

His Soul

by firefly124

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Notes: This story contains several direct quotations from both *Deathly Hallows* and *Half-Blood Prince*. Those sections that come directly from canon are italicized. Many thanks and cauldrons full of chocolate to ubiqrk for beta'ing and Saracen77 for Brit-picking!

His Soul

"I am concerned less for myself," said Dumbledore, "than for accidental victims of whatever schemes might occur to the boy. Ultimately, of course, there is only one thing to be done if we are to save him from Lord Voldemort's wrath."

Snape raised his eyebrows and his tone was sardonic as he asked, "Are you intending to let him kill you?"

"Certainly not. You must kill me."

There was a long silence, broken only by an odd clicking noise. Fawkes the phoenix was gnawing on a bit of cuttlebone.

"Would you like me to do it now?" asked Snape, his voice heavy with irony. "Or would you like a few moments to compose an epitaph?"

"Oh, not quite yet," said Dumbledore, smiling. "I daresay the moment will present itself in due course. Given what has happened tonight," he indicated his withered hand, "we can be sure that it will happen within a year."

"If you don't mind dying," said Snape roughly, "why not let Draco do it?"

"That boy's soul is not yet so damaged," said Dumbledore. "I would not have it ripped apart on my account."

"And my soul, Dumbledore? Mine?"

~*~

It was said that each murder rent a soul. Some foul few used that fact to create some of the vilest magic. Would a soul still be torn when the killing was done at the victim's

behest? And if so, and the killer used that death to create a Horcrux, was it still such a vile thing? Or was it only fair when the "murder" would no doubt result in the killer's eventual death?

For it surely would. Either the Ministry or, far more likely, the Order would hunt him down and kill him once Dumbledore was gone. He could hide but did not care to spend his entire life doing so. And if they did not, surely the Dark Lord would consider anyone who could successfully eliminate Albus Dumbledore to be a potential rival and far too dangerous to allow to live. It was only prudent to be prepared.

When Filius ran in to fetch him, Snape grabbed the nearest object. A jar containing a root of asphodel. How fitting. He Stunned his colleague and directed the idiotic children in the hallway to look after him. Perhaps that would keep them away from the worst of it.

He raced towards the sounds of dueling, arriving just in time to see Longbottom flung back from the stairs to the Astronomy Tower. Ignoring Order Members, children, and Death Eaters alike, he charged through the barrier, barely registering the tingle of magic as it recognized his Mark and let him through.

He burst through the door to the ramparts, wand out, and took a moment to scan the scene, *from Dumbledore slumped against the wall, to the four Death Eaters, including the enraged werewolf, and Malfoy.*

"We've got a problem, Snape," said the lumpy Amycus, whose eyes and wand were fixed alike on Dumbledore, "the boy doesn't seem able "

But somebody else had spoken Snape's name, quite softly.

"Severus ..."

Snape said nothing, a heavy sensation settling in his stomach. Stepping forward, he shoved Draco out of the way. The other Death Eaters, suddenly silent, could deal with him.

For a long moment, he stared at Dumbledore. How weak he looked, and yet he still controlled Snape's every move. Even more than the Unbreakable Vow to Narcissa, his promise to Dumbledore compelled him to act. The man who had failed to save Lily yet held him to his side of their bargain. Revulsion and hatred surged through him.

"Severus ... please ..."

"Avada Kedavra!"

The spell left his wand with such force that Dumbledore flew over the battlements and seemed to hang briefly in the air before his lifeless body fell. Knowing the others were transfixed by the sight, Snape took advantage of their distraction to silently cast the spell that would bind the sundered portion of his soul to the asphodel root in his pocket. He shuddered at the icy sensation its leaving caused.

He had his insurance, which he would surely need before the night ended.

"Out of here, quickly," he said to the Carrows, Greyback, and Draco, grabbing the blond boy by the scruff of his neck and shoving him through the door first.

~*~

The Dark Lord's ways were inscrutable. Severus found himself in a position where he could not be touched. Not by the Ministry, which was the Dark Lord's plaything now, and not by the Order. Potter had not returned to school, but this was still the best place from which to aid and protect him, particularly once Miss Granger decided to kidnap Phinneas Nigellus' portrait. Her blindfolding charm was rather brilliant, but the children had become complacent about what they said in front of it.

"Headmaster! They are camping in the Forest of Dean! The Mudblood "

"Do not use that word!"

" the Granger girl, then, mentioned the place as she opened her bag and I heard her!"

