

Loyaulte me lie

by Vorona

Severus Snape is in Azkaban, awaiting his trial for the murder of Albus Dumbledore. When the trial occurs, what, if anything, will he say in his defence? A snapshot of Snape before and during his trial, and a prequel to *The Secret Papers of Regulus Black*. This is compliant to Half-Blood Prince, but not Deathly Hallows.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: Nothing belongs to me. I am making no money from my efforts.

Dedicated to the Red Hen.

Author's Note: This is a prequel to *The Secret Papers of Regulus Black*, but written after it. You may want to read *Papers* first as the flashback in that story happens before this story. Also, for those who have not read that story, Draco and Luna are together, Neville and Ginny are dead, and Ron and Hermione are unconscious at St. Mungo's. Finally, but most importantly, many, many thanks to my betas for this story, melusin and Insecurity. Any remaining errors are mine.

A note on the title: This Old French phrase means "loyalty binds me" and was the motto of Richard III, who was accused of many things that were actually the deeds of others. It is the Red Hen who made the connection to Snape, and I couldn't resist using it as the title of this story. Most of the theories in the story were also hers. It is also in the French style of formatting, in which only the first word is capitalised. This was done deliberately.

I reach into plain, drab robes for my wand. The gesture has become a nervous tic since I am fully aware that the wand is not there. These are not even my robes, being instead a set issued by Azkaban Prison where I am currently awaiting my trial. They are scratchy, but not yet tattered. It is not my first time here, of course, and the only man who can get me out this time is the same one who got me out last time. Only this time, I will hardly be able to repay the old man. After all, he's dead. I should know: I killed him.

Still, he is the only one who knew the truth. He is the only one who knew all the other lives on the line that night and who chose to sacrifice himself. And me. My soul for Draco's. His life for mine, Draco's, and Narcissa's. And Potter's. I clench my fist. As much as I admired, trusted, and even loved the man, he angers me to a point beyond control. I would have chosen death over this.

Would I? No, of course not. To say I would have chosen death implies that I was without choice in the matter. I could have chosen to die. Although that was my *only* other choice, considering the Unbreakable Vow I made to Narcissa, it was a choice. And, as much as I hate being denied a choice, in this instance, I wish Albus had got over his repulsion for the Unforgivables and Imperiused me properly. Then I'd at least have some sort of defence in this situation.

The sound of my own snort echoes in the confines of my cell; it is altogether too quiet in Azkaban. But defence what a joke! Even if I had been under the Imperius Curse, I

doubt it would be a defence for me. There's no defence with Potter, the Savior of the wizarding world as my accuser.

Another snort. As if the fate of the wizarding world rested on only one person. What of Albus? Did he have no part in the victory? How would Potter have destroyed any Horcruxes without knowing about them? Even I did more than Potter in assuring the Dark Lord's destruction. All under cover and known only to me, of course. Heaven forbid anyone should know of mitigating circumstances on my behalf.

Potter has realized that defeating an inhuman monster such as Voldemort is hardly satisfying when placed beside the deaths of loved ones, especially when there is a fully human enemy to punish more completely.

I never thought I'd come out on top. But I always thought I'd at least have been given the chance to die in peace, on my own terms. No, even that was overestimating Potter. It assumed he'd actually get his priorities right. Oh, no, let's waste time using the Cruciatus Curse on the hated professor instead of focussing on the task of eliminating Voldemort! Marvellous logic that. I think even Miss Granger would give you a T on that judgement call.

No, death isn't an option open to me any longer. I have no valid options. Trying to escape would be futile. My choices are reduced to what, if anything, I will say in my defence.

I wish there were some way to know Albus' feelings on this. It was his death: only he has the right to decide if I should be punished or not. Prison is certainly something he could demand for all the other deeds I've done in my life. From him, I'd accept it. He knows me: my failings, my aspirations, my weaknesses. He alone has the right to pass judgement on my life. Not Potter, not the Wizengamot, not popular opinion.

