

From the Shack to Quiescence

by beaweasley2

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Severus stood waiting as the Dark Lord raised his wand, prepared to make his counter curse or at best a Shield charm. It would be pointless trying and he knew it, but this was the end, the final confrontation, and Severus needed to get to Potter now. His attention was locked on the Dark Lord like two men in a duel, and it was in that one momentary hesitation that he failed.

The Dark Lord hadn't flinched; he had just made one of his usual random gestures, the typical sweep of his hand when the Dark Lord spoke that for a moment seemed as if he'd been given a reprieve. Severus hadn't anticipated the Dark Lord's true intent. No direct curse, no flash of light, no he didn't get the customary Avada Kedavra. The large sphere moved instead, entrapping his head and shoulders into the snake's protective magical cage. His arms were trapped at his sides and the snake coiled around him. He felt the bite of the snake as its jaws clamped down on his neck. One bite. The sphere that contained the snake held him fast, his wand in his hand outside the barrier, and he knew that his magic would not work. The sphere was made of all the protective spells the Dark Lord knew, encasing his precious snake, the only thing the Dark Lord cared about, and the symbol of what the Dark Lord was.

Betrayed, was Severus' only thought, *betrayed by Dumbledore and now by Voldemort by both men I serve. One I expected had always expected. The other had been quite the revelation a surprise*; and with it a realization of exactly how far Dumbledore would go, the depths he would delve to obtain a goal. That one betrayal seethed in his mind. *And I will fail. 'You must tell him, Severus. When the time comes, he must know...' he told me, and I have failed*

The huge snake let loose of him, its powerful grip slacked off and Severus knew that if he had any hope at all of surviving, it would be at this moment. He would have to convince the Dark Lord that Nagini's bite was more fatal than it truly was. He let his body fall to the floor and rolled onto his back. The venom in his wound made his body spasm and convulse as he'd seen many of Nagini's victims do; however, the spasms were mild, and he emphasized their effects because Severus wanted the Dark Lord to be convinced. But it would be the wound the loss of blood that could end him. Not the poison. *How many times did that arrogant psychopath ask me to make potions with Nagini's venom? How many times after his rise to strength did he want that snake milked? How many times he wanted potions, poisons made with Nagini's venom? Did he really think that after Arthur's attack, when that snake had bitten him thrice and Arthur lived, that I wouldn't take precautions? That I wouldn't be ready! It was ME! I sent the anti-venom to St. Mungo's.*

Severus lay there, waiting until the footsteps could no longer be heard, listening to the Dark Lord as he left the shack. He felt weak, the loss of blood making even breathing difficult. *I have to tell the boy he must know... or EVERYTHING was for nothing* He tried to raise his hand to send his Patronus... but he could barely lift his arm *I can't give in now... I must... I can't fail...*

Just then the crate by his head moved. *What the...? The boy! Potter. Lily's son, the bane of my existence, the arrogant, mediocre imbecile... The child that should have been mine Lily's and mine!* Severus wasn't pleased, but felt an unwanted sense of relief. *The Dark Lord was right... he was right about the boy. He came*

Severus watched out of the corner of his eye as Potter climbed into the room and knelt beside him. As he looked into the boy's eyes, he could see her; he could see Lily in her son. Staring into the calm, vivid green memories of Lily his Lily their friendship... and his betrayal, all came to him. Uttering the curse that would sever and release his memories under his breath, he forced them free and allowed them to separate. Without a wand to collect them, they simply flowed from him, mingling with his blood.

He wanted this boy, Lily's son, to know, to know everything. After a short while he switched his memories to the ones that would make Potter understand, the sacrifice, the betrayal, and the promises he'd made and why. He wanted to show Potter what Albus was really like the real Albus Dumbledore. With nothing more than determined will power, Severus grabbed hold of Potter's robes. "Take... it... take... it," he finally managed to say, while still concentrating on the curse that would separate his memories from his mind, concentrating as the memories he wanted the boy to see flowed from him. Potter didn't ask why. A bottle materialized and Potter took his memories. *The ones I had to hide all these years, the ones I had to lock deep inside myself, away from the Dark Lord. Finally to be freed from the guilt they hold.* Severus watched as Potter took them away from him for good. *Maybe now I can be free from you* he thought as he lay there.