"Good. Very good!" cried the portrait of Dumbledore behind the headmaster's chair. *"Now, Severus, the sword! Do not forget that it must be taken under conditions of need and valor and he must not know that you give it! If Voldemort should read Harry's mind and see you acting for him "*

"I know," said Snape curtly. *He approached the portrait of Dumbledore and pulled at its side. It swung forward, revealing a hidden cavity behind it from which he took the sword of Gryffindor.*

"And you still aren't going to tell me why it's so important to give Potter the sword?" said Snape as he swung a traveling cloak over his robes.

"No, I don't think so," said Dumbledore's portrait. *"He will know what to do with it. And Severus, be very careful, they may not take kindly to your appearance after George Weasley's mishap "*

Snape turned at the door.

"Don't worry, Dumbledore," he said coolly. *"I have a plan ..."*

And Snape left the room.

It took him some time to locate their encampment. Fortunately, there was a suitable pool of water nearby, and he silently slipped the sword from its concealment in his robes. He thawed the surface of the small pool and floated the sword down into the water. After casting a Freezing Charm, he peered down. It required a fairly strong *Lumos*, but it could be seen.

The Dark Lord had been generous in teaching Snape to fly without a broom. With little effort, he sought and found a perfect vantage point in the trees, never having left a single mark in the snow, and Disillusioned himself.

Now, the final element. Could he do it? Could a person with a sundered soul cast a Patronus at all? And would its form have changed? No matter. He had other ideas, if necessary, as to how he could direct Lily's boy to the sword.

Closing his eyes, he summoned the same memories he always did and wordlessly cast the Charm. As ever, a brilliant silver doe sprang from his wand and, at his direction, nimbly picked her way over to the campsite where Potter was nodding off as he supposedly kept watch.

Predictably, the boy jumped up and followed. Once he spotted the sword, it was, perhaps, inevitable that he would dive in, though he spent some time pacing around the pool's edge and trying a Summoning Charm first. Snape was less certain this could be construed as a condition of valor so much as a condition of stupidity. As it began to be too long that the boy was underwater, he prepared to rescue the fool from himself yet again.

To one side, he saw the Weasley boy. Quickly, he cast the Patronus again and sent it to lead him to the pool. The redheaded boy dived in and pulled Potter out.

Snape sighed relief. It was far easier to keep the boy ignorant of his involvement this way.

And then the boys appeared to be arguing over a ... necklace? Potter gave Weasley the sword and did something to the necklace. After a moment, ghostly forms rose from it, indiscernible from this distance. More bickering ensued until Weasley stabbed the locket with the sword and the ghostly forms vanished. A palpable wave of dispersed Dark magic flowed through the air.

Weasley had stabbed the locket with the sword. As Dumbledore had done with the cursed ring.

Suddenly, a great many things began to make sense.

He slipped his hand into his pocket. The root still tingled with Dark magic. A sigh of relief escaped him. Mere proximity to the sword had not damaged it.

Soon, the boys were gone, and he was able to return to Hogwarts.

~*~

Dueling with McGonagall was a waste of his time. He kept his spells flashy enough to appear impressive without actually taking the risk of harming her. When Filius joined her, however, he had to flee, or someone would have been killed or seriously injured. Incapacitating an Order member or even a sympathetic colleague was out of the question, but he could not risk himself yet either. While his death would not be final, he would be unable to act for some time, and the boy needed Albus' information. Surely that time was drawing near. And so he dived through the Ravenclaw common room window.

His Mark began to burn, and so he sought the Dark Lord out. How ironic that his supposed Master had chosen the Shrieking Shack as his center of operations. When he arrived to find the Dark Lord's unnatural snake hovering over him in a protective cage, he knew the time to locate Potter had come.

The Dark Lord had other ideas.

It seemed no amount of persuasion would convince the Dark Lord to let him leave and find the boy. It was as if he knew, though Snape was certain his true loyalty had not been discovered.

"Why doesn't it work for me, Severus?" the Dark Lord asked as he held his wand up delicately.

Snape could not imagine what mad pathways the man's mind was following now.

"My my Lord?" said Snape blankly. *"I do not understand. You you have performed extraordinary magic with that wand."*

"No," the Dark Lord replied, his eyes narrowing. *"I have performed my usual magic. I am extraordinary, but this wand ... no. It has not revealed the wonders it has promised. I feel no difference between this wand and the one I procured from Ollivander all those years ago."*

Snape rather thought that was impressive in itself, that another's wand should work that well for him. Malfoy's certainly had not. Why had he thought stealing Dumbledore's wand would increase his power? While the wand chose the wizard, it assuredly did not make the wizard.