I get up and begin to pace my cell in frustration. It all comes back to Albus. I cannot escape the man. Shouldn't that be punishment enough? My fingers brush the cold steel of the bars imprisoning me. I reach for the wand that isn't there. I hate him.

Enough. This is not a time for self-pity.

I return to the quagmire of my decision. The only choice I have left: what, if anything, to say in my defence. There is no convenient outside source of corroboration, at least to my knowledge. We couldn't risk any copies. A Death Eater might have found them. No Pensieve memories left to show that Dumbledore really ordered Snape, the cold-hearted monster, to kill him. No parchments with my blood-oath carefully preserved. Just my word, my word alone.

Perhaps I will be given an advocate. If so, there's no harm in telling my story and hoping they find some facts. Perhaps there is some proof that Albus left without letting me know. It is up to him now; if he left proof of my loyalty, I will welcome it. If not, I will assume that even he agrees that I belong with the criminals. So be it.

The evening passes slowly, torturously, but it passes without incident. It is with amusement that I contemplate my first hours in Azkaban. The time consisted predominantly of a trial of boredom, rather than anything particularly painful. Aside from the Dementors, what would be the greatest torture? I've already experienced everything Voldemort could dish out. With a last look at the bars of the door, I turn back to the sagging cot in the corner. I might as well try to get some sleep.

Sleep comes slowly as my mind continues to replay what has come of my life so far. It is only the thought of Voldemort's demise that allows me to relax and fall into slumber. One master gone. My mind lets go, thrusting me into a dream. It is Hogwarts, the Welcoming Feast. Albus is conducting the horrid school song, but somehow even that is endearing. Minerva is betting me that Gryffindor is going to win the Quidditch Cup, but I know we have a spectacular Seeker this year in Slytherin. To my left is Miss Granger, the new History of Magic professor who, it must be said, is more enlivening than Binns. Next to Minerva, on the other side of Dumbledore, sits Draco Malfoy who has taken over as flying instructor. The song is over. Dumbledore turns to me, eyes twinkling as usual, and whispers in my ear: *'Thank you, Severus, I am proud of you. You did what was right, not what was easy. Few will understand, but you will always have family at Hogwarts.'*

I awaken with a pounding headache, my head somehow swollen as if I've cried all night. Ridiculous. I don't cry. It must be some sort of Azkaban sleep torture. I doubt I will be given any access to pain relieving potions. Meanwhile, the image of Dumbledore persists in mocking me, and I sense that he whispered something to me, but I can no longer recall what it might be. Minerva, Draco, and Granger flit briefly through my mind as well; to what purpose, I know not. And then it hits me. They are the only ones I can reasonably expect to believe me, or find out the truth. Minerva, because she knew Albus better than anyone else. Surely, she knew he wouldn't have begged for his life. Draco, because I saved him from this very fate and he knows it. Of course, he might well not want to associate with me. Having a Death Eater father is damning enough in this society. Granger... I cringe. Much as I'd hate for my destiny to hang on her penchant for *causes*, I am aware that she possesses a singular mind, one capable of discovering the anomalies of the situation, as well as the persistence to see the investigation through to the end. Additionally, her friendship with Potter may have provided her with knowledge of the poison, the real cause of the old man's death. I contemplate contacting her. No. I recall that she was injured badly in her battle with Fenrir Greyback and is currently ensconced in St. Mungo's. Pity. At least it gives me another reason to hate werewolves. Well, Minerva, then, or if I'm lucky, Draco.

It occurs to me that I have unfinished business with the boy. I presume he is safe as I am still bound to protect him from all harm. Well, perhaps my death will occur sooner than expected. I make a mental note not to forget that clause of the Unbreakable Vow, in case I should ever prove to have a viable future. At the moment, there is no cause for concern; death would be preferable to an Azkaban existence, defeated and humiliated.

