

# Shadow on My Heart

*by Lady Whitehart*

Set in the aftermath of OotP, Severus Snape's complicated web of lies and loyalties becomes too much to bear. A new instructor is hired, and a previously ill-fated romance gets a second chance. SS/OFC story containing romance, drama, humor, and lemons, nice juicy lemons. Revision of a story that was started prior to the release of HBP.

## Prologue

*Chapter 1 of 12*

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Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter or any other characters you may recognize. Sad but true.

A/N: In case you are new, this story is undergoing a major renovation. One of the wonderful things about fanfic is that you can make changes whenever you want. My only hope is that these changes will be for the better. I cringed when I went back and read some of the early chapters. I was hoping to complete it prior to the release of *Deathly Hallows*, but Real Life didn't always cooperate. Finishing this story has become a labor of love.

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It was well past midnight when Severus Apparated into the end of the alley. The dirty cobblestone street was barely visible in the pale moonlight. As a precaution born of habit, he cast a Disillusionment Charm over himself and slunk past the boarded up two-up-two-down buildings. He stopped at the fifth door and tapped the lock with his wand. Faint clicks signaled the wards disengaging. Glancing over his shoulder, he cracked the door open just enough to enable himself to slip through.

With a wave of his wand, the room was illuminated by a grouping of candles suspended from the ceiling. The interior of the dwelling was shabby and dark and had the odd smell that was associated with neglected places. Severus hated this place, but it served his needs. It was secluded, and with a few modifications, it was reasonably secure. The walls were lined top to bottom with various books and a few potion ingredients. A battered leather armchair, a sagging sofa, and a scuffed table, the house's only furnishings, were grouped before a fireplace on a threadbare, dusty rug. The remains of his last meal were moldering on the table. He wrinkled his large, hooked nose at the smell and vanished the mess.

The thin man threw his black traveling cloak over the back of the chair and collapsed onto the sofa, which creaked ominously. To say he was exhausted would be a gross understatement. The last few days had been spent trying to keep Bellatrix LeStrange from convincing the Dark Lord that Severus had informed Dumbledore of Potter's trip to the Ministry. It was a difficult task because he had in fact been the informant. However, he managed to make it look like Sirius Black could have been informed by the portrait of former headmaster Phineas Nigellus Black of the idiot boy's doings. It was remotely possible after all, and with Black conveniently dead, there was no one to prove or disprove the theory. The disastrous failure to retrieve the prophecy only hindered Bella's case. All things considered, he couldn't fully say part of him didn't enjoy watching her and the others pay for their lack of success. But right now, he didn't want to consider anything other than a few hours of sleep, unencumbered by memories or thoughts.

"*Accio! Dreamless Sleep,*" he muttered, pointing his wand at a shelf. A small bottle flew obligingly into his hand. He uncorked it and was about to tip the contents into his

mouth when a silvery, ghost-like phoenix circled the room. Severus swore in irritation born of exhaustion. Leave it to Dumbledore to demand a report immediately upon his arrival. Why on earth had he allowed the man to put an Alerting Charm on his residence? He staggered over to the bookcase nearest the hearth and yanked out one of the many thick volumes housed there. In the center of the book was a Chocolate Frog card of Albus Dumbledore.

"Severus!" called the voice, as the old man stared up at him from the trading card. "Thank Merlin you've returned. When I hadn't heard from you, I feared the worst."

I'm sure you did, he thought with a flash of bitter contempt. "As you can see, I managed to placate the Dark Lord... for now."

"I would like the complete briefing as soon as possible," the old headmaster said without seeming to register the fatigued look on the other man's face. "Can you return to the castle within the hour?"

"Impossible," the younger wizard said firmly, sinking back onto the sofa. If he could just close his eyes for a few hours....

"Severus..."

"Headmaster," Severus interrupted with a yawn that refused to be suppressed, "I assure you there isn't anything I've seen or heard that can't wait until morning."

"Let me be the judge of that, Severus."

The younger man scowled, seized by a sudden desire to shred the Chocolate Frog card into tiny pieces. He was in no condition to Apparate to Hogwarts. It had been difficult enough to come here without splinching himself. Wasn't it enough he risked his life every time he was summoned? He knew he was nearly indispensable to the Order, but no one would ever acknowledge it... or give a rat's arse if anything happened to him for that matter.

"I'm exhausted," he heard himself say, the words sounding petulant and childish to his own ears. "I don't trust my ability to Apparate that far without risk of splinching."

"How long would it take you to fly, Severus?" Dumbledore's tiny portrait asked. "Half an hour, maybe forty minutes?"

*Oh, yes, dozing off and tumbling from a charmed twig is much better!* Severus thought indignantly. Besides he hated flying. Why the hell else would one learn to tolerate the ear-popping, innard-squeezing sensation of Apparition? At least it was mercifully brief, unlike pelting through the freezing wet air several hundred feet above certain death. He glared at the twinkling face on the Chocolate Frog card, wondering if he could convince the old man that it had accidentally fallen into the fire.

"Or," the headmaster continued, "you could take the Floo to Hogwarts. You do have Floo powder, don't you?"

"Yes," he said through clenched teeth. Dumbledore had seen to it that a supply was kept there 'just in case.'

The miniature wizard nodded. "Excellent! I will see you as soon as possible." As if he had finally noticed the scowl on the younger man's face, Dumbledore went on in a placating tone, "Severus, I'm sure you are...how do you say it? Ah, yes...utterly knackered, but the sooner I am informed of Voldemort's plans, the sooner we can find a way to end this. I need to see what you have seen these last few days."

As much as Severus loathed to admit it, he knew the old man was right. He drew in a deep breath. "I will be there shortly."

"I will see you then, Severus," Dumbledore replied before retreating from the card's frame.

Slamming the book closed on the card, the younger wizard let it hit the floor with a loud thud. Sometimes he hated the manipulative old bugger enough to murder him in cold blood. *But*, the part of his mind that served as his conscience reminded him, *your choices have made it very easy to manipulate you. No one ever forced you to take the Mark; you could have refused. Would death have been any worse than this pitiful existence you call a life?*

Severus crossed the room and stuffed the book back into its place. Leaning his forehead against the wall of leather spines, he couldn't help but think that death was indeed preferable to the constant suspicion and loneliness. He continued to live for the sole purpose of repaying debts and honoring memories.

An hour later he was sitting in a hard wooden chair in front of Dumbledore's desk, the Pensieve between them. The old man's face was grave as they discussed what they had seen.

"So Voldemort plans to seize both the Ministry and the school, but you were not told when or how?" Dumbledore asked, and Severus shook his head in response. The old man went on, more to himself than the exhausted man across from him, "He wants me disposed of, naturally, and the new Minister as well."

"I had the impression the two would coincide," Severus added, pressing the heels of his hands to his eyes.

Dumbledore stood up and began to pace, speaking to himself, purple robes swishing with each step. "That would make the most sense. A rapid take over would give the population very little time to react. The new Minister will need to be put on the alert as soon as he or she is appointed. The school will need additional protection, of course."

Even though such a move on the Dark Lord's part was highly probable, Severus wondered how the old man could discuss the matter with the Ministry and not expose his source. Anything that remotely connected the information to Severus was the same as signing his death warrant.

Dumbledore turned his focus back to Severus. "Have any of the other Death Eaters been in contact with you, Severus?"

"No," he answered. "Although I have been expecting to hear from Narcissa Malfoy since Lucius was incarcerated after the Department of Mysteries debacle."

"Was young Draco forced to take the Mark sooner than expected?" Dumbledore asked, a deeply troubled look on his lined face.

"On the contrary," Severus said, frowning with concentration. "The Dark Lord has decided to make the boy prove his worth first. Naturally, Draco wants to take his father's place. However, I had the impression that Narcissa was far from interested in her son following in his father's footsteps."

Dumbledore fiddled with his beard for a moment. "Guide him as best you can, Severus. Keep him from harm's way."

"That may prove to be problematic, sir," Severus answered. "The boy no longer trusts me. I believe that Bellatrix has convinced him that I am the reason he was not accepted as a replacement for Lucius."

"Then you simply must find a way to regain his trust, Severus," the headmaster insisted, "before he causes harm to himself or others. Take him into your confidence and provide him with some information that could keep him within Voldemort's good graces but not enough to earn him the dubious honor of being Marked. I'm trusting you to find a solution."

"Perhaps something will present itself," Severus said, not sounding convinced.

The younger man fell silent. All he wanted was several hours of sleep without the concern of being murdered looming in the background.

"Is there anything else you feel we need to discuss?" The old man's eyes pierced him.

"No, sir," Severus answered, his tone stiff and unfeeling. Unless you plan on offering me the Defense Against the Dark Arts post.

"Please, go to your quarters and rest, Severus," said the headmaster with a sliver of compassion. "I will have the house-elves send a tray to your room if you wish."

The offer was tempting. Eating and drinking in the company of those who would prefer him dead was not an advisable practice, and the last four days left him exhausted and famished. Potions helped, but he had used them so frequently that their effectiveness was beginning to wane. There was nothing at Spinner's End worth Transfiguring into something barely palatable, and.... What if he had somehow, however unlikely, been followed to Spinner's End? It would be best for him to return.

"No, thank you, sir," he said, rising to his feet. He made his way to the fireplace and vanished in a flash of flames.

"As you wish, Severus." Dumbledore sighed. There had been a flash of hopelessness in those black eyes. Severus had lost so much over the years, and it was obvious the stresses of his ever flip-flopping display of loyalties were taking their toll. Sooner or later he might make an error and all would be lost. It was no doubt difficult for him to continue working toward a future of freedom and peace that would have no place for him. He needed to have a vested interest in that future, a reason to continue fighting besides honoring the memories of loved ones.

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"Unless we find a suitable candidate, it may be best to discontinue the course all together," McGonagall said the following morning as she and the headmaster faced the annual challenge of filling the Defense Against the Dark Arts post.

It was something that he had considered more than once in his tenure as headmaster. Dumbledore fell silent, staring blankly at the clutter of paper on his desk, frowning as he shared his concern with her. "Defense Against the Dark Arts is a course we can ill-afford to drop from the curriculum. We need a competent teacher; perhaps Alastor would be willing to take the offer. He never genuinely taught the course, Barty Crouch, Jr. did. Maybe the curse will have no affect on him."

"After what happened to him?" McGonagall shook her head. "I wouldn't count on it, Albus. Having been locked in a trunk for nearly a year may make him think twice about the offer."

Neither of them spoke for several minutes.

"Have you considered offering it to Severus?" she asked in a business-like tone. "He applies for the post every year. Perhaps it's time to finally reward his patience?"

"Allowing Severus to teach the Dark Arts course will be a last resort," Dumbledore informed her without looking up from the sheaf of parchment on his desk. "The risks he is taking at the moment are great enough."

"It sounds more like you don't trust him to teach the class." McGonagall's expression conveyed that she, too, mistrusted the former Death Eater.

"This has nothing to do with trust, Minerva." He had lost count of the number of times they had had this conversation. "Severus provides vital information to the Order, he prepares his students well for their exams, and he keeps a close watch over the children of his fellow Death Eaters. While I'm sure Severus would be elated to procure the post, and no doubt Voldemort would find it somehow to his benefit, I would rather not risk losing Severus at the end of the school term." Dumbledore shook his head, closing the matter. "No, he will continue teaching Potions for as long as I can manage to find a warm body to fill the Defense post. There is a suitable candidate out there, and that person needs to be located."

Realizing that further debate would be futile, McGonagall said crisply, "Then we need to keep looking. I would hate for the Ministry to appoint another teacher."

"Agreed." The name of a retired Auror who had worked with Alastor Moody came to mind. "What about Orion McTavish?"

"Not unless you can resurrect the dead," McGonagall said dryly. "He died two years ago."

*Resurrect the dead?* Why hadn't he thought about that before? "That may be a possibility, Minerva."

"Albus, you can't seriously be thinking about...."

The old man opened one of the drawers of his massive desk, tapping the bottom of it with his wand. From inside the hidden compartment, he retrieved a file containing letters and a few photographs, and passed them to the deputy headmistress. "I think I may have had our Defense professor under lock and charm all this time."

McGonagall nearly dropped the file in astonishment. "But everyone thought she was murdered around the same time as the Potters." After scanning the photographs, she looked sharply up at the old man, an angry edge to her voice. "How long have you known?"

"She was first brought to my attention three or four years after her disappearance. An old friend of mine, Jarvis Pike, had written to me to inquire about the possibility that one of Voldemort's followers may have taken refuge in the States. At the time, the Ministry had accounted for all young women who may have fallen into that category. I had instructed him to observe her carefully and notify me if there were any further concerns." Dumbledore picked up one of the pictures. "I didn't hear from Jarvis until just before Harry started school. He had caught her in a series of inconsistencies and discovered that the young lady in question had been employing Occlumency to conceal her true identity. This time he sent me photographs, and I recognized her immediately."

"You didn't think to tell her family?" Minerva's lips were a thin, angry line. "They were devastated when they thought Sirius Black had killed her."

"Minerva, I had every reason to believe she didn't want to be found." Dumbledore proceeded to explain his reasons for withholding the information, which at that time had been logical choices. Now it was obvious that some of the damage could have been... perhaps not undone, but at least repaired.

"You had no right to keep something like that from me." Her eyes had narrowed. "She was a student in my House, Albus. She was supposed to be under my guidance and protection."

He let out a long sigh. "I had no choice at the time."

"And you think she may consider returning after all this time?"

"That remains to be seen," Dumbledore said calmly. "However, there is no harm in asking. If she accepts the post, our problem is solved for another year. If she declines it, then we are no worse off than before."

Dumbledore closed his eyes and sighed, remembering the hollow look in Severus Snape's eyes. Severus needed someone to confide in, and Dumbledore needed someone to teach Defense Against the Dark Arts. And there was also a connection to Lily and James Potter, which would be helpful to Harry.

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"No, thank you, Barbara. I should be finished packing by the end of tomorrow," Dr. Jarvis Pike said to his secretary over the intercom as he sat behind the cluttered desk in his university office. This afternoon had been spent packing boxes with the numerous books and personal items he had amassed over his thirty-year tenure. Come August, someone else would be sitting in the department head's office and he would be retired, reduced to giving an occasional lecture. He was a spry man approaching his late seventies, far from ready to retire. However, that was one of the drawbacks of being a wizard who embraced the ordinary world: you had to do everything on their timetable.

Pike tried to convince himself that there were advantages to retiring. His wife, Meredith, would be cutting back on her course load come September, and they could spend some time together away from the university. There was a greenhouse full of 'exotic' plants that needed to be tended, several articles and a book to complete, and perhaps he could take some time to travel to Europe.

Traveling had been Meredith's suggestion. For the past forty-odd years, he had treated her to trips to every uncivilized corner of the globe, which she had enjoyed initially. Unfortunately, in spite of being nearly twenty years his junior, his beloved wife did not have his stamina or longevity. Unlike Jarvis, Meredith was an Ordinary, a Muggle as his friends across the pond would say. The only thing he ever regretted about marrying her was that he would likely outlive her by many years.

A sudden flash of fire in the office caused him to yell in surprise, and with surprising speed, he pointed a slender length of wood at the disturbance. Suspended in midair was the form of a bird so brightly colored in shades of orange and red that it looked like it was made of flames. A phoenix! He hadn't seen one since...

"Dumbledore," he whispered, lowering his wand and cautiously approaching the bird. The elegant creature lowered its head in acknowledgment, dropping a large, old-fashioned envelope on the desk before vanishing in another flash of fire.

Jarvis tore open the envelope. Inside, there was a letter for him, neatly wrapped around a second smaller, sealed envelope. Reading the sheet of parchment, he sighed; he had been hoping this day would not come. Things were out of his hands.

There was an quick knock at the office door before it was pushed open by a thin, elderly woman bearing two steaming cups in her hands.

"Is everything all right, Dr. Pike?" she asked. "I thought I heard you yell while I was down the hall getting coffee. I came as fast as I could."

Jarvis smiled, grateful that she had been instructed early on that he was a bit 'odd.' "No, everything is fine, just a really large spider in the file cabinet drawer. Could you do me a favor? I need you to see if Professor O'Brien has left for the day."

"She wasn't in her office when I walked by."

He distractedly continued packing. "Yes, I know she said something about leaving early. I have some urgent news for her. Tell her it can't wait if she asks."

Barbara set the cup on a nearby shelf. "I'll see if I can find her."

"Thank you, Barbara." Maybe he would miss her after all.

He finished packing the last few boxes, charmed to hold twice the usual amount at this point, and sealed them with a wave of his wand. Doubts that the ever-faithful Barbara had been successful in her location of Professor O'Brien were beginning to creep into his head. As much as he hated to call on O'Brien after hours, he would need to stop by her home to drop off the letter. As he moved to stuff the envelope into his briefcase, a knock sounded at the door.

"Come in."

A woman in her early thirties stepped across the threshold, surveying the sea of boxes with an amused smile. "Jarvis, Barbara said you had something important to tell me. Did I get the grant?"

Pike shook his head. "I told you not to get your hopes up about that grant. You were at the last budget meeting; the university is concerned they may need to cut staff. Grants for wizard-centric projects may very well be out of the question."

"But it would benefit both the magical and non-magical communities in the long-term!" she protested.

He could see she was getting ready to launch into her mutual-benefit speech, and hearing it again would only make him feel worse when her proposal was denied. Indicating a chair next to the desk, Pike said, "Have a seat, my dear."

"This isn't going to be good news, is it?" she asked, eyeing the old man suspiciously.

"That remains to be seen, Callista," he said, taking a seat himself.

Once she was seated, he slid the heavy envelope across the desk towards her. Callista O'Brien picked the letter up without doing more than glance at it, and an annoyed expression covered her face. "It's very nice, Jarvis, but did you really need to show me the invitations to a costume party?"

"Look at the address on the front and the seal on the back."

The name *Callista Hawkins* followed by *c/o Dr. Jarvis Pike* and the university address stared surreally up at her from the parchment.

"What's this all about?"

"I suggest you open it," he said softly.

The young woman turned it over; on the back was a shield decorated with a badger, a snake, a lion, and an eagle *Draco dormiens nunquam titillandus*. Never tickle a sleeping dragon.

"What kind of joke is this, Jarvis?" Callista demanded, throwing the unopened letter on the desktop.

"Callista, it isn't a joke. Dumbledore's phoenix arrived just a short time ago and delivered it."

She jumped to her feet and began pacing, as if an assortment of unwelcome thoughts had fueled her perpetual nervous energy. "Why would the old bugger want to bother me? I left a long time ago. There's nothing to go back to."

"From what I read in my own letter, he's offering you a teaching position."

Callista faced him, clearly flustered. "I'm in the middle of getting my doctorate, Jarvis! I can't just drop that and rush off to teach little witches and wizards how to wave their wands!"

"I remember at one point you wanted to do just that, but Salem wasn't hiring," Pike reminded her gently. "After you opted out of medicine, it was your ambition to teach."

"Ambitions change, Jarvis. Lives change." She looked at her hands.

"You have been spending too much time with Lucas." Pike frowned; it was no secret that he disliked the businessman. "He seems to be rubbing off on you and not in a good way."

"Lucas promised matching funds if I could get a grant from the university," Callista said, shrugging. "I may be the brains behind the research, but he's the one with the money."

*Oh, yes, Lucas Hart and his money, a combination that can only mean trouble.* "Has he..."

"No," Callista answered quickly. "Our relationship is strictly professional, and I intend to keep it that way."

"I...well, Meredith and I...worry about you." Pike kept his voice controlled; the last thing he wanted was to push her to the point where she would shut him out. "We both detest how he treats you at those public functions, Callista; it's neither right nor proper. I... I think he's using you, or at least he's trying to."

Her face softened. "Jarvis, I know you think of yourselves as my surrogate parents, but please, stop. I'm an adult and more than capable of taking care of myself. I was doing that when our paths crossed. There is no room in my plans for a relationship, with anyone, period."

"Perhaps this offer from Hogwarts is providential, Callista," he said soothingly. "Things aren't going as you had hoped they would; maybe you should go."

"I get the very distinct impression you're trying to hide something from me," she said sharply.

He ignored her remark. "If nothing else, you could inform your parents that you are still alive."

"Absolutely not!"

Pike pointed a bony finger at her. "Callista, they deserve to know..."

"As far as they are concerned," she broke in bitterly, "their disappointment of a daughter is missing and most likely dead. There's nothing for me to go back to. I still haven't quite forgiven you for informing Dumbledore about me. Had you kept quiet, none of this"...she pointed angrily at the envelope..."would have happened!"

"When I heard he wasn't convinced that the Dark wizard was truly gone, I felt it only right to inform him I had a witch from his school under my direction." The old argument was rising to the surface yet again. "You should be grateful I didn't notify their Ministry. How was I to know you weren't one of What's-His-Name's followers?"

While Callista sat in a seething silence, Jarvis reminded himself that he had done the right thing. News about the rise of a new Dark wizard had drifted to the North American wizarding community, barely making a ripple in the lives of the majority of witches and wizards. The threat had seemed to be nothing more than a vague concern to most; that unconcerned attitude had given her high hopes of leaving every trace of her past behind.

"You meant well. We established that a long time ago," she said with a sigh.

"So what do you intend to do?"

She shoved an errant strand of brown hair out of her eyes. "Tell Dumbledore to never contact me again for starters, and then go on as if none of this had ever happened."

"Are you certain you can do that?"

She lowered her head into her hands, staring at the toes of her shoes. "I don't know."

"Read the letter and think it over for a few days." Pike handed her the parchment. "You wouldn't have to go back to take the position; you could just go back to visit. How much leave time do you have?"

"Four weeks or more, I know I wouldn't qualify for a year-long sabbatical."

"Why not take a vacation? If I recall correctly, it's beautiful over there this time of year."

"When tisn't rainin'," she clarified, allowing her accent to thicken.

Jarvis laughed encouragingly. "Before I forget, Meredith is throwing a small dinner party in honor of my retirement Saturday evening. Would you care to join us?"

"Lucas wants me to do some hard-core schmoozing at some company event with him, but I think I can get out of it." Dressing up in revealing evening attire was something she preferred to skip whenever possible.

"Then we will be expecting you, Callista." He showed her to the door. After she left, Jarvis felt a little guilty. He knew the next few days were going to be unpleasant for her.

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Later that evening, Callista sat on her bed, staring at a picture of her arm-in-arm with a young wizard. He wasn't handsome by any definition: scarecrow-thin with lank black hair framing a pale face on which the most noticeable feature was an overly-large, hooked nose. Although the man was smiling at her, it did little to enhance his looks by revealing his discolored, uneven teeth. Callista wasn't sure why she had kept this particular photograph. In all honesty, she would have been better off trying to forget him and her old life entirely. That's what she had been attempting to do for the last thirteen years. Yet, for some unknown reason, she had kept this shred of evidence of her former self. A tattered wizarding photograph, a snip of jet black hair, and an old wand were the only things tying Callista O'Brien to Callista Hawkins, student of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Her life here was a busy one, but even for it's hectic pace, there was an emptiness that hadn't faded, no matter how many friends she had gained or accomplishments she had achieved. Perhaps she was more homesick than she was willing to admit. But she was so close to completing her degree that she didn't feel that she could just drop everything. Besides, most of her friends had died during the last war or had been imprisoned for their crimes.