His strength was ebbing; Severus loosened his hold on Potter's robes. "Look... at... me," he said, barely a whisper. *I want to see her eyes one last time... I want to see her in you...*

Severus turned his attention inward as he stared at the ceiling, while directing the difficult counter curse to stop the flow of memories. The concentration took every effort he could manage and still breathe. From deep in his mind where the memories had been kept locked away, he mentally worked to cauterize the wounds of his curse. He didn't want to lose all of her, just the painful ones. With all of Severus's concentration focused on mentally reversing the effects of the curse, he vaguely heard the Dark Lord's voice as it filled the surrounding area as if he were still standing in the room. All of Hogwarts and Hogsmeade could hear him *an old trick*, he mused, momentarily distracted.

Part of the Dark Lord's words echoed in Snape's mind as the room fell silent. "You have permitted your friends to die for you rather than face me yourself. I shall wait for you one hour in the Forbidden Forest... One hour..."

Arrogant, conceited fool... the boy's here, right under your nose

Severus concentrated again on the difficult counter curse, shifting his attention inward as he continued to stare at the ceiling. The effects of the damage to his protected memories finally reversed, and those remaining memories shifted back into his subconscious, once again available if he wanted to recall them. Even as he felt his counter curse release, he vaguely heard the boy leave and the soft murmur of assent from his companions.

But Severus felt weak, very weak now. The loss of his blood was alarming. Once again his eyes focused on the old ceiling, only then recognizing a mass of bushy hair surrounding a weary eyed, solemn looking face. Hermione Granger had taken one brief moment to check on him before leaving. Severus could hear someone slide into the hole in the wall, their feet kicking and scraping on the floor beside his head. *If Potter left, that could be Weasley*, he surmised. *This insufferable... brilliant girl why would she...* She would be the last to slide back into the tunnel then and return to the castle possibly to die.

He tried to tell her to go, to leave but the sounds were muffled. Quickly she pulled a bottle from a tiny bag and poured some potion that smelled like dittany onto his neck. "Why? Go. I can't..." he croaked. The skin of his wound was still bleeding, and he was cold; he couldn't feel his arms or legs. She dug again, this time pulling out a silver and red bottle, tipping the fluid into his mouth. He swallowed the offered Blood Replenishing Potion, knowing that within minutes the 'new' blood would leave his body as well. Severus could see a pair of jeans and old Muggle trainers slip from the hole in the wall.

"Professor?" she asked. "What can I...?" she asked turning. *Expecto Patronum.* An otter erupted from her wand. "Shrieking Shack. He needs help; he is one of the Order. Hurry, please, he's been bitten..." she said into her Patronus, and the silvery otter shot away.

"Left pocket... venom green... antivenom... then dark-k pur-ple... with the s-silver snake..." he forced each word harshly.

She didn't slip her hand into his robes to grope his pockets, but used a Summoning Charm instead. "Professor, how... I can't get..." He tried to scoff at her, making the blood in his wound sputter and his laugh come out as a ragged cough. At the sound she slipped her hand in and fumbled with the multiple vials, pouches, bottles and jars with a look of confusion. "I thought... How come I can't get it? How do I..." she stuttered annoyingly. "I can't get them out."

"Now... say... nonverb...(cough)...ally...(cough)..." She nodded, her lips moved, then she nodded again and pulled out one bottle of pale and putrid green, and another of the deepest eggplant with a silver snake stopper. "Green... one..." She opened the stopper of the green one and he opened his mouth. She dumped half the contents, nearly choking him. "Other..." She held up the second bottle and waited. "Pour... neck."

