

# Those Who Are Loyal

*by sylvanawood*

When the trio leave him for dead, Snape thinks about his life.

## One-shot

*Chapter 1 of 1*

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*Disclaimer: Canon doesn't belong to me, and I'm rather glad about that. The story here does belong to me; no money is being made with it.*

A/N: Highest praise and thanks to beta and brit-picker, Melusin, who agreed to beta-read this on short notice. The following is firmly AU but contains DH spoilers.

### **Those Who Are Loyal**

So this was it, the last chapter of his miserable life.

A Potions master, an expert at Defence Against the Dark Arts, a healer, a wizard. What use was his knowledge, his quick thinking, his being prepared for betrayal, backstabbing and murder when in the end, it had been the bloody snake that got him?

Bloody it was, all right. If he could have laughed, he would have, but he didn't want to waste the last feeble puffs of air in his lungs. His blood was everywhere. If he hadn't been so weak already, the smell would have been nauseating, but as it was now, he didn't care anymore. It would be over soon enough.

Potter and his sidekicks probably thought that he was dead already. In any case, they hadn't cared, not even enough to check if there was any life left in him. And why should they? To them, he was the traitor, the Death Eater, Albus Fucking Dumbledore's murderer, their loathed and despised teacher. They'd be glad to have seen the last of him. All he could hope for was that the boy would have the presence of mind to look at the memories before it all was over. The boy, Lily's son, showed surprising flashes of intelligence from time to time. That intelligence and those green eyes about the only traits inherited from his mother. All the rest of the boy was James Potter in all his pompous glory.

But helping the boy along any further was out of his hands now. And it was more or less out of his mind, too. The boy, foolish as he was, would do exactly what Albus Bloody Dumbledore had always wanted him to do; he would sacrifice himself like some mythological saviour who gave his life for wizardkind. Wizardkind, which would carry on as usual after some token shows of gratitude, which would breed the next Dark Lord and then would need a new saviour: an endless circle that was spinning around ad nauseam. But it wasn't spinning for him any longer. He was out of it. He was ready to move on. Death had never frightened him.

Death didn't necessarily attract him, either. If he was honest with himself, something a wizard should be in his last moments, then he'd admit that he would rather have lived. He would have liked to be free for once. Free of the madman, the basket case who was known as Voldemort, and free of the scheming old goat Dumbledore, whose ethics and morality were so conveniently resilient that they could be moulded to accommodate any of the self-righteous old geezer's manipulations without the slightest hesitation. To be free of both of them would have been bliss. And he would miss neither of them, not even Dumbledore. No, there wasn't much love left in him for the old man.

Love? He had loved. His love for Lily Evans had, in a sense, destined the whole course of his life. He could remember enough of that love, that obsession almost, to acknowledge this. The memory fragments he had given to the boy had hopefully been enough to make the boy see what was necessary, but those fragments had only

been a simple and rather sentimental recollection of his relationship with the boy's mother. That relationship had been so infinitely more complex but he doubted that the boy would have understood that. He even doubted that the boy would understand that he had been raised and kept like a lamb for slaughter. But no matter, as long as the boy understood what he had to do, it would be enough. Harry Potter had seen horrors enough in his short life; he wouldn't be afraid of death, Severus had to give him that. In that regard, the boy was just like his mother, who had died to save him.

How he had begged for her life, more the fool he. He should have known that Lily Potter, née Evans, wouldn't live and let her son be murdered before her eyes, but he had been too blind at that time to see it. He simply couldn't bear the thought that Lily wouldn't be there anymore, living happy and content somewhere safe. Lily, who had been his friend, his confidante, his everlasting crush until she discovered that it was more fun to hang around with the flashy, the popular people, instead of with him. Had he really hoped that she would develop romantic feelings for him, the oddball, the troubled, ugly git, the Slytherin?

Ah Slytherin! His House, his home. The only place where he had been accepted.

"Do we Sort too soon?" Albus Dumbledore had asked on more than one occasion when, in Dumbledore's eyes, Severus had proven his worth by an act of bravery. He had always been shocked by this question, rendered speechless momentarily, but the stricken look he inevitably had given Dumbledore as a reply had probably been misinterpreted as the secret wish to have been Sorted into Gryffindor. What rubbish!

The whole Sorting into houses based on a character analysis from a dusty old hat was more than questionable, rather idiotic, really. Slytherin House had always been damned; he had known this for a long time but had been powerless to do something about it, given his own role in the big scheme. Perhaps the ones surviving this war would be wiser, burn the Hat and in the future, Sort at random. Alas, he very much doubted it. And Dumbledore had never understood it. Being a Gryffindor to Dumbledore had meant being always right. And of course that explained why Sirius Black was still allowed to bully him around after almost killing him through his werewolf friend. That also explained the lack of insight and humility Dumbledore had shown after his own shady involvement with Grindelwald and the mysterious occurrences in his family. Oh yes, those stories had been told in Slytherin. There was a good reason why there were people who distrusted Dumbledore, why not everyone in Wizarding Britain sang the old wizard's praise. And still, Severus had loved him.