Leaving her old life behind and coming here had been the best choice available to her at the time. The relative freedom for a witch here was far more appealing than the culture-stifling segregation she had grown up with. Magic and Muggle coexisting (even if the Muggles were for the most part unaware) was worth every cent she paid in taxes. She had learned more about the non-magical world in a few months than any of her classmates had learned taking N.E.W.T. level Muggle Studies and had discovered a wealth in art and adapted science that made her question the superiority-of-blood rhetoric she had grown up with. After spending most of her life closeted away from Muggles, it was liberating to be able to walk among them and not worry about being conspicuous. Of course, she had endured a few comments from the witches and wizards she had become acquainted with about being a pure-blood because the last century had rendered purity of blood as obsolete as quills and parchments, instead of something to be proud about.

However, she gradually found acceptance from her fellow wizarding students at the dual university. Here she took courses in traditional Muggle academics along with advanced magical instruction. She had marveled at the ingenuity of concealed classrooms within the hallways of the Muggle university and decided to stay on as a part-time instructor for some of the entry-level classes once she had finished her Master's Degree. Now she was nearing the completion of her doctorate, and if luck and budget were with her, she would remain on as a full-time professor. She knew she should be proud of her accomplishments, and yet...

She read the letter aloud, trying to coax it into revealing the best course of action. *"My dear Miss Hawkins,"* she read. *"This letter will no doubt disrupt the neat and tidy life you have built for yourself; however, I am at a loss at the moment and in great need of your assistance."* She snorted derisively. "And what makes you think I would even consider returning to offer it?"

*"As you no doubt remember, the Dark wizard, Lord Voldemort was defeated nearly fifteen years ago, and his demise brought about the deaths of James and Lily Potter. Their son Harry is alive and reasonably well. Unfortunately, this year the young man has suffered yet another devastating loss: his godfather Sirius Black was killed in an attempt to protect him. I know that for the last fifteen years you have thought Sirius to be a traitor and responsible for the death of the Potters. This has turned out to be false. Two years ago I learned that Sirius was innocent of that crime."*

*"My concern for Harry is not the only reason I have contacted you. Voldemort is once again a threat to the wizarding and Muggle worlds. A long time ago you expressed a desire to aid the Order of the Phoenix in undermining his efforts. I am hoping I can count on you to assist us."*

*"I currently have a post open for Defense Against the Dark Arts or, if you would rather, Potions for the upcoming school year. As I'm sure you would well remember, no professor has taught the Defense Against the Dark Arts course more than once; therefore, the contract will be for one year only."* There was a line about contacting him before the middle of August and then the closing of the letter.

There had to be more to it. Dumbledore never did anything without a good reason. But what was that reason? She wasn't overly powerful. Her spell work had always been better-than-average, but her true talent was in brewing potions. She had been nearly as good as Severus Snape, and... What if something had happened to him?

"And why should I even care?" Callista asked herself flopping back against the pillows. As far as she was concerned, Severus had been nothing but a lying, using, Death

Eater bastard. She had been little more than a pawn to him, a source of information and nothing more. But there had always been something about the way he had looked at her and the way he had treated her that had made her think otherwise. She pressed the heels of her hands to her eyes. "Severus Snape lied to everyone about what he was, and somehow the Wizengamot let him get away with it."

The telephone rang, and Callista hesitated before answering. "Hello?"

"Ah, Callista!" Lucas Hart's voice was a welcome distraction. "I just wanted to remind you about the fund raiser Saturday night. My driver and I will be arriving before six. There will be some important clients and investors there for you to meet. The event is formal, so I think you should wear the red backless dress. It's very flattering." There was a bit of a hesitation before he continued. "I even managed to procure some delightful baubles to enhance it. No doubt you will be very appreciative of their rarity and elegance, and it would give me great pleasure to see them on you."

Six? She could have sworn the invitation said eight-thirty. Surely, it wouldn't take any more than forty-five minutes to get to the country club? Why would he want to pick her up so early? Callista suddenly felt annoyed. Their relationship was professional, and she had never given him any reason to think otherwise. Yet, he treated her like she was some kind of trophy he had won, showing her off more than representing her projects. Now he was attempting to sway her with some antique jewelry. Maybe Jarvis was right about him.

"Since we will be speaking with prospective clients, I was planning on wearing the navy blue one with the square neckline. It's a bit more business appropriate, don't you think?"

"Oh, come now," he interrupted, laughing in his superior way, and Callista wished they were having this conversation face-to-face so she could Transfigure him into something slimy and disgusting. "You're a bright, engaging, and attractive woman; there's nothing wrong with using everything you can to your advantage. There are many other researchers looking into plants in the Amazon. You need to outshine the competition, and that's something we could do very well together, Callista."

"I think I can manage better if the investors are focused on my words and not my cleavage." She really didn't even want to go. Lucas was more than capable of presenting her projects to investors. He had told her so more times than she could count on both hands. "Besides, I would hate to miss Dr. Pike's retirement dinner."

There was a prolonged silence on the other end. When Lucas finally spoke, he sounded irritated. "You mean you would consider skipping an important...and potentially lucrative...event to have dinner with a worn-out college professor?"

*How dare you!* She barely kept her temper in check. "If it weren't for Dr. Pike, I wouldn't be where I am now. You rarely let me say anything when we chat up your business associates anyway. I can't see the purpose of me even being there, Lucas."

"The purpose is so they can attach a face with the project," Lucas said. Callista could hear him clenching his teeth.

"No, they attach a pair of boobs!" Callista snapped without thinking. "What are you really after?"

There was another sullen silence. "You make it sound like being with me is something sordid you wish to avoid."

She regretted her outburst. "I just want to keep everything professional."

"Then why did you keep dropping me subtle hints that you were interested in us becoming something more?" Lucas asked bitterly. "The way you talk to me during meetings... The electrifying eye contact you try to make when I come to your office... "

*What the hell is he talking about?* she wondered, beginning to think that maybe she had inadvertently lead him on. "Lucas, I've never given you any indication that this was more than a professional business relationship. I don't want you sending me flowers... or procuring rare jewelry for me... or parading me around like I'm some kind of show dog."

Another silence, longer and more uncomfortable than the last. Lucas Hart's voice was edged with malice. "If you aren't interested in promoting yourself, then I can't see why I should waste my time. Consider yourself no longer of interest to Dunce and Hart Enterprises, Miss O'Brien. I will have one of the secretaries issue you a formal severance letter."

**Click!**

"Lucas, you fifthly rat-bastard!" She nearly flung the receiver at the opposite wall. Instead she dropped it on the bed and covered her face with a pillow. "Callista, you moron, what have you done?"

A snide voice answered in her head, *Looks like you've committed professional suicide, that's what.*

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The week didn't improve. On the contrary, it grew steadily worse. Wednesday afternoon, Callista received a letter from the grant committee informing her that her proposal had not been accepted. Thursday morning, she was greeted with a severance letter from Dunce and Hart Enterprises. Lucas Hart's signature was stamped, not signed, a clear indicator that he really didn't find her worth his time.

"Damn him!" She slammed the letter on her desk. "What the hell else can possibly go wrong?"

Friday morning answered that question when she was informed there was insufficient enrollment for both cryptozoology and magical plant studies for the fall session; the classes would both be canceled. To further add to her woes, Callista was notified later in the day that the sections of biology and botany she normally taught for the regular university were both low in enrollment and were going to be combined with another professor's classes. Callista would not be teaching unless she was willing to take the Fundamentals of Science for Elementary Education class, which was only going to be taught one night a week. Since she didn't have a doctorate and was technically one step above a graduate assistant, the university wasn't obligated to offer her any other courses that she may have been able to instruct.

"Going to teach at Hogwarts is beginning to look better and better," she grumbled as she tried to print some recently collated data. Thinking about the ancient halls teeming with spells and enchantments made her own magic surged through her. The printer's lights flashed wildly in reaction to the energy source before shutting down. Callista cursed under her breath as she restarted the machine.

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"I heard you had a fairly terrible week," Jarvis said to Callista Saturday night after the last of the guests had gone home. He had wanted her to stay and talk away from their colleagues, some of whom were not exactly sympathetic.

Callista leaned against the wooden railing of the deck overlooking the pool, rubbing her temples. In an effort to relax and forget about her problems, she had gone against her better judgment and had over-imbibed. Now, in addition to her professional affliction, a nasty headache was developing. "I'm trying to decide which part sucked the worst. Right now, essentially getting canned is in a pretty strong tie with being ditched by Dunce and Hart." She gave the old professor a stern look when he started to speak. "Don't even say you tried to tell me. I'm painfully aware of that right now."

"I wasn't going to say anything of the sort," he said, patting her arm. "What are your plans?"

"Pointing my wand at my chest and using the Queen Mother of Unforgivable curses comes to mind." Callista noted the fleeting look of horror on the old face and quickly amended, "But I'm not that type."

"I should hope not!" Pike exclaimed, his relief blatantly reflected in his eyes.

Callista studied her hands for a few moments before announcing her plans. "I was thinking about taking a break from my studies to do some traveling."

"Will Scotland be one of your destinations?" he asked, and Callista reluctantly nodded. "Maybe some time away will be good for you. You haven't taken a real vacation in years."

"Jarvis, I'm going to take Dumbledore up on his offer," Callista said quietly. "Something about going back there feels right. Maybe I screwed up my Karma or whatever by running away from my problems. If I go back and fix things as best I can, then perhaps things in my future will work out. If nothing else, at least I'll be employed for the next year."

Her mentor was quiet for a long time. "This isn't just the alcohol talking, is it?"

Callista shook her head and immediately regretted it. "No," she said, "I started seriously considering it after the committee rejected my grant proposal."

"You'll let your parents know you're still alive?"

"Knowing how small the wizarding population is, I don't have much choice." She let out a humorless laugh. "I wouldn't want them to read about my appointment in the paper."

He nodded in agreement. "So when will you be leaving?"

"As soon as I can get a visa. My passport is still good for another four years. Then there is everything I need to fill out to put my doctorate studies on hiatus." She wrinkled her nose at the thought of the sea of paperwork that needed to be tackled. "I need to be there by mid-August at the latest."

"Callista, you don't need a visa or anything like that," Pike said. "You of all people should know how deeply closeted the wizarding world is over there. All you need is a long-range Portkey, my dear."

"I guess that would simplify things, wouldn't it?"

The old man smiled at her. "You handle the paperwork for the university; I'll inform Dumbledore of your decision and manage the Portkey. We can have you there by the beginning of August."

"Keen to get rid of me?" she teased.

"On the contrary," he said, pulling her into a fatherly embrace, "I shall miss you very much."

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Here's hoping you enjoyed it and won't be throwing rotten eggs at me or anything.

## Interviews

### *Chapter 2 of 12*

Two candidates vie for the Defense Against the Dark Arts post. Who will emerge victorious?

Disclaimer: All HP characters are the property of J.K. Rowling, and I promise to put them away neatly when I'm finished playing with them.

A/N: This revision is starting to take on a life of its own. Sure, it's turned into a lot of extra work for me, but my readers are worth it. Thanks to sempra for proof reading.

### **Chapter 1: Interviews**

The orange glow of the fading mid-July sun shone through the windows of the headmaster's office. Severus sat rigidly in the straight-back chair opposite Dumbledore. The same farce of an interview had been played out over and over for the last fifteen years. The only thing that seemed to change from one year to the next was Severus's age.

"Thank you for your continued interest in the Defense Against the Dark Arts post, Severus," Dumbledore said as he surveyed his current Potions master over the rims of his half-moon spectacles.

"You know I apply every year, Headmaster."

Leaning back in his chair, Dumbledore sighed. "Pretenses must be maintained, I suppose."

"Actually, sir, it has nothing to do with maintaining pretenses," Severus began, keeping his tone low and cool. "I feel, considering the current state of things, that it would be prudent to have a highly qualified instructor for the class this year. If for no other reason than to avoid students forming illicit defense groups."

With a light laugh, the old man replied, "I was hoping for the continuance of Dumbledore's Army in some form or another."

*He cannot be serious about allowing Potter's pet project to continue,* Severus thought furiously. Keeping his voice calm, he replied, "Don't you think it would be inappropriate? What if the Board of Governors disagree?"

"Severus," Dumbledore began gravely, "if the students are able to defend themselves when they are outside the safety of the school, then that is the more important than the opinion of the Governors."

The dark-haired wizard scowled. Severus's tone was bitter. "I suppose the Governors' opinions have never had anything to do with me being denied a post I am uniquely qualified to teach."

"I assure you, Severus, it never has. That decision has always been mine alone." The old man raised a hand to silence him when Severus opened his mouth to protest. "You are needed here at Hogwarts for as long as it is possible for you to remain. If you are correct that Voldemort will at some point attempt to take control of the school, your presence here will be a safeguard for the students. I cannot risk losing you at the end of the school year if it can be avoided, Severus. Your appointment would be a last resort."

"Not only did I earn an Outstanding on my Defense Against the Dark Arts N.E.W.T., but I have studied the subject extensively after leaving school and have an intimate..." Severus abruptly halted, absently rubbing at the spot on his left forearm where the Dark Mark was imprinted on the skin. Correcting himself, he said firmly, "I have a very thorough, working knowledge of the Dark Arts."

"I am fully aware of your qualifications, Severus." Dumbledore's eyes wandered from Severus's face to the window. "However, it is in your best interests...and the best interests of the students...for your application to be denied."

"Headmaster, you are making a mistake," Severus said, making an effort not to sound as angry as he felt. It was always 'in his best interests,' according to Dumbledore. *More likely*, Severus thought venomously, *it's in his best interests. Merlin forbid, if he was required to explain to the Board of Governors why a former Death Eater was teaching a course concerning the Dark Arts.* "You don't trust me as much as you claim to, do you?"

Dumbledore watched him quietly for a moment before saying, "I'm sorry you feel that way, Severus, because I do trust you. I trust you with the students, with the school, with the role you have volunteered to take on. Again, you are needed right where you are. However, if a suitable candidate cannot be found, that may change."

"Very well, sir. I shall not keep you." Not wanting to linger, he rose to his feet and headed to the door, black robes billowing in his wake. After the door closed behind him, all pretenses of calm evaporated as he stormed down the tightly spiraling staircase.

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A few weeks later, Callista and her suitcase were slammed to the ground just outside the boundaries of Hogwarts. She scrambled rather ungracefully to her feet, brushing herself off and taking in her surroundings. The towers of the ancient castle rose gracefully against the gray sky. It was breathtakingly beautiful. She felt once again like a wide-eyed eleven-year-old seeing it for the first time. The gates were chained and most likely warded. The letter had instructed her to signal her arrival with a Patronus, which she had been practicing for a week. She couldn't even remember the last time she had seen a Dementor let alone had needed to protect herself from one, but it would be easier to cast a Patronus without the distraction of every bad experience she had ever had tormenting her.

"Focus, Callista. It's like riding a bicycle; you never really forget." She filled herself with the happiest thought she could remember and pointed her wand skyward. *Expecto Patronum!*

A partially formed, silver creature erupted from the wand's tip and sailed toward the tower. "Guess I need a better memory."

Momentarily, a tall figure approached the gates. As the person came closer, she recognized her old Head of House and memories washed warmly over her. Callista felt a telltale prickling in the corners of her eyes, and her voice was slightly choked when she said, "Hello, Professor McGonagall."

"As a security measure, I need to ask you a question first," the older woman said, carefully keeping her voice emotionless. "Can you tell me what happened the very first time you came to my office?"

*What?* She hadn't been expecting something like this. Callista racked her brain for a minute. Of course she remembered! "I cried during Transfiguration," she began, her face reddening, "because I couldn't manage to make any changes in the toothpick that was supposed to be turned into a pin... or maybe it was a needle. You took me to your office after class and gave me ginger newts and treated me so kindly. It turned out I was just homesick, and that was why I couldn't make anything work right. The very next class I transfigured it correctly."

For a moment the witch said nothing, and Callista thought that perhaps she had answered incorrectly. But then McGonagall's stern lips quivered as she tapped the lock on the gate to open it. Stepping out of the protection of the castle wards, she pulled Callista into a trembling embrace. "Welcome home, my dear girl!"

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A few hours later, Callista...uncomfortably dressed in traditional wizarding attire...was sitting in Headmaster Dumbledore's office. He and Professor McGonagall were reviewing her credentials. O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s in Arithmancy, Runes, Charms, Herbology, Potions, and Defense Against the Dark Arts... Muggle degrees in biology and botany... American Wizarding degrees in cryptobiology and magical plant studies... Then they questioned her at length about her knowledge of the Dark Arts.

Professor McGonagall seemed more than slightly surprised. "This is very impressive, considering you have been living as a Muggle for the last fifteen years, Professor Hawkins."

"That's not entirely accurate," Callista said patiently, knowing full-well that all things Muggle were looked down upon even by the most open-minded in the wizarding community and that foreign degrees were considered almost worthless regardless of how much more advanced or more extensive they were when compared to a two or even three year apprenticeship. "It would be more correct to say I have been living among Muggles. I never ceased practicing magic as my American Wizarding degrees should prove."

"I think," Dumbledore said politely, interrupting McGonagall when she opened her mouth to argue, "it would be helpful if you explained some of your... adventure to us."

Lifting her chin, Callista answered, "When I left, I needed to make both a life and a living for myself. That was not something I could have easily done by passing myself off as a Muggle. I'm a witch and, had I tried to live only in the Muggle world, I would have eventually called unwanted attention to myself."

"How did you manage to remain hidden all this time?" McGonagall asked.

This was the part that she had been dreading the most, accounting for those years she had been missing and assumed dead. "The wizarding world is too small a place in which to conceal one's self for any length of time. The Muggle world, however, can offer greater anonymity once you learn how to live in it. I needed and wanted to go somewhere that offered both. The first step was to change my name; I adopted my mother's maiden name, O'Brien, for this purpose. It wasn't much of an effort to Transfigure a Muggle birth certificate and passport.

"I spent a little over a year in the Mediterranean, learning as much as I could about ancient wizarding history, healing, and culture, but I eventually decided I needed formalized training. That was when I made the decision to go to the United States...the wizarding population was large enough to hide in without going completely underground. Although," Callista added with a smile, "Australia was a close second choice."

"Why? The war was over; you could have come back," McGonagall asked.

Callista steadied herself, not knowing how much information they were aware of as to why she had disappeared in the first place. She wasn't going to give up anything unless it was absolutely necessary. "Freedom for one thing," she said truthfully. "It's so different over there. Magic can live among Muggle as long as the laws of commonsense are adhered to. There is no pure-blood supremacy; in fact, I was a bit of a curiosity. But living openly in a world that had long been denied me was very appealing. There was so much to learn...music, science, and literature. All of it was so new and exciting."

"So you immersed yourself in the culture and never looked back," Dumbledore said, nodding in understanding.

Callista averted her eyes. "More than once I thought about returning," she said, "but I didn't want to return only to end up a lonely spinster or make a politically correct match for the sake of pleasing my parents. When I was out of the country, there were no limits to what I could become, and I embraced the opportunities."

"Before we decide whether or not to ask if you would be willing to embrace a teaching opportunity at Hogwarts, I have one final question," Dumbledore said with a curious smile. "What exactly is your Patronus?"

Callista felt her cheeks blaze. A vision of the job offer swirling down the loo came to mind. She reluctantly admitted, "It's a bit of a lame duck."

"Animals are usually whole and healthy in their Patronus form," McGonagall said, looking both confused and worried.



"My apologies, Professor McGonagall. I meant it's not fully formed," Callista clarified, remembering that a malformed Patronus could indicate mental problems, which was definitely not the impression she wanted to give them. "There are no Dementors in the States. I haven't had the need to use a Patronus in... well, since I left."

The two professors exchanged glances, and Callista felt a sudden sinking sensation. It was over. Of all the idiotic things that could have happened, her inability to cast a proper Patronus had turned out to be the stumbling block.

"Professor Hawkins, starting in the fourth year of Defense Against the Dark Arts, there is now an emphasis on practical defense." The twinkle had gone out of Dumbledore's eyes. "It would be difficult, if not impossible, for you to teach a spell you have not mastered yourself."

She *had* mastered it at one point; she was merely out of practice. Callista realized that so much of what she had learned in magical defense had been tucked far away in the recesses of her mind because it hadn't been relevant. It was doubtful that she could teach older students, most of whom may have used defensive spells regularly, with any confidence. She felt as if coming here had been a huge waste of time. If only it had been a Potions position. *No*, she thought, *I've mostly taught about magical plants and their uses. My potions are good and surely adequate enough to keep up with the N.E.W.T. level students. Unfortunately, if the qualification standards are the same as they had been when I took my N.E.W.T.s, the examination committee would frown upon any changes or improvements to the standard brewing instructions.*

She cleared her throat. "I'm sorry, professors, but it looks as if I'm only qualified on paper. Had it been Herbology, or even Potions, I feel I would have been a suitable candidate, but...."

"I understand, Callista," the headmaster replied. "Where will you be staying?"

"A small hotel in Muggle London, sir" Callista answered calmly, expecting him to question why she wasn't staying at The Three Broomsticks or the Leaky Cauldron. "I needed to be able to contact Dr. Pike and inform him of my safe arrival, and Muggle methods of communication are better over long distances. I will be meeting my mother at the Leaky Cauldron first thing tomorrow and getting the things I need for my extended stay." Callista paused before adding, "Thank you for contacting her for me first. It has made things much less awkward. At least I've been forewarned about changes in my family."

There was a sorrowful look in the old man's eyes, and when Callista glanced over at Professor McGonagall, she saw she wasn't the only one in the room holding back tears. Dumbledore spoke to her in a tone of utmost sympathy, "I am very sorry for your loss. Your father was a respected Auror and great man."

"Thank you, sir." Callista extended her hand to each of the professors in turn as they said their good-byes.

Dressed once again in her normal attire and with her suitcase in hand, Callista was escorted from the castle by Professor McGonagall. They didn't discuss the interview on the brief walk to the gate; Callista didn't want to think about it. Instead, McGonagall briefed her on the latest political changes...mostly new names in different departments. With one final embrace for her old mentor, Callista stepped outside the castle's wards and Apparated to London.

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Later that evening, McGonagall and Dumbledore met to discuss their latest DADA candidate. They agreed that Callista's lack of defense skills made her ill-suited for the position as far as preparing students for formal exams; however, her general knowledge of the subject was adequate enough for her to instruct everything but O.W.L and N.E.W.T. classes.

"It seems a shame to turn her away, especially after everything your friend Dr. Pike explained about her situation," McGonagall said, swirling the last of her wine around in the goblet.

"I agree. She would have made a loyal addition to the staff," Dumbledore said, nodding in agreement. "She could have been useful to the Order as well. If I recall correctly, her ambition was to become a Healer. Perhaps we could convince her to stay and work in that capacity."

"Albus, Callista has fashioned a new life for herself!" McGonagall exclaimed, nearly dropping her goblet in surprise. "Why on earth would she want to stay only to involve herself in a fight that is no longer hers?"

"She has lost as much as anyone else," he stated matter-of-factly. "Surely she would want to see her family live in the same peaceful conditions she has enjoyed over the years."

"Are you going to consider offering her the Defense post?" McGonagall asked, narrowing her eyes. "As she said herself, she isn't competent enough to teach the NEWT students. We cannot afford to have another instructor who is incapable of teaching the class. After having Umbridge here, the Board of Governors..." The deputy headmistress stopped abruptly as if a thought had finally dawned on her. "Are you going to offer the post to Severus and let Callista teach Potions?"