Severus closed his eyes for a moment. He felt thousands of stinging prickles when the potion touched his wound. He tried to lift his hand and she placed the bottle in his grip. Thunderous footfalls rocked the ground, shaking the Shrieking Shack. Silence followed in the room, and although he tried, he knew that he would not be able to raise his arms. Cracks, pops and explosions could be heard up at the castle. *I should have stayed at the castle... made Minerva and Filius see made them understand. Potter needed time... I was to remain 'loyal' until... Until the Dark Lord became concerned for the snake, then only then would I know... I was... I am still one... my promise... his side. I shouldn't have listened to Lucius.*

Another crack sounded, making Severus open his eyes. He never knew when Miss. Granger had scurried away. The room was tilting slightly and all he could feel was cold.

A large nose and huge eyes looked at him briefly before the strangling feeling of death, the sudden darkness of leaving this world, yanked him away.

~o0o~

Bright light. White light. He was lying on something... flat.

He must have groaned or made some kind of sound because all of a sudden he heard someone shout at him. "Master Snape, sir, can you hear me?" the young, enthusiastic voice jarred his consciousness back to awareness.

So I'm not dead. Nobody dead can be this loud Severus mentally scowled. *Besides only the good die young and I'm not destined for Heaven... And Hades wouldn't be this bright.*

"I'm Augustus Pye; do you remember me? I'm a Healer."

Question one down, Severus snarled silently to himself.

"You're at St. Mungo's the Dai Llewellyn Ward..."

That answers question number two, Severus thought sarcastically. *So if I can just go back to sleep now and put off Azkaban for a while longer*

"You helped me cure Mr. Weasley... Do you remember?" the enthusiastic Healer asked.

Okay then, no sleeping...

"He was bitten by the same snake you were, we think. At least the same potions work... We still had some, and your directions on how to make the potion to heal the wound, and you were holding the antidote..." Healer Pye continued. "Do you remember? It was sure lucky that you had the antidote don't think we could have done it without the venom. Smart thinking, having that on hand."

No, I don't oh, wait... Argh... not... young, skinny, dark, stringy hair... Severus cringed inwardly. *This is worse than death... I'd rather want to go back to Hogwarts* was his first thought. *At least Poppy is quiet* However, if he was alive, he needed news. "What of Potter?" he managed to say, although his lips were dry. He did not want to open his eyes and see the Aurors standing guard over him.

"He did it! He killed him Tom Riddle. Did you know that You-Know-Who's real name was Tom Riddle?" Severus groaned as Healer Pye rattled on excitedly. Severus kept his eyes closed, his face impassive, refusing to look at him. "Everyone saw him, hundreds of people and with his own wand too. Turned out that Potter had been destroying magical objects of Riddle's that's why he was missing all last year fighting *Him* You-Know-Who Riddle. *Him* and his five friends been fighting against them." Something wet was applied to his neck, a smell Severus remembered as having the anti-venom for Nagini's bite. "*The Quibbler*, they got the exclusive interviews from Harry Potter, Hermione Granger and Ronald Weasley the whole Weasley family actually. People wanted Luna Lovegood, Ginny Weasley and Neville Longbottom's stories as well... maybe next issue. I subscribe to them now."

Severus opened his eyes, and the bright light streaming in from the large window made him squint. There were no Aurors standing guard over his bed, or at his doorway. *Interesting... I wonder...*

"Ah, there you are," said a squat wizard as he entered the room. His comical handlebar moustache blended into his thick sideburns and bushy hair. "Taking care of my distinguished patient here, are you?! Order of Merlin First Class, Bonamicus Medal for Magical Betterment, and the Sawbridge Medal of Valor. A true war hero you are. *Witch Weekly's* Top Ten Most Distinguished Wizard Award. Yes, very honored..." Severus thought that the newcomer had been addressing his irritating Healer, but mid-rant he had obviously redirected his comments to him.

Healer Pye was now giving the squat Healer his undivided attention. *So you are the Head Dog around here interesting*

"Thought we'd lost you there for a while, Master Snape but you've pulled through. Augustus here remembered your directions for the anti-venom and the reparative potion for the bite of that snake Riddle's snake. Neville Longbottom killed the snake, you know. What a brave lad, that Longbottom isn't he?"

