

Outside of Mind

by Seph7

A young woman from Snape's past re-enters his life, but he has no idea what he should do about it. Set in Year 5. Warnings for later chapters.

Re-acquaintances

Chapter 1 of 5

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Outside of Mind.

Chapter 1

Re-acquaintances

Dumbledore was pacing his office, as he frequently did when something important was troubling his thoughts. The Sorting Hat and the various portraits were watching him with mild interest; Fawkes sat idle on his perch and appeared to be asleep. He had been so deep in thought that he did not hear Professor McGonagall enter the office.

"Albus, are you alright?" McGonagall asked with a tone of mild concern in her voice.

"Oh, Minerva, I didn't hear you come in. Yes, I'm fine. I'm just wondering how best to handle this situation," he replied, immediately giving her a reassuring smile.

"Well, I suppose we'll find out soon enough. They should be here soon."

"Yes, of course. My Gods, I didn't realise the time. We should be there to meet her," he said, suddenly looking dishevelled.

Dumbledore quickly gathered himself and followed Professor McGonagall out of the office and down the spiral staircase. They walked quickly down the corridors towards the entrance to the castle. When they arrived, they noticed that several of the other teachers had already gathered and were awaiting Dumbledore's arrival. He also noticed that Professor Snape was not among them. Dumbledore quickly caught the attention of a nearby student and asked him to collect Snape from his dungeon office. The student reluctantly hurried off towards the dungeons.

The boy knocked on the large door to Snape's office and waited for a reply. None came. So he slowly and silently opened the door a few inches and poked his head around the side. Snape wasn't there. He closed the door and turned around to find Professor Snape staring down at him merely inches away.

"May I enquire as to what you were doing in my office?" Snape said severely.

The boy looked petrified.

"I was... just..." he replied shakily.

"Just what?" Snape questioned, his piercing eyes boring into the boy's skull.

"Professor Dumbledore told me to come and get you."

Snape backed up a little, still keeping his eyes on the boy.

"Then you are dismissed." At that, he turned quickly and walked up the corridor. But, while still in earshot of the boy, he said, "Don't let me catch you near my office again."

The boy ran off in the other direction.

It didn't take long to catch up to the other teachers, and he could see Dumbledore's uneasiness from down the corridor. He eyed Snape with an almost disapproving look, and Snape suddenly realised that he'd forgotten the new teacher's arrival.

"I'm so sorry, Headmaster. It completely slipped my mind," he said, looking deeply ashamed, although a little put out.

"Well, you are here now," sighed Dumbledore, almost with great relief.

He took out his wand in readiness for the knock that came seconds later. With a quick flick, all the locks unlatched in quick succession and the doors opened to reveal two young women standing with bags in their hands.

Dumbledore stretched out his hands in front of him.

"You are most welcome here," he said with a look of deep satisfaction on his now smiling face. "Please, do come in."

The women shuffled in and rested their bags on the ground with great relief. One spoke immediately, as though she were afraid of an awkward silence.

"I'm Grace Huxton. This is my sister Evelyn," she said in a slightly American accent.

She stretched a hand towards Dumbledore; he took it and held it in his own for a few seconds. She then nudged her sister, who had her arms folded, in an effort to get her to shake hands with him. She did so formally, desperately trying not to show any signs of deep resentment.

Dumbledore turned to Professor McGonagall and introduced her and the others in turn.

"This is Professor Minerva McGonagall, Transfiguration teacher and Head of Gryffindor house. Standing next to you is Professor Sprout; she is the Herbology teacher and Head of Hufflepuff house. Standing in the shadows behind her is Professor Snape, our Potions Master and Head of Slytherin house. Professor Flitwick is our Charms teacher and Head of Ravenclaw house." He stood to one side to reveal the small teacher with a big, beaming smile on his face. Grace smiled back, and Evelyn simply nodded.

"Well, I expect you are both exhausted. Professor Snape will show you to your rooms," he said in a matter-of-fact manner.

Snape looked at him wide-eyed with surprise. After a few seconds, he nodded and looked over at the sisters, waiting for them to pick up their bags. He was immediately struck by how beautiful they both were, and not the least because they were twins. Evelyn, he could tell, was as irritated as he was; however, Grace was completely the opposite. He hadn't been so taken with a woman in such a long time; it seemed to him he had become somewhat cynical and narrow-minded when it came to the opposite sex. He continued to stare at Grace.

"Oh! Of course, thank you, Professor." Grace picked up her bags and waited for Evelyn, who was clearly in no mood to rush, to do the same.

"This way," Snape said rather sternly.

Evelyn glared at him, knowing that within seconds she would be able to intimidate him into looking away. She had immediately disliked him and was sure the feeling was mutual. Snape sniffed and turned away, his eyes falling once again on Grace. He wasn't sure what to make of her. She seemed overly nice, but not in a girlish way. He decided that the best place to peruse such things would be in his office, alone and away from current company.

He led them to the staircases and waved Grace and Evelyn in front of him. With no warning, the stairs began to move away from the entrance they had just come through, making them drop their bags and grab for the banisters.

"What the hell is going on?" exclaimed Grace.

"I wasn't given much opportunity to explain about the moving staircases," Snape replied, rather intolerantly.

"Oh, I'm sure you could have found a moment," Evelyn retorted, catching his eye. He quickly looked away.

The staircases finally stopped at their destination, and Snape led the way to the teachers' rooms. He proceeded to the end of the corridor, stopped outside the second to last room and pointed out to Evelyn the already changing sign on the door.

"These will be your living quarters," he stated and hastily moved along to the last room before Evelyn could comment.