Dumbledore rose to his feet and began pacing. He needed Severus to remain at the school for as long as possible, and if the theory that the position was cursed was indeed true, this could very well be Severus's last year at Hogwarts. Having recently learned that several students, including Harry, had not achieved the requisite Outstanding mark on their O.W.L.s. to continue with Potions, perhaps appointing Callista as the Potions mistress would be for the best. Severus had suggested more than once that he could possibly persuade Voldemort to lift the curse, provided it truly existed, if it could be turned to his advantage. Dumbledore knew Severus was more than willing to take the risk; however, he was not.

"Albus," McGonagall said, breaking through his thoughts, "I know it sounds unorthodox, but what about dividing the two positions?"

Dumbledore stopped pacing and turned to face her. "I beg your pardon?"

"Why not divide the posts?" she replied. "Severus could teach the older students, and Callista could teach the younger ones."

"Minerva, in theory it would be a good idea," said Dumbledore with an air of forced patience. "However, it would need to be done the other way around for it to be of benefit to those who didn't qualify for N.E.W.T. Potions. Unfortunately, we agreed that Callista is not suited to teaching the more advanced students."

"I think," McGonagall began drily, "you could convince Severus that such a division would be beneficial."

The two of them discussed the changes that would be brought about if Severus and Callista accepted the newly divided posts, working well into the night. Tomorrow morning Dumbledore would contact her with their offer, and Callista would be invited to join the Order.

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A/N: After seeing McGonagall's reaction to Harry's death at the end of DH, I find it very possible that she would react strongly to seeing one of her 'deceased' students alive and well.

## Unexpected Reunion

Severus and Callista are reunited at an Order meeting.

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter. I don't own Severus Snape. No money is being made.

A/N: The revision continues. Many thanks to verity and sempra for making sure this is fit for posting.

## Chapter 2: Unexpected Reunions

Severus stepped into the foyer of number twelve Grimmauld Place for the first time since Sirius Black's death. The only reason he came was for the simple fact that Dumbledore requested his presence. Normally, Snape would have been thrilled at the thought of going there and flinging into Black's face how he was risking his life for Sirius' precious brat of a godson while Black cleaned the house. Now that he was dead and gone, it hardly seemed important anymore. Dread filled him at the thought of giving up yet more of his nonexistent spare time to waste on Potter. Inwardly, Severus cringed at the thought of what foolish and pointless training he would be requested to give the arrogant little whelp this time, vowing to refuse no matter what the consequences. He opened the door to the library.

Inside, Dumbledore was speaking with a woman. Her back was to him, but he quickly guessed she must be the new Defense Against the Dark Arts mistress. He didn't even know her name, yet he despised her instantly. Their conversation ended when they heard the door close.

"Ah, Severus, how good of you to join us on such short notice," said the headmaster in greeting.

"You wished to speak to..." Severus stopped abruptly as the woman turned to face him, and he felt his heart skip a beat. No, this couldn't be happening. That person had disappeared and was assumed dead fifteen years ago. Here she was alive and well. She was a little heavier than he remembered and there were now light character lines on her face, but it could only be Callista Hawkins. Severus was seized by an impulse to sweep her into his arms and...

*A twenty-three-year-old Professor Severus Snape waited outside the examination room while Callista finished giving her N.E.W.T. presentation. If it had been possible, he would have paced a groove in the stone floor. The door creaked open, and Callista walked out, her face expressionless, a by-product of the Occlumency lessons he had been giving her. Severus longed to learn every curve of the body that was hidden under those school robes.*

"Well?" he asked with an anxious tone to his voice.

"Well, what?" Her voice sounded innocent and slightly puzzled.

"Fine," he said, realizing that she wasn't going to tell him unless he asked the question directly. "How did your presentation go?"

"Are you sure you want to know?" Her eyes were still clear as she met his gaze full on, revealing nothing. She was clearly enjoying herself.

"I suppose you became nervous, lost your head, and the examiners had to comfort you," he teased, raising an eyebrow.

She rolled her eyes. "Hardly."

*They were standing so close to each other that he could virtually feel her heart beating. In a few days, she would finish school, and he would no longer be her professor. Pulling her into a secluded alcove, Severus reached out to place his hand on her waist. She looked up with shining, expectant eyes. He lowered his mouth to her ear, whispering, "You passed then?"*

"You had doubts?" she asked in a matched whisper, her lips grazing his jaw.

Stop it! he ordered himself. She handed you over to the Aurors. You cannot trust her.

"I believe you remember Callista Hawkins," the old man said, a twinkle in his bright blue eyes.

Ignoring Callista completely, he asked "You needed to see me, Headmaster?"

"We will need to rearrange the Potions and Defense courses for this year."

The statement piqued his curiosity. "Why is that, sir?"

"Severus, I would like to offer you the opportunity to teach the Defense Against the Dark Arts and Potions courses for O.W.L. year and the N.E.W.T. levels," Dumbledore said, his penetrating blue gaze not wavering from the other man's face. "Professor Hawkins has more than enough qualifications to teach the beginning levels; however, after being away for so long, she does not feel comfortable enough to prepare students for their examinations."

It took the Potions professor a moment to digest the words. Did that mean starting today he would never need to watch another eleven-year-old girl cry when she failed to properly read instructions? Would he never have to mark another paper where more words were spelled incorrectly than correctly? If only this had happened five years ago, then Severus would have been spared dealing with that total incompetent, Neville Longbottom.

Snape took time to consider this option. All students who were somewhat intelligent, and an extra free period a week, as he would be teaching six classes instead of seven. Working with the Dark Arts, even if it was only teaching the defensive portion. He was sure that he would still be stuck with that insufferable know-it-all Granger, now four periods a week as opposed to two and more than likely still have to put up with Potter and Weasley. However, Snape seriously doubted that either of those two dunderheads managed to receive an outstanding in their Potions O.W.L. All in all, it might not be terrible.

"How will Miss Hawkins be able to teach eight classes?" Severus asked before snapping his mouth shut, wondering why he even pretended to care.

"Professor Hawkins will not be teaching the fourth year Defense Against the Dark Arts."

"Who will be teaching it? Lupin?"

Dumbledore cleared his throat. "Harry will be will be teaching the class under Professor Hawkins' supervision. The course will focus on practical defense."

"Potter?" Severus was dumbfounded. There had to be some sort of a mistake. "Headmaster, is this a joke? Surely that little boy..."

"Is 'uniquely qualified' to teach students how to defend themselves against Voldemort," the old man said testily, throwing Severus's words back at him.

"Utter rubbish!" he snapped.

Callista stood in front of him, clearly surprised by his outburst. "Severus, you should be very proud of Harry's accomplishment. You're a good teacher..."

"Severus," Dumbledore said gently, "there is something else we need to discuss. Harry's mark for Potions was an Exceeds Expectations, but he needs to take Potions to

qualify for the Auror training program."

"So this is the catch," Severus said snidely. "Oh, yes, let's lower the standard for my class just for Potter's benefit."

"It's not just for Harry," Dumbledore snapped impatiently. "There are several other students who need will need to take N.E.W.T. level Potions for their future careers. Terrence Boot and Anthony Goldstein also wish to become Aurors. Parvati Patel, Ernie McMillian, Tracey Davidson, and Daphne Greengrass need a Potions N.E.W.T. in order to be accepted at St. Mungo's for the Healer trainee program. As you see, this will benefit other students, some of whom are Slytherins, as well as Harry." He fixed the younger man with a very stern gaze. "Think it over, Severus. I'll need your answer by the middle of the week."

Dumbledore left the two of them alone, and Severus turned on his heel to leave. Callista reached out to touch his arm, gently detaining him. He tensed at her closeness.

"I've missed you, Severus," she whispered. "I had no idea you were still at Hogwarts. I thought that perhaps you were dead by now. Being a spy carries risks, no matter whose side you're on. Professor Dumbledore told me everything, well, almost everything."

Setting his face, Severus turned to her, wincing at what he saw in her eyes now. The look made him want to forget the past, to put old hurts behind him. Suddenly, the memory of her betrayal flooded his mind, and his heart hardened. He glared down at her, his harsh features rigid. "Don't ever allow yourself to believe that Dumbledore has told you everything. Like the rest of us, you will only be given information he feels you need to know."

"I see," she said. "He told me you tried to teach Harry Occlumency without much success. To be honest, I was really surprised. You're a such a highly skilled Occlumens, and Harry is surprisingly talented."

"Potter is an arrogant, self-centered bastard like his father." He kept his tone even as he continued to stare coldly down at her.

"He's not like James or Sirius..."

"Don't you dare mention their names to me," Severus snarled, remembering the day he was suspended in the air and stripped of all dignity.

"Lily stood up for you, and he's her son as well!" Callista's eyes blazed with anger, and her jaw had set stubbornly. "You really have changed. Perhaps I should have stayed away."

"At last we agree," he said bitterly, hoping the words stung.

"Worm!" Callista snarled as she practically threw herself out the door, slamming it behind her. Outside in the hallway, the portrait of Mrs. Black began screeching in fury. Severus fell into the chair, remembering the first time he had seen her as an adult.

*"Professor Blackburn, I trust you remember Severus Snape?" Dumbledore said as he took young Severus Snape around to the dungeons of Hogwarts. The young man was to begin teaching part-time in September. The classes were finishing up exams, and they were sitting in on the sixth-year Potions practical.*

*"Ah yes, my most excellent student. How are you, young man?" the withered old Potions master greeted him warmly.*

*"Fine, sir." Snape gazed around the dungeon. "Part of me feels like I am home again."*

*"I haven't had a student who could hold a candle to you. Well, that's not quite true; Callista Hawkins is equally brilliant. She is the dark-haired one over there. I'm staying on until she finishes school. She's doing a bit of an independent study with me next year in addition to her regular course work. She's hoping to be accepted at St. Mungo's after she sits her N.E.W.T.s. An amazing mind she has. I'm sure the Sorting Hat struggled with where to put her. She would have fit into Ravenclaw nicely. Callista, come here if you can leave your work, I want you to meet someone."*

*A young woman walked over to join them. Her chestnut brown hair was pulled back away from her face. Her eyes were beautiful, wide set, and a most pleasing shade of blue. She smiled at Severus, and his heart skipped a beat. He prayed that she wouldn't remember him from his days at Hogwarts.*

*"Miss Hawkins, this is Mr. Severus Snape. He was my best student until you brightened the dungeons. He will begin teaching here next year and take over when I retire next June," the ancient man said as he introduced them.*

*"It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Snape," she said, shaking his hand firmly.*

*"The pleasure is mine, Miss Hawkins." He tried to sound mature.*

*"How is the potion coming along?" Professor Blackburn asked, smiling.*

*"Quite well, sir," she began, excitedly. "I decided to crush the foxglove to be able to extract the essence more quickly. I should be able to lower the simmering time, which in turn should keep the bowtruckle blood from curdling." Her entire face positively glowed with fervor. It was the same look Severus knew had been on his face every time he'd found a new technique. He had to admit that it only enhanced her stunning beauty.*

*"Excellent!" The elderly man clapped his hands together in delight.*

*She smiled at them before excusing herself to return to her project. Snape watched the concentration on her face as the pale, blue vapor began to rise from her cauldron. Her hands ladled some of the liquid into a beaker to cool. There was no smugness, only passion for her work. She looked over at him again, fully aware that the young man had watched her every move. Dumbledore surveyed him over his glasses. Apparently, he had noticed Snape watching her.*

He pressed his hands against his eyes. It had been so uncomplicated then. Callista had been an assignment, a means of advancing himself in the Dark Lord's eyes, and nothing more. The last thing he had ever expected was to feel for her.

Lupin walked into the room. He stood, leaning casually against the door frame, watching Severus. He looked a bit peaky. "Severus, just so you know, the meeting is about to start."

"Funny how you were sent to *fetch* me," he said waspishly.

Lupin stiffened at the term, a trace of the wolf lurking within reflected in his eyes. Instead he said in an overly-casual tone, "It's hard to believe Callista has been alive all this time. I'm surprised you're not more grateful to see her."

*Yes, of course, Black probably would have conveyed what he had known to his faithful, furry companion* Severus rose gracefully to his feet. "I had a job to do, Lupin. I never thought about her after she left."

"You really expect anyone to believe that?" Lupin's hands were in the pockets of his well-worn robes.

"She made her choice to betray me, and I ceased to care for her existence."

"Now that is a lie," Lupin accused, crossing his arms over his chest.

"If you're finished, I believe there is an Order meeting about to commence." Severus side-stepped the other man as he exited the room.

"You're making a mistake, Severus," Lupin told him.

As he silently billowed down the hallway to the kitchen stairwell, Severus wished Lupin would keep his muzzle out of his affairs. He paused at the door to compose himself. The thought of facing Callista any time before the term started, or ever again for that matter, was not appealing at the moment.

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Callista had taken a side trip to the bathroom to compose herself. Judging by Severus's reaction at seeing her, Dumbledore hadn't prepared him for the encounter. Good God, would it have been so difficult to warn Severus that she was still alive? Callista cringed, thinking about their horrible reunion. Not that she hadn't expected Severus to order Dumbledore out of the room so they could become reacquainted in private, but after all she had heard about his isolation following Voldemort's first fall, she thought maybe he would be a bit more forgiving.

*If he's so cold and hateful towards everyone, Callista thought angrily, no wonder he's so despised. I refuse to waste another ounce of pity on him.*

She looked at the assembled Order members in the kitchen of the old house. Earlier that evening, she had been introduced around by Professor McGonagall. Arthur Weasley had been delighted to make her acquaintance, plaguing her with questions about the Muggle world. Dear old Alastor Moody, who had known her father very well, was pleased to see her. Unfortunately, the eldest Weasley son, Emmeline Vance and Sturgis Podmore treated her with suspicion. She didn't exactly blame them, she was a stranger returned from the dead; their caution was reasonable.

"Excuse us, Callista. You haven't met Tonks yet," said Fred, or was it George, indicating a young woman with bubble-gum pink hair.

"Tonks?" Callista asked, shaking the woman's hand.

"Nymphadora Tonks," she said, smiling. "But everyone calls me just Tonks. I was Sirius's cousin."

Callista racked her brain trying to figure out the connection. Her family had been familiar with the Blacks, but she couldn't place how the name Tonks came into the picture. Thankfully it was explained to her. Callista remembered a photo she had seen at Sirius's flat shortly before her departure depicting a rather striking, young woman and a plain man playing with a bright-eyed girl whose hair changed color. They chatted for a bit until a dark figure descended the stairs.

"Well, if Snape's here, then it must be time to start," Tonks said, looking at Severus with a touch of contempt. "Don't envy you getting stuck at Hogwarts with him. Nasty bugger, but Dumbledore trusts him, so he must be all right. At least we hope he is."

Callista took a seat at the long wooden table between Remus Lupin and one of the Weasley twins. Reports were given, and Callista asked questions until Bill Weasley made a remark that shut her up for the duration of his statement. Arthur gave her an apologetic look that she returned with a fleeting smile. Kingsley Shacklebolt briefed the group on the goings on at the Ministry. Rufus Scrimgeour seemed to be taking a very proactive stance to protect both wizards and Muggles alike. Then Dumbledore nodded to Severus.

Callista turned her head slightly to focus on him. He was as thin and sallow as she remembered, yet Severus still gave off an aura of power that made her heart quicken. His voice was low and emotionless as he spoke of his most recent meeting with Voldemort.

"So he has plans to take over the Ministry?" Moody asked, his normal eye fixed on Severus's face. "But you didn't get to hear the details?"

"If I had been told, I would have passed the information to the Order immediately," replied Severus through clenched teeth.

Moody continued to watch him. "Sure you would have."

"Gentlemen," Dumbledore said with a stern glance at Moody before turning his attention to Kingsley Shacklebolt. "Perhaps the best way to prevent this action is increased vigilance of those protecting the Minister. Most likely he will have already considered the threat of assassination and will take the necessary steps for his own safety."

As they went on and on, thoroughly exploring the implications if the Ministry fell, Callista absent-mindedly turned her attention to Severus's hands.

*"Try crushing it with the flat of the blade instead of chopping it," Severus instructed from behind her, as Callista labored over the shriveled pod.*

*"Crush it, sir?" Callista asked dubiously when her young Potions professor came for a routine workroom inspection.*

*He was behind her with his arms around her, not quite in what could have been considered an embrace. Slender, strong hands were over her suddenly limp ones. His sharp, masculine scent wasn't unpleasant, and she breathed deeper, her pulse racing. Her fingers, among other things, were suddenly wet, and Callista looked down at the bean in surprise.*

*Severus's voice was like a caress. "You're an excellent Potions student, Miss Hawkins, but there is much I can still teach you."*

Callista yanked herself from the memory and turned her attention back to the meeting. Severus was watching her intently from his place at the table. She bit her lip, wondering if he knew what she had been thinking about just now.

"We pulled our Peruvian Darkness powder," one of the twins said, and his brother finished with, "And we'll give all Order members a special illuminator that we developed."

There was a bit more discussion before the meeting began to break up. Molly Weasley ambled about, offering food to everyone. The red-haired matron gave Callista a sharp calculating look after a private word with Bill. Callista turned her head toward the steps as Severus and Dumbledore exited the room.

*Maybe the look wasn't intended for me, she thought, spearing a roasted potato on the platter in front of her.*

The Weasley twin next to her grinned. "Mum's in her glory right now. She's used to cooking for a crowd. Hope you find everything to your liking."

Callista took a bite. "It's excellent."

"I'm George, just so you know which of us you're talking to," he said pleasantly. Lowering his voice to a stage whisper, he added, "I got the looks and the brains."

A giggle escaped her, and Callista took a quick sip of wine to cover it. George and his brother told her about their daring escape from Umbridge, which they assured her wasn't as romanticized as it sounded. Callista talked about her work for the university and offered to have some ingredients sent over for them to experiment with.

"Professor Hawkins." Dumbledore was next to her. "A brief word please."

"Excuse me, Gred and Forge," she said, getting to her feet.

She followed Dumbledore up the stairs. He led her to the library and closed the door behind her. His eyes twinkled at her and he said with a smile, "Severus has agreed to the arrangement of the classes. The post is yours if you still want it."

"I'll take it," Callista said without hesitation.

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Later that evening, Severus Snape sat before a low burning fire at Spinner's End with an old book in his hand. With an almost loving expression on his face, he stroked the leather bound cover. *Delving Into the Dark Arts* was the first Dark book that he had received, at the tender age of thirteen. His uncle, aware that Severus, while deficient in aesthetics, instead possessed a keen intellect, had given it to him, saying to be sure of his loyalties. Not having many friends to encroach on his time, young Severus eagerly read the book and became enthralled by promises of power. It was small wonder that he knew more curses when he entered school than most of the seventh years. The only literature that he had ever been exposed to dealt with the Dark Arts. He wondered how it was that somehow he had managed to enter into Voldemort's inner circle while his uncle had not.

After a long time, his eyes wandered to the clock over the fireplace. It was after midnight, and he might as well turn in. After heading upstairs, he disrobed and pulled on his old gray nightshirt. He yawned and ran his fingers through his greasy hair before he settled under the blanket.

*The night was so warm that he decided to take a walk along the edge of the lake. As he approached the shore, he noticed that someone else had taken up the same idea.*

*Callista Hawkins was sitting on a stump, the wind blowing through her long, brown hair. He took another step, breaking a twig. In less than a heartbeat, she drew her wand, pointing it in his direction.*

*"It's Professor Snape!" he shouted, holding up both hands.*

*"Oh, it is you, Professor." He noted the relief in her voice as she lowered her wand.*

*"If it had been an enemy, you would be dead by now! Why are you out of the castle at this time of night, Miss Hawkins?"*

*"I couldn't sleep. I came for a bit of fresh air." Her voice was apprehensive.*

*He stopped next to the stump she was occupying. How very Gryffindor of her to sneak out at night. He looked down into her blue eyes and said, "Ten points from Gryffindor and a detention for being out of bounds after hours. I expected better behavior from the head girl."*

*Anger and surprise shifted across her face, but she didn't dare answer him back. He was, after all, a teacher, even though he was only a few years her senior. Instead of arguing, she replied sweetly, "Would you care to escort me back to the castle, sir? You need to be sure that I get back safely. I don't think it would look good if the head girl was attacked right after her callous, young professor sent her back to the castle unguarded."*

*The corners of his mouth twitched against his will. Severus forced a stern look onto his face. How was he ever going to gain her respect if she was able to turn everything he said into a joke?*

*"Impertinent girl," he said in a sneer that didn't even remotely have the bite he had hoped. "How did you get out of the castle undetected?"*

*"I learned from the best," she said, lightly springing to her feet.*

*"Who?"*

*"James Potter and Sirius Black."*

Severus woke with a start.

*Another reason to hate her,* he thought, lying back down; she had been friends with them.

Sleep was elusive that night, punctuated with dreams of taunts, gentle touches, and laughing blue eyes.

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## Chapter 3: Unavoidable Encounters

*Chapter 4 of 12*

Severus reports to Voldemort, and Callista receives a gift from her father.

A/N: See, I didn't fall off of the face of the earth. When I revised the original chapter it took much longer than I thought it would and end up insanely long. No, I'm not going to post the whole thing at once, but at least the next few updates will be a bit closer together.

### Chapter 3: Unavoidable Encounters

Severus knelt before the Dark Lord, waiting to be acknowledged. It was a private meeting, and the wizard was grateful not to have to deal with Bellatrix and her accusations for a change. The woman was clearly less than sane after her stint in Azkaban and was constantly trying to catch him in some minor inconsistency. He knew he was clever enough to not be trapped in one of her attempts to expose him, but her persistence was grating.

"It has been reported that Callista Hawkins has been brought out of hiding," came the cold, high voice. "Can you confirm this, Severus?"

"Indeed, it is true, my Lord," he affirmed from his submissive position on the floor. The Potions master watched as Voldemort paced back and forth in front of him, wondering why he had not been given leave to rise. "Her appointment will be announced the in the *Daily Prophet* within the next day or so. She will be teaching the younger students Defense and Potions."

The pacing stopped. "Will she have anything to do with Potter's training?"

"I don't know," Severus replied truthfully.

"You are to find out."

"I shall do my best," he assured before continuing with a slight sneer. "Although, what she could possibly contribute to the boy's education is questionable at best. Other

than her skills with potions, she was not that impressive of a student. I had always suspected her becoming a prefect and Head Girl had more to do with her father's connections than her own merits. I would not be surprised if her appointment to Hogwarts came about for the same reason. Dumbledore has made it a habit to favor his precious Gryffindors over Slytherins, regardless of superior qualifications."

Ignoring his servant's remarks, the Dark Lord fixed him with a penetrating red stare. "Severus, you should be pleased with your ~~own~~ promotion."

Bowing his head, Severus said, "It will please me to use it to your advantage, my Lord."

There was a long pause on Voldemort's part before he continued the questioning. "Has Dumbledore indicated whether or not you will continue to give the boy Occlumency lessons?"

"He has not my Lord." Severus winced; his knee was beginning to cramp from its prolonged contact with the cold stone floor. "It is possible that Dumbledore finally came to realize that it was futile. Potter proved he didn't have the aptitude. His mind, uncontrollable as his temper, was easy to pry open and manipulate."