Severus could have groaned. *Oh, of course Longbottom was a war hero! Figures! That would mean that Weasley girl and Lovegood would be touted as heroes too. Oh, the trouble those three caused me.* He tried to raise his head and noticed cards, gifts and flowers sat on every surface, and things were taped to his wall as well. He let his head fall back onto his pillow. *At least I have a room to myself*

"Healer Smethwyck," a timid voice said. "What do I do with these?" Severus opened his eyes and saw a huge bouquet of flutterby stems, belladonna, larkspur, foxglove stocks and yesterday-today-and-tomorrows boughs that obscured the witch carrying them. "There's no more room for flowers and I have six more."

The stout Healer flicked his wand and a shelf appeared on the wall. "Master Snape, I am Hippocrates Smethwyck, Healer-in-Charge of the Infectious Bites ward. I have personally been overseeing your treatments," he said with a small bounce that reminded Severus of Hugo Bagman.

"Ohh, Healer Smethwyck, is he awake?" another female voice asked from the corridor. "He has visitors. The waiting room is full of people."

"Would you like to have me let them in?" his Healer asked, looking pleased.

"No," Severus croaked.

~o0o~

The house suited Severus. He'd had his family home magically disassembled and reconstructed on the side of a tall, wooded hill overlooking a remote valley. The three-storey row house now blended in with the rock and was flanked with tall pines. The front door, two large windows on the ground floor, three smaller windows for the upstairs rooms, and twin dormer windows on the top level, were all that were discernable from the path that led to the house.

The front door still led into the sitting room, which had been slightly enlarged. The Floo was larger, but all the bookshelves remained the same. Behind a hidden door in the bookcase was a hallway that connected his potions lab and a personal study on one side and the staircase to the three bedrooms upstairs on the other. His parents' room had been redecorated with replicas of the furnishings from his room at Hogwarts: the four-poster bed, the double wardrobe, his two favorite wingback chairs and table. His study looked just like his office had, except the large desk now faced the window instead of the door and was blissfully free of the piles of sheets of insipid and idiotic dribble and flagrant plagiarism the students called essays. A couch sat against the wall, flanked by reading lamps. The room was brighter, even more cheerful than the office he'd used for seventeen years. Minerva had even given him all his surviving books, potions ingredients and potions. The walls of his study and potions lab were covered with shelves of books, jars, bottles, vials and boxes on the shelves; his bookshelves once again were full.

The sitting room where he sat reading while he waited for his dinner had been furnished with a simple black leather couch and chairs, small tables and lamps. Hanging from the ceiling was a wrought iron candelabrum of a simple design, holding as many as a dozen candles in crystal hurricanes. A large rug provided the only color in the sitting room beside the hundreds of books and artifacts on his shelves. There wasn't a snake carved or embroidered anywhere in the house with the exception of the occasional book cover or potion ingredient. He'd had enough of snakes.

Severus also had the kitchen remodeled, and the house-elf, Peren, who had attended to him at Hogwarts, could be heard from behind the hidden door as she prepared his

food. *The most noble house of Snape, Peren called the place. Oh, dad would have loved that one* he sneered silently as he turned the page of the paper. The house-elves had saved all his personal possessions, hiding them away when he'd left the castle, since *they* knew the truth about him. When Peren came to deliver them, the house-elf begged him to let her stay. It had amused him to say yes.

The money for all this renovation had come from his books, *The Anthology of Venoms and Poisons in Potions, Antidotes of the Dark Potions of the Dark Arts and To Reverse the Most Potent of Potions and Poisons*, listing all the antidotes and counter-reactive potions Severus had provided during his years under Albus Dumbledore, as well as many of the potions and poisons the Dark Lord and Death Eaters used. Basically it amounted to twenty-two years of his life, seventeen of which he served as Potions master, Head of Slytherin House at Hogwarts and Dumbledore's puppet. Ironically, he had started his first book the year Albus made him Defense Against the Dark Arts professor. The book reviews said that his books were hard to read, the directions blunt and straightforward, and many of the potions and spells that were listed were very difficult and complicated. However his publisher said that every Healer and Potions Brewer or Master of Potions in three countries seemed to have ordered copies. They had become the must-have books for the medical and potions practitioners. He'd sent two copies of each to Minerva as a gift for the Restricted Section of the new library. Madam Pince had been thrilled.