"These will be yours," he said, a little softer this time. He turned to walk away when Grace grabbed his arm.

"Thank you," she said with a smile. Snape nodded and walked away.

Grace placed her bags just inside the door and looked inquisitively around the room. The large window opposite the door immediately caught her eye. She smiled in appreciation. Evelyn walked in and glared at the window.

"Yours is bigger than mine," she said petulantly.

"Yes, but no doubt there will be something in your room that is better," Grace replied.

Evelyn snorted as she circled round to the bed.

"You know, I never thought they'd take me. You I can understand, but not me," Grace mused.

"Why not?" Evelyn questioned. "Just because you're not magical does not automatically mean you can't teach here."

"Yes, but I'm not even a Squib, and I won't be teaching. I'm only a classroom assistant."

"So? I wouldn't want to be related to a Squib. Besides, you know everything there is to know about the magical world, especially Potions. Just because you can't actually do magic doesn't mean you haven't anything to offer the kids. Who better to teach them about Potions than you?"

Speeches like this made Grace appreciate her sister more, even though she sometimes thought Evelyn could appear to be a little abrasive. Mostly she thought it was deliberate.

Evelyn returned to her room to leave Grace to unpack. She hadn't brought anything out of the ordinary, just clothes, books, electrical equipment, and some magical

encyclopaedias just in case. The room was more than big enough for all her things, and she felt it looked a little bare. She examined her bathroom, which was around the same size as her bedroom, with an enormous bath in the far corner, a large basin, and a toilet made from what she assumed was gold. She gathered her nightclothes and ran a bath.

She spent a good long hour in the bath, daydreaming about what it would be like to have magic. As her dreams went along, she slowly fell asleep and began dreaming about a dark-haired man whose face was being obscured by shadows. He raised his hand to her face, and she saw a mark on his arm that resembled a skull with a snake coming out of its mouth. It wasn't until she realised what the mark was that she awoke with a start, splashing water all over the floor. She quickly got out, cursing herself for falling asleep and almost drowning in the process. It was already well past midnight, and she knew it would be a long day as all the students would be arriving at Hogwarts in the afternoon, and she had to meet the rest of the staff and familiarise herself with the grounds.

She wrapped herself in a towel and dried off quickly. As she slipped into a nightdress, she noticed that her door was ajar. She looked at it rather puzzled, as she was certain she had locked it behind her sister's departure. Then she realised a simple lock would not stop magic in this school.

She threw on her robe, a long beige-coloured one made from linen. She crept out into the corridor wearily and proceeded down the staircases. She ran into Professor McGonagall at the bottom.

"Could you direct me to the dungeons? Is Professor Snape's quarters in the dungeons?" she asked quickly, not giving McGonagall time to wonder what she was doing looking for Snape at this hour.

"Yes, is there something wrong?" She gave Grace a once over, wondering why she was barely dressed and looking for Snape.

"No, just something I need to ask him."

McGonagall directed her to the dungeons, and she quickly hurried down the corridor to his quarters. She knocked on the door labelled Prof. S. Snape. She hesitated for a few seconds before knocking again. She was looking over her shoulder, with her wet hair falling over her face, when Snape opened the door. She quickly spun round to face him.

"Yes? Is there a problem with your room?" he asked, seeming rather annoyed.

"Um, well, I was taking a bath. When I got out, my door was open, and I'm sure I locked it. Since I can't do magic, I wondered if there was a way you knew for me to protect my door from being opened by unwanted persons?" she asked timidly.

"I may. Wait here." With that, he slammed the door in her face, making her jump back a pace.

Before she could register what had happened, the door swung open again. Snape, clad in his nightshirt and holding two planks of wood, strode past her towards the stairs. He proceeded up them two steps at a time, leaving Grace to run after him. He approached her door and surveyed it before quickly using his wand to attach metal brackets for the planks to each side of the doorframe.

"Um, I... I don't see how two bits of wood will keep people out of my room if they are using magic," said Grace.

He whipped his head round and glared at her. This usually made people look away, but she simply stared back. Her ocean blue eyes looked up at him with no fear or timidity.

"They are magically protected. When you place them over the door, no one using any spells or incantations will be able to lift them. Since you cannot place wards on your door, this is the next best thing," he said, looking almost put out.

As Grace surveyed the new additions to the door, Snape glared at her again. He looked down to see that her robe had opened to reveal her nightdress, which hung delicately from her body. Her nipples were visible due to the coldness of the room. He had the sudden urge to reach out and touch her. He stared transfixed until she turned to meet his gaze. He quickly looked away and mentally tried to shake away the image.

"Thank you for helping to protect my door." She smiled and offered out her hand.

He simply nodded and left, deciding that he should not spend any length of time alone with her while she was not properly dressed.

Grace shut the door and locked it, placing the planks between the metal brackets now wedged into the doorframe. Although she didn't know Snape, she somehow trusted that his method would work. She felt a strange comfort from his presence, which she did not understand. She also found it particularly difficult reading him, which she put down to his skills at Occlumency. These abilities would not be able to keep her out forever. Her gift was something she had been born with.

It was rare for a Muggle to have any kind of powers or magic. Although Grace was born with the power of empathy, she could not perform magic of any kind. Her sister, however, was a very powerful witch. She had the rare gifts of Pyrokinesis, the ability to create and control fire; Telekinesis, the ability to move things with her mind (sometimes allowing her to actually levitate); and Telepathy. Abilities like these usually happened in bouts of uncontrollable use of magic. The Huxton family had honed these abilities down to perceptible uses and had great control over them. Not many in the Wizarding World were capable of such control, as many found it easier to use a wand.