"You have done well to make him vulnerable, Severus," the Dark Lord said. "Unfortunately, it turned out to have such undesirable effects."

"I live to serve," Severus replied evenly. His knee was now throbbing, and he hoped to be dismissed soon.

As if he was enjoying the other wizard's discomfort, Voldemort resumed his pacing. "You would be wise to befriend Callista Hawkins and regain her confidence at all costs."

Considering that they parted on the very worst of terms, Severus didn't think it was even remotely possible. "I have my doubts that she will even speak to me, let alone grant me any confidence, but I shall do my best, of course."

"With your considerable knowledge of potions, I am most certain you will succeed in extracting the necessary information or die trying. Do not disappoint me, Severus." The red eyes narrowed meaningfully, leaving no doubt that, as always, failure was not going to be tolerated. "You are dismissed."

Severus rose gratefully to his feet, backing away. Once he was a respectful distance, he turned on his heel and headed towards the exit. A tall, pale-haired woman approached him, but he ignored her as he strode to the Apparation point at the end of a stone tunnel and vanished with a muffled pop.

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An hour later Severus was standing in the headmaster's office. Dumbledore was listening to Severus's report, calmly stroking the brilliant plumes of the phoenix, and Fawkes answered the old man with contented warbles.

"The Dark Lord wanted confirmation that Miss Hawkins has returned," Severus said. "He was interested in her role in Potter's education. As you requested, I reported that she has little talent to offer."

"Very good, Severus."

Severus was silent for a moment. "There may be another spy within the Order, Headmaster."

"Oh?"

The younger man's brow wrinkled. "He had already been informed of her arrival and appointment. I was under the impression you intended to keep that information from becoming public until she was on the castle grounds."

"That indeed was my intent; however, another spy in our ranks, while always possible, is unlikely." Dumbledore shook his head, brushing off the notion like an irritating insect. "Callista's mother travels in the same social circles as both the Greengrass and Parkinson families, who in turn are also connected to the Malfoys. It is more likely the gossip eventually made it to Narcissa Malfoy's ears. She, of course, would be eager to present it to Riddle."

"But, sir--"

"Don't worry, Severus, Professor Hawkins will be warned," Dumbledore assured him, continuing to pay attention to Fawkes. "Alastor Moody has offered to work with her. I'm sure she will be more than capable of looking out for her own safety, but I will feel relieved to have her within the school wards."

The younger man frowned deeply. Of course she was capable. Adolphus Hawkins had been a high-ranking Ministry official; therefore, his children would have been wanted by the Death Eaters. It had been common knowledge that the man had spared no expense making sure they were well-protected. By the time Callista was old enough to attend Hogwarts, her father had been so paranoid about her security that he had considered arranging for private tutors until Dumbledore convinced him the school was as secure, if not more so, than any private home.

"You are concerned about her?" Dumbledore was feeding Fawkes a mouse.

Severus remained cool and detached. "You feel she is a valuable asset to the Order."

"That's not what I meant," the headmaster said with a touch of impatience. His lined face softened. "You still harbor feelings for her, don't you?"

"No," Severus replied in a short tone.

"Someone cannot be an enormous part of your life without leaving some kind of a shadow on your heart. You cannot reasonably deny that Callista was once everything to you. Have you tried to reconcile with her, at least enough to have a minute measure of civility?" Dumbledore patted the top of the bird's head before sitting down.

"She wants nothing to do with me, and I want nothing to do with her." Snape's voice became icy.

Dumbledore gave the Potions master a disheartened look. "You have been given a second chance. I suggest you take it."

"I have a duty to the Order. I don't have time for such trivial nonsense." Severus could feel the anger rising in him, threatening to break his carefully controlled emotions. "Now, if you will excuse me, Headmaster, I need some rest. I will return to the castle within the week to prepare for the upcoming term."

"Good night then, Severus."

That night, Severus sat for a long time in front of the fire at Spinner's End, hating Albus Dumbledore. If he had gone against the old man's orders all those years ago, he wouldn't need a second chance with Callista now. Dumbledore had convinced him that letting Callista know about his involvement with the Death Eaters and the Order would have endangered them both. Severus had been terrified that something would happen to her. Even more than that, he had been afraid of losing her love if she had ever learned of the horrific things he had done. So he had done as he had been told and had kept his role as a spy to himself. No one had known that Severus was part of the Order at the time. That information had only been revealed after the Tri-Wizard Tournament a little over a year ago. Not that it had made a difference; he knew that everyone in the Order, save McGonagall, hated and mistrusted him. He buried his head in his hands, dwelling on his dismal past and contemplating his bleak future.

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"You really should speak with your father's portrait, Lissie," Moira Hawkins urged her daughter gently over their afternoon tea. "It would give you a sense of closure, give you a chance to reconcile with him. He was so very heartbroken when we thought you were dead. He went on and on about how he should have tried to make you see the error of your ways. I'm sure he would have forgiven you had you come home."

Callista, cringing at both at the sound of her nickname and her mother's latest attempt to make her feel guilty, continued to sip her tea to avoid answering. For the past few days, her mother had been trying to convince her that Adolphus Hawkins--or his portrait at least--actually wanted to see her. It wasn't that she didn't wish for some measure of reconciliation; on the contrary, it was something she greatly desired, but the thought of dredging up a very painful part of her life was not appealing. That, and being forgiven by a picture wasn't the same as hearing the words from the man himself. True closure was impossible. Since her return, Callista had vainly explained this to her mother more times than she cared to count.

She had heard the whole story from her mother during their first meeting. Shortly after the death of the Potters and Sirius Black's arrest, her father had been seriously wounded in the process of bringing down Evan Rosier, whom he had killed in a raid. After suffering for nearly a week, he had finally succumbed to his injuries. He had been so despondent that his wife had been both amazed and pleased that he hadn't become a ghost. For the last week, Callista had found herself wondering if things would have been different had she tried to return home. In the end, she decided the events probably would not have changed, other than her being able to visit him at St. Mungo's... provided that he would have allowed his 'rebellious and ungrateful' daughter access to his bedside. Callista let out a soft sigh.

"And I still don't understand why you would prefer to linger in Muggle London of all places either. Couldn't you just remain at the house until the start of term?" her mother continued. "There are so many things you need, my dearest. A trip to Twillfit and Tattings is a priority. You only have two robes, and I can't bear to see you dressed like a Muggle. Those wretched Americans, they have no proper wizarding pride or common sense whatsoever, mingling so openly with the non-magic folks."

"I tried to explain all of that to you, Mum," Callista said wearily; a slight throbbing began in her temples. "I need to keep in touch with Dr. Pike; therefore, I must have access to a telephone. My last bit of business at the university needs to be taken care of this evening and my presence is required at Hogwarts the day after tomorrow. I want to get settled in my quarters before I start my teaching duties."

"There are house-elves that can unpack for you. How those Americans can survive without house-elves is beyond me. Utter foolishness on their part." Her mother shook her head and looked at Callista with concern before saying in a teasing tone, "Is Dr. Pike the only person you're in touch with, or are you trying to hide my son-in-law and grandchildren from me?"

"I told you, I never bothered to get married." Another thing her mother didn't understand: her single status.

"Just so you know, Allen Buxley isn't married, although he has been engaged twice while you were gone. I'm positive he would like to become reacquainted. Perhaps you could--"

"No," Callista said firmly, setting her tea cup down with more force than she intended and cracking it neatly in half. *Reparo*. I told you, I have no intention of staying after the school year has ended. I did not come back to tie myself to a wizard who would only be interested in my domestic skills. Please, I'm over thirty and set in my ways. Besides," she continued, her thoughts straying to Lucas Hart, "I've learned that men are more trouble than they will ever be worth."

Her mother squeezed her hand. "You just need to find the right one, myluv."

Not wanting the argument to continue, Callista nodded. Could sitting here and listening to her mother be any worse than meeting with her father's portrait? Clearing her throat, she said, "Perhaps I should visit with Daddy's portrait. I need to borrow some books on potions and defense anyway, and I don't feel right taking them without asking. If you don't mind, that is."

"By all means," the older woman said, smiling as she rose to her feet. "His portrait is hanging in his study. Your father always valued his privacy."

Callista dutifully followed her mother to the book-lined room that had been her father's sanctuary when he was alive. Her mother knocked before opening the door, and with a wave of her wand, the study was glowing in soft candlelight.

"Adolphus?" her mother addressed the snoring figure in the portrait. With a snort and a grunt, the image of the former master of the house awoke and peered at his wife. "There is a visitor to see you. It's our Callista, home safe and sound."

The old man sat up straighter in the leather armchair in the painting. He gazed gruffly at the pair, his dark eyes glaring out from under his bushy brows. Mrs. Hawkins silently withdrew from the room, leaving father and daughter to sort out their issues alone. Adolphus Hawkins' portrait was every bit as stern-looking as the man had been in real life.

"So," he began, surveying his daughter with penetrating look, "finally plucked up the courage to call on me? I know you've been back for more than a week; you should have come to see me immediately. What took you so long?"

"I met first with Headmaster Dumbledore at Hogwarts, sir," she answered calmly, barely keeping the defiant tone out of her voice. "He has graciously appointed me to a post for the upcoming school year."

His tone was mocking. "Fancy that, my daughter is now a lowly schoolmistress." Callista bit her tongue, refusing to answer. "We were told you were dead, killed by Sirius Black or possibly He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named himself. Where have you been all this time?"

"I was on the continent for a time before I was able to make my way to the States, sir," replied Callista. Her father's eyes betrayed his interest in her adventures, and Callista briefly talked about her time in hiding, speaking in glowing terms of Dr. Pike and his Muggle wife. By the end of her tale, the old man seemed impressed with his bright, resourceful daughter. "So, as you can hopefully deduce, my time here will be brief. I have made a life for myself and have no intention of staying after the end of the school year."

"We shall see," he said off-handedly. "What does that ridiculous old man have you teaching? I suppose they still go through a new Defense teacher each year. Is that your subject?"

"More or less. I shall be teaching Potions and Defense Against the Dark Arts to the younger students." She had no intention of elaborating unless he probed further.

A fluffy eyebrow rose curiously. "And who will be teaching the other students?"

Callista hesitated. "Severus Snape is the current--"

"What?" the portrait bellowed. "That foul creature is still at Hogwarts?" The old man continued to mutter furiously. "Dumbledore is more of a fool than I thought he was. I advised him to sack the bloody bastard all those years ago. Had I not been injured tracking down Snape's vile friend, I would have testified at his hearing and nothing, nothing, Dumbledore could have said would have kept that loathsome beast from Azkaban! Snape should have been Kissed and good riddance to him."

Even though Callista was not about to take Snape's side, she felt obligated to defend the headmaster, if for no other reason than that he had made sure she had temporary employment. "But Professor Dumbledore--"

"Hang Dumbledore!" the portrait roared. "The man has no sense whatsoever!"

"I'm sure he had his reasons."

"Trust no one, Callista," Adolphus Hawkins cautioned. He was silent for a while, brow furrowed in concentration. "There is something I want you to have."

Looking up at the portrait in complete surprise, Callista asked, "You want to give me something?"

"I had intended it for your brother, Niall, but as he predeceased me...." The old man in the painting closed his eyes for a moment before directing his daughter. "Tap the panel at the base of the third set of shelves to the left of the fireplace with your wand three times. Very good."

Callista did as he ordered and the panel shifted aside, revealing a small hiding space. Groping inside, she felt a paper-covered package and drew it out. "What is it?"

"Unwrap it and see."

She opened the wrappings, her fingers clumsy with anticipation. Inside the package was a small box containing a frame with a dark blue background. Her father's likeness in miniature suddenly appeared before her eyes, and she almost dropped the frame.

"You could have given me some warning," she said through clenched teeth.

Her father laughed. "With nerves like that, I can see why you decided against becoming an Auror. This was meant to help me advise your brother without having him come to the house in case I died before he did. Unfortunately, he was discovered and killed--"

"What are you talking about?" interrupted Callista, confused. She had only been nine when her eldest brother's body had been found, and the cause of his death had never been explained to her. "What was Niall involved in?"

The small face frowned sadly. "There is too much to explain, but suffice it to say your brother's death was partly my fault. I... I promise to tell you everything, but not now."

"Wouldn't it be better to give this to Connor?"

"The banker doesn't need or want any help from me," her father said bitterly. "He has that Muggle-born girl to watch out for him. All he needs to do is make certain the goblins give fair exchanges on the quaid or quid or whatever the hell it's called. You, on the other hand, are in danger if you are working for Dumbledore and working with Snape. Listen to Alastor Moody if he gives you advice."

"I will," Callista answered, still unsettled about the new information about her brother's demise.

The portrait demanded to hear more about her work at the American university, and she politely obliged, carefully keeping away from more personal subjects.

It was nearly time to dress for dinner when she vacated the study, leaving her father's image to mull over the account of her adventures. At the table, her mother was rattling on about how much fun they were going to have while shopping in Diagon Alley the following day. Callista listened only enough to keep up with the general thread of the conversation, her mind constantly straying from her mother's cheerful monologue about the latest fashions to the miniature portrait of her father stashed in the magically-expanded box of books.

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Next up: An early morning visitor and a trip to Diagon Alley.

# Tangling the Web

*Chapter 5 of 12*

Severus receives an unexpected, early morning visitor.

Disclaimer: All things Harry Potter belong to Rowling. I only own the original characters and the situations they get themselves into.

WARNING: Sexual situation

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## Chapter 4: Tangling the Web

It was indecently early when the wards of the dilapidated row house on Spinner's End were disturbed. Severus was instantly awake, drawing his wand out of his pocket. In the process of getting up and moving towards the door, he tripped over the thick book that had slipped from his hand when he had fallen asleep in the chair. Other than Dumbledore, not many people knew where he lived during the summer, and it wasn't as if he normally had any Muggle callers to cope with.

Looking through the dingy window, he saw a figure dressed in an emerald green cloak. What the blazes was ~~was~~ *he* doing here?

He opened the door and asked, "Isn't it a bit early for callers, Mrs. McKeene?"

"I am sorry to disturb you, Severus, but I needed to see you," replied his guest in a rich, feminine voice. "Are you going to invite me in?"

Wordlessly he stood aside so the woman could enter. As she entered the room, Bianca McKeene lowered her hood, revealing long, silvery-blond hair. Her piercing gray eyes swept over the shabby room before fixing on him. In their younger years, she had been a glorious sight, beautiful and powerful. She had been more than ten years his senior, and Severus, young and vulnerable at the time, had been drawn to her. Bianca, her husband oblivious to the mutual attraction, had taken Severus into her tutelage, and he had soon discovered that the Dark Arts were not her only area of expertise.

"You've been avoiding me, Severus," she said without preamble. "I saw you after your meeting with the Dark Lord and tried to get your attention. Could you not be bothered to speak with me?"

"I had no time to pause. Much the same as you have had no time to speak with me for the past several years," Severus said pointedly, recalling how, after the Dark Lord had disappeared, Bianca had ignored him completely, never contacting him, never acknowledging him during their few brief-yet-awkward social encounters.

Bianca lifted her chin. "Well, I have time to speak with you now. You must understand, Severus, in the aftermath of the Master's disappearance, I had a reputation to protect if I was ever going to covertly continue his noble work. You and I were not in the same social circles; it would have looked suspicious for us to be seen together. Besides, you had Dumbledore to plead your case; the only way you could have done better would have been if the Minister herself had vouched for you. The endorsement of two 'Imperiused' followers would have done you more harm than good."

"I see," he said, giving her a stony look. Not caring to be pursue the past, he changed the subject. "So, have you been making yourself indispensable with your Ministry connections?"

"Of course," replied Bianca. "I'm even more indispensable than ever since poor Lucius has been incarcerated, thanks to that raving lunatic Bellatrix, besotted whore that she is."



A brief mental picture of Bellatrix LeStrange intimately servicing the Dark Lord flitted through his mind. It was far from a pleasant image; on the contrary, it was utterly disturbing. He raised an eyebrow. "Jealous?"

"Not really," said Bianca staunchly. "While it is irksome to see favor bestowed on someone so unstable and undeserving, I have better ways of showing loyalty than fawning and constantly dithering about time wasted in prison. My husband and I could better serve the cause by remaining free, and that was exactly what we did. Have you heard her latest rant about what a traitor you are?"

"More times than I care to think of," he answered grimly, rubbing his hands over his face. "I take it you hold no stock in her opinions of me?"

"Of course not!" She moved closer to him, reaching out to lightly stroke his chest with a delicate hand. "Yours is a dangerous game, Severus, and you play it so well." Pressing against him, her hands became more insistent as she cooed, "Forgive me for leaving you to your own devices after the Dark Lord's disappearance. It really was for the best. Besides, with my husband now dead and gone, I'm free to pursue whomever I choose without scandal."

Severus leaned his head back slightly and reveled in her experienced touch, lengthening and hardening as she caressed him through his clothing. He hadn't been with a woman, witch, Squib, or Muggle, since the Dark Lord's return, and the promise of intimate contact was cause for indulgence. With each firm stroke, the constant vigilance he had been living with began yielding to desire. Constant vigilance had kept him alive but unsatisfied. Constant vigilance-- A mental image of Moody uttering the mantra was like a dousing of frigid water. Severus's sense of pleasure came to an abrupt halt. He grabbed Bianca's wrists to restrain her wandering hands.

"As much as I find it flattering that you would travel all this way for a tryst," Severus said with an air of forced levity, "I have the impression that isn't the main reason for your visit."

"Why wouldn't it be?" the witch asked, pulling out of his grasp and pouting. "Have you replaced me, Severus?"

He ignored her questions and demanded. "Why are you really here, Bianca?"

"To warn you, of course. Bellatrix is determined to undermine you and will stop at nothing to discredit you. She doesn't seem to fathom how important your role as Dumbledore's confidante is to our cause as a whole. She especially resents how you, a mere half-blood, have usurped her family's place in the Dark Lord's favor. You need someone to watch out for you. I can help if you confide in me, Severus," she answered, breathless from her rambling explanation. "I was hoping you would share the particulars of your assignment with me. I'm very aware of your prior dealings with Hawkins, and I was wondering if--"

"My conversation with the Dark Lord was confidential," he interrupted, realizing that she was likely here at Bellatrix's behest or perhaps even the Dark Lord's. In either case, he was not about to share sensitive information. "As far as me usurping Bellatrix and her family's position, it's been my understanding that her rash behavior coupled with Lucius's inability to keep her in check--a difficult task indeed--was what caused cause the entire plan to fall apart. That failure, in turn, caused them to fall from favor. I had nothing to do with it, and you may feel free to carry my words back to Bellatrix." He drew himself up angrily and ushered his guest to the door. "Now, if you will excuse me, I need to make a trip to Diagon Alley today."

"But, Severus--"

"Bianca," he said firmly, opening the door. "I appreciate your offers--all of them--and the words of warning, but I know where my loyalties belong. Bellatrix and her insecurities are of minor importance."

The blond witch stalked towards the exit. Before she stepped over the threshold, Bianca said over her shoulder, "I hope you realize, Severus, that my offers expire very quickly. I would hate for you to not take advantage of them."

*Keep your options open. The time may come when you need her.* Severus stopped her and, tipping her face up to his, captured her lips in a mouth-bruising kiss. Bianca's breath caught as he parted her lips and slid his tongue seductively over the roof of her mouth. When they parted, he whispered in her ear, "I would never take advantage of a lady."

"Always the gentleman," Bianca said, her tone playfully mocking.

She glided from the room and Disapparated from the doorstep. The witch was gone, but the heavy, uncomfortable sensation in his groin remained. Perhaps he should have taken her up on one of those offers.

*Would it have been worth possibly finding yourself at wand point?* He asked himself as he quickly closed and warded the door. He scratched the back of his head. Years ago, her attraction to him had made some semblance of sense; they both had been drawn together out of physical frustration and a mutual need of for satisfaction. The possibility that she was genuinely concerned for his safety and well-being was dubious at best. Still, it was wiser to play along with her game than to openly reject her and make a true enemy of the woman.

His stomach gave a loud growl, and Severus was reminded that there probably wasn't much more than a dust-covered tin of peaches left in the house. No matter, he could stop at the Leaky Cauldron for breakfast before placing his order for the school potion stores. He also needed to stop at Ollivander's to have the finish on his wand inspected. The varnish was beginning to crack near the handle, and one thing he could not afford to have happen was his wand malfunctioning at a critical moment. Yawning and stretching, Severus climbed the concealed staircase to the second floor to wash up and change into a clean robe before setting off to London.

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It wasn't until Callista entered Diagon Alley with her mother that she realized she had never known peace and security in the British wizarding world. Many of the shops were boarded up, posters showing the likeness of escaped Death Eaters peered at passersby, and there was an unmistakable sense of tension that could be felt from all but the youngest children.

"Callista, are you even listening to me?" her mother asked.

The younger witch looked at the elegant woman beside her, feeling slightly guilty. "Sorry, Mum, I was just thinking how little this has changed."

"I will have you know that up until June the Alley was busy and thriving. Peace is merely a dream it seems." Her mother sighed. "I suggest we go to Twillfit and Tattings; Madame Malkin's will be crowded with students."

In Twillfit and Tattings, Callista endured a long and intrusive session with the measuring tape. She balked at the more intimate measurements, declaring that her current undergarments would suffice, and refused to be swayed by her mother's insistence. However, when she was finally finished, she was well outfitted for her return to the British wizarding world. All the while, her mother chatted with the head seamstress about upcoming weddings and recent births. Callista only vaguely remembered some of the names and quickly lost interest in the conversation. When her mother decided to purchase a few items for herself, Callista conveniently realized she needed to have her wand repaired and fled the shop after promising to meet her mother at Gringotts within the hour.

Knowing it would take Ollivander only a moment to fix the tiny fissure, Callista toyed with the idea of visiting other shops. The apothecary was across the street, but Dumbledore assured her that Severus would take care of ordering supplies for the Potions classroom, so she didn't need to stop there really, and with her lousy luck, Severus would probably be there.

*Perhaps an owl would be a good idea,* she thought as she paused briefly at Eylope's Owl Emporium to admire the beautiful birds, a few of which untucked their heads to glare at her for daring to interrupt their slumber. No, she wasn't planning on staying for any longer than one school year, and for that brief amount of time, the school owls would do. Reaching up, she stroked the soft feathers before moving on.

About half-way along the cobbled street was a garish store front, ablaze in purple and gold: Weasley's Wizarding Wheezes. Callista couldn't help but smile when she saw

it, remembering the vivid description of the young entrepreneurs Dumbledore had given her. If there was time at the end of the day, she would do her best to talk her mother into stopping. While she had no intentions of purchasing anything, she knew the shop would be intriguing to say the least.

Continuing along the busy street, Callista glanced at the various shops, some of which hadn't changed in the slightest since the last time she had last walked along the street, and remembered how much she had enjoyed coming to Diagon Alley as a child. There was a familiarity about the place that none of the magical communities in the States would ever have.

At last, Ollivander's came into sight. She pulled the door open and stepped into the shop. Unfortunately, the person she had been hoping to avoid was standing at counter.

"A few firm strokes every night, and your wand will remain in top condition, Professor Snape," Ollivander declared as Severus paid for his purchase.

The double entendre caused Callista to force the laughter that was rising in her throat into a cough. Severus glared at her and swept from the shop without so much as a word. There was a fleeting feeling of disappointment. Had she been expecting him to say something? Shaking her head, she decided it was for the best that he hadn't said anything to her.