It isn't long before I hear movement in the corridors. From the sounds of doors sliding open and silverware clinking, I deduce that it is breakfast time. Well. I was brought in last night after supper, so this will be my first occasion to evaluate the cooking of Azkaban. As they get closer, I no longer hear the sounds I heard earlier. Instead, the sound that comes to mind is a scraping of metal on the floor followed by lapping or sucking. Before I have the chance to consider the implications of such noises, a crude metal bowl is pushed between the bars of my cell.

The guards walk on, and I turn my attention to the bowl. The metal is cheap and sharp-edged. Perhaps they are hoping I will slice my hands on the edge of the bowl. I am not so stupid as to grasp it by the edge, however, so if that is their hope, they will be sadly disappointed. I leave the cot and pick the bowl up by the sides. Inside is some sort of porridge, grey in colour, with the consistency of honeyed slop. There seems to be no aroma. There are also no eating utensils provided. My lip curls in distaste. Perhaps lunch and supper will be better, but it is doubtful. With the absence of the Dementors, they have to find some way to suck joy out of the prisoners.

The thought of refusing the food out of pride is quashed as I have endured worse humiliations at the hand of Voldemort. Besides, withering away out of hunger is, in the end, more humiliating than taking the sustenance they provide. I carry the bowl back to the cot, and after a moment of hesitation, plunge my hand into the bowl. Once I have finished the tasteless meal, I notice the lack of a napkin. Normally, napkins are irrelevant in the wizarding world, but without a wand, wizarding solutions to cleanliness are equally absent. I lick off my hand, grimacing in disgust. It's the best I can do in the circumstances.

Once the food is gone, I place the empty bowl at the edge of my cell. Presumably, the guards will collect it. Indeed, it is only minutes after I have placed it here that they begin the collection. I hear the protesting noises of nearby prisoners who haven't finished yet. Their protestations are met with the invocation of "*Accio!*"

My own bowl is collected silently by hand, but the guard seems surprised. He hesitates, meeting my eyes. I recognize him then; it is one of my many former students.

"Not too proud, eh, Snape?"

"I've always been a survivor, Stebbins."

"*Petrificus Totalus!*"

As my body immobilizes and falls over, Stebbins adds, "That's *Sir* to you, Snape." He turns away, muttering under his breath. I catch the words, "It's too bad the Cruciatus Curse is an Unforgivable even for Azkaban guards. They really should change that..."

I wonder how long I'll be stuck here. I do not have time to wonder as a new pair of guards stops directly in front of my cell. "What's this? Full Body-Bind?" asks the first, another former student whose name I can't quite place.

"Looks like it. He must have insulted one of the other guards."

"Well, better undo it. He has his trial today. *Finite Incantatem!*"

I am able to move, but unfortunately am prone on the ground. By this time, Stebbins and another guard have returned. The first guard nods to the newcomers as I rise to my feet.

"Stand in the corner and extend your hands," instructs the first guard.

I dust myself off and follow the instructions. The four guards enter, blocking any possibility of getting to the door. I expect to hear *Incarcerous*, but instead, the guards advance on me and clamp metal shackles around my wrists and ankles. A chain is wound around my waist, and one end of it trails to the floor. They affix my wrists to the waist chain with a quick sticking spell, and my ankles are similarly attached to the other end.

Stebbins and the first guard each take an elbow and urge me forward, away from the corner, while the other two fall in behind. I hear the catcalls of other prisoners as I am led past the cells into a circular area. A central fireplace dominates this room. I remember that they have modified the Floo connection here. Azkaban guards are given special badges that are attuned to their identity. Without being in the presence of such a badge, the fire turns red, not green, and the would-be traveller is stuck inside the fire until a guard can release him. It is an excellent means of preventing escape through the Floo.

There is, of course, still the original Apparition point at the far end of the island, but that is impossible for prisoners to get to. There are other specific wards that are also attuned to the badges worn by the guards. The only other method of departure and arrival is by Portkey. One of the guards not holding an elbow retrieves an old Muggle newspaper, and we all huddle around it. Soon, we are spinning to the Ministry of Magic, to the landing for Levels Nine and Ten. I am led down the stairs into the corridor to Courtroom Ten.