Severus dropped the paper he'd finished of the next issue of the *Daily Prophet* onto a pile of back issues he'd amassed since leaving Hogwarts. The issue he held now reported the new appointments in the Ministry as well as those at Hogwarts during the time he had been under treatment at St. Mungo's. For once he was pleased to see a real change in the paper. *They are actually printing the truth their first real news in years*

The headlines he'd read stated that Kingsley Shacklebolt had been officially appointed Minister of Magic. His first act in the office was to re-appoint the heads of each department in the Ministry. Hermione Granger had assumed Head of the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures. Already she'd made news by her drastic review and revision of all the legislation for magical beings. *So that know-it-all is going to try changing inter-species relations* he snorted in derision. *Good luck, Miss Granger.* Harry Potter and Ron Weasley had been accepted into the Aurors office and had been rapidly advanced so that the wonder duo now held the Head and Chief positions. He was pleased to see that like Miss Granger, Potter and Weasley were reorganizing the department and revising the policies and procedures. All three had been appointed to The Wizengamot. According to the new Wizengamot Charter of Rights, everyone accused now had the right to have council representation in his or her defense; they were allowed to call any witnesses to testify on their behalf or to be represented by another person. No one could be arrested and sent to Azkaban without a proper trial. *And about time too...*

The next issue announced that Arthur Weasley had been appointed as head of the Improper Use of Magic Office. Percy Weasley had been assigned to work under Sturgis Podmore in the Department of International Magical Cooperation. But the announcement that made Severus smile most was a article that reported that Dolores Umbridge had been dismissed, under a large picture of the woman being escorted, none to gently, from the Ministry atrium with Potter in the lead. *Justice... you bitch. Too bad they won't just send her to Azkaban with her Death Eater friends and comrades*, thought Severus as he carefully laid the paper aside, wanting to keep the article about Umbridge's sacking.

In the next issue there were announcements of several new appointments made at Hogwarts. Minerva McGonagall was now officially Headmistress of Hogwarts, but it was reported that she would retire after a year. Filius Flitwick accepted the post of Deputy Headmaster. Severus approved. Pomona Sprout already retired, turning the position over to her favorite student, Neville Longbottom. *Hardly a surprise there*, he mumbled.

A comical article on the page stated that during the battle at Hogwarts, Professor Binns had suddenly come to the realization that he was in fact dead. Apparently this shocked the ghost professor so much that he actually requested his retirement. However, since ex-professor Cuthbert Binns discovered that he had nowhere to go to; he decided to make Hogwarts his permanent home so as to offer assistance to the newly appointed History of Magic position, Professor Marcus Lancaster. *Interesting choice... I wonder how he'll hold up with Binns haunting him? I wouldn't be surprised if he lasts only a year*, Severus scoffed. *With the Defense Against the Dark Arts post cursed and the History of Magic post haunted... I'm glad I chose to write instead of teach.* Severus smiled and picked up the next back issue as he continued to wait for his dinner.

Minerva had sent Severus an owl requesting that he visit her after he had been released from St. Mungo's, which after careful consideration he accepted. She had been politely formal when he arrived in her office, apparently unsure of how to receive him after the events the previous school year. She not only apologized to him, which had shocked Severus deeply, although he did not show it, she also offered him his job back. *So either Potter shared my memories with her... or the portrait Dumbledore gave her a bit of his paint-encrusted mind*, he had assumed. That Minerva had even wanted him back was interesting enough to indulge in her fine-quality spiced tea and biscuits, but he was being offered the N.E.W.T. level Potions or Defense Against the Dark Arts post.

He had considered. "Wouldn't you rather have Potter as Defense Against the Dark Arts professor?" he had sneered. Secretly he'd been honored by her request, but couldn't bring himself to let her know that.

