Body Bind before turning his attention to Lucius and Bella. Midway through casting a spell, Rodolphus spun in the youngest boy's direction and sent an electric-blue jet of energy at him. Severus ducked and sent a Stinging Hex at Rodolphus. He hadn't had time to be careful with his aim, but he could tell by the retching sounds emitted by the hunched-over form that the hex had found its mark.

He soon realized that his significantly smaller size was an advantage. Small, quick targets were much harder to hit than large, lumbering ones. The only person who even came close to him in speed was Bellatrix. That, combined with deadly accurate aim and the ability to cast spells without saying the incantations, made her a formidable foe.

Severus, who hadn't mastered nonverbal spells, was whispering his curses, hoping to keep his intentions secret. It slowed his ability to return fire and gave Bella just enough of an edge. She caught him off guard, knocking him off of his feet.

"Let's see how you do with following orders, little boy." She raised her wand. *"Imperio!"*

Severus felt his mind go peacefully blank, and a warm, buzzing sound filled his ears. He felt relaxed... peaceful, and he could just barely hear Bella's voice.

"You look hungry, Severus," she crooned. Now that she mentioned it, he was hungry. "Pick up some dirt and eat it. *'Dirt?* He didn't want to eat dirt. Bella's voice continued, "Come on now, Severus, you're really famished." He felt hungrier. He had probably eaten dirt when he was little. It wasn't too terrible. He scooped up a handful. It didn't look appetizing, and he decided to drop it. Bella's voice insisted, "Now be a good little boy and eat that dirt."

Why not? It's not going to hurt me. He brought it to his lips and opened his mouth, ready to take a bite.

"That's enough, Bella!" Severus barely heard Lucius's voice through the power of the spell. "It's time to go back."

The spell lifted, and suddenly Severus was once again in his right mind. He threw down the handful of dirt that was merely inches from his gaping mouth, humiliated about what he had almost done. Bella tossed her hair back from her face. "You're always spoiling my fun, Lucius."

With a harsh laugh, the girl vanished and the rest of the small group followed her. Lucius looked at the scowling boy. "Congratulations on not being completely taken in by that Imperius Curse."

"She still got me."

"True, but now you know how it feels. You also didn't comply right away; it looked like you were trying to resist it. That's... impressive." He offered Severus his elbow. "We need to get back."

Fifteen minutes later, Severus fell across his bed, exhausted but bolstered by the fact that Lucius Malfoy had not only taken notice of him but had included him in their clandestine activities. As he fell asleep, he knew this new turn of events would please his uncle. Morning came all too soon, and Severus side-stepped Sebastian's many questions. As much as he liked Sebastian and enjoyed his company, having someone as important as Lucius Malfoy befriend him meant respect and status in Slytherin.

As the final term progressed, Severus went on a few more excursions with the older Slytherins, waking the following morning with scrapes and bruises. Sebastian only tried to pry the truth out of him once more before giving up. Wilkes and Rosier continued to ignore him until one evening when Lucius Malfoy invited Severus to join him for a game of wizards' chess. Severus proudly took his place at the table across from the prefect and didn't mind losing fifteen minuets into the game. After that, the two of them made an effort to include Severus beyond study sessions in the common room. While Severus would never consider them friends by any stretch of the imagination, it was a pleasant change to see the looks of awe on their faces when he brewed potions flawlessly or perfected charms before everyone else in class.

Shortly before final examinations began, Lucius requested that Severus sit with him during the evening meals. Flattered by such an honor, the first year sat with the older students, much to the consternation of both his year mates and Bellatrix Black. Lucius approved of him, so he didn't care what she thought. After the spring term, she would be finished with school and married to Rodolphus Lestrange by the end of the summer; Severus would no longer have to deal with her. It seemed as if respect was indeed coming his way.