The hallway is impossibly crowded. While I have on occasion enjoyed putting on a show for mindless idiots, such as during Lockhart's amusing duelling club, I much prefer solitude. Particularly these days. I wonder if there is any reason for this circus. Why have a trial when everyone already knows the outcome? I suppose they must go through the motions in order to display how truly evil I am.

Am I evil? That is a question that I have never contemplated. I have done what is necessary for my own survival and what I've been asked to do by Albus Dumbledore. Before that, I may have indulged somewhat in my dark side. Does that make me evil? Would Albus call me evil? Is that why, in the end, he chose me to do it? Draco's soul had to be preserved. Was mine already beyond redemption?

I snort at the irony. I'm thinking of this now? After all, I don't have time to ponder the state of my soul. I am thrust forward, into the glaring lights of the courtroom. The eyes of those here to judge and condemn look down upon me from the benches. The guards lead me to the chair in the centre of the room. I have no illusions as to whether I will be chained in place, Death Eater and murderer that I am in their eyes.

The guards guide me to the chair, undoing the shackles while the chain around my waist remains. Once that is done, I am pushed forcibly into the seat as each of the four guards takes one of my limbs and holds it in place. As expected, chains spring to life, locking me securely in place. Now, this parody of a trial can begin properly.

My eyes scan the audience. The faces reflect back to me various forms of hungry glee. Too many of them belong to students who feel I've wronged them. Three faces show a different expression, aside from the visages of the judges, which are, of course, carefully neutral. Miss Lovegood's face is unsurprisingly vacant, as though she is thinking about something that is not currently present in the courtroom. Draco Malfoy, sitting next to Miss Lovegood, looks merely thoughtful. And Potter is nervous. I smirk briefly at his nervousness, but realize that despite his nerves, he is the one with the power in this situation. I glower, awaiting the commencement of the trial.

As I continue to contemplate the faces surrounding me, the Chief Warlock speaks up. "Who will speak for the victim?"

"I will." Predictably, Harry Potter struts forward, a hard look of righteous anger painted on his face.

"And for the accused?"

As the silence lasts, I become certain that no one will dare step forward on my behalf. Finally, I see Malfoy rise and come to stand beside Potter. "I will speak for the accused," he says, his face inscrutable.

As well it might be. His father had been recaptured shortly before I was. I heard he'd earned himself a life sentence in Azkaban, sullyng the Malfoy name. Despite the fact that Slytherins always repay their favours, I am surprised that Draco is risking his reputation by defending me. He could have decided on another way to repay it.

"Very well," intones the Chief Warlock, nodding to Potter. "Please state the case against the accused."

"The greatest wizard of all time is dead because of this man." With those words, Potter begins his account of how I blatantly disregarded the Headmaster's plea and, in hatred, cast the Killing Curse. "He was asking for you, did you know?" Harry's eyes are hard, full of hatred. "In the end, he *trusted* you!"

"His trust was well-placed," I murmur. I long to tell him that he is alive today because of what I did that day.

Potter's face contorts with surprise and indignant anger, and he turns to the Chief Warlock. The latter gazes sternly down on me. "It is not your turn to speak. If you speak out of turn again, I will have no choice but to administer the Silencing Charm."

Potter looks satisfied whilst Malfoy seems nervous. Wonderful. The boy makes no intervention on my behalf, and the Chief Warlock turns back to Potter.

"Is there anything else?"

"Yes. I have his wand. I would like the court to perform the *Priori Incantatem* spell for the day of the murder."