"Welcome home, my dear Miss-- I mean, Professor Hawkins," said a beaming Ollivander as he shook her hand with both of his. "Headmaster Dumbledore informed me that you would likely pay me a visit before the start of term."

"Thank you, Mr. Ollivander," she replied, holding out her old wand to the elderly gentleman. "Indeed, I was hoping you could repair my wand for me. I'll also need the appropriate polish and a new cleaning cloth."

Ollivander took the wand and looked it over. "Ah, yes, ash, ten and a quarter inches with a dragon heartstring core. How ever did it acquire that crack on the shaft?"

Callista briefly explained the accident, which in retrospect was actually rather amusing. Since wand ownership was traceable, replacing it instead of having it repaired had been just another way to protect her identity. There was also the law that American witches and wizards were required to own American made wands. In the end, she had decided to keep the battered wand for purely sentimental reasons. At the end of her story, she braced herself for the possibility of a lecture on proper wand care.

"At least you did not attempt to use it in this condition," he said, fixing her with his pale eyes.

"No, I've been using this one," Callista told him as she handed over her current wand, which Ollivander studied intently. "It's an Osborne and Leeds creation: ten and a half inches, apple wood, with imported phoenix feather core, in service for twelve years, seven months. All of their products are treated with a special Disillusionment charm-- very helpful when you mix with the non-magical population. It works quiet well for Transfiguration."

"Hmph!" he said dismissively, but Callista could tell he was grudgingly impressed with the quality of the foreign wand.

"Now that I'm back, I want to have a proper, British wand and use the apple wood wand for a spare."

"You do realize that a wizard or witch, unless they have obtained a special permit, is limited to one registered wand at a time, don't you?"

Callista lifted her chin. "I'm also aware that a number of people don't follow that particular law."

Ollivander frowned at her, saying, "Are you suggesting that I sell unregistered wands?"

"Not at all, sir, but I am saying that not all of wands that are listed as destroyed have actually met the fates their owner's claimed. My father was an Auror, and I remember hearing stories about criminals having a spare wand or two on their person at the time of capture." She smiled reassuringly. "Dumbledore suggested that I carry a spare wand at all times, and I planned on using the apple wood wand as my spare. if the old one can't be repaired, I will purchase a replacement from you."

His frown relaxed a little at her words. "Very well, Miss Hawkins. Osborne and Leeds wands are decent enough, but...."

"I understand." Callista was no expert on wands, but even she knew the apple wood wand without the spells applied to it was equal in quality to anything that Ollivander carried. The enchantments made it superior, and a wand that was unnoticeable to Muggles would be in great demand by the Aurors of Magical Law Enforcement. Why it had never occurred to the wand maker to attempt to do what Osborne and Leeds managed in the early 1700's was beyond her. Perhaps necessity really was the mother of all invention.

It took a few moments for Ollivander to mend the ash wand. Callista thanked him and left the shop. As she stepped out into the street, a flash of light caught her eye, and she drew her wand. Looking about, she was unable to find the source of the flash. Since none of the other people on the street took any notice, she felt confident that it was probably not a spell. Pocketing her wand, Callista hurried off to Gringotts.

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A/N: Osborne and Leeds would be one of three major wand makers in the United States and located on the east coast. The names come from Sarah Osborne (one of the accused witches in the 1692 Salem Witch Trials) and Jane Leeds (the 'mother' of the Jersey Devil) of Leeds' Point, New Jersey. About forty years separate the two, but I wanted some historical significance behind the names.

## Return to Hogwarts

*Chapter 6 of 12*

Callista settles in for the school year and gets some much needed advice.

A/N: I've been working on a few of the upcoming chapters to (hopefully) reduce the lags between chapters. If any readers have an extra house-elf they're not using, please send it my way. Same goes for liquid Muse or a Time-turner. Anyway, if you like what you've read, let me know.

Disclaimer: I'm not Rowling and I'm making any money on this fic. Got it? Good.

### Chapter 5: Return to Hogwarts

Later that evening, Severus sat at his desk, culling a pile of lecture notes that he had been using for the younger students. Dumbledore had asked him to pass the first through fourth year syllabi and any pertinent notes on to Professor Hawkins, enabling her to concentrate her efforts in Defense Against the Dark Arts. The request had been made in such a way that part of Severus wanted to thrust the Potions information into the fire and state that Callista Hawkins could bloody well read up on her own

subjects, and if she wasn't capable of doing that, then her little assistant, Potter, could pitch in.

"Potter!" he hissed venomously, throwing another sheet of parchment into the jumble of papers in a box next to the desk. The idea of that arrogant whelp instructing a class irritated him to no end. The only bright spots in the situation were that Potter wasn't going to be brought to school early and would not be considered part of the faculty, and Severus wouldn't be required to show him even the slightest measure of professional courtesy. If only he didn't have to even look at the boy this year, Potter's position would be almost tolerable. He could picture young Potter strutting about the classroom, praising his fellow Gryffindors whether they deserved it or not, giving nods of approval to the Ravensclaws, assisting the Hufflepuffs, and ignoring or humiliating the Slytherins. Oh, yes, that was *exactly* something Potter would do--all with Dumbledore's twinkling approval and Callista Hawkins' nodding acceptance, no doubt.

"Puffed-up, snot-nosed little bugger," he snarled to himself, tossing more parchment haphazardly into a box.

On the other hand, he probably should have been grateful that Longbottom had only just managed a passing mark on his Potions O.W.L. Had it been a question of choosing between Longbottom's incompetence and Potter's arrogance, perhaps it would have been better to suffer another year with Longbottom. It was at least possible to intimidate him, and there was always the eventuality of an error causing a potion-induced fatality.

"She's not getting *all* of my notes," Severus muttered with a grim sense of satisfaction as he finished sorting through the stacks of parchment. The journal that stored the results of the years spent tinkering with potions, finding ways to brew them more efficiently or without unpleasant side-effects, was locked away. When it was completed to his satisfaction, he would publish it and leave his post at Hogwarts. That had been the plan up until the day his Dark Mark indicated the return of his former master.

Looking down at the jumbled mess, the Potions master's sense of order prompted him to lean over and put the notes into some type of logical arrangement. Resisting the urge, he sat back. After all, he had his own classes to prepare for, and Miss Hawkins could manage to organize them herself. A house-elf was summoned to take the box up to the new Defense/Potions mistress's office. Duty fulfilled, Severus turned his attention to the Defense Against the Dark Arts course outline.

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A few floors above, Callista sent the remains of her personal items rocketing to the bathroom. Content to deal with them later, she turned her attention to the clothing in the cavernous depths of the trunk. For the last hour, she had been arranging the rooms that were to be hers until the end of June. The house-elves had done an exceptional job of removing every trace of the prior occupant--not a kitten plate or lace doily was in sight and the stone walls were no longer tinted pink. She had vague childhood memories of Dolores Umbridge, which made the idea of sleeping in the woman's former bedchamber not exactly comforting.

With a sigh, Callista removed the hastily wrapped miniature portrait frame from one of the boxes and, after searching about the room for a suitable place for it, set the frame on top of the spindly-legged table next to the chintz chair, facing the window. She turned the miniature so her father would have a somewhat decent view of grounds if he popped in while she was teaching a class.

A knock sounded at the door of the adjoining study, and Callista tossed aside the everyday robe she was unfolding and hurried to answer it. She opened the door and smiled at Professor McGonagall, saying, "Please, come in, and don't mind the chaos."

McGonagall surveyed the piles of books that were stacked on the desk and a jumble of furniture clustered by the window. "I could send up a house-elf to assist you if you like."

"Oh, thank you, but that won't be necessary," Callista said. "Other than the books, there isn't much to unpack, and I'm almost settled in my private quarters. I'll properly organize my office after the evening meal."

"Very well," the older witch answered. "I just wanted to remind you that there will be a staff meeting the day after tomorrow. At that time you'll receive your timetable and class lists."

Callista nodded as she sent several thick volumes gliding to the shelves. "I must confess that I'm a bit nervous," she said, glancing at her former head of house. "You see, I've never taught children before. Any sound bits of advice you can offer me?"

The older woman cocked her head to one side. "Don't smile until Christmas and no laughing until after Easter."

That was not exactly the type of advice Callista had been hoping for. "Anything else?"

"Good discipline is the key, Callista," McGonagall said sagely, as she gave Callista a pointed stare, giving the younger woman the impression that such a notion should be obvious. "Let the class know from day one that you will not tolerate any shenanigans, and don't feel you can't make an example out of a student who misbehaves--regardless of House. Keep them busy and engaged. Focus on the basics--especially in Potions. Just think back to the effective teachers you remember from your own school days. Even more so, remember the ones who were not as effective and avoid their mistakes. Above all, remember that you are neither their friend nor their enemy, but their instructor and maintain a certain amount of distance between yourself and your students."

The latter part of the speech and the piercing look from the older woman made Callista decidedly uncomfortable. The first thought was of a very young, very uncertain Professor Severus Snape and the very inappropriate romance that had developed between the two of them. It made her wonder if McGonagall had been told about them and their relationship. In all fairness to Severus, at the time he had been barely older than any of his students. Callista, on the other hand, had been away from the school and the British wizarding world for more than fifteen years. The odds of finding herself in the same position were slim to none. *In most cases*, she thought, suddenly feeling older than she wanted to, *I'm old enough to be their mother.*

Her thoughts were interrupted by the appearance of a house-elf, who was partially hidden behind a large, cardboard carton.

"Pardon old Diddy, Professors, but Diddy is bringing a box of papers for Professor Hawkins from Professor Snape." The creature set the box on the floor at Callista's feet and Disappeared.

The two women peered at the jumble of parchment. Callista could almost see Severus's sneering face in the mess and felt it as a very deliberate, very spiteful act. If she had been uncertain of his feelings towards her, she was now positive that they consisted entirely of resentment and dislike. At that moment she felt the urge to storm into his office and have it out with him. There was no reason to tolerate such behavior from him, and Callista wanted to make it apparent that she would not be treated like-- *And that's probably exactly what he wants and expects from me*, Callista thought, reigning in her indignation. *Likely he wants me to lose my temper with him so he can further belittle me. I'll be damned if I'll give that arrogant prat the satisfaction.*

"I always pictured Severus to be a bit more... organized than this," she said, wrinkling her nose. "Obviously I was wrong."

"That was unnecessarily rude of him," McGonagall said, her lips drawn into a furious, thin line.

"Perhaps he was in a hurry to get it to me," Callista replied, shrugging her shoulders and pretending not to be annoyed.

The older woman shook her head. "Even so, there was no need to toss everything in a box."

"He didn't even need to send me everything; a syllabus for each class would have sufficed." Callista drew her wand and pointed it at the box. "*Accio Syllabi!*" Four lengths of parchment sifted from the depths of the container, and Callista studied each of them briefly. "There. If I need anything else, I can always dig through to find it. No harm done."

"Callista, I really think--"

"Professor, it's not worth the trouble. I'm just going to ignore it." She sincerely hoped such a simple tactic would work, because arguing with him sounded almost as appealing as grooming a Hippogriff with mange. "I'm only going to be here for this school year and I really don't want any unnecessary difficulties."

"You really have no intention of staying, do you?"

"Sorry, but no, I don't." Callista slipped the sheets of parchment into an empty desk drawer for safe-keeping; she would deal with lesson-planning tomorrow evening. Her stomach growled, reminding her that she hadn't eaten since the late lunch with her mother at the Leaky Cauldron. "I really don't feel up to communal dining just yet. Would it be acceptable for me to have a quiet meal here?"

"Most of the resident staff members take their meals in their rooms unless the students are in the castle. A tray could be brought up if you like," McGonagall offered. "Would you like some company?"

"Thank you. That would be very kind of you," replied Callista, making sure her tone reflected the warmth and appreciation she was feeling towards her former head of house.

It didn't take long for the two women to put the office in order. The heavy desk was situated near the hearth to be warm during the winter months, a pair of straight-back chairs were tucked in a corner for when she needed to conference with students, and a collection of potion books and her father's volumes on the Dark Arts were sorted onto the selves. The only thing the office lacked was a sense of the occupant, for there were no personal items at all. The absence of photographs and framed certificates, which had been common in her university office, emphasized the coldness of the stone walls, making the space desolate, even with the fire in the hearth. If she was going to be here until June, she should at least make some effort to provide herself with a welcoming work environment. Callista decided a few potted plants--ones that didn't mind the constant chill that pervaded the castle--would take away some of the empty feeling.

A tray laden with a sampling of common main courses arrived. Trying not to think about the indigestion that was sure to follow, Callista enjoyed the familiar favorites as she and McGonagall discussed the changes in the Ministry.

"Are you acquainted with Rufus Scrimgeour, Callista?"

The younger woman shrugged. "Not well. He was a friend of my father, and I've met him a few times, but that was when I was much younger." She wrinkled her nose, remembering the former Minister and the reasons for his dismissal. "Certainly he would be an improvement over Cornelius Fudge?"

"He'll at least be willing to listen to Albus," the older witch replied with a curt nod. "As to how well he protects the Ministry and the wizarding community, that remains to be seen."

"Tell me about Harry, please. I haven't seen him since he was little more than a baby."

"You'll have no trouble recognizing him; he's the spitting image of his father," said McGonagall. "As a student, he's reasonably talented, but he would do better to apply himself to his studies instead of looking for trouble. Defense Against the Dark Arts and, by extension, Charms seem to be his best subjects. Going by Severus's complaints, he hasn't even remotely inherited Lily's potion-making abilities, just his father's arrogance and every other awful trait James ever possessed."

Callista was a bit surprised. Most of it had gone against what she had heard in her conversations with various members of the Order, and she said so.

"Harry has potential, very real potential at that, to be a great many things, Callista." McGonagall refilled their goblets. "However, the opinions of others tend to become exaggerated."

"Meaning?"

"Those who love Harry tend to perceive him as better or more powerful than he is, and those who don't, focus on the worst."

Callista smiled slightly and decided to take a wait-and-see approach. However, her curiosity got the better of her and she felt compelled to ask, "And how do you feel about Harry... personally, I mean?"

McGonagall's sharp eyes softened a bit. "I like him. He's much like any other teenager, temperamental at times, but overall, he has a good heart. You'll like working with him, I think."

"I have my doubts about the situation, but since I didn't have a better idea, I figured it was best just to go with it." An abrupt yawn caused Callista to press her hand to her mouth and mumble a hasty apology.

"I didn't think it was overly late," McGonagall said, glancing out the window. "You're not feeling ill, are you?"

"It's the switching of the time zones, not the time and certainly not the company," replied Callista. "For some reason, I'm having trouble making the adjustment. Hopefully a long hot bath and a decent night's sleep might help."

McGonagall took the hint and rose to her feet. "I feel I should warn you before I go. Hagrid plans to invite you to go with him on his after-breakfast rounds. He has it in his head that a tour of the Forbidden Forest is just what you need to feel at home again."

"Oh... well... that's very... um, kind of him. Thanks for letting me know." She had an uneasy feeling about a foray into the very woods that she had been told to avoid as a student, but she knew that the gamekeeper would take it personally if she declined his offer. "I'll see you at breakfast then, Professor."

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A little over two hours later, cozily warm but thoroughly exhausted Callista climbed into the bed and settled down to sleep. As she drifted off, she briefly thought she heard her father singing the song about Babbity Rabbit.

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A/N: Here's hoping there are still readers reading out there.

## Rare Ingredient

*Chapter 7 of 12*

On her first day back at Hogwarts, Callista lucks into a rare ingredient. Severus gets the short end of the stick.

A/N: Nope, it's not a belated April Fool's joke, I'm really posting a new chapter. Thanks and hugs to Verity for beta-ing and to Tylenol Farie for sending a house-elf. I just want to make it perfectly clear I hate writing Hagrid. Next time he appears, I think I'll have him keep his big mouth shut.

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## Chapter 6: Rare Ingredient

The following morning, a few stragglers were still dawdling over the remains of breakfast when Severus arrived in the Great Hall. With a brief nod to Madam Pomfrey and Professor Sprout, he sat down in an empty chair and poured a cup of tea. Glancing at the vacated space next to him, he picked up a discarded copy of the *Daily Prophet* and opened it. On the second page, a picture of Callista stepping out of Ollivander's was at the top, followed by an article.

*Bring out Your Dead!*

by Rita Skeeter

At first glance it would seem that Hogwarts Headmaster Albus Dumbledore has finally been forced to resort to grave-robbing for his next Defense Against the Dark Arts instructor. Or has he? As it turns out, Callista Hawkins, aged 32, the presumed deceased daughter of the late Auror Adolphus Hawkins and Moira (O'Brien) Hawkins of Wexler, Ireland, wasn't dead after all. Miss Hawkins recently returned to Britain after spending the last fifteen years somewhere in North America.

On Halloween 1981, the fall of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, the young Healer Trainee vanished suddenly, leaving her grief-stricken parents with no body to bury. At the time, it was assumed that she had been killed by convicted mass murderer Sirius Black or possibly even by He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named himself. Did Black, who was killed in the Department of Mysteries in June and has supposedly been exonerated of his crimes, send her away for her own protection? Is it possible the two had been romantically involved? Sources suggest that there may indeed have been an understanding between Black and the Hawkins family--

Severus threw the paper aside in disgust and attempted to take a swallow of his tea. *An understanding* between Black and Callista's family? It wouldn't have been surprising. Black had been good-looking, well-off, and not Severus Snape--a fine match for Auror Hawkins' only daughter. Being from a pureblood family would have been an added bonus. A nasty half-smile twisted his thin lips. All of Adolphus Hawkins' other noble sensibilities aside, the old man had been a firm believer that those with pure blood were superior to those who were not.

"Ah, Severus." Dumbledore was smiling at him amiably as he passed by the younger man's seat. "I trust your first night back at the castle was a comfortable one?"

While his dreams had kept his sleep from being overly restful, not having the usual anxiety of waking up at wand point was refreshing. "It was adequate, Headmaster."

The old headmaster gave him a nod of understanding. "What were your plans for today, Severus?"

"I planned on cleaning out the store cupboard in the Potions classroom and working on some lesson plans for Defense Against the Dark Arts. Is there something you require of me?" asked Severus, wondering what, if anything, the old man had in store for him.

"Nothing that will require any more time than you have already allotted to your morning's tasks." Dumbledore smiled at Severus's surprise. "What do you normally do with the ingredients that are not up to standard?"

After fifteen years, why would the headmaster suddenly be interested in the fate of out-of-date potion ingredients? Severus wrinkled his forehead and answered, "Toss them into the bin, sir."

"If you would, please set them aside."

"What ever for?" Severus's forehead wrinkled as he tried to think up what earthly purpose saving substandard potion ingredients could serve.

The headmaster's blue eyes twinkled. "Professor Hawkins will be using them to teach the first-years correct preparation methods."

"Correct preparation methods?" Severus asked with a sneer. "Any student who isn't a complete dunderhead can learn to correctly prepare the ingredients. Those that can't, deserve to fail."

"Nevertheless, Professor Hawkins feels such basic instruction would be beneficial." The headmaster smiled brightly. "Unless you would rather they used top-quality ingredients to refine their techniques."

Of course he wouldn't want to see ingredients wasted! He was on the verge of informing Dumbledore that Miss Hawkins could sift through the Potions stores herself when he realized that allowing her to do so would give her a measure, however small, of control over the classroom, and that was something he absolutely didn't want her to have. He was a senior staff member while she was merely a temporary solution to the school's permanent problem, and Severus had no intention of letting her forget that.

Keeping his face expressionless, Severus replied, "As you wish, Headmaster."

"Thank you, Severus." With a beaming smile, Dumbledore exited the Great Hall.

Feeling more than a little put out, the Potions master mercilessly speared a sausage with his fork. Halfway through his breakfast, he decided to have another go at reading the paper, skipping the page that featured Callista's picture. The Quidditch standings only aggravated his developing case of indigestion. Severus pushed his chair away from the table and strode out of the Great Hall. At the main entrance, he saw Hagrid holding open the door and Callista struggling with a cauldron.

"Can yeh carry it down alrigh' there, Callista?" Hagrid asked, his voice booming in the corridor. "Don' see why yeh can't just charm the thing an' float it down to the dungeon or at least have me carry it for you"

Severus heard Callista's panted answer. "Thank you, but... I really can manage. Don't... want to chance... using magic... and interfering... with its properties."

"Well then, I reckon yeh' know better' me. Feel free to come 'round anytime, now."

"Thank you... so much, Hagrid... for allowing me to join you. I think... I saw a reference book... in the Potions classroom... on the correct method... of preparation for this. If not... I do believe I have one." Callista wasn't paying attention to where she was going and nearly collided with Severus.

He tossed her his best sneer. "Look where you're going, Miss Hawkins!"

She briefly threw him a nasty look and continued on her way, struggling with a covered cauldron. His curiosity getting the better of him, he asked Hagrid, "What on earth does she have?"

"Oh, tha' be the afterbirth o' a unicorn."

Suddenly understanding Callista's reluctance to let someone else handle the weighty parcel, Severus asked, "Unicorn placenta? How the bloody hell did she get that?"

"One o' the dames dropped a foal today, an' we was lucky enough to see it. Bit late in the season, so the poor thing probably won't survive the winter. Anyways, soon as the foal was up, Callista rushed in to claim the afterbirth. Righ' excited 'bout it she was, Callista that is, goin' on 'bout how it's so very rare." Hagrid shrugged his massive shoulders.

Severus leaned against the wall for support, grinding the heels of his hands into his eyes. Unicorn anything was an expensive purchase. The hair was easy enough to come by, but hooves or horn were used only rarely. The blood of a unicorn could stop death, but one had to be desperate to use it. The blood from the placenta was recognized to have the healing properties without cursing the user. Since unicorns were not domesticated, finding a placenta that was still fresh and viable was virtually impossible. The preparation wasn't so much difficult as it was a race against time and using exact but variable amounts of purification solutions and preservatives. Leaving Hagrid to ramble on about the potentially sad fate of the unicorn foal, Severus strode towards the dungeon corridor as he envisioned the multiple ways an unpracticed hand could render the organ and blood useless.

By the time he got to the classroom, Callista was intently reading a preparation guide and assembling the appropriate materials, which included various glass blades, storage bottles and a wooden rack, from the student supply shelves. He fixed his gaze into a cold, unconcerned mask as he strode over to the work bench. Callista pointedly ignored him, concentrating on her work so completely that she could have easily been the only person in the room. He glared at her, waiting for her to ask for assistance. Once she picked up the knife, he had no choice but to break his stony silence.

"Do you know what you are doing?" he said huffily, as she continued to bisect the mass. When Callista failed to acknowledge his question, Severus raised his voice, asking, "Miss Hawkins, I said."

"I heard you, but this requires all my attention," she said, frowning in concentration. "Please, don't bother me while I'm working. If you can't be quiet or don't wish to be helpful, then please leave."

He couldn't believe that she would actually have the audacity to politely order him out of his own classroom. "If you do it incorrectly, you will foul it up."

"That won't happen if a certain obnoxious berk will kindly remove his overly large nose from my business," she muttered in a quiet voice, continuing to delicately cut. "I can read, you know. Besides, you of all people should be certain of my skills."

He growled in frustration, determined to ascertain if she actually did know what she was doing. "What methods will you be using?"