Since Grace didn't have any magical abilities, she could not teach a class of her own, so she would be Professor Snape's assistant. Although she would never be able to make a competent potion, she loved the research and properties of the ingredients. Snape wasn't fond of the idea of having an assistant, but Dumbledore had insisted. Grace, however, was quite looking forward to it. She loved the idea of being able to help magically inclined children with potions. She had heard that most children didn't do well in Potions at Hogwarts due to Snape's cold and often callous nature. Grace could understand why he was taken to be so abrasive. Nevertheless, she got the feeling that there was more to him than that. She was hoping that with her helping him, she would make the children feel more at ease ... and maybe he would calm down with them.

She climbed into bed and fell asleep dreaming about what the next day would bring.

Confrontations

Chapter 2 of 5

Grace finds her first lesson with Snape less than stimulating, and decides to do something about it.

Chapter 2

Confrontations

The morning sun shone brightly through her window and woke her before the alarm did. She decided it was best to be early to the breakfast feast in the Great Hall. She left her room to find Professor Snape on his way to the hall.

"Good morning, Professor," she said, smiling.

"Good morning," he replied sternly before continuing down the hall.

Grace turned at Evelyn's tap on her shoulder.

"I don't think he slept well. He seems surly," Grace commented.

"You mean more so than normal?" Evelyn sniped.

"Come on, we don't know him. And he's blocking us, so we don't really know what's going on in that head of his."

"You always did give people the benefit of the doubt. And usually you're wrong," Evelyn said.

"What can I say? It's my kind nature. I think we should get there early," Grace said as she led the way to the Great Hall.

They paused at the door and looked around. Students were settling at their tables and spooning food onto their plates. There was a large dining table for the teachers at the far end. From his seat at the middle, Dumbledore gestured for them to come over.

"Good morning, my dears!" he exclaimed.

"Good morning, Headmaster," Grace replied.

"I trust you both slept well?"

"Oh yes. I fell asleep in the bath, actually!" Grace said with a laugh.

"You what? You never told me," Evelyn said worriedly.

"It's nothing," Grace assured her.

"Please, have a seat and get something to eat." Dumbledore motioned to the two seats adjacent to Snape, who was already eating silently. Grace took the seat next to him, and he glanced up for a second.

"I think the sun is going to stay for the day, don't you think?" Grace mused. She had hoped for a reply, but he seemed to ignore her.

"You do realise that it is incredibly impolite not to answer when someone asks you a question," Evelyn barked, eyeing him.

"Evelyn, it doesn't matter," Grace said quietly.

"Forgive me for wanting to finish my breakfast in peace," Snape replied sternly. Evelyn was about to retort when Grace kicked her under the table.

"I'm sorry about my sister, Professor. She rarely thinks before she speaks," said Grace.

Evelyn took this remark as a cue to leave the table.

"Where are you going?" Grace called after her.

"I'm not hungry."

"Sisters," Grace grumbled.

"I wouldn't know," Snape replied.

"Sometimes she can be hard to get along with."

"So can I," he said as he looked into her eyes.

Those blue eyes! He almost felt as if he would get lost in her eyes. He broke away from her gaze when he felt her mind getting closer to his own. If their eyes remained locked, she would soon be able to sense his feelings, and he did not want that. He had always prided himself in keeping his feelings private. He quickly finished breakfast and left. Grace sat thinking about what he was trying to hide from her. She couldn't fathom why he wanted to be so closed off from everyone.

She had a full day of teaching ahead, so she consulted her map of the castle and grounds and made her way down to the dungeon classroom. When she entered, Snape was already there, hastily scribbling something down on a long piece of parchment. He shoved it in his desk drawer when he noticed her come in.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't realise how early I was."

"I suppose it's just as well. I need to show you around," he said, sounding put out.

"OK, well, I can see the students' desks, and I can see your desk."

"This is where the students will read the ingredients for potions they prepare during the lesson," he said, gesturing to the blackboard to the far right of the room.

"This is the store cupboard. Any ingredients used in the lessons will come from here. You will be required to get them to the students' desks before the lesson begins." He circled round her to one of the front desks and picked up one of the cauldrons.

"You will need to make sure all cauldrons are adequately clean and free from leaks before each lesson and after the lessons finish. You should check all desks for anything left behind and put away all ingredients. Any questions?"

"Yes, just one. Where is the teapot?"

"Excuse me?" he said, looking confused.

"Well, if I'm to be the cleaner, I might as well be the tea lady as well." She wasn't smiling as she looked straight into his eyes. He had no idea what to say.

"Professor, I may be a Muggle, but I assure you, I know everything there is to know about Potions. The only thing I can't do is make them myself. If you wish me to prove it,

I will. I can tell you exactly what to put into the cauldron, if you give me a potion to make. Please, I'm here to help the children. If I can't use my knowledge, I would at least like to pass it on." She could tell he was unsure of what to make of her, but he decided to give her a try.

"Alright, you may assist the students if they need help. But I will be watching for mistakes," he cautioned her.

"Of course."

She walked over to the next cauldron. "And I'll do all you asked out of 'good faith.'"

He nodded and returned to his desk.

"So, how long have you been teaching?" she asked.

"Fourteen years," he replied obligingly.

"And what made you become a Potions master?" she asked, sounding almost nosy.

"It's an intricate art." He sounded almost annoyed.

"You don't like small talk, do you?"

"It's an unnecessary waste of energy." He didn't even look up from his desk.

"Oh, no, I don't think so. It's a good way to find out more about each other." She was smiling at him again.

He looked up at her and was about to say something when the door opened and in came the first years, rather noisily. Snape rose.

"There is no reason why you should be making so much noise," he warned.