Dumbledore had never been his friend or even his mentor. Albus Dumbledore had manipulated him, had used him like he had used everyone else around him, uncannily finding out people's strengths and weaknesses, enabling him to put them to their most efficient use. And yet, despite all his self-righteous arrogance, there was something admirable in the old wizard's tireless fight against self-proclaimed Overlords, against discrimination, for freedom. This something had taught Severus that there were things worth dying for, just like Lily's love for her son had taught him. Just like his own undying love for Lily, rendered from an immature obsession to a pure, selfless love for the childhood friend, had taught him who he really was, had shown him the true worth and beauty of the odd combination he himself had been: a mixture of Muggle and Magic. A wizard and a human being. And he had called her Mudblood...

It had dawned on him that Lily wouldn't have mirrored his own reflections, had she lived. She had been a bright girl, brave, compassionate, kind up to a certain point. But there was also a shallowness he hadn't wanted to see, an urge to conform, to blend into that new and exciting wizarding society, and someone like Severus Snape, the eternal outsider, could never have helped her achieve that. Instead, she chose James Potter, the epitome of coolness: Gryffindor, Quidditch star, prankster, bully, and popular with everyone.

The last year of their friendship had already been overshadowed by Lily's incessant mating dance whenever James Potter was around. After she was married, Severus was certain that he would have eventually seen her for what she was and wanted and could have let go of his obsession. But the fates, or Voldemort, had decided otherwise. She had died, and his love for her had remained. He could call himself lucky that this obsessive love had changed into something else over time, something more abstract. It had become an ideal of love, an object he could admire safely since he didn't have to face the everyday problems wont to put a strain on any relationship and sometimes destroy it. His ideal could guide him, serve as a motive for his actions and help him endure what hardly anyone else could have endured. And even though this ideal had slowly mutated into a more general form of altruism, he still had called it Lily Evans and had pictured her lovely face when he was desperate. It was almost like being religious and hanging on to one of these icons of saints or gods. In a sense, Lily had been his patron saint, his goddess.

And now he would see her again, very soon. Would she welcome him? He doubted it. Would he mind? Certainly not. During his last, horribly lonely year as Hogwarts' Headmaster, he had had time enough to reflect and understand, finally. Lily would, at best, acknowledge him. Apart from that, she would be busy watching over her son, who likely would join her soon, wherever she was now. He, Severus, would move on and see what this next great adventure was all about. Maybe there was even a bit of compensation in it for him. He would see it when death came. But death wasn't here yet.

He wished it had come already. His vision had become dim as soon as he had given his memories to Potter. This was caused by a lack of oxygen; that much was clear. Blasted snake venom! He had known that Nagini's venom kept wounds open. He never had liked that snake, which was weird because he rather liked animals, and the snake was, after all, the symbol of his house. How very trite, the Head of Slytherin was killed by a snake. If the fates had a sense of humour, it had to be a rather lame and one-dimensional one.

Of course, he had been on a basic level of anti-venom all the time. He wasn't a fool. However, he hadn't/couldn't/foresee that he would be caught in that cage with Nagini. When he had seen the snake confined and close to Voldemort, he had known that the time had come to tell the boy. And he had become desperate to get away and find the boy. That was his mistake: never get desperate, always keep your cool. This had worked for him for years, and now, once neglected, had caused would cause his demise.

What use was the anti-venom when the bloody beast had bitten him right in the neck instead of piercing other, less fragile body parts? With a blood loss like that, he would have had to take blood-replenishing potions very soon. But he couldn't get away. And Potter and his sidekicks wouldn't even dream of helping him. They knew that wizards don't die easily from wounds; they would have known how long Arthur Weasley had survived unaided with similar wounds, but they didn't care. They had simply left him there to rot. And so he was doomed. While his blood loss was slowed down somewhat, it couldn't be stopped easily, and the detrimental effect on his system couldn't be counteracted. Thus he would die. He would die now, just as he had lived his life: alone, unloved, and missed by no one. However, he would finally be rid of all his obligations. He had done what he could do for Lily, for the boy, for Hogwarts, for Wizardkind, and for Dumbledore. It had to be enough; he simply didn't know how to be any more loyal than that. Severus closed his eyes.

The last thing he saw was a scarlet-golden flash.

He forced his eyes open once again. "*What in Merlin's name?*"

It was Fawkes. The phoenix sat at his side, tears streaming from his eyes into Severus' wounds. He had no idea why the bird had come, but here it was, and Phoenix tears could heal poisoned wounds caused by Dark creatures. With a sigh of acceptance, Severus started to hope again. When the bird had finished crying, and his wounds had healed, he weakly grabbed Fawkes' tail and asked, "Can you take me to Spinner's End? I have all the potions I need there." Fawkes looked at him, let out a trilling sound, and with a bright red flash, they both Disappeared.

The End