"No difference," the Dark Lord repeated.

Saying nothing, Snape glanced at the snake. A third Horcrux? How had Dumbledore known? And how did the Dark Lord seem to know that his other two had been destroyed? Ah, the ring. He had, perhaps, found it when stealing the wand. Yes, that would have alerted him, even if he did not know about the locket. However, he did not know that yet another fragment of his soul dwelt in the boy. Perhaps if he alerted him to this, the boy could be spared?

But he had promised to do anything Dumbledore asked. Anything. That meant the boy must die.

If he was to have the chance to do this, he would need to find a way to get away, to find the boy. There was always more to Dumbledore's plans than he let on. Surely there was more to this one as well?

"I have thought long and hard, Severus... Do you know why I have called you back from the battle?"

"No, my Lord, but I beg you will let me return. Let me find Potter."

"You sound like Lucius. Neither of you understands Potter as I do. He does not need finding. Potter will come to me."

This, of course, was precisely what Snape feared: that the boy would face the Dark Lord without this last bit of critical knowledge. That all would truly be for naught.

"I know his weakness, you see, his one great flaw. He will hate watching the others struck down around him, knowing it is for him that it happens. He will want to stop it at any cost. He will come."

"But my Lord," Snape tried, *"he might be killed accidentally by one other than yourself "*

"My instructions to my Death Eaters have been perfectly clear. Capture Potter. Kill his friends the more, the better but do not kill him.

"But it is of you that I wished to speak, Severus. Not Harry Potter. You have been valuable to me. Very valuable."

"My Lord knows I seek only to serve him. But let me go and find the boy, my Lord. Let me bring him to you. I know I can "

"I have told you, no!"

Snape froze, suddenly certain that, despite all his precautions, despite not feeling the slightest hint of the Dark Lord's Legilimency penetrating those areas he kept so carefully hidden, somehow, he knew.

"My concern at the moment, Severus, is what will happen when I finally meet the boy!"

"My Lord, there can be no question, surely ?"

"but there is a question, Severus. There is. Why did both the wands I have used fail when directed at Harry Potter?"

"I cannot answer that, my Lord."

"Can't you?"

How ironic that, when Snape was actually telling him the truth, the Dark Lord clearly did not believe him.

"My wand of yew did everything of which I asked it, Severus, except to kill Harry Potter. Twice it failed. Ollivander told me under torture of the twin cores, told me to take

another's wand. I did so, but Lucius' wand shattered upon meeting Potter's."

"I have no explanation, my Lord." Snape watched Nagini as if transfixed. What could the Dark Lord think he would know of any of this?

"I sought a third wand, Severus. The Elder Wand, the Wand of Destiny, the Deathstick. I took it from its previous master. I took it from the grave of Albus Dumbledore."

Snape looked up at the Dark Lord, projecting astonishment. It was not entirely feigned. He already knew of the Dark Lord's grave robbery, but he had not known that the legendary Deathstick was real, much less that it had been Dumbledore's wand. Snippets of myths about that wand flickered through his mind, and he became more concerned than ever that he might not find the boy in time, that he might not leave this accursed shack until it was far too late.

"My Lord let me go to the boy "

The Dark Lord did not seem to have heard him. *"All this long night, when I am on the brink of victory, I have sat here wondering, wondering, why the Elder Wand refuses to be what it ought to be, refuses to perform as legend says it must perform for its rightful owner ... and I think I have the answer."*

Snape did not speak.

"Perhaps you already know it? You are a clever man, after all, Severus. You have been a good and faithful servant, and I regret what must happen."

"My Lord" Panic filled him. Nothing. It would all be for nothing. He did not fear death, but to fail this last task was unthinkable. No, his death would not be permanent, any more than the Dark Lord's death had been, but he would lose valuable time, would most likely not reach the boy much less find a way to convince him of what must be done before he faced the Dark Lord one last time.

"The Elder Wand cannot serve me properly, Severus, because I am not its true master. The Elder Wand belongs to the wizard who killed its last owner. You killed Albus Dumbledore. While you live, Severus, the Elder Wand cannot be truly mine."

"My Lord!" Snape protested, raising his wand.

"It cannot be any other way. I must master the wand, Severus. Master the wand, and I master Potter at last."