Many of the students froze at the sound of his voice. They eventually got up the courage to sit down, and they waited patiently for Snape to begin their first Potions class.

Grace took her place at the front of the class to the side of Snape's desk while he went over what they would be learning. He put some basic facts up on the board, and the students copied it all down fervently. Grace stood for what seemed like hours and began to feel like a spare part. Professor Snape had already returned to his desk and continued his laboured scribbling. Grace approached the desk and tried to get close to him without invading his personal space.

"Professor, is there anything you'd like me to do?" she whispered, trying not to disturb the class.

Snape sneered inwardly. He didn't even lift his head.

"I am afraid that the first few lessons with the first years will be like this."

"Perhaps I should find something else to do. I know Evelyn needs a demonstration assistant. I could..."

"Absolutely not. You are my assistant, and I require your presence in my class."

"OK, perhaps I'll bring a book next time." Without waiting for a response, she returned to her original spot. He stared at her with disdain. She did not return his stare.

Grace stood rooted to the spot for the entire lesson, determined not to give Snape satisfaction by showing her discomfort. When the class left, she rounded all the desks and collected pieces of parchment and other things the students had left. She then walked up to his desk and stood patiently for about three seconds.

"Is there anything else?" she asked nonchalantly.

He looked up and saw she was standing with her arms folded.

"Firstly, I do not appreciate being spoken to like some annoying adolescent," said Snape. "Secondly, I would appreciate some respect from my colleagues."

His obsidian eyes bored into hers, but she did not falter.

"Fine, I guess it's my turn." She placed her hands on the desk and bent down to his level, making him sit back.

"Firstly, I am your assistant, not your student, so don't talk down to me. I'm sure there are other teachers who would appreciate my help, more so than you would. And secondly, you may not have noticed, but your 'colleagues' do respect you. I would imagine that some of them are also terrified of you, with me being an exception. I don't scare easily." She removed her hands from the desk and stood upright with her hands behind her back.

Snape blinked a few times, unsure how to react. The only person who had ever stood up to him was Dumbledore, and perhaps Harry Potter, although he was always good at beating Harry down.

"Look, Professor, it's obvious you didn't request me. Perhaps I could ask Dumbledore if I could be placed in another class."

"No, that won't be necessary. I... do appreciate your help, and I do understand why Dumbledore has placed you in my class. My work for the Order has become more and more time consuming. I think he is worried about me missing lessons..." His voice had become more calm and reasoned.

"He wants someone to fill in for you when you're... away," Grace added tactfully.

"It would appear so."

"Why didn't you just say so?"

"I wanted to observe your interactions with the children. Some people are not meant for teaching."

"Well, firstly, you have to stop thinking of them as children. Your seventh years are 17 going on 18. And secondly, I haven't had much chance to interact with them yet," she stated simply, trying not to sound accusatory or ungrateful.

"The next lesson should be better. I have the fifth years: Gryffindor and Slytherin." He sounded less than pleased at this statement.

Grace didn't understand why.

"Harry Potter is in that class."

"You don't sound happy about that. What has he ever personally done to you?"

"He's just like his father...arrogant and self-important," he spat out.

"I didn't realise that you went to school with his father. We are not born to be like our parents. Maybe he needs a second chance. I'm not defending him, after all, I have yet to meet him, but I can't understand how he could be so bad."

Snape glanced at her disdainfully. Grace shrugged her shoulders

"Everyone deserves a second chance; even you."

He narrowed his eyes, wondering what she meant. Did she know that he was a former Death Eater? Did she care? He couldn't find out without actually telling her he was.

Stupid man, he thought. *Why should I care what she thinks of me? Why should I care about her opinion?* Deep down he did care, but he couldn't understand why. All he could think of was the image of her in her nightdress.

The curve of her breasts accentuated by the satin; the fabric hugging her hips. How I would love to place my hands on her hips as I...

He was immediately shaken out of his daydream as the door swung open and the fifth years piled in. He was inwardly thankful that he was seated behind his desk, which hid his growing 'problem'.

Three Gryffindors took to the front row. She recognised Harry Potter instantly; his lightning bolt scar was visible through his black hair. The other two she supposed were his friends: a tall boy with striking red hair and an equally red face, and a girl with bushy brown hair and kind smile.

Grace could feel several pairs of eyes on her from the back row; she glanced over and noticed four Slytherins glaring at her with disdain. Grace simply smiled widely at them. The girl of the group had the look of someone who had had horse manure shoved under her nose.

This could prove to be an interesting class, Grace thought as Snape took to the front to begin the lesson.

Emergencies

Chapter 3 of 5

Grace's first day in Snape's class doesn't go as planned...

Chapter 3

Emergencies

It took the class two thirds of the lesson to finish their Draught of Peace potions. They had all began collecting samples for marking when Grace noticed Ron put his head right over the cauldron.

"Ron, no!" she shouted, just as he inadvertently breathed in some of the fumes.

He swayed on his stool and crashed to the floor in a heap. He let out a loud snore as Grace rushed round with Snape on her heels. She bent down and placed his head on her lap as Snape stood over them, looking more scornful than ever.

"We need a revival draught. I don't suppose you have any lying around?"

"No," he replied. "It's always best to make it fresh. It causes insomnia if it's left for too long. I would have thought a potions expert such as yourself would be privy to such information. Or have I been misguided to think that you are truly an expert in said field?" he said scathingly.

Grace looked at Harry and Hermione, who were at Ron's feet, and gave them a knowing smirk.

"Hermione, would you take my place please?" she asked.

"Of course, Professor."

Grace stood up to face Snape and leaned in a little so as not to speak too loudly.