"The blood will have impurities removed, and then a preservative added to prevent coagulation after bottling, and finally be sealed in crystal vials. It seems to have the longest shelf life with that preparation, while being the most versatile and closest to a natural state. The placenta itself will be dried with a steady stream of warm air and sewn into cotton casing. Satisfied?" She went back to her work, cutting the slippery, silver pieces so the blood could drip into a glass beaker. With that task completed, she began mixing the ingredients for the preservative potion.

"It was amazing, seeing the foal come into the world," Callista mumbled absently as she combined ingredients.

He sneered at her foolish, feminine sentimentality. "Very fortunate for you to stumble upon such a rare ingredient, Miss Hawkins."

"Isn't it though, Severus?" she said. Callista paused before looking up at him with narrowed, angry eyes. "You needn't hover. It's been a while, but I'm confident I can handle the preparations without your assistance. I would hate for it to be made unusable. Blood must be handled carefully, you know."

He gave her a confused look before it dawned on him what she was talking about.

*Severus awoke in a daze as someone gently shook his shoulder. Opening his eyes, he looked into the face of Callista Hawkins. She was in his bed, wearing his shirt. The events of the previous night came flooding back. "What time is it?"*

"A little before five. I need to return to the dorm before I'm missed." She was lightly stroking his arm. "Sorry, I fell asleep."

"Not your fault," he said with a yawn. "You were tired from your exams and the Relaxing Draught must have affected you more strongly than it normally would have."

She blushed and hesitated before continuing, "I noticed you... um, cleaned things up. I wished I could have helped you prepare it."

"I wish you had, too," he said, pressing his hands against his eyes.

Another pause. "Well, where is it?"

He didn't look at her. "Something went wrong in the preparation, and it coagulated. It's ruined."

Her hand flew to her mouth in disbelief. "Oh, no."

"I'm sorry," he whispered, as he took her in his arms.

Severus shook his head in irritation. If she had only known... Looking up, his eyes met hers, and for the briefest of moments, he thought she would actually ask for his assistance. Her expression suddenly hardened before she turned back to her work.

After studying the page for further instructions, she began squeezing the slimy pieces of organ, coaxing the blood from them. Severus watched tensely as drop by drop she added the correct amount of preservative, all the while painfully aware of the clock ticking in the back of the silent classroom, each second making the difference between viable and useless product. Finally the blood had just enough preservative added, and he nearly shouted at her when she went to add one more drop. As it became apparent the blood was still viable, her excited smile expressed a sense of confidence and accomplishment. As the finished product was deposited and sealed in a multitude of tiny vials, he caught himself on the verge of congratulating her. Unfortunately, towards the end of the process, the blood began to solidify from exposure to the air. He frowned, realizing that had she allowed him to work with her, the entire batch could have been bottled.

Callista blew out a frustrated breath and mumbled, "Most of it is usable anyway."

*Most of it!* A former student of her caliber should have been able to bottle all of it before it turned. Aggravated by her lowered standard of success, he scathingly remarked, "If you had bottled the finished product more efficiently, you would have been able to salvage all of it,"

"If *you* had offered to lend a hand instead of hovering, the process could have been completed more efficiently," she returned testily, vanishing the unusable leftovers with an irritated wave of her wand.

He glared at her. "I was under the impression that you didn't want my assistance."

"Well," Callista began, lifting her chin defiantly, "it certainly wouldn't have killed you to offer, would it?"

"Nor would it have harmed you to ask for assistance," he pointed out critically, not wanting her to get in the last word. Callista made no reply, and he felt his lips twitch into a triumphantly sneering smile as she sent the soiled utensils zooming over to the utility basin at the back of the classroom and set them to washing with a spell. Taking more time and care than was necessary in placing the vials in a box, Callista ignored him. With a sharp snap of the box latch, she secured her treasure and turned her attention to the placenta. After hanging each piece on the wooden rack, she twirled her wand, creating a steady stream of warm, dry air.

Callista checked her watch and said, "It take several hours to dry, so I'll be back sometime in the evening to finish up. Hopefully I won't disturb you."

"See that you don't," he snapped as she closed the door behind her. Stalking to the front of the classroom, he swooped to his desk and read down through the list of tasks he needed to complete before the start of term. Unfortunately, he found the only things left to do were to clean out the storage cupboard and restock it with new ingredients.

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"I really need to have a separate work space," Callista grumbled as she climbed the main staircase. "Trying to work with Severus standing over me like I'm some kind of incompetent firstie is intolerable. Of course, if I somehow had managed to totally screw up the preparation of the unicorn blood, I just know I would've never heard the end of it. I suppose I could put a Permanent Silencing Charm on him; that might be appreciated by nearly anyone who has to deal with him. Obnoxious, arrogant bastard."

She continued muttering increasingly rude comments about the Potions master until she reached the sanctuary of her rooms. Once the door was closed, Callista leaned against it, pressing her hands to her face to keep from screaming in frustrated anger. Hoping a long hot shower--or even better, a bath--would rid her of both the mud from her morning adventure and her annoyance with the Potions master, she selected a very old book on healing potions from her shelf and headed to the bathroom.

After her thoughts were more under control, she would request to see the headmaster about a private, Severus-free workroom -- preferably in a warmer part of the castle. Experimenting with existing potions was something she hadn't done for a very long time. However, she had a few ideas for ways to use the unicorn blood, and all of them were best done away from Severus and his sneer.

# Shadows of Doubt

Chapter 8 of 12

Callista learns the fate of an old friend.

Disclaimer: I don't own the Potter character, but playing with them is always a treat.

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## Chapter 7: Shadows of Doubt

Severus stood up and stretched as he returned the last container to the cupboard. With a sneer, he levitated the carton filled with outdated ingredients to the door. He decided to spend the remainder of the afternoon devising lessons for the N.E.W.T. classes. The biggest challenge he faced, other than the number of dunderheads who would be taking each class, was teaching new material with minimal backtracking.

Quirrell had been a decent instructor with the Dark Lord constantly whispering in his ear. Lockhart... Lockhart had been a complete joke, hardly more than a glamorous version of Umbridge. Grudgingly he had to admit Lupin had managed to cover most of the basics and the number of students passing O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. levels that year had been respectable. The up-coming N.E.W.T. class had already seen the three Unforgivable Curses thanks to the impostor Moody two years ago, but Severus would no doubt need to demonstrate them again. Potter and Weasley were in the class; possibly his aim could be off just a little? No, it was unlikely anyone from the Ministry believed it to be an accident. Last year had been an utter waste of instructional time. He certainly had his work cut out for him.

"Professor Snape, sir?" whispered the squeaky voice of a house elf. "Winky is having a message for you from Headmaster Dumbledore."

Dismissing the house-elf with a curt nod, Severus took the parchment.

*Severus,*

*Below is the course outline for N.E.W.T. level Defense Against the Dark Arts mostly as we discussed it. Please meet me in my office at four this afternoon. There is something further we need to discuss.*

*Albus Dumbledore*

"Hopefully it involves the sacking of Miss Hawkins or the expulsion of Harry Potter," he grumbled sourly, glancing at the clock. He'd find out in a little less than an hour. Until then, there were Dark Arts lessons to plan.

Reading the bottom of the letter, Severus saw that Dumbledore had given him a list of points that they had agreed needed to be covered and had given him leave to teach the class as he saw fit, which included permission to teach practical defense. The thought of using Potter as a guinea pig during class and allowing the boy to humiliate himself in front of his peers was indeed very enticing. However, it would only be done if, or more likely when, the whelp was in need of a set-down. The day ickle James Jr. openly displayed his arrogance, was the day Severus would show the boy how much he still had to learn.

Severus's lips twisted into something that almost passed for a smile. "And I'll greatly enjoy it."

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Refreshed after a bath and a brief nap, Callista sat at her desk, filing the last of the notes Severus had sent up. Since she felt very comfortable with the basics of Potions instruction, she sincerely doubted that she would be needing any of it, but she organized the stack of papers anyway, intending to return them to Severus at the end of the school year in a significantly more presentable fashion than she had received them.

Scanning the shelves for a book on Dark creatures, she began to prepare her Dark Arts lessons according to the outline Dumbledore had given her. Callista diligently refreshed her memory about kappas and hinkypunks until she felt she could discuss them in her sleep.

A tug at her sleeve startled her. "Please be excusing old Diddy, Professor Hawkins, miss, but a package is arriving."

"Thank you. Take it to my quarters, please," Callista said, following the house-elf through the door.

Diddy placed the large parcel on the bed--her order from Twillfit and Tattings--and vanished from the room. Thankful for the distraction, Callista tore open the paper and lifted out the robes and other 'appropriate' attire out of the capacious depths of the box. The two academic robes for teaching and her everyday attire were hung in the wardrobe without ceremony. Even though they were well made and, all things being relative, attractive for wizarding fashion, she wasn't looking forward to wearing robes full-time. At least she had been able to convince her mother it was unnecessary to purchase undergarments or sleep wear. Those were the few Muggle luxuries she was determined to keep.

Next came the two things on which she had splurged: her dress robes in a rich, iridescent, apple-green silk and a matching pair of high-heeled boots. In the Muggle world, the cut would have been considered exotic, but it was very becoming and much more appealing than the evening gowns Lucas had always suggested. She held the shimmering folds to her cheek. Temptation got the better of her, and Callista quickly pulled the garment over her head, and slipped on the shoes. She turned to the mirror smiling.

*"You look lovely, my dear," her mother said, as eighteen-year-old Callista smoothed the front of her new, pale green dress robes. The day after she had come home from*

Hogwarts, she had received a letter of acceptance from St. Mungo's to join their Healer trainee program. Her parents had decided to celebrate her appointment in style. The new robes and party were exciting, but best part was that Severus would be coming. She hadn't seen him for two weeks and was eager to feel his touch again, even if it was only during the course of a dance.

"Thank you," Callista said, kissing her mother on the cheek. She turned to her father. "Thank you for everything."

"You're welcome, Lissie," said her father, taking her hand and tucking it into the crook of his arm. "Just so you're aware, the Crouches are here, and young Barty is anxious to see you. They are a fine, upstanding family, and young Barty is doing quite well at the Ministry. Please make certain you pay him an **appropriate** amount of attention."

Remembering how odd her friend had become since he had finished at Hogwarts, she cringed at the thought of spending any more than a few moments with Barty and hoped a passing hello would suffice. Nodding like the dutiful daughter she was expected to be, Callista said, "If he wishes to speak with me, I'll be happy to entertain him, sir."

Her parents smiled.

"Oh, has Professor Snape arrived?" she asked, trying to sound casual. However, the look on her father's face suggested it would have been better to invite homeless Muggles.

Mrs. Hawkins quickly answered, "Not yet, but neither has Headmaster Dumbledore or Professor McGonagall."

"I don't see why you invited that scruffy-looking half-blood," her father growled.

Callista swallowed hard, quickly scrambling for something to say. "I have invited all of my other professors; it would have been rude to exclude him."

"I'm sure Professor Snape did his best and you learned a lot from him, Lissie. When he makes an appearance, I will speak to him," said her mother, trying to smooth over the situation and giving her husband a pleading look. "Shall we welcome our guests?"

Out in the main room, the Hawkins family circulated, greeting friends and family members warmly. Callista was left to speak with Barty Crouch Jr. She found his company a little disconcerting; he was nervous and kept rubbing his left arm, as if plagued by some kind of irritating rash. Within a few minutes, she was desperate for a polite means of escape. He was boring her with the latest news from his department when she felt a slight tug on her sleeve.

"Please be excusing Blinky, Miss Callista," whispered a house-elf. "Sirius Black is wanting to see miss in the garden."

Callista started when she realized the sensation was real and not part of her memory. At her side was a house-elf, dressed in a little girl's sailor dress and hat. The creature was holding a small scroll. "Winky is having a note for Professor Hawkins from the headmaster."

Winky? Why was that name familiar? Callista took the note, saying, "Aren't you the Crouch house-elf?"

"Winky was the Crouches' elf, but Winky failed to be keeping Master's secrets and was dismissed in shame!" Tears filled the tennis-ball sized eyes, and the house-elf dropped to the floor in a heap of uncontrolled sobs, leaving Callista to stand in shocked silence. She remembered Winky from the few times she had gone with her parents to visit the Crouches. The elf had been a fixture in Barty's playroom, keeping the pair supplied with sweets and biscuits and entertaining them.

In a gently commanding voice, Callista ordered, "Winky, you are to stop crying and tell me how exactly you ended up at Hogwarts."

Sniffing and blubbing, Winky poured out the story of Barty Crouch Jr.'s fall from grace, incarceration, fake death, and his years as his father's prisoner. Callista listened in horror as the elf wailed out that the young man's last moments had ended with the Dementor's Kiss. Callista was numb. The Barty Crouch she had grown up with, who had taught her how to ride a broom, and whom her parents had hopes of her marrying was nothing more than a soulless shell, existing in pointless oblivion until mercifully claimed by death. Had he gone down fighting for either side, she could have dealt with it better, but the thought of him sitting vacant-eyed in an Azkaban cell made her ill. No one deserved such a punishment.

"Winky is only wishing that Professor Snape has been trying to stop the Dementors!" wailed Winky pulling in her long ears. "My poor, poor young Master Barty!"

Desperately attempting to pull herself together, Callista demanded, "How exactly was Professor Snape involved?"

"Winky is not fully remembering, Miss. Professor Snape was being told to stand watch on my Master Barty by Professor Dumbledore, and--and Master Barty was saying about Professor Snape's secrets. Professor Snape made Master Barty all quiet with a red spell. When Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge was arriving, Professor Snape told Minister of Magic Fudge that Master Barty was a bad, dangerous boy. Then the Dementors was coming, and Winky was being all cold and remembering her Mr. Crouch giving her clothes, and... and...." Winky crumpled to the floor in a howling, miserable heap.

Had Severus deliberately convinced Fudge to have Barty Kissed? Why would he do that if he knew how much Barty's testimony would change things? Or was it because of what Barty's information could change? Callista buried her face in her hands. Should she confront Severus? No, he would only make some snide comment about her not knowing the situation in its entirety, or worse... he would avoid answering her questions. No matter what the situation, Callista felt it was immoral and unforgivable to sacrifice a person's soul to cover one's own ass. Besides, she had no desire to listen to Severus Snape's self-serving justifications or evasions. Only one other person could provide her with answers, and Callista had no problems confronting him.

Ignoring the sobbing house-elf and tossing the dress robe onto the bed, Callista quickly changed. Turning to Winky, Callista said, "I would greatly appreciate if you would finish unpacking my parcels. When you feel up to it, that is."

Winky looked up at her with a watery smile. "It would be Winky's pleasure to be serving a person from a noble family once again."

*Noble?* Callista smiled at the remark in spite of her growing anger as she pushed open the portrait door leading from her rooms to the hallway. If being a from a pure-blooded family made one noble in a house-elf's eyes, who was she to argue with that logic.

The empty corridors echoed her footsteps as she stormed towards the headmaster's office. A list of things she wanted to immediately confront him with forming in her mind. The gargoyle gave her a cheeky greeting.

"Well, well, well, if it isn't our newly appointed schoolmistress. Here to see the headmaster, are you? Hope he gave you the password or you're stuck here until Professor Snape arrives,"

Only if hell has frozen over, thought Callista, knowing full well Severus would probably make sure the doorway sealed itself in her face just for a cheap laugh. "Fizzling Whizbees."

"Always a favorite," the gargoyle said, sliding aside to reveal the tightly spiraling staircase.

Callista trotted up the stairs so quickly that she was a bit queasy before she was half way up. Taking a moment to lean against the wall and compose herself, Callista decided that barging into the headmaster's office and demanding information on what Winky had told her was not the best way to handle the situation. One thing was certain, Dumbledore probably wouldn't readily or completely answer her question about Severus' involvement in what happened to Barty; she would be better off trying to catch him off guard--if it was possible--and derive an answer from his reaction. She slowly climbed the remaining stairs, rehearsing possible ways to air her grievances



before springing the question she wanted, no, *needed* to have answered.

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A/N: Sorry for the long wait between posts, real life keeps sucking up my writing time like a Hoover vacuum cleaner. Someone please send a Time Turner and/or a house-elf. Carrots for the plot bunnies would also be appreciated.

## A Change in Plans

Chapter 9 of 12

Dumbledore changes the course of Harry's extracurricular education.

Disclaimer: Do I own HP? Nope. Am I making any money from posting this? Nope. Do I still enjoy writing fanfic? Yes.

A/N: Did you know this story is in the Top 25 Fics based on rating? Thanks to all of those reviewers who helped. As always, reviews are desired but not required.

Chapter 8: A Change in Plans

A few minutes before four o'clock, Severus was climbing the staircase to the headmaster's office when he heard the rise and fall of voices. Upon being admitted, he was mildly surprised to see Callista standing there, hanging her head contritely, face reddened with embarrassment. There had been only one other time he had seen her so chastised.

*Callista stormed into the castle slightly ahead of the young Potions professor. She was furious that he had the gall to deduct points from Gryffindor. Since the beginning of the term two weeks ago, she had expressed how much she was beginning to like him, in spite of his grubby appearance and unpleasant demeanor. Miss Hawkins made it very clear that she admired his brilliant mind in the Potions lab and appreciated his helpfulness when she did research. Right now, however, she was fuming over the fact that he had just pulled rank on her. Severus could sense that she was working up the nerve to explode at him when they were met in the Entrance Hall by the headmaster.*

*"Professor Snape, Miss Hawkins, what is the meaning of this?" His eyes were devoid of their usual twinkle.*

*Callista opened her mouth to say her piece, but Severus cut her off. "Headmaster, I was patrolling the grounds when I found her down by the lake, sitting out in the open."*

*"Is this true, Miss Hawkins?" he asked; his strict gaze seemed to quell her temper.*

*"Yes, sir," she whispered, a perfect picture of contrition.*

*"What were you thinking, dear girl? You know it isn't safe for anyone to be out alone on the grounds. As Head Girl, I would think you'd have more sense."*

*"I couldn't sleep. I went out for a bit of fresh air," she explained quietly.*

*"How did you get out without Mr. Filch or Mrs. Norris noticing you?" the headmaster demanded.*

*"I waited until Mr. Filch passed and, well, I slipped Mrs. Norris a bit of chicken." She looked up at them through her lashes.*

*"You bribed his cat!" Snape was shocked. Yes, that was the kind of thing James Potter would have done.*

*She looked at him and lifted her chin in defiance, "I didn't bribe her; I fed her."*

*"Miss Hawkins, please go straight to your dormitory. I'll speak with you later," the headmaster said, with a tone of finality.*

*"Yes, sir," she said, lowering her head. Callista had only gone a few paces when she turned and asked in a sweetly innocent voice, "What about my detention, Professor Snape?"*

*Before Severus could answer her, Dumbledore replied, "That will be discussed when I speak with you later. You are dismissed, Miss Hawkins."*

*Once she was out of earshot, Severus asked, "Why did you override my authority, sir?"*

*"Severus, do you know who her father is? No? He is a ministry official heading a special group of Aurors in the capture of dark wizards. Even though I would, of course, vouch for you, I don't think it is wise for you to be seen alone with her, and that includes periods of detention. Things such as that could be misconstrued. She will serve her detention with either Professor Blackburn or Professor McGonagall." He surveyed the young man intently.*

*Indignant, Severus felt his face redden. "So what you're saying is I have no real authority over the students."*

*"Of course you have the same authority as any other teacher." Upon seeing the cynical look on the young face, Dumbledore explained, "I know it must be difficult for you, Severus. Many of the students are only a few years younger than you are; however, you are now a professor here and any social contact would be entirely inappropriate."*

*Social contact? Callista Hawkins was a student and an assignment, nothing more. He had no intentions of taking things any farther than absolutely necessary. Weaseling information out of the girl was one thing, Dumbledore could explain everything away after the Dark Lord was defeated. But Severus knew taking advantage of her could land him at the business end of her father's wand, or worse, Bianca's.*

Dumbledore was speaking to him. "Severus, I see you are right on time. As I mentioned in my note, there has been a slight change of plans. I have decided that you will no longer be teaching Occlumency to Harry." A slight smile tugged at Snape's lips. "Callista will instruct him from now on."

"Are you sure Miss Hawkins can manage the task?" he asked flatly, making it a point to sound as if she wasn't in the room.

Callista frowned angrily, no doubt ready with a stinging retort, but Dumbledore answered in his usual soothing tone. "I'm sure she is more than capable, after all Professor

Hawkins learned from you. Don't look so shocked, Severus, I am well aware that you taught her when... it was necessary. While she is not as skilled as you are, I'm sure she will be able to manage."

Snape smirked. "Will I have anything to do with Potter outside of the classroom setting?"

"Yes," replied Dumbledore softly, "you will be teaching him some of the Dark spells that he is likely to encounter and instructing him on the best means of defending himself."

"I still don't see how this is a good idea at all," Callista said, fighting to keep her voice controlled. "From what you told me, Professor Snape failed to teach Harry Occlumency because he was incapable of controlling his temper with the boy. Yet you feel it would be better for him to be left alone with Harry, completely unsupervised, teaching him--"

Snape whirled on her. "I see you've been drawn into Potter's little fanclub. Perhaps in time you will see him for the insolent brat he is. As for teaching him the Dark Arts, there isn't anyone else."

"Callista, I'm sure that James and Lily would want Harry to be able to defend himself, no matter what," Dumbledore said reassuringly. "Severus, I am trusting you with his safety. Don't let us down."

With a curt nod, Severus swept from the room without waiting for Dumbledore to dismiss him.

As Severus stormed down the second floor hallway, he became aware that the ghost of Sir Nicholas was floating placidly behind him. He couldn't stand the Gryffindor specter, with his unwanted chatter and prying ways. Had Severus known a decent ghost-repelling spell, Sir Nicholas would have been on the receiving end of it.

"Dear me, Severus, where are you off to?"

"I have many important things to do, Sir Nicholas," he snarled without pausing.

"What could possibly be more important than what you have left behind?"

Snape continued on. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Surely, you must be overjoyed to have the lovely Miss Hawkins back. She was more than just a student to you."

Severus stopped dead in his tracks. "What are you insinuating?"

"Nothing that isn't common knowledge among the ghosts. You didn't really think that the Bloody Baron was beyond a bit of gossip, now did you?" The ghost went on with a laugh. "Miss Hawkins was so very infatuated with the young, brilliant Professor Snape, and it was obvious that you were rather taken with her genius and beauty. We may be dead, Severus, but we still remember what love looks like!"

"That is all in the past. She detests me now, and I have long since gotten over my feelings for her. Now excuse me, I have a lot of work to do." Snape started toward the staircase, lost in thought.