Severus knew that any student that wanted to re-take their previous school year or to return to Hogwarts to complete their education had been given the offer to do so by owl already. All the students who had been deemed undesirable had been invited back, and all the surviving members of Dumbledore's Army, as they were now known, had been invited back as well. He knew from the articles in both the *Daily Prophet* and *The Quibbler* that there was more faculty this year than ever before, each subject now having two professors, O.W.L. level and N.E.W.T. He was surprised to be offered the N.E.W.T. level for either Potions or Defense Against the Dark Arts professor. He'd been offered a choice.

She had sat at Albus' desk, her pose prim and proper, although with the open attempt at comradeship of long time associates. The office surrounding her looked nearly the same, with the exception of a plaid rug and drapes and a vase of fresh-cut heather sitting next to her biscuit tin. Fawkes' perch held a magnificent grey owl. "I would like to have you return, Severus, please reconsider," she had stated, sipping on her tea.

He was certain it was a lie. Potter probably turned down the post. "I no longer wish to teach, Minerva. I don't really like kids." She had smiled at his blatant statement.

"I will be hard pressed to find anyone as qualified as you are, Severus," she had said with unassuming dignity. The scar on her cheek was barely visible in the warm light of the office.

He had smiled at the compliment. "I am certain that the students will be relieved to know I am no longer teaching."

"I understand that you are going to continue in the field of potions," she had said as more an inquiry than statement. "I know that you received several offers of employment."

"If I were to accept any of my offers, Minerva, it would be yours," he had replied amicably. "I want quiescence peace, quite and solitude. I shall be making potions by way of orders, but for a select few clients."

"I heard Poppy saying that you agreed to continue making potions for her. She was very happy," Minerva had said.

"She was always quite appreciative of my draughts and ointments," he had said, placing his cup on the desk in front of him. He had smiled when Minerva refilled the cup. *Discussion not over yet, I'm to presume...* "Although, I know that she is quite capable of brewing them herself. However, yes, I have agreed to continue to stock her supplies."

"You will always be welcome here, Severus," she had replied. Somehow, he actually believed her.

In the end Minerva had insisted that he join the remaining staff for dinner in the Great Hall. Severus had wanted to refuse, but relented. The corridors had been cleared, many of the stained glass windows repaired or various patterned leaded glass panels replaced. Several suits of armor and statues still wore bandages, supports and slings until the restorers could get to them. The Great Hall had been repaired, although much of the castle still showed evidence of reconstruction. Many of the paintings had been

taken down for refurbishment. As he and Minerva entered the cavernous room, the staff had risen from the one long table set in the middle of the room and applauded him. It had been embarrassing, the warm accolade and over friendly response from his past work associates.

~oOo~

It was dusk. The descending sun was already turning orange when the wards around his home alerted him to intruders. Very few knew the location, and the Fidelius Charm covered his home and several acres of the valley. Cautiously, he stood at the window and gazed outward.

A thestral soared down the length of the valley carrying a lone figure in long robes and cloak. The animal landed with grace, and its rider sat up and looked around, confused. Hermione Granger sat staring in the direction of his home, waiting. After several minutes, she slid from the animal's back. He knew she couldn't see the house, but his curiosity escalated as she waited patiently beside the thestral.

"Well, Miss Granger, what brings you here?" he asked.

She jumped as he suddenly appeared in front of her. He had only broken the wards when he was a few feet away from where she stood. "It will be Mrs. Weasley in a few more months."

"Congratulations," he said with his signature drawl, holding the edges of his cloak as he crossed his arms. "Am I to be personally invited by the bride?"

"I'd be honored and delighted if you would come, but no, that's not why I came. You are on the guest list. However... I wanted to see you," she said softly. "I have your Order of Merlin, the Sawbridge Medal of Valor and your Tammerforth Medal of Potions Excellence. They were most disappointed that you didn't show up at the awards ceremony."

He regarded her, trying to determine the real reason for her visit. "I didn't want to attend."

"But I wanted to present your awards to you personally," she said, handing him two velvet covered boxes: one in purple, embossed in gold with the seal of the Ministry of Magic; the other in rich green with the emblem of the Tammerforth Society of Potion Mastery in silver. "So I borrowed one of the school's thestrals to find you. You are hard to reach lately."