"Prepare a cauldron," she said through gritted teeth, staring straight into his black eyes.

He stepped back and waited a few seconds before preparing a cauldron on the front desk.

The class was completely silent as Snape started to add ingredients to the cauldron. Grace watched for a few moments and then suddenly stopped his hand. His head whipped up so fast that she thought he might have snapped a tendon. Grace saw the students' eyes widen in shock.

"This happens to be one of the most potent revival draughts I know," he said, curling his lip and twitching his nose.

"That may be, but I have one of my own. Maybe this could be my test?" she said, looking at him with one eyebrow raised.

"Perhaps."

Snape emptied the cauldron and waited for her to bring the ingredients she thought would make potent revival draught. She then began instructing him on what ingredients to add and when. She had gathered ingredients that he'd never even considered using with one another; and although he tried to remain as indifferent as possible, he was curious to see how the potion would turn out.

After 15 minutes, the draught was ready. Snape was surprised, to say the least, as most of the potions he knew and used took much longer. He sometimes brewed potions that took months to prepare.

"Would you like to test it?" Grace enquired. He quickly ran through the list of ingredients in his head, making sure that none of them would do any harm.

"No, I believe it is safe to administer to Mr. Weasley."

Grace nodded and took a small vial of the revival draught to the snoring Ron. Hermione lifted his head while Grace tipped a little of the potion onto his lips. It immediately made him stir and swallow, giving Grace ample chance to pour the rest down his throat. Within a few seconds, he had swallowed the entire contents and was wide-awake. He bolted to his feet, looking around confusedly.

"You got too close to your own draught, and the fumes knocked you out cold," Grace explained. "On the plus side, at least your potion was successful."

She looked directly at Snape as she said this. He raised an eyebrow in return. Harry and Hermione smiled at Ron, knowing full well that Snape was in the habit of finding fault over Ron's potions almost as much as he did with Neville Longbottom's.

"Everyone prepare a vial of your potions. Label the vials clearly and place them on my desk for marking." His voice was as stern as ever.

Her throat a little dry from the ordeal of proving her potion skills to Snape, Grace poured herself a cup of tea from the pot that the house-elves had prepared before the lesson.

The class was hurriedly placing samples on Snape's desk when Draco Malfoy called Grace over. She quickly made her way to the back of the class towards the Slytherin table. Pansy made for Grace's cup of tea.

"I'll hold that for you, Miss." She smiled sweetly, taking the cup.

"Oh, thank you. What's wrong, Draco?"

"Well, I think something might be wrong with my potion," he whined.

"It looks okay. What do you think is wrong with it?"

"I don't think I let it simmer for long enough," he said, slumping on his stool.

"It should be okay. It has a similar smell and look to Ron's, and we know his works!" she said, smiling at him.

"Thanks, Miss." He smirked as she turned away.

"Here, Miss." Pansy thrust the cup at Grace.

"Thanks," Grace said and took a big swig of the tea. It tasted a little different, but she immediately put it down to the tea going cold.

By the time she reached the front of the room, most of the class had submitted their potions and were leaving. Grace suddenly felt hot and sweaty.

"Is it warm in here, or is it me?" she proclaimed.

"It's you," Snape remarked without looking up from his desk.

She felt a little shaky and looked down to see her hands trembling. She felt dizzy and suddenly realised what was wrong. She started to get breathless and was wobbling all over as she made her way to her bag by Snape's desk. She rummaged around, but she could not find what she was looking for.

"Oh no! This is bad!" she said between breaths.

Snape looked up sharply as he heard Grace drop her cup. She had lost the use of her legs and slid down the wall.

"Are you ill?" he asked, looking at her confusedly.

"Evelyn..." she whispered before collapsing to the floor shaking violently. At that moment, Hermione had entered the class and noticed Snape bent over Grace.

"Sir, what happened?" she asked.

"She's shaking ... or fitting or something." He had no idea what was going on.

"I think she's having a seizure. Does she have any conditions you know of?" Hermione questioned.

"I don't know. Maybe her sister does. Go get her quickly." Hermione wasted no time running to Evelyn's large classroom on the first floor. They returned quickly as Grace's seizure worsened.

"She complained of being hot, and seconds later, she collapsed," Snape reported.

Evelyn went to Grace's bag and found nothing there.

"Where are those damned needles!" she cursed.

"Needles?" Snape looked incredibly confused.

"Yes! Needles! Injections! She's a diabetic!"

"I have no..." Snape replied, shaking his head

"Look, it's a serious condition. Just get underneath her."

"What?" he questioned, shooting Evelyn a wide-eyed look.

"Get under her! You need to restrain her arms and legs. I'll be back. I have to get some insulin." At that, she ran out.

Snape reluctantly slid himself under Grace's badly shaking body. He wrapped his arms around her chest, capturing her arms, and restrained her legs with his own. He found this difficult, as she was much stronger than he expected. Suddenly, her fingers clenched into fists, and her face contorted with a look of agony as she let out a low scream through clenched teeth. This made it all the more difficult to hold Grace's arms, so he resorted to digging his fingers into her forearms.

Evelyn barrelled into the room with a medicine bag in her hand. She dropped to the floor, ripped open the bag, and pulled out a needle and vial. She lifted Grace's shirt to expose the flesh near her hip and stuck the needle into the vial.

Snape was watching with heightened curiosity; he'd never seen a needle and wondered what it was for.

Evelyn wasted no time in sticking the needle into Grace's lower abdomen. After 30 seconds or so, Grace's fits started to cease. Her fingers uncurled, and her teeth unclenched. Her breathing slowed, and Evelyn helped Hermione prop her up against the wall so Snape could remove himself from the floor. Her eyes slowly opened, and she stared unfocusedly into the distance.