*A small knot of seventh year students were in the courtyard discussing their future plans. Severus, who was stuck doing yard duty, a very unpleasant part of his teaching responsibilities, listened to them.*

*"I'm hoping that I'll get high enough marks to get into the Auror training program," said Allen Buxley, the Quidditch captain for Gryffindor. "If not, I hope to get an offer from Pride of Port tree."*

*"I sent my application to Gringott's last week. I can start by working over the breaks just to see if I like it." Dana Lions turned to Callista with a smile. "I suppose you'll get in the Auror program. That's what your father's hoping for anyway. Isn't he, Callista?"*

*"What he wants and what I want are two different things. I prefer Healing to Dark Wizard hunting." Callista shook her head.*

*"of Dark Wizards," Cera said, casting a glance at the young Potions master. "' reputation isn' exactly fine and upstanding."*

*"A Death Eater suspect, I'm sure." Buxley's handsome face darkened. He put his hand on the small of Callista's back.*

*"I suppose so," admitted Callista reluctantly, "is forever asking me questions about him. What does he do? Is he teaching us any Dark potions? I'm tired of trying to explain to him that Professor Blackburn still teaches our class, and Professor Snape is rarely there. All I've ever seen him do is mark papers for the lower years."*

*Dana shrugged. "But he **was** in Slytherin. My brother remembers him; up to his eyeballs in the Dark Arts, Snape was."*

*"Just because he was in Slytherin doesn't mean he has the Dark Mark," argued Callista. "Besides, Uncle wouldn't have offered him a post if he wasn't sure about his loyalties."*

*"Well, I think he's horrid, sneaking about the castle grounds, giving the Head Girl a detention and constantly looking like he just got out of bed. He should at least take the time to properly groom himself," Dana's roommate Cera commented.*

*"So that's who gave you the detention!" Allen growled, pulling Callista to him. "You should be more careful, Callista. It probably wouldn't be safe to be alone with him. Mum works at St. Mungo's; she's seen what Death Eaters can do to women."*

*"He wouldn't hurt me. I've spoken with him while I worked with Professor Blackburn. Professor Snape was ever so polite, and he helped me research a few of the more difficult assignments. I rather enjoyed his company. I thought he was, well, nice," she finished lamely.*

*Severus could hardly believe what he had heard. Not only was she defending him to her friends, but she dared to tell them she thought he was nice. He couldn't remember the last time someone had said anything good about him. WHACK! A sharp pain exploded above his right eye. He looked around to see a terrified, red-haired boy staring at him, too terrified to move. "William Weasley!"*

*"Oh, Professor Snape, are you all right?" Callista called, hurrying over to him. "He didn't do it on purpose, sir. They were playing a game, and he missed. You're cut. Please, let me take care of that."*

*Callista gently dabbed at the cut with a clean handkerchief. She carefully touched the injury with the tip of her wand; he felt the skin slowly knit back together. She smiled at him. "I'm not very skilled yet so it may bruise, but that should fade in a day or two."*

*Her smile warmed his heart in a way he didn't even know was possible.*

Severus wrenched open the door to his office and slammed it behind him. How could things between the two of them have gone so utterly wrong? Pressing his slim hands

to his face, he took a few deep breaths. *It doesn't matter. What's done is done, and perhaps it's for the best.*

---

Callista turned to the headmaster. "I can't believe you're going to allow this! Why don't you just teach Harry yourself?"

"There are other lessons I must teach him," Dumbledore answered. "Severus knows better than anyone else what Harry could face."

The witch frowned in annoyance. "And the Occlumency lessons with me won't really exist?"

"Of course they will," the headmaster said, as he took a seat behind the massive desk and invited Callista to take the chair opposite. "You will instruct Harry to sufficiently protect his mind."

"But according to you," Callista began, her forehead wrinkling in confusion, "He-Who-- V-Voldemort can't bear the connection between them. If he can no longer invade Harry's mind, then what's the point of continuing with Occlumency?"

"Surely you do realize that there are others among his followers that may try to gain access to Harry's thoughts. According to Severus, Riddle hasn't been eager to share his failure with any of them," replied Dumbledore. "However, there may come a time when Harry may find it necessary to connect his mind to Riddle's, and I want him to be able to do so without detection."

"Long-distance Legilimency?" Her eyes widened in surprise, and Callista felt utterly overwhelmed. "That's completely beyond my skills! The best I can do is teach Harry to detect when his mind is about to be infiltrated and block an attack. With practice on my part, I may be able to show him the basics of decoy images. Perhaps Severus--"

"Severus is a proficient Occlumens, the most practiced one I have ever encountered, but his skills in Legilimency are barely more than rudimentary. He can detect if someone is lying; however, that may have more to do with his experience in the classroom than anything else."

"But, sir--"

Dumbledore raised a wrinkled hand. "Callista, I'm of the opinion that you are capable of such a skill." He smiled at the dubious look she gave him and went on. "I spoke with your mother after Jarvis Pike informed me you would be willing to interview for a teaching position. She told me that for the last few days she had been experiencing some very vivid dreams about you. In one of them, she described you sitting next to a fountain, staring at a large brick building with white pillars, and a clock tower. Your mother was not exactly surprised by the news that you were alive and well and would soon be returning home."

Callista rubbed at her temples. Shortly after speaking to Jarvis, she had been so agitated that she taken a long walk around the campus and had stopped at her favorite spot, the fountain in front of the Main. Her thoughts had been so focused on her family that it could have been possible that her mother had felt something. Even if she had, the connection likely had more to do with a maternal bond than any special ability of her own. No matter how it had been accomplished--provided it wasn't just a coincidence--it wasn't a conscious act. The chances of Callista being able to do it again were minimal at best, and the possibility of her being able to actually instruct anyone else were laughably slim.

"I'll do my best," Callista promised with forced enthusiasm.

"I ask nothing more," he said kindly. "There is one more thing I do need from you concerning the instruction of another student."

"Oh?" She was instantly wary.

"I would like you to work with Neville Longbottom," Dumbledore replied in a matter-of-fact tone. "He would like to continue with Potions but will not be able to take the N.E.W.T. classes."

"But I thought Severus was going to allow students--"

The headmaster broke in with an explanation. "Mr. Longbottom is, according to Severus, 'too dangerous to be allowed in the classroom.' He also only achieved the mark of Acceptable on his O.W.L., which was more of an allowance than Severus was willing to give."

Callista barely restrained herself from rolling her eyes. "So I'm going to be stuck with him."

"You indicated a need for a personal workspace so you could experiment with Healing potions." The old man was smiling at her in the most irritating way. She was cornered and they both knew it. "Surely an assistant would be helpful?"

"Yes," Callista said, suddenly wondering if Severus had made the suggestion in hopes that both she and this Longbottom person would end up a slimy puddle on the floor. "But not one that could land me in St. Mungo's! A potions lab where there are experimental brews involved is no place for incompetence. I don't want to be responsible for any disasters he could create."

"A valid concern, Callista. However, I believe Mr. Longbottom would benefit from tutoring with someone who is patient enough to instruct him in the basics of Potions." The headmaster continued to smile pleasantly at her desperate look. "He has a keen interest in Herbology, and I'm sure he would find accounts of your university work and travels fascinating."

"I don't suppose I have much of a choice in the matter, do I?"

"Of course you do, but I would be much in your debt if you undertook this task."

Her shoulders slumped in resignation. "As you wish, Headmaster. But if his incompetence impedes my progress, I want to have the right to dismiss him."

Dumbledore gave her a twinkling smile that bordered on patronizing. "That sounds quite reasonable. If you have no further questions, you are dismissed to continue with your preparations."

Callista nodded and turned to go. She paused at the door and turned to the headmaster and asked, "That other matter ~~was~~*discussed*, the one concerning Severus and Barty Jr.--"

"I have told you what I know," replied Dumbledore repressively. "All of it was made a matter of public record over the summer, Callista. Anything more, you will need to ask Severus, but I'm sure you've deduced that he is unlikely to answer your questions."

"I understand, sir." Callista pushed the door open and made her way down the staircase. More likely than not, Severus indeed had been responsible for Barty's fate. No matter what Barty had become, Callista didn't think she could forgive Severus for having someone Kissed.

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A/N: One of my pet theories post GoF, was that Severus Snape had played a part in Fudge's decision to have Barty Kissed instead of just incarcerated. True, Fudge could have been covering his own backside, but Severus also had secrets that only Barty would know, secrets that could have caused difficulties had they made it back to Voldemort's... um, ears. Here's hoping this latest hasn't made me unpopular to the point that my handful of readers ditch me.

# A Battle of Wills Begins

Chapter 10 of 12

Back-to-school staff meeting and a power play--always a winning combination!

A/N: Thanks to all who have read! Thanks to all who have read and left reviews! Thanks to my muse for putting the cap back on the booze and actually doing her job. Most importantly, thanks to Verity and Trickie Woo for proof-reading this.

**Question:** Who's the biggest ditz on the planet?

**Answer:** Me! I thought I had posted the chapter before leaving for vacation. The lack of reviews mystery has been solved. \*blush\*

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## Chapter 9: A Battle of Wills Begins

Callista sat at the table in the staff room, doing her best to ignore the fact that she was seated across from Severus. The students would be arriving the following evening, and the staff had gathered to be briefed on the changes that would be taking place that year. Most of the staff had known Callista as a student and had remembered her sudden disappearance shortly after the first fall of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Even with her return being leaked through the newspaper, they still gave her not-so-subtle stares.

To avoid their scrutiny, Callista listened attentively as Dumbledore outlined the newest security measures for the school, which included a small detail of Aurors, and cringed at the notion of Filch being free to use a Secrecy Sensor as he saw fit. For the most part, the measures were commonsense and well-received by the staff: strict enforcement of curfews, additional wards on the Astronomy Tower especially during night-time classes, and limiting the range of the Snitch during Quidditch games. However, disconnecting access to the external Floo Network to all staff offices, excluding the offices of the headmaster and the heads of house, caused uproar among the staff.

"I understand *why* you feel it's necessary, Headmaster, but it's a huge inconvenience to members of the staff who don't live at the school," protested Charity Burbage, the Muggle Studies mistress.

Aurora Sinistra agreed. "I only live in Hogsmeade, but some of my classes don't finish until midnight or later. Isn't it more than a little unfair to make someone wait up just so I can go home?"

"The heads of house finish their final patrols of the evening after your late classes are dismissed to make sure all students have returned to their common rooms," Dumbledore reminded her. "It's no trouble for them to escort you to an open connection. I believe most week nights Severus has the final patrol."

Sinistra glanced at Severus, turned pink, and mumbled, "Oh... Well, I suppose.... There's always Apparition from the gate."

"I could wait for you sometimes, Aurora," Burbage chimed quickly, and it was clear to Callista--and anyone else who may have been paying attention--that Burbage was making a concerted effort not to look at the Potions master.

"While Apparating from home to the gates isn't an enormous inconvenience during the day or when the weather is decent," wheezed the elderly Runes mistress, "it's going to be horrible on rainy days and during the winter. I don't much like barging in on anyone in the early morning hours, but making a dash through the pouring rain is impossible at my age."

"Perhaps it would be better to have only one way in or out via the Floo Network. Why not just leave the staff room Floo open and have it guarded?" Vector suggested, her eyes briefly flitting in Severus's direction. "After all, we can't be too careful."

Callista noticed the faint color rising in his cheeks at Vector's comment. Had he not been such an utter arse to her, she might have been able to scrape together some sympathy.

Since the issue with the Floo didn't pertain to her, Callista turned her attention to the list of Aurors, selected by Kingsley Shacklebolt and approved by Dumbledore, who would be on the premises at all times. Glancing down the short list of names, she was pleased to see Nymphadora Tonks' among them. Dawlish and Warwick were other names she recognized. The other four were unfamiliar. Not that it mattered much, as the staff had been assured that the Aurors had been instructed not to interfere unless absolutely necessary. She was vaguely aware of the scraping of chairs around the table, signaling that the meeting had broken up for a short break.

"Pardon me for interrupting you reverie, Miss Hawkins," a silky voice sneered, bringing her abruptly back to full attention. "However, I need to have a word with you concerning our... arrangement."

Looking up from the parchment, Callista was confronted with the unpleasant visage of the staff member with whom she was going to be sharing classrooms. She narrowed her eyes. "I would greatly appreciate it if you would address me by either my given name or Professor Hawkins."

"My apologies, old habits die hard," he replied coolly, the trace of expression on his face conveying that he was anything but apologetic about incorrectly addressing her.

*That isn't the only old thing that will die hard if you don't soon get it straight.* With forced politeness, she answered, "As much as I would love to chat with you, Severus, there are a few pressing matters I need to discuss with Professor McGonagall. Is it a matter of life and death, or is it something that can wait until the noon break?"

"Hardly a matter of life and death, but it must be addressed before the end of the day," the Potions master replied in a very business-like tone, his expression unreadable.

With the hope of figuring out what he was going to spring on her, Callista studied the harsh lines on his face, noting that the last fifteen years hadn't been exactly kind to him. The frown lines around his mouth that had been just starting to form when they were together were now prominent, and the furrow between his brows was deep and permanent. There was a pinched, worn look about him. Not that Severus had ever been a handsome man, but now he looked... old, far older than he should. Callista found herself wondering what he had been through.

*But why should I care?* she thought, working up a small yet galvanizing measure of indignation. *He lied to me and used me; he's earned whatever guilt he feels.*

"Excuse me, Severus," said Callista before heading over to McGonagall.

"There you are, Callista." Gryffindor's Head of House was sorting a large stack of parchments. "I wanted to let you know that I've arranged for Harry to meet with you shortly after the welcome feast."

"Oh, good," the younger witch replied. She was eager to see the young man who had grown from the baby in her memories, in spite of her reservations as to his ability to

work with her in the classroom. "He understands that he's just helping with spell demonstration and not actually teaching the class without any supervision?"

McGonagall nodded. "I did my best to make that clear when I spoke with him. Harry understood that he's not considered the equivalent of a prefect and that he can't deduct points outside the classroom."

Callista frowned; she hadn't planned on her young charge having that much power in the classroom.

"I'd be more comfortable with him not being able to deduct points at all. If I recall correctly, prefects would sometimes abuse that privilege," she explained recalling a Ravenclaw prefect who docked Gryffindor ten points simply because Callista stumbled upon him snogging his girlfriend behind the stacks in the library.

"Callista, it's your class and Harry is under your direct supervision; I'll leave it to your discretion." McGonagall vanished one of the piles of parchment with a wave of her wand. "Might I make a suggestion on the matter?"

"Certainly, Professor."

"Offer the ability to bestow points, one or two at a time, first. Once Harry has granted *each* House twenty points, then offer him the ability to deduct points at the same rate." A sly smile twitched at the older woman's thin lips. "Just remember to add the stipulation that he can't deduct more points than he grants."

Callista snorted. "Won't he figure it out?"

"My dear, Harry may be reasonably intelligent and magically capable, but he's far from a genius. Even if he does catch on, you can tell him it's on a trial basis until he proves himself trustworthy of the responsibility."

"Speaking of responsibilities, I hope Harry's work in the classroom won't interfere with his own course work."

"It almost sounds like you've changed your mind on working with him Callista," the older woman replied. "If he runs into any problems, you could offer to help him as your time permits. Now doubt at some point he may need your assistance."

"Oh?"

"I've decided to promote Harry to Quidditch captain this year."

McGonagall's rare smile widened as she began to fill Callista in on Harry's Quidditch record. Callista listened, duly impressed by some of the better, if unorthodox, catches. If he was half as good in the classroom as he was on the pitch, the year would go better than she had anticipated.

*As long as he doesn't argue with me at every opportunity.*

---

As the staff was dismissed at the noon break, Severus saw that Callista was the first one out the door. Had she conveniently forgotten he had something to discuss with her? He exited the staff room and saw her hurrying along the corridor.

After a few long strides, Severus caught up with her. "Miss... I mean, Professor Hawkins, after spending most of yesterday organizing the Potions classroom to accommodate our classes, I've determined you will not be able to make use of the main storage cupboard in the classroom."

"Why on earth not?" she asked, stopping short.

"I have ordered several expensive and rare ingredients that I would rather the younger years not have access to."

"Wouldn't it make more sense to just have another cupboard brought in?" asked Callista, offering an obvious solution.

In the exaggerated, patient tone that one would use while speaking to a very young and very over-wrought child, Severus explained, "Normally that would work. However, since I was coerced into more than doubling my sixth-year N.E.W.T. class, I needed additional equipment to outfit the class. There simply won't be enough room."

"Severus, you're being unreasonable! I'm sure if we worked together we could find a way to make everything fit." Her angry tone now had a touch of desperation to it. "Why not just use Shrinking Charms on the extra, unused equipment and store it?"

"And when the charm wears off, have the items suddenly become normal-sized and burst out of storage and become damaged? I think not."

"Surely if you did the charm **properly**, it wouldn't be a problem," Callista said through clenched teeth.

"Even when the charm is done correctly, the effect is only temporary. Have you forgotten the very basics of magic?" He shook his head in mock regret. "I'm sorry, but I had everything so well organized before I knew I would be sharing the classroom or having so many additional students at the N.E.W.T. level."

"But--"

"I need more space. Besides, it's my classroom." He added insult to injury with his next request, "And before I forget, you will also need to remove all collected sample flasks, as I will be using the shelves along the back wall. Normally it wouldn't be an issue, but again since the number of N.E.W.T. students has increased, I really will need the extra storage space."

Her voice rose to an almost hysterical pitch. "How, exactly, am I supposed to transport all of those samples between classes? They can't be reduced without the possibility of changing the composition of the potions!"

He gave her a challenging look. "I'm sure you will find a way, unless you wish to ask the headmaster to intervene." The corners of his mouth twisted unpleasantly when the mulish look on her face made it clear she would not be rushing to the headmaster and asking him to fight her battles. Giving her what could almost pass as a condescending smile, Severus continued, "Since I don't wish to be completely unreasonable, I will lend you a sample case for the school year. A house-elf will deliver it later today. As long as you are very careful traveling to and from your office, the potions should come to no harm."

Before she could stammer out a protest, Severus turned his back to her and swept down the corridor, feeling triumphant and knowing her Gryffindor pride would never allow her to air her grievances to Dumbledore.

---

Her brisk, furious pace from the staff room to her office had only added to Callista's anger, and she slammed the door to her office behind her.

"I can't believe the nerve of that... that..." She found herself at an utter loss for a word strong enough to express how completely infuriated she was with Severus Snape and his petty posturings and power play.

*"What exactly were you trying to do, Miss Hawkins?"*

*After an accident with a potion had filled the Potions classroom with choking fumes, Professor Snape, who was taking over the class during the regular professor's absence, demanded she wait for him in the dungeon corridor. Now Callista looked up into the furious face of the young Potions master. Swallowing hard to keep her voice calm, she answered, "I was trying to come up with a way to prepare the potion to increase its shelf life, sir. Scintillation Solution is very expensive and tedious to brew, and*

I--"

"Thought it was a good idea to experiment during class?"

She kept her chin level and her voice steady. "It wouldn't be the first time I've done so, sir. Professor Blackburn always--"

"Only an **idiot** would have added powdered fire salamander scales to Scintillation Solution!" shouted Professor Snape. "Your **utter incompetence** could have seriously harmed the other members of the class!"

"I am NOT an incompetent idiot!" Callista shouted back, forgetting in her indignation that he was a teacher and she was a student. "My potion was tampered with! I didn't even **have** powdered fire salamander scales at my work station!"

His pale face was suffused with furious color. "How dare you use such a tone with me! Fifty points from Gryffindor and a week's worth of detentions!"

"What?"

"If you have a problem with being disciplined, Miss Hawkins, take it up with the headmaster." The expression on his face was coldly triumphant. "Unless you would rather not have the headmaster know yet another precious **Gryffindor** thinks herself above point deductions and detentions."

Not wanting to get herself into further trouble, Callista turned on her heel and fled up the corridor without waiting for him to dismiss her. Had she not lost her temper with him, she would have gone straight to the headmaster's office and explained that somehow, somehow, her potion had been tampered with. But now, her outburst towards a professor -- no matter that he was only a few years her senior -- would outweigh any injustice that had been heaped on her. If only there was a way to prove someone had tampered with her potion, she wouldn't have to rely on the word of a fellow student.

It was no secret to any of the seventh years that Severus harbored a deep hatred of Gryffindors and why, but still it didn't seem fair that he should take it out on all of them for something that happened back in her first year at Hogwarts. She certainly hadn't had anything to do with him being hung upside-down by his ankle and stripped of all dignity. There was nothing to do but serve her detentions in silence and make sure she didn't give him a reason to do it again. If she needed to put wards around her workspace, then that's exactly what she would do.

"Good to see the Grudge Against Gryffindor is alive and well after all these years," she grumbled sarcastically. Her appetite gone, Callista decided to skip lunch with the other teachers in the Great Hall and work on some more of her lessons. "If Severus thinks I'm going to go running to the headmaster, then he'd better think again. If I can just somehow manage to avoid him until June, everything will be fine. Unless I decide it's better to transfigure him into a mouse and drop him in front of Mrs. Norris."

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A/N: In case anyone was wondering or cared, Horace Slughorn has been replaced with Professor Tiberius Blackburn in this story. He's old, as in Professor Tofty old, and was created before we knew about Slughorn. You'll learn a little more about him in later chapters.

## Arrivals and Introductions

Chapter 11 of 12

The students arrive, and Callista meets a more grown-up Harry.

A/N: It's my Big 4-0 on Monday, but you're getting a gift of new chapter.

This chapter is a little different because it's only from Callista's PoV. I honestly tried to fit more Severus in, but it came out all contrived and crappy so I changed it. Don't worry, he'll be back in the next chapter in all his billowy glory.

Disclaimer: Don't own it. Not making any money. Shall we move on with the story, my darlings?

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### Chapter 10: Arrivals and Introductions

On the night of the students' arrival, Callista stood before her mirror, staring at the alien appearance, trying to decide if she liked what she saw. Carefully she smoothed the front of the deep purple robe. The simple cut was flattering, and contrary to her doubts, the fancy bronze stitching around the neckline and sleeves was subtle yet elegant. She adjusted the angle of the tall, pointed hat, complete with a cluster of jaunty pheasant feathers in the band. A sigh escaped her. There was a comfort in wearing tall, pointed hats and flowing robes again, but...

"I look like I'm going to a Halloween party," Callista mumbled to her reflection.

"I'm sure you look splendid; however, I would like to see for myself."

Callista started at the sound of a voice. Crossing to the sitting area by the window, she turned the miniature portrait of her father.

"Trick or treat," she said, her lips twitching into a smile.

Hawkins gave his daughter an appraising head-to-toe look before smiling. "You look beautiful, my dearest. Did you mother choose the color by any chance?"

"Thank you. Uh... yes, yes, she did," replied Callista, half-embarrassed to admit her mother had chosen most of her wardrobe. "I haven't worn purple in years."

"Really?" His bushy eyebrows shot up in surprise. "It was the only color you'd wear from the time you were four until shortly before your seventh birthday. About drove your mother mad, too."

"Perhaps I got tired of it." Callista laughed briefly before suddenly becoming very sober. "The students arrive tonight. I'll be meeting with Harry after the start of term feast."

The painted face stared at her with a curiously longing expression. "Harry as in James Potter's son? The savior of the wizarding world?"

She nodded. "At least that's what the *Daily Prophet* has been calling him."

Her father was silent and thoughtful looking. "Would you mind putting my frame in your office for the meeting? I would like to see the boy."

"I don't suppose there would be any harm in that as long as you didn't talk to him." She picked up the portrait and moved it to the mantle in her office, positioning the frame so it offered a view of her desk. "How's that?"

"This should do just fine." Adolphus Hawkins looked around in satisfaction. "I promise to keep quiet during your little chat unless you speak to me first."

"I would appreciate that, Daddy," she said as the clock in the tower began to chime. "Time to go."

She headed toward the door and blew her father's portrait a kiss before departing. Halfway down the corridor, it dawned on her why her father had requested to be party to the meeting. Of course her father would want to see the son of his favorite trainee. He'd want to see the face of someone he had such high hopes for, or to see how son measured up to father. She shook her head. Such reasoning was surely beyond the capabilities of a mere portrait. More likely, it was the portrait projecting her father's nosiness.