I hiss in my breath, but merely watch as the spell is performed. Several spells flash from my wand before it finally comes to the one we're all waiting for. Dumbledore floats out the end, twinkling as ever. I stare at him, hoping against hope that, echo though it is, he will say something in my defence. Instead, I get a smile and a wink before he fades from view. Potter is speaking, but I cannot hear him. Instead, I see Dumbledore, weakened and in pain. I knew the cause of his torment and knew that the antidote was not ready yet. I take a deep breath, unwilling to think about how I'd failed him in his last days, how that failure turned the Killing Curse into a gift. I focus my attention back on the trial.

"As you can see, there is evidence that the spell *Avada Kedavra* was performed from this wand, resulting in the death of Albus Dumbledore. I have nothing more." Harry Potter struts back to his position near the front, crossing his arms over his chest. He is right to be smug; Malfoy will have a hard time making up for such damning evidence.

"Mr. Malfoy."

Draco turns to me, swallowing. He is clearly unprepared, but I give him points for trying. "The accused was acting in self-defence. He had made an Unbreakable Vow to, well, to my mother. I was the one who was supposed to have killed Dumbledore."

More excitement arises, but Potter steps in, exclaiming, "But you didn't! You wouldn't have: I saw you lower your wand."

"The point is," Malfoy says, overpowering Potter, "since I didn't do it, if he hadn't, I would have died, Mother would have died, and Snape himself would have died. Not to mention that the other Death Eaters would have killed Dumbledore."

The Chief Warlock looks down on Malfoy. "I'm afraid that all of that is mere speculation. Please keep your comments pertinent to the charges at hand."

"Very *well*." Malfoy's eyes blaze in anger. He appears to be insulted that his confession to nearly murdering Dumbledore himself is considered "mere speculation". I could have warned him of such; not even he can top me for Evil Wizard of the Year. I'm not even sure that the Dark Lord himself would manage that feat, were he alive today. "I was merely stating that Snape's action falls under the self-defence clause."

"Do either of you wish to question the accused?"

Potter shakes his head, but Malfoy nods, then moves toward me.

Potter's voice cuts in before Malfoy has a chance to speak. "I would like the accused to answer questions only under Veritaserum."

"I'm sorry, but that is no longer allowed in court." Potter looks mutinous. "The reason," continues the Chief Warlock, "is that too many have been known to lie under its use. The accused in question is known to be an exceptional Occlumens, and thus, use of any truth potion might actually seem to validate his lies."

Potter says nothing, but looks at me suspiciously as Malfoy asks his first question.

"Were you, as I have stated, under an Unbreakable Vow?"

"I was."

"What were the conditions of that Vow?"

"To watch over you as you completed the task and help as needed, to protect you to the best of my ability from all harm, and to perform the task myself if it seemed you were unable."

"To whom did you make this Vow?"

"Your mother, Narcissa Malfoy."

"Who was the bonder?"

"Bellatrix Lestrange."

"What was the task in question?"

"You were given the task, by Voldemort, of killing Albus Dumbledore before the end of your sixth year at Hogwarts."

"What would have happened if you had not killed Albus Dumbledore?"

"I would have died, certainly. You and your mother would likely have been killed by Voldemort, or perhaps by one of his lackeys who were waiting for you to act." Draco breathes in sharply. Clearly, he didn't realize that his "back-ups" would have likely turned on him had things gone differently. "I do not know if Dumbledore would have survived." Do I mention that the potion would have killed him? No his last act was to protect Potter, not me. I take a breath.

At this comes another interruption from Potter. "He was weakened. You could have helped him!"

I close my eyes and swallow. My potion was meant for Voldemort, not Dumbledore. Potter ruined everything. "No. I couldn't have. There wasn't time to make the antidote. Besides, I didn't have all the ingredients necessary."

"Liar!" At Potter's word, the rest of the court erupts once more into chaos. "You could have used a bezoar!"

Remarkable. Potter knows about bezoars. Pity he didn't think about them when he was my student. "Unfortunately, a bezoar does not work for all poisons and would certainly not have worked in Dumbledore's case." In point of fact, it would have exacerbated the pain and made it nearly unbearable. It also would have prolonged the effect, cancelling out some of the death-causing effects, but not long enough for there to be any hope of recovery, just long enough to draw it out.