"Grace, look at me," said Evelyn, trying to coax a reaction from her. Her eyes started to focus.

"Grace, what happened?"

"I don't know... just felt hot... dizzy...."

"Where are your injections? Why weren't you carrying any?" Evelyn questioned.

"I don't know what happened to them... I check everyday... It came on so fast... didn't have time to do anything." She was a little more focused and was aware of Snape and Hermione staring down at her.

"Maybe it's the fumes from the potions," Hermione suggested.

"No, I've been around more potent potions than that before. It must have been something I ingested." She looked over to the broken cup on the floor and then at Snape.

"The tea!"

"I assure you, I did not put anything undisclosed into that tea," he quickly admonished.

"No, I gave my cup to Pansy while I was speaking to Draco. After I took it back off her and had a drink, I noticed it tasted a little different. What could she have put into it?" Grace mused.

"Are you suggesting that a student purposely spiked your drink with something?" Snape questioned.

"It's the only thing I can think of, and my injections were gone. They must have found out from someone. Maybe they didn't realise how serious a condition it is."

"Bullshit!" exclaimed Evelyn.

"Evelyn..." Grace pleaded.

"No! They must have known what would happen. They deliberately went into your bag and took your injections. They knew exactly what they were doing."

"I think we should hear their versions of events before we 'hang, draw, and quarter' them," Snape said sarcastically.

"You are no longer needed, Miss Granger. You may go."

Hermione had been watching the events unfold in disbelief. She simply couldn't believe that the Slytherins hated Muggles so much that they would try to kill one right inside the school.

"It's okay to go, Hermione. I'm fine now," Grace reassured her.

"I just have one question. Where were you when all this was going on?" Evelyn looked at Snape accusingly. But before he could answer, Grace interjected.

"We were helping Ron. He'd taken in a whiff of his potion and knocked himself out. That's when I think they took the injections from my bag. Under normal circumstances, I wouldn't have left my bag unattended."

"I want all those involved in Dumbledore's office in 10 minutes. Grace, let's go." Evelyn took hold of Grace's arm and pulled her towards the door. Grace broke free of her grip and turned to face Snape.

"I just want to say thanks. If you hadn't had the presence of mind to get Evelyn, I wouldn't be here. None of you knew of my diabetes except for Madam Pomfrey. I should have warned you before, but it's never been that bad." She turned and left.

Snape turned to his desk and placed his hands on it while lowering his head and breathing deeply. He had almost witnessed his assistant's death on her first day. While he wasn't sure if the prank was deliberate or not, he wondered how the Slytherins had learned about such a condition and knew to take her injections. He couldn't let it lie. If she had died, Malfoy, Parkinson, Crabbe, and Goyle would have been sent to Azkaban.

He rounded up all four members of the elite gang they seemed to have established and marched them all to Dumbledore's office.

Excuses

Chapter 4 of 5

The Slytherin four have some explaining to do!

Chapter 4

Excuses

In the office, Grace was trying to explain what happened.

"Headmaster, I think a practical joke got out of control," Grace reasoned. Evelyn stood up in disgust.

"No, sir. I think it was a deliberate attempt on my sister's life."

"Evelyn, please," Grace pleaded, pulling her sister down by the arm.

"I don't think they realised how serious diabetes can get if it's left untreated. It's usually a Muggle condition, as far as I'm aware. So they might not have known what could happen," Grace tried to reason.

Just then, Snape strolled in with the four Slytherins behind him. Parkinson, Crabbe, and Goyle had their heads down; Malfoy stood with his chin up and his arms folded in defiance. Dumbledore waved a hand and five chairs appeared.

"Please sit, all of you." No one hesitated, including Snape, who deep down felt partly responsible for the situation since Grace was technically under his care.

"Now, I presume you all know why you have been brought here?" Dumbledore asked in his mild-mannered tone.

"No, Headmaster," replied Draco assertively.

"I see. Then you are not aware of Professor Huxton falling ill after your Potions class?" he enquired. Pansy gave Draco a worried look; he simply scowled back.

"No, Headmaster." Draco was deliberately trying to avoid looking at Dumbledore.

"I see. And how about you three?" Dumbledore asked, looking to the others. Pansy continued to look down, while Crabbe and Goyle gazed absently into space.

"Headmaster, perhaps I could talk to them," Evelyn offered.

Dumbledore was well aware of her telepathic capabilities, as they were much more advanced than any Legilimency could be.

"Before Miss Huxton proceeds, do any of you have anything to say? No? As you wish." He sat back in his chair. Evelyn calmly approached the four students.

"Do you all know what a telepath is?" she asked the group with undeniable restraint.

"Of course," huffed Malfoy.

"Good. Did you also know that a telepath does not have to look into the eyes of the intended person? The two merely have to be in proximity with one another." Malfoy's expression changed to confusion mixed with worry.

Pansy had a terrified look on her face ... so much so that Evelyn thought Pansy might actually wet herself with fright. Crabbe and Goyle looked as confounded as ever, not understanding a word of what Evelyn had said. She decided not to probe their thoughts for fear of irreparably damaging her own IQ.

"Did you also know that when a telepath 'reads' someone's mind, the person invariably is not aware of it? And even if the person is, he or she can do nothing to stop it. Even the most skilled Occlumens would have great difficulty blocking a telepath."

Snape raised an eyebrow, feeling that this comment was directed more at him than at the students.

"Miss Parkinson, please close your mouth. You are not a guppy," Evelyn continued.

Pansy's mouth snapped shut.