When the final day of the term arrived, Severus and Sebastian boarded the train for the long journey home. Since Lucius was going to spend most of the trip in the prefect car, Severus doubted that he would be allowed to join the older students, so he and Sebastian settled on sharing a compartment with Wilkes and Rosier. They stowed their luggage on the racks overhead and took their seats. It was stiflingly hot on the train so they decided to leave both the window and the compartment door open. After the train started to move, Rosier pulled out a deck of Exploding Snap cards and began to shuffle them. Three games later, he put the cards away and looked at Severus.

"What did you do to get Lucius Malfoy to notice you?" he asked.

Lucius had told him to never, under any circumstances, tell anyone anything about the practice sessions. No matter how much he wanted to impress his dorm mates, Severus knew betraying Malfoy's trust would have consequences he didn't want to deal with. He let a cryptic smile drift across his lips. "Lucius Malfoy knows true talent when he sees it."

"Is it all of those curses you know?" Wilkes asked.

"Maybe."

"Could you teach us some of them?" Rosier was eyeing him skeptically.

Severus returned the gaze, his dark eyes not blinking. "I could. Are you willing to let me demonstrate on you?"

The other boys paled, and Sebastian looked uncomfortable, as if half-expecting himself to become the target. Severus wouldn't do anything to his friend unless he absolutely had to. Rosier and Wilkes, on the other hand, would be worthwhile targets; it would be payback for a year of them treating him like nothing. Severus drew his wand. Luckily for his travel companions, better prey in the form of Peter Pettigrew wandered by the open compartment door. It wasn't Potter or Black, but he would have to do.

"Furnunculus!" Pettigrew yelped as the boils popped out on his skin. Even if Potter and Black dared to pick a fight with him...which Severus was certain they would...he felt confident that he wouldn't have to face them alone. He turned to the others. "Satisfied?"

The other boys nodded, clearly impressed, but Sebastian stared out the window. Severus sat back in his seat and crossed his arms across his thin chest. The little witch with the trolley stopped at their door, and the boys dug into their pockets and ordered off of the cart. Severus didn't bother; he knew he only had a Sickle and a handful of Knuts in his pocket.

"Want anything, Severus?" Wilkes asked, grinning at him. "Cauldron Cake? Berti Bott's? My treat."

Severus had eaten more than normal at the school in preparation for the trip to Kings' Cross Station. He didn't care much for sweets, but he knew refusing would be rude. "Maybe a Licorice Wand or two and a Chocolate Frog."

The items were tossed into his lap. He ripped open the package of one of the wands and took a bite. The bitter flavor of the licorice filled his mouth. When he finished it, he opened up the Chocolate Frog box, capturing the frog before it hopped out of the compartment. Elladora Ketteridge, who discovered the use of gillyweed in the early eighteenth century when she nearly suffocated after eating it and recovered only when she stuck her head into a bucket of water, smiled up at him. He stuck the frog back in the box, deciding to save it for his mother. He joined in on the Quidditch talk with the others.

Wilkes was going on about Puddlemere United when James Potter and Sirius Black stomped up to their compartment door with their wands drawn and a whimpering Peter Pettigrew in tow. Remus Lupin stood behind Pettigrew with an indignant look on his face.

"Snivellus, only cowards hex someone in the back," James snarled. He and Sirius raised their wands.

Severus jumped to his feet. "I'm not a coward!"

"Then why did you hex him in the back?" Remus demanded, pushing Sirius out of the way. The sickly boy's amber eyes, which were normally gentle, seemed to glow with rage. Severus had never seen him angry before.

"Is there a problem, gentlemen?" said a lazy voice. Lucius Malfoy and another Slytherin student, Augustus Rookwood, were in the corridor, towering over the much younger Gryffindor boys. The prefect's eyes flicked to poor, boil-ridden Pettigrew. With a wave of his wand, Lucius reversed the spell. "I think it's time for you to return to your own compartment. And this time, be sure to stay there."

The four of them stalked off, giving Severus and the other Slytherin first years filthy looks.

"Little wankers," the other boy said, glaring down the hallway.