"And yet you've found me," he said, bemused, standing over her in the way he used to when he had been her professor. She didn't even flinch, cringe or break eye contact. *Little girl has grown up at last..* "Was there anything else?"

"Yes," she said, dropping her eyes from his. "I wanted to say thank you. I know how much you did for us... all through school. I knew even before Harry showed us those four memories in the Pensieve... I always believed you were working with us, helping us, trying to protect us." She looked up into his black eyes with unconcealed sincerity. "I wanted to say thank you."

His eyebrow rose slightly when she said four. He sneered silently, *Only four... Why not all of them?* "You're welcome."

~oOo~

A large snowy owl flew into the clearing where he gathered his fresh herbs. She landed softly and extended a leg, showing him a folded parchment tied to a small package. "You're as annoying as your owner," he said, untying the parchment. "How is it you always find me?" The owl hooted at him questioningly. Ignoring the owl, he read the familiar messy scrawl.

Severus,

The arrogant, impertinent boy, using my given name as if we are friends he thought irritably when he saw how Potter addressed him.

I went back to Godric's Hollow to visit my parents' home... the place where, for me, all this started. I found among my parents' things, well, my mum's, these letters. I don't know why she held onto them all those years, but I think she considered you a friend for many years. I thought that you would like to have them.

I also wanted to return this book to you. It's yours. I admit that I copied down many of your notations, as they are excellent, but this book belonged to you. It's time it was returned.

I know now just how much you did for me all those years. How many times you tried to protect and save me. I know I was ungrateful and suspicious of you in school. I hope you can forgive my ignorance.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Harry James Potter

He considered checking the package for hexes, jinxes and curses, then disregarded the notion. The letter was amicable, even respectful. Something Potter had never been toward him as a student.

Inside the package was a small collection of notes, two pictures and his old sixth-year Potions book that had belonged to his mum. He looked at the book, examining the well-worn condition of the pages inside a new cover, and a knowing grin spread across his face.

The slanted scribble and tight slanted writing indicated two handwritings, his and his mum's. Memories of his mum packing all her old school books for him to use carefully in his trunk flooded him. His father had *not* approved of his attending Hogwarts and would not pay for new books. The tiny script, so very like his own, had been reassuring and a source of strength in his years as a student, even after her death. In his mind she was still tutoring him, giving him assistance in all her best subjects. *She always encouraged me to read between the lines, to think for myself and to experiment. She was an exceptional academic a brilliant witch. But marrying that Muggle my father had changed her, defeated her, diminished....* He put the book into his pocket.

The letters were bound by a green ribbon, the one he'd given Lily before her first Quidditch game. He had told her that it was to match her eyes. Lily had smiled at him, quickly using the green ribbon to tie up her lush red hair. *The truth was I just wanted to see her wear green, even just a touch of green on her. From across the Quidditch pitch... from the Slytherin stands I could see the green ribbon against her hair. She frequently wore a green ribbon in her hair for years after... until....* He didn't need to read these letters he knew every word by heart. He looked at the pictures instead, curious.

There hadn't been many times when we had enough money to buy sweets in the village, let alone film. In fact I've never owned a camera... Although, Lily's sister had one... Once, one summer during the holiday... she had taken our picture as proof to her parents that he and Lily remained friends... hoping to catch them practicing magic together. The first picture showed Lily and Severus on the swing set during their first summer holiday from school. The second picture depicted Severus and Lily sitting side by side on a plank dock that stuck out from the bank of the river. That dock used to be Lily's favorite place to eat lunch during the summer holiday after their second year. They were eating the sandwiches and chips she had brought and the apples he had stolen while dangling their toes in the cool water. He knew that later that afternoon he and Lily had gone for a swim...

~oOo~

Author's note:

I tried to carefully weave this from JK Rowling's Deathly Hallows, pages 658-660 in a plausible way. I think I made this believable, even though it slightly varies from canon.

This may not be an ending that most will have considered... but I didn't want Severus dead in some cheesy way. Sorry Jo.

A great deal of thanks goes to Countrymouse712: not only did she unknowingly provide the inspiration for this story but she also gave me her invaluable assistance as a beta making this story readable.