"Basically, what I am trying to say is, I am a born telepath. If need be, I will retrieve any and all information regarding the aforesaid incident, unless any of you decides to tell us what happened. I would much rather not take the information by force ... but I will if I have to."

Pansy looked as though she might crack, but she obviously felt she couldn't in Draco's presence. They kept quiet.

Draco stood up, and Snape whipped up behind him. Evelyn stepped forward just as Draco decided to step back, and he trod on Snape's shoes. Snape pushed him back in place as Evelyn took hold of his shoulders. He quickly looked away, but Evelyn gained access to his mind regardless. In a flash, she was reliving the memory as Draco had seen it.

Evelyn saw Grace and Snape run round to the front desk as Ron collapsed. She watched through Draco's eyes as he sneaked to the front of the class and rummaged around in Grace's bag, removing the injections and stuffing them in his robes. He returned quickly as Grace and Snape set up the cauldron for the revival potion on the front desk.

Pansy leaned over to Draco and told him she had acquired an unusual potion meant for hyperactive children or children who ate too many sweets and chocolate. She explained that it should reduce the sugar levels in a person's body almost instantly. She hesitated in giving Draco the bottle, but he simply snatched it from her to look at it before handing it back.

Evelyn pushed forwards into the memory and was brought to the moment Draco called Grace over to check the potion he'd been working on. She saw Grace come around and give her cup to Pansy. Then as Grace was looking over Draco's cauldron, Draco motioned to Pansy to add the potion from the vial to the cup. Pansy hesitated, but she did it after an evil glare from Draco. Grace told Draco his potion was fine, and Snape reminded the class to bring samples to his desk for marking. Grace retrieved her cup and drank what was left. By the time she was at the front of the class, most of the students had submitted their potions and left. Grace was already beginning to feel hot and a little dizzy. The memory ended as Draco left the classroom. He was smiling to himself. Evelyn withdrew from his mind and looked him straight in the eyes. She was overwhelmed with anger. Draco now looked like he might wet himself, and Pansy was crying.

"I didn't want to do it!" Pansy exclaimed between sobs. "He made me do it!"

"No, I didn't!" Draco snapped at her.

"Enough!" bellowed Snape, and Draco and Pansy flinched.

"Headmaster, I think it would be prudent if we were to observe the memory for ourselves ... with Professor Huxton's permission, of course." Evelyn looked back to Grace, who shrugged her shoulders.

Dumbledore brought out his Pensieve and told Evelyn how to extract her memories. Soon the memory was swirling around inside the Pensieve, and Snape and Dumbledore entered into it.

Several minutes later, they returned to the office looking extremely disappointed.

"I am extremely disturbed by what has happened. I shall be writing to all of your parents tonight. I feel no alternative than to expel you both, effective immediately," Dumbledore stated.

"Headmaster, I don't think that would be a good idea. With everything that is going on and with Voldemort getting stronger..." Grace started. Snape and the students all flinched. "I think it best for them to stay here. They should be punished, of course; but they should remain here for their safety. I would also like to make it clear that if anyone were to try to poison me again, simply because of my lineage, I'm sure Evelyn here will hex them into oblivion for me." Grace looked over to the students.

Draco had a look of fear and confusion splashed across his face. Pansy was sniffing back tears, and Crabbe and Goyle still looked utterly confounded.

"If you are sure. I'd hate to think that I'm getting soft in my old age," said Dumbledore.

"Yes, I'm sure. Although some hefty punishments will have to be administered."

"Of course. I shall leave that in the capable hands of Severus."

"Of course, Headmaster," Snape replied and nodded, ready to leave, when Professor Umbridge came rushing into the room.

"Professor Dumbledore. You are here! Good! I have just been informed about the incident in the Potions class. I came to help clear the matter up." Umbridge beamed at him. Grace, who had her back to Umbridge, rolled her eyes in disbelief. Snape caught the expression with understanding, but he neither spoke nor moved a muscle.

"There is no need, Professor Umbridge. The matter has already been resolved. Against my best wishes, the culprits are to remain at Hogwarts, albeit under strict conditions."

"Against your best wishes?" Umbridge questioned.

"Yes. Given the nature of the incident and its dire seriousness, I had planned on the expulsion of both Draco Malfoy and Pansy Parkinson."

"But surely their misdemeanour couldn't possibly warrant an expulsion?" Umbridge placated.

"Almost killing a Professor would indeed warrant an expulsion. If they had succeeded in her death, I would have had no reservations in having them both arrested and charged with murder," said Dumbledore.

Umbridge stared up at him in deep shock, but she quickly regained her usual disgustingly sweet composure.

"I'm sure they didn't mean for this little joke to go so far. How serious could it be?" she reasoned.

"Are you kidding?" Evelyn snapped.

Grace grabbed hold of her arm. "Evelyn, it's done now," she warned.

"Yes, well, I'll make sure they receive detention," Umbridge said insincerely.

"Actually, Professor Umbridge, it is for Professor Snape to decide their punishments since he is their Head of House," Dumbledore stated.

"Of course. However, I am here to help in any way I can. If you need me to discipline them, I shall be happy to take the responsibility," Umbridge smiled at Snape, making him feel physically ill.

"No. Thank you, Professor Umbridge. I can handle it."

"Very well. You know where I am if you need me." With that, she swiftly left.

Evelyn made gagging signs behind her, which made Grace chuckle.

"There is something about her I don't trust," Grace commented.

"Oh, really, you think?" snapped Evelyn, causing Snape to glare at her angrily.

"For goodness sake, Evelyn, can't you hold your tongue for five minutes?" Grace exclaimed.

Evelyn stormed out, slamming the door behind her.