The Dark Lord slashed his wand through the air. No green bolt flashed from it, and for a moment Snape thought the Dark Lord might be right. Perhaps he was this wand's master, and it would not act against him. Then the Dark Lord's strategy became apparent.

Suddenly, Snape found his head encased in the same cage as that despicable snake. Instinctively, he yelled, knowing it would do him no good. The Dark Lord hissed something, and the snake's fangs sank into his throat. He thought he might have screamed, but the searing agony momentarily blocked out all else. His knees buckled, and then suddenly the cage was gone, no longer holding him up at all, and he fell sideways onto the floor.

The Dark Lord left, arrogantly not even waiting to ensure Snape's death.

He clutched at his neck, desperate to stop the flow of blood. If he could just slow it long enough, he could deal with this wound and go find the boy. He need not lose the time it would take to utilize the Horcrux. He could still fulfill his mission.

And then the boy was there. Was he hallucinating? The boy bent towards him, *and Snape seized the front of his robes and pulled him close.*

"Take ... it Take ...it"

His voice was nearly unintelligible, he knew, but he hoped the boy would understand as he willed a selection of memories to push forth from his mind. Without finesse, the memories gushed from his mouth, ears, and eyes. And the boy was using his wand to put them into a flask. Good. Good.

"Look ... at ... me ...," he whispered.

And for a long moment, he allowed himself to see that the boy did, indeed, have his mother's eyes. He hoped this would be enough. Hoped that wherever she was, she might forgive him for failing to save her son, might forgive him for everything.

The green eyes became dimmer and dimmer, the pain faded to nothing, and soon all was dark.

~*~

The children had left.

Standing apart from his body but unable to quite leave it, he concentrated fiercely upon his desire to put his lifeless body through the necessary motions. At least he, unlike the Dark Lord, had retained a body with which to work. No other sacrifices would be necessary.

He tried very hard not to think how grotesque it was to manipulate his body this way. It made it look like an Inferius, and the spell he was using was actually not that far removed from that magic.

Lacking their usual dexterity, his fingers packed the wounds on his neck with fabric torn from his robes adequately but inelegantly. Then they withdrew the necessary potions to replenish his blood and counter the serpent's venom and forced them into his mouth. Guiding his body to swallow properly was, surprisingly, the most difficult part of the procedure.

Lastly, he directed his corpse to take his wand in one hand and the asphodel root in the other. His will would control the wand's actions, but his body still needed to control its direction. Pouring as much magic into it as he could, he cast the spell to direct that fragment of his soul into his corpse and then unify the sundered portions. It was not the way one would normally utilize a Horcrux, but he did not think the Dark Lord's approach was one he cared to emulate. He had no desire to become a madman. And fortunately he had always excelled at developing new spells.

He paused just before casting the spell.

What life could he have in this world? Never mind the loathing he would receive from all sides, the single purpose that had driven him was completed.

A cheer echoed through the night air. Yes. It was done.

There was no more he could do for the boy. The Dark Lord was obviously dead, and thus so was the boy. His sole purpose these last sixteen years was gone. What was left for him now?

Looking at his body, he truly felt the horror of what he had done to it. He'd been pulling its strings like a puppeteer. Like the Dark Lord. Like Dumbledore. And then there was the portion of his soul bound to the root of asphodel. A Horcrux, like those used by the Dark Lord, created when he had killed Dumbledore. Clinging to this life ... it would only bind him to them both all the more.

He wasn't sure what happened after one died. He wasn't sure that he cared. It had to be different than the life he'd known, and perhaps that was what he truly needed.

He cast the spell to reunite the parts of his soul, leaving out the words that would bind his soul to his body and return him to life. Warmth flowed through him, though it seemed odd that he should be aware of it. Did souls feel heat and cold? Apparently so.

The shack faded away to be replaced by a vaguely familiar patch of forest. That pool of water ... yes. Nothing lay at its bottom now. There was no snow on the ground, and there were several game trails vaguely visible. Somehow he knew that he must choose one. As he considered each of them, a flicker of light caught his eye. Looking towards it, he saw something bright moving towards him. He thought he might know what it was.

When the silver doe approached him, tears welled in his eyes. She turned and stepped onto one of the paths, walking away again. After a few paces, she turned to look back at him.

How he knew, he could never have said, but he was certain that he could not follow her. He longed to follow her, burned to. Instead, he turned and took a different path, choosing utterly at random, knowing only that it had to be some other path than the one from which she beckoned him.

Had he looked back, he might have seen a hint of a smile on her silver face.