"How very convenient." Potter's voice is cold. "Dumbledore thought you could do something."

He is twirling his wand around in his hand. Draco is watching, eyes narrowed, perhaps hoping to find a chink in Potter's version of events. Then Potter comes closer and leans over me, making eye contact. His voice, when it comes, is quiet and harsh. "He *begged* you."

Unbidden, the image of Dumbledore rises to the surface of my mind. Weakened, at Draco's wand-point, he slumps against the wall of the Astronomy Tower. '*Severus...*' Save Draco. Save Harry. Kill me. '*Severus... please...*' You'll survive.

"I know," I say, my voice barely audible.

Malfoy looks at me, surprised. As the crowd calms, he asks, "Were you under another Unbreakable Vow... to Dumbledore?"

"No." Dumbledore had never required one. He had my unreserved loyalty.

"Were you under the Imperius Curse?"

"No."

The boy looks thoughtful, but finally turns back to the full Wizengamot. "I have no further questions."

Potter steps forward. "I know I said I didn't have any questions, but I do."

The Chief Warlock motions for him to continue.

"Why did you make the Unbreakable Vow, if you didn't intend to kill him?"

I pause. It is a good question, but I do not want Potter taking that secret from me. No one can force me to speak without Veritaserum or the Imperius Curse, and even those can be fought.

"Never mind," he snaps. "I don't want to know."

"Anything else?" the Chief Warlock asks Malfoy and Potter. Both shake their heads this time. Then, he looks at the Interrogators. "Any questions?"

A balding man in the front leans forward, looming over me. His withered voice is barely heard in the courtroom. "I would like to know the answer to Mr. Potter's question. Why did you make the Unbreakable Vow?"

I bite back the response I long to make, knowing no one would believe me. Instead, I say, "I will not answer that question." There. Now maybe we can get on with the

sentencing.

"Did anyone else have access to your wand?"

I'm astonished that the thought would occur to someone, but this man has clearly been in law for a long time. A pity I cannot give an answer in my defence.

"No."

He continues. "Did you know what the task was when making the Unbreakable Vow?"

I nod. "I did."

"Did you kill Albus Dumbledore?"

I close my eyes, again swallowing. "I did."

I hadn't wanted to falter in any of my testimony, and I'm furious that I was unable to contain my emotions. Azkaban must already be getting to me. Either that, or it's Dumbledore.

"That is all." The balding man sits back in his seat.

Finally, the Chief Warlock turns back to me. "Do you have anything to say for yourself?"

The image of Albus from my wand, winking but saying nothing, fills my mind. As the silence stretches, the crowd grows restless. Again, I choose not to speak.

The Chief Warlock turns to the Wizengamot. "Well, what is the verdict? All those who find Severus Snape guilty of casting the Unforgivable Killing Curse, raise your hands." All the hands rise into the air. After all, what could I expect?

"And those who find him guilty of the murder of Albus Dumbledore?" This time, a few hands remain down, but all the others rise. A macabre smirk crosses my face: majority rules. At my face, the few who'd chosen to keep their hands down raise theirs, hesitantly. It is now unanimous.

"Those who find him innocent of the charges against him?"

No hands.

Potter and Malfoy return to their places in the audience as one of the Azkaban guards approaches, holding something in his hands. I don't recognize it, but a part of me knows I should, knows that it is intimately connected to me. Through the haze of my dreamlike state, I hear the sentence. Life in Azkaban.

Then, a snap. Pieces of ebony land on the floor, clattering away. Something inside me breaks. My wand.

I do not feel the chains recede from my arms and legs. I do not notice as the guards rebind them with the steel shackles. All I am aware of is the echo of the snap of my wand.

I did not tell them that Dumbledore was already dying. I did not mention that he begged for an end to the pain given to him by the potion. Taking a deep breath, I quietly allow the guards to lead me back to my cell, bound by my loyalty.

Fin.