"I'm sorry about her; I'll go see to her." Grace got up to leave but turned as she reached the door. "Professor," she called. Snape turned to look at her.

"Thank you for doing what you did. I can only imagine what would have happened if you hadn't. I would... thanks." She quickly left, leaving Snape to his thoughts. He was relieved that she was still alive.

He couldn't believe that Draco had done something so openly to a teacher. He usually wasn't that stupid. And he involved Pansy in it, who was a nasty piece of work herself, but she was never one to follow up her threats. He would make sure they had detention for at least a month. He would even consider banning them from Quidditch.

He quickly came back to reality when he realised Draco, Pansy, Crabbe, and Goyle were still staring at him.

"Crabbe, Goyle, go back to the common room. Malfoy, Parkinson, follow me," Snape ordered.

Pansy whimpered. Draco tried to glare at Snape with no success.

They followed him to the dungeons, where Snape took 50 points off each Slytherin and made them gut rats, separating the organs into piles. Gutting the rats was to be expected, but he had never taken off so many points from his own House.

Retributions

Chapter 5 of 5

Grace is still struggling to understand the enigma that is Severus Snape.

Chapter 5

Retributions

Grace knocked apprehensively on Evelyn's door. She didn't reply, so Grace entered. Evelyn was stomping around the room, throwing clothes on the bed and then throwing them back in the wardrobe.

"Evelyn," Grace said, trying to start a conversation.

Evelyn went into the bathroom and slammed the door behind her. When Grace tried opening it, she discovered that Evelyn was using her telekinesis to hold it shut.

"Evelyn, that's not fair. You know I don't have any powers," Grace said.

Evelyn reluctantly opened the door to face Grace.

"What are you so mad about?" Grace asked.

Evelyn glared at her in disbelief. "Are you kidding? That little bastard tried to kill you, and you let him off!"

"It's not that simple. I don't think he intended for it to kill me," Grace reasoned.

"Of course he did!" Evelyn yelled.

"No, he didn't. If he'd truly wanted me dead, he'd have used a poison. Many poisons dissolve in the blood, so no traces can be found. I think all he wanted was for me to be ill."

"Why?" Evelyn couldn't understand her reasoning.

"Maybe so I'd leave."

"Why would he want you to leave?" Evelyn asked.

"Because I don't have any magical ability. He's Slytherin. They hate non-magic people."

"Snape doesn't hate you," Evelyn replied.

"How do you know?" Grace asked curiously.

There was something about Snape she couldn't put her finger on. It was almost as if she was drawn to him. She hadn't been able to sense anything from him yet. And, although he hid it well, she could tell he got slightly nervous in her presence.

"Well, he seems to tolerate you more than others," Evelyn explained. "And from what I hear, that's high praise coming from him. He doesn't like anyone, except maybe you."

"I wouldn't go so far as to say he likes me," Grace said, "but I think we came to an understanding."

"How so?"

"Well, let's just say I gave him a piece of my mind. He expected me to do slave's work instead of acting as his assistant. I don't think he'll make that mistake again," Grace mused. She turned in time to see Evelyn smile evilly at Snape's predicament.

They sat and talked for a while, mostly about Evelyn's first Defence class, which had been with sixth-year Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws. It was hours later when they realised that it was time for dinner. Classes had finished for the day, and most of the school was now in the Great Hall eating.

They walked to the teachers' table under the watchful eyes of many of the students. Evelyn ignored them, walking briskly and confidently. Grace tried not to notice, hurrying behind Evelyn and settling into a seat next to Snape. Professor Sinistra usually sat next to him, but she had moved to the other end of the table. He didn't look up from his plate and appeared to be deeply studying his food. Evelyn rolled her eyes, which, compared to her usual outbursts, was a major achievement in self-control. Grace shrugged her shoulders and began eating. After several minutes, she couldn't help but wonder what punishment he'd given Draco and Pansy.

"Professor," Grace said quietly. He whipped his head up and stared at her, obviously a little surprised.

"Um, I was curious. What punishment did you give Draco and Pansy?" she enquired, trying desperately not to sound too abrasive or questioning. He relaxed his glare a little when he realised that she had no intention of criticising.

"I made them gut rats and took a total of 100 points from Slytherin," he replied.

"But that would leave them with minus 80," Grace said, a little surprised. She knew how he prided himself in trying to keep Slytherin ahead of all Houses.

"Yes, it would," Snape deadpanned.

"How long do they have to gut rats for?" Grace asked, smiling slightly.

"For as long as I feel they need to learn their lesson or until they are out of puberty."

Snape eyed her, wondering if she was going to suggest a time period. She simply nodded approval and went back to eating. Snape continued to look at her for a few seconds, realising they had reached an understanding much like the one he had with Dumbledore: If he didn't question her, she wouldn't question him. He finished his dinner and headed back to the dungeon, leaving Grace with her thoughts. She followed his progress to the door, wishing he would have more than a three-second conversation with her.

"I doubt that will ever happen," Evelyn said suddenly.

Grace looked at her scornfully. "Stop using your powers on me!"

"I didn't have to. Your thoughts practically invaded my mind." Evelyn smiled at her.

"I'm going to go draw," Grace said as she got up.

"Don't stay up too late," Evelyn called after her.

Grace returned to her room and pulled out her sketchpad. Before she even realised what she was drawing, she'd finished. She was shocked to find that she'd drawn Snape in profile. She threw the ledger on the bed and went to have a bath.

It didn't take long to relax, and she soon fell asleep. She started having the dream again, still not able to see the man's face and why he was reaching for her. The closer he got, the darker he appeared. She was never going to find out who he was.