"I don't suppose you want to tell me who hexed the little lump from Gryffindor, do you?" Lucius asked. He looked at Severus knowingly; there was little doubt in his mind who had cast the hex. "If you have any other problems, Augustus will be in the next compartment along with Antonin Dolohov and Arcturus Flint. Enjoy the rest of your trip."

"Call on Triple A if you have any problems," Rookwood said with a wink.

Severus saw Lily pass by their compartment with one of her friends. He fleetingly wondered if she had heard about him hexing Pettigrew in the back. Well, it was too late to do anything about it if she had. Sebastian was quiet, speaking only if spoken to. When Rosier and Wilkes made a trip to the loo, Severus asked him about his silence.

"It was really low of you to hex Peter Pettigrew in the back like that, even if he's only a Gryffindor." He looked up at Severus, concerned. "What's gotten into you, Severus?"

Severus was irritated. "As if any of them have ever passed up a chance to hex me."

"That's not the point. I just thought you were above that, that's all." Sebastian turned back toward the window.

"Taking a Gryffindor's side over mine?"

"No."

"Then why should you care?"

"I just thought you had a sense of honor; I guess I was wrong." The other boy leaned over and fiddled with his shoelace. "You're clever, ambitious and hard-working... someone I wanted to be like."

Severus was stunned by the words. Sebastian looked up to him? He became uncomfortable. The numerous times Potter, Black and Pettigrew had used spells on him over the course of the year came to mind...unsolicited attacks for the most part. Sure he had done the same to them, but he was only one person; they were always two against one...sometimes three, even four. No! He would not feel guilty about what he had done. Guilt was for the weak, according to Lucius Malfoy and his uncle. Severus was not weak; he couldn't afford to be.

The rest of the trip was spent playing a few more games of Exploding Snap and complaining about Gryffindors. Finally, as the light was fading, the train entered London and pulled up to Platform Nine and Three-quarters. The boys grabbed their luggage and exited the train. Severus caught sight of his uncle and said good-bye to the other boys. He was struggling with his trunk when it lifted without warning. The boy reflexively drew his wand, expecting retribution from Potter and Black for hexing Pettigrew.

"Now, now, Severus," Lucius said with a smile, "you're not under attack."

"Thank you," Severus answered gratefully.

He escorted the boy over to his uncle. "Mr. Prince," Lucius said, nodding politely, "here is your nephew, safe and sound. He had an excellent final term."

"I'm pleased to hear that, Lucius. Enjoy your summer, young man." William Prince shifted his attention to his nephew as soon as Lucius left to join his family. "I see you've made an impression on young Malfoy. That will be a benefit to you in the long run." They headed toward the barrier. "You've pleased me, Severus. I'll be certain to reward you this summer when you come for your visit. Perhaps you will be allowed to accompany your aunt and me to Bellatrix Black and Rodolphus Lestranger's wedding."

The last thing Severus wanted was to see Bellatrix; such a thing would ruin his summer. An owl, a new set of robes, or a book about the Dark Arts would have been more satisfactory. However, if his uncle considered it a reward, then he would go along.

Before long he was walking up to his parents' door with his uncle, dragging the heavy trunk behind him. William left him there, not finding it necessary to speak with his sister. The date he would take Severus to his home for the rest of the summer would be announced by owl.

Severus entered his Muggle home. Tobias Snape was in the front room, reading the newspaper. Eileen was coming from the kitchen, her apron dusted with flour. His mother greeted him with open arms, exclaiming over how much he had grown since Easter. His father ruffed his hair, his own greeting a little more subdued. Even though Severus knew his father was glad to see him, he could tell that their relationship would only grow more distant as he became part of the wizarding world while his father remained firmly in the Muggle world. He couldn't wait to tell them a carefully edited version of his final term and hear their news about the local events. Overall, it was wonderful to be home.

A/N: Someone said it was such an unusual thing to see Snape happy to be home in a Marauder Era story, and she couldn't wait to see the reaction to it. Come to think of it, neither can I.

For all intents and purposes this section of young Severus Snape's story is complete. I am working on more chapters, but I haven't decided if I should post them as one-shots and shorts or post them under the same title. Suggestions?