In the entryway, the other teachers were gathering, and Callista discreetly joined their ranks. Professor Sinistra turned at the sound of someone behind her and gave Callista a reserved smile. The latter nodded stiffly in return. She vaguely remembered Sinistra from her school days and was fairly certain the Astronomy mistress had once been a Slytherin prefect. Out of the corner of her eye, she caught sight of Severus emerging from the dungeons, and her heart briefly picked up its pace.

*Get a grip already, she order herself. He isn't likely to announce that he would prefer that I teach out in the dungeon corridor or some such nonsense.*

"Welcome, my dear colleagues and friends!" Dumbledore greeted them with a twinkling enthusiasm. "I just received word that the students have arrived at the station and will be joining us within half of an hour. As always, Professor McGonagall will be in charge of the first-years and will see to the Sorting. I ask that you enjoy this evening and help make sure that no students are left roaming the corridors after the feast. And now, let us prepare to meet our students."

A feeling of excitement rose in her as Callista followed the rest of the staff into the Great Hall. At the door, the heel of her shoe awkwardly caught one of the floor seams, and she almost lost her balance. A hand grabbed her elbow and steadied her.

"Thank you. I..." She saw with surprise that it was Severus who had come to her aid.

"Try not to look so shocked," he said grimly.

For a moment, she thought there had been the briefest flicker of longing in his dark eyes. Callista realized she was holding her breath and carefully let it out.

"Oh, no," replied Callista, trying to keep her tone pleasant. "It's got nothing to do with you.... I mean, I don't often trip myself." Annoyed with her fumbling speech, she smiled politely. "Thank you, Severus."

He graced her with a curt nod and marched off to find a seat at the head table. Not wanting to be uncomfortable during the entire meal, Callista headed to the opposite side. An enormous chair occupied the very end of the table and was obviously reserved for Hagrid's use. She settled into a chair next to the wheezy Runes mistress.

"That's a very becoming color on you, my dear," said Professor Babbling in an attempt to start a conversation with Callista.

While the younger woman wasn't exactly thrilled to engage in small talk with the old lady, it would help time pass more quickly than sitting in silence. The conversation drifted from clothing to classes to Quidditch to Babbling's own years at school. Callista discovered the Runes mistress had gone to school with one of Callista's paternal grandmothers. Unfortunately, that led to some long-winded reminiscing, but Callista was content to let the stories become a pleasant background noise for her own memories.

*An eleven-year-old Callista could feel her heart pounding with excitement as she waited for Professor McGonagall to call her name. She glanced over at Barty Jr. who was sitting at the Ravenclaw table and too engrossed in a conversation with his friends to notice her. Instead the girl let her eyes travel over the tables. Her brother waved at her from the Gryffindor table.*

*"Hawkins, Callista," said the brisk witch holding the scroll.*

*Taking a deep breath, Callista walked up to the stool and pulled the hat over her head.*

*"Well, well, well, what have we here?" asked the Sorting hat. "Another Hawkins child. How delightful! Now let's see where you should go."*

*Callista squirmed uncomfortably on the stool, and the hat continued, "A very keen and eager mind, a fair amount of courage, loyalty, and ambition to spare. Four older brothers, four different houses. Where should I place the little sister?"*

*She really didn't care where the hat put her, Ravenclaw would put her with Barty, she knew Regulus Black in Slytherin, a few cousins were Hufflepuffs, and her older brother, Connor, was a Gryffindor prefect. Of course, if she had to **choose** where she wanted to go, she would want to be with her brother.*

*"If that's how you feel, I'll put you in..." The hat paused before announcing in a ringing voice. "GRYFFINDOR!"*

*Callista pulled off the hat to applause and caught sight of her brother grinning at her from the Gryffindor table.*

The wheezy voice tried to produce a girlish giggle. "Oh, yes, my dear, your gram and I managed to get into a goodly number of scrapes. I often wondered how we didn't get expelled!"

"I should say so," Callista said absently.

The conversation was ended by a rumble of voices that signaled the arrival of the students. As they took their seats at the long tables, Callista eagerly scanned the Gryffindor section for what she had been told would be a familiar face. Almost at the middle of the table she saw him. There was no mistaking that cow-licked thatch of black hair. He was talking with a lanky, red-headed boy and a girl whose untamed mane could best be described as a cloud of brown frizz.

"I gather you're looking for young Mr. Potter?" Babbling asked.

Callista nodded. "I found him. Do you know the two students he's talking to?"

Breaking into a smile, Babbling answered, "Oh yes. The boy is the youngest of the Weasley boys. Richard... no, no, Raymond... oh wait, Ronald. Sorry, I only had William and Percival in my Runes class, so I don't know much about the younger boys."

"I vaguely remember Bill, but I've seen the twins' shop on Diagon Alley." The younger woman chuckled at the memory of some of the wares. "Not that even a blind person could miss it."

The Runes mistress gave a weak laugh that dissolved into a cough. "Not likely at all! I purchased some things for my great-grand nieces and nephews."

"Who's the girl? A relation of Trelawney's?" Callista asked quickly before the old lady could launch into an endless stream of anecdotes about her young relatives.

"Goodness, no, Hermione Granger is a Muggle-born, and the top student in her class and quite possibly tops in the school."

Letting Professor Babbling rattle on about the many academic virtues of Miss Hermione Granger, Callista turned her attention back to Harry, wondering how their working relationship would be.

*I'll find out shortly*, she thought as the crowd of first years entered the Great Hall in Professor McGonagall's wake.

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"Enter," Callista called when she heard the knock. The door swung open, and Harry stepped uncertainly into her office. She walked over, shook his hand, and introduced herself, smiling at the familiar shape and color of his eyes.

"You wanted to see me, Professor?"

For as much as he looked like his father, Callista was surprised that he sounded nothing like James *Lily's eyes, James' looks, but thankfully his voice is his own.*

"Yes, I was afraid tomorrow would be too hectic. Please, have a seat. We need to discuss exactly what your duties will be." He opened his mouth to speak, but Callista halted him as they sat across the desk from each other. "I know Professor McGonagall has spoken with you and you're only helping with the fourth-year classes, but I wanted you to hear everything directly from me." Feeling that she may have sounded harsher than she had intended, Callista added, "It's more to avoid confusion than anything else."

"Oh." He was still wary but relaxed slightly.

"Harry, I've been in a different country for the last fifteen years. I don't know much about you or what's been going on other than what I've been told by the headmaster and Professor McGonagall or read in the paper, but the headmaster has pressed on me how vital it is for students to be able to protect themselves if need be."

The young man snorted. "It's about time the Ministry allowed Dumbledore to do what needed to be done."

Callista replied evenly, "I'm sure it's a relief to you to be taken seriously as well. What classes are you taking, Harry?"

"Er..." he mumbled as if taken by surprise by her question. "Transfiguration, Charms, Defense Against the Dark Arts, Herbology, and Potions."

She noted the expression on his face when he said the last class. "I've heard from Professor McGonagall you have an ambition to be an Auror?"

"Yes, Professor."

His face became a bit more animated, and she encouraged him to chat about his ambition and the reasons behind it for a few minutes. Their conversation branched into his DA efforts, and Callista, who had vague and unpleasant memories of Dolores Umbridge, found herself being a bit more understanding of last year's situation, if only from a student's perspective. But in the course of the discussion, she realized there was one serious matter that she needed to address before they had their first class with the fourth-year students.

"Since you aren't a stranger to teaching others spells, your duties will be easy. You will demonstrate the spells and their counters and circulate among the students correcting or praising as needed." She gave him a meaningful look. "That includes *all* students, Harry, even the Slytherins."

"But..."

She cut him off. "Not all of them are pure-bloods. There are a few half-bloods in that house; people with family members who are both sides of the conflict. By teaching them how to properly defend themselves, you're giving them choices."

"Yeah," he said, his dislike of Slytherins evident in his tone, "choices on the best curses to use when someone has their back turned."

"Or," began Callista, doing her best to keep her tone neutral but failing, "the choice to pick what's right over what's easy. You're giving them the ability to defend family members who may not be able to defend themselves. I know it's not easy to overcome prejudices, Harry, but if you don't at least make an effort to show fairness and encouragement to *all* of the students we work with, I will advise the headmaster that it would be better for me to manage on my own. Have I made myself perfectly clear?"

He glared at her. "I get it."

"Good," she replied, willing to drop the matter for now. "Come see me when you receive your timetable, and we will work out a set time for us to meet and coordinate exactly how the lessons will be structured. I have a short break after the lunch period. Would that suit you?"

"Yeah, I suppose so."

She nodded. "I'll see you tomorrow then. You may return to your common room."

He opened his mouth as if to say something but quickly closed it and turned to leave. Unexpectedly Harry paused at the door. "Can I ask you something, Professor?"

"You *may*," she corrected.

Harry looked at her critically. "Were you a Slytherin?"

"No, I wasn't. What made you ask?"

He shrugged as if unable to find the words to properly ask the question.

"If it's just a case of curiosity, I was sorted into Gryffindor." She allowed herself to smile. "Not all pure-bloods end up in Slytherin, Harry."

The young man's jaw dropped. "Then you... you probably knew my mum and dad."

"I did," said Callista, keeping her tone guarded.

"And Sirius and Remus?" asked Harry eagerly.

"Of course," she said. "They were a few years ahead of me, I was a first-year when they were in their fifth, but, yes, I knew them well enough."

A strange expression crossed his face, making him look both angry and pained. "Did you know Snape?"

*Now there's a loaded question if I ever heard one.* She decided to answer it within the context of their conversation and hope he didn't pursue the topic. "Not really. We were in different years and different houses. I knew him by sight."

"What did..."

"It's getting late, Harry," interrupted Callista, glancing up at the clock on the mantle. The last thing she wanted to discuss was the past. "When we have time to talk" *and I*



*have time to sort out what I feel comfortable telling you--*"I'll be more than happy to tell you what I know about your parents and your godfather. But for now, we both need to get rested and ready for classes tomorrow. Just to be sure you don't run into trouble with Filch, I'll escort you to Gryffindor Tower."

---

The trip from her office to Gryffindor Tower had been spent mostly discussing Quidditch and Harry's captaincy. Callista was far from a fanatic about the sport, but it had been the safest topic she could think of. It also revealed a lot about her young assistant... some of it good and some of it not.

Her father was waiting for her to return, eager to discuss the meeting. The image complained, "For all the boy looks like his father, he certainly doesn't have James Potter's spirit!"

"Perhaps it was just nerves," Callista answered, pouring herself a glass of water but wishing for something a bit stronger. "I'm a complete unknown this year. After having Umbridge, I certainly don't blame his reserve."

Her father chuckled. "The look on your face when he thought you had been in Slytherin was priceless."

Callista rolled eyes. "I can only imagine the trouble I would have had with him if *had* been! God in Heaven, he probably would have refused to work with me, and that would have been if I was exceedingly lucky."

"Doesn't seem like the boy has had much luck with Slytherins... teachers or students. He most assuredly doesn't like Snape."

*Had to bring that up, didn't you?* Callista thought. Instead she shrugged and kept her tone nonchalant. "Maybe it's just because of how things have gone in Potions class. No doubt Harry isn't thrilled at the prospect of having Severus for two classes this year, especially a class that's been one of his stronger points. According to Dumbledore, it's been a problem since the first Potions class. Students who wouldn't be considered up to scratch would have a hard time. Snape, from what I've heard, has a tendency to weed out weakness, and not just academic weakness," Callista slapped her forehead as two bits of information finally made sense. "That's probably why I'm stuck with teaching Potions basics to this Longbottom boy in Harry's year."

"Longbottom?" Painted bushy brows disappeared into a painted hairline. "So Frank and Alice's son wasn't a Squib after all. When do you get to meet him?"

"Not until after the first week of the term when I get my workroom set up unless I can put it off longer." Working with students in the classroom was one thing, but having someone impede her private research was another.

"Did you get evicted from the dungeons?" her father's portrait asked.

"No, but it's not large enough to accommodate the both of us. I can't work on the things I need to work on without someone hovering over my shoulder constantly, waiting for me to screw up. Dealt with that enough at the university, and I don't want to deal with it here."

Her father nodded. "Can't say that I blame you for that, Lissie."

---

A/N: As I believe I mentioned earlier in the story, Callista's father was an Auror by profession. He knew James and Sirius (as well as the Longbottoms) when they were going through Auror training. Before anyone starts having a canon-canary, yes, I know Rowling told us via interview canon Potter and Black lived off of inheritances, worked for the Order full-time, and blah, blah, blah. However, for purposes in the story, I had to give them logical (?) occupations. Anyway, James and Sirius haters may have rolled their eyes a time or two while reading this, but rolling the eyes actually strengthens ocular muscles and helps lessen eyestrain, so consider it a good thing.

If you have any questions, feel free to PM me or leave a review.

## Digging for Information

*Chapter 12 of 12*

Dreams are invaded and answers sought. Hope that's cryptic enough to grab your attention.

Disclaimer:

*The Potter series isn't mine,  
which is why I make no money.  
Reviews are all I really need  
to fatten my plot bunny!*

Hey, if I have to do this to keep from getting sued, why not have some fun with it?

A/N: About the posting lag... I've made some changes in what should have been just a side-plot (the nature of Severus and Bianca's relationship) and other more significant ones (the Draco/Severus dynamic) that made large sections of original chapters completely incompatible with the new story line. Which means \*sigh\* huge rewrite. It's great for the reader, but think of me, slaving over the keyboard to bring a new chapter to fruition! "dramatic gesture"

I deserve some reviews, or maybe a cookie, for all my hard work. As always, feedback is greatly appreciated.

Warning: Sexual situations

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### Chapter 11: Digging for Information

*Delicate, experienced hands caressed his chest and belly. The hands teased him, reaching just low enough to graze his highly-sensitive anatomy, and were followed by a tongue which traced the shivering trails the hands had created. If only...*

A log in the fire had popped and brought him to the edge of wakefulness. Severus ignored his throbbing enough to relax his mind and pick up the dream again.

*Impatient with the woman, he guided her, moaning with renewed pleasure, focusing on the embracing heat as he clutched at the sheets. The sensations built, bordering on pain, before bringing him to an explosive release. He looked appreciatively at the woman, expecting to see her obscured in shadows, but blue eyes hungrily met his.*

With a gasp, Severus opened his eyes, and an unaccustomed moment of disorientation clung to him as he tried to sort out what was real and what was not. The bed was empty, but if he closed his eyes, he could still see...

"Damn it!" The realization of his partner's identity shattered the afterglow's feeling of well-being. It was almost as undesirable as having Granger featured in his nocturnal fantasies.

*Hawkins isn't one of your students.*

Grumbling under his breath, Severus groped under the pillow for his wand. With a wave, he was able to rid himself of the physical aftermath of the dream, but the unwelcome emotions remained. He didn't want her, couldn't have her if he did, and didn't trust her as far as he could throw the giant squid without magic.

---

*Dark hair tickled the side of her face and a nose grazed her cheek as someone whispered in her ear. "Do you know how beautiful you are?"*

*Before she could reply, her partner was touching her, bringing her senses toward a rapid, heated climax.*

Callista cried out and was suddenly very much awake and alone. According to the clock, it was an awkward hour...too early to rise but too late to go back to sleep. Not that she felt she could go back to sleep after such a vivid dream. Instead, she tried to recall each sensation from the intimate touches to the tickle of the dark hair. Dark hair? The feel of that nose? Oh, Merlin's beard, no! It was bad enough she had to deal with Severus Snape during her waking hours, and now he was invading her dreams! The type of dreams made in even more upsetting. She didn't want him back in her life...especially not in that capacity...not even if they were the last two people on the planet.

Flustered, Callista flopped to her other side, trying to figure out exactly what would cause her to dream about him of all people.

*It shouldn't be too difficult to figure out; you're both in the same place*an annoying part of her brain insisted.*Besides, he was your first; he knew you best.*

She shook her head to dislodge the thought before it could take root. Facing a roomful of second-years first thing was going to be difficult enough without the added stress of a poor night's sleep. Callista smoothed a wrinkle out of the pillowcase and tried to settle into a restful state of mind.

---

That morning at breakfast, Severus slid into his preferred seat at the staff table and began filling his plate, mechanically consuming his morning meal. The remains of the dream began tugging at the edge of his thoughts, and to distract himself, he surveyed the assembled students and was thankful he no longer had to deal with the younger ones. Somehow each year they managed to look younger and more troublesome. Of course, considering the older ones he had to deal with, perhaps it wasn't such a wonderful trade off. The only positive was he knew exactly what degree of dunderheaded-ness he would be dealing with.

The rustle of robes halted further contemplation, and he glanced up to see Callista Hawkins taking the seat next to him. She didn't look at him, but he noticed the slight shaking of her hands and her tightly-composed demeanor barely concealed an aura of nervousness.

He almost opened his mouth to say something reassuring to her, but caught himself just in time. After all, Hawkins was a highly-educated, seasoned teacher, according to her American Wizarding degree. Surely such an elite creature had no need for reassurance from someone with a mere fifteen years experience and an ordinary apprenticeship?

"Are you reading that?" Callista asked, indicating a copy of the Daily Prophet between their place settings.

"Hoping to see another article about yourself?" He passed the newspaper to her. His fingers accidentally grazing hers in the process, and a sudden warmth flared where they had touched.

"No," Callista replied, paging through the paper. "I was just checking on the Gringotts exchange rates." She ran her finger down the financial column. "Looks like I made that transfer just in time."

Unable to come up with a worthwhile retort, he turned his attention to the sea of students. His dark eyes rested on Draco Malfoy, flanked as usual by his over-sized lackeys. Severus was almost certain there was a pressing mission from the Dark Lord on the boy, but he only had a general idea of what it was. Dumbledore wanted specifics. Draco's avoidance of Severus after his presentation to the Dark Lord shortly after the close of term and Bellatrix's smug demeanor suggested the witch had been instructing her nephew not to trust him. Her interference would make dealing with Draco far more difficult.

Severus barely had time to finish his toast before a stack of time tables appeared in front of him. Picking them up, he had a surge of inspiration and shuffled through the stack until he found Malfoy's. Surprisingly enough Draco had achieved Outstandings in both Defense Against the Dark Arts and Potions...two classes that would prove indispensable for someone wishing to rise in the ranks of the Dark Lord's service. No doubt the boy would have been advised or even ordered to take at least one of those classes. He carefully tucked Malfoy's to the bottom of the stack before circulating among his students. When the last Slytherin had been sent off to the first class, Severus turned to a very agitated Malfoy.

"Your timetable, Mr. Malfoy."

The blond-haired young man turned to face him. "Thanks, *Professor*."

The disdain in Malfoy's tone was unmistakable, yet there was a definite undercurrent of anxiety. Severus immediately knew it would take very pains-taking prying to get any useful information. "I was pleased to see you earned an Outstanding on your Potions and Defense Against the Dark Arts O.W.L.s. I hope you will be continuing with both?"

Draco stiffened. "Yes. Also Transfiguration, Charms, Runes and Arithmancy."

"Very good," Severus replied, tapping the squares on the parchment as he tried to discern whether or not Draco's classes could give him any insight to the young man's task from the Dark Lord. "One more..."

"Transfiguration starts in ten minutes. Can't be late." Draco shouldered his bag and joined the noisy throng of students.

Severus stared after him, frustrated that his attempt to discover anything useful had failed. A pair of passing Ravensclaws, engrossed in a conversation about Quidditch, barely avoided running into him. In his irritation, Severus considered giving them each a detention. Then a brilliant idea made him change his mind.

---

*"Good morning and welcome to year two of Defense Against the Dark Arts,"* Callista willed herself to greet the assembled second-years, but the words stubbornly refused to leave her lips. So she stood there, mutely staring at them, wishing she was once again teaching the basics of biology to a group of young adults, who, in their opinions, already knew everything.

*For crying out loud, say something... anything... before a riot breaks out and Dumbledore throws you out on your ear*a voice demanded as the curious looks of her students became more and more disconcerting. Prodded into action by the thought of how ridiculous she would look being magically ejected from the castle, Callista cleared her throat and took roll to break the horrible silence. When all students from Boyle, Marius to Zeller, Rose were declared present and accounted for, she launched

into her opening comments.

"Good morning and welcome to second year Defense Against the Dark Arts," she said, cringing at how bright and forced her voice sounded to her ears*For God's sake, they're twelve, not two!* "This year you will be introduced to the most common Dark creatures and how to identify, catch, and deal them safely and humanely. Keep in mind I'm using the term Dark rather loosely because in most cases, the creatures on our list for this term are little more than household pests. However, some of them can and do bite, and the bites can sometimes cause problems. Is there anyone who can think of a creature that could potentially be on our study list?"

A few tentative hands went up, and Callista felt a little more encouraged. She was half-tempted to smile at the groans of disappointment when she informed them that dragons weren't going to among the fantastic beasts they would actually see during the course of the year, but if they had time, perhaps they would touch on them after they were finished with werewolves.

At the end of the class, she assigned them a brief assignment and sent them on their way, plopping in her chair and feeling relieved. Overall, things had gone way better than she had anticipated, but all the same, she was glad the first ordeal... no, class, was behind her. Callista closed her eyes and sighed, "One class down for the day; three to go."

---

After the morning break, Severus opened the door to the Potions classroom, and the class of sixth-years trooped quietly in and took their seats. Striding to the front of the classroom, he turned to glare at them until all attention was focused on him.

"As you will soon discover, N.E.W.T. Potions is a highly demanding course, which is why I normally only take students who obtained an Outstanding at the OWL level. However, this year I was told to accept some students who fall below that exacting standard." Severus' gaze traveled over the students resting on the various faces that wouldn't have been there under normal circumstances. Most of them glanced away or allowed their own gazes to falter, except for Potter, who glared back defiantly. "While entry standards may have been lowered, course standards have not. Let it be known that any student who consistently fails to meet my expectations will be dismissed... permanently. Due to the nature and complexity of the potions we will be studying, I cannot tolerate shoddy methods that pose a danger to the class."

Stares met his dark penetrating eyes, and an odd mixture of trepidation, confidence, and defiance radiated from the class.

"The potions we will deal with this term will be poisons. Can anyone in here name the main classifications of poisons?" Inwardly he groaned as the only hand that was raised was attached to Hermione Granger, and he paused, hoping that someone else would volunteer. When no one did, he was forced to listen to the girl parrot back the answer from the text.

He spent the class asking questions and listening to Granger answer them. Twenty minutes in he resigned himself to the fact that, with the exception of the Gryffindor swot, no one had been curious enough to read the opening chapter. Towards the end of the class period, he assigned them an essay listing the main classifications of poisons with descriptions of the indicators for each. The idea of limiting it to exactly one thousand words crossed his mind just to see Granger's reaction.

As the class was packing up, Severus passed the table where Draco sat with Theodore Nott and Blaise Zabini, he paused and muttered, "I need to speak with you after class, Mr. Malfoy, regarding the Quidditch captaincy."

Nott and Zabini glanced at each other and then Malfoy, exchanging knowing grins. As the rest of the class filed out, Malfoy asked the other Slytherins to wait for him outside the classroom.

The moment the door closed, Severus asked, "I gather you know Worthington did not to return to school?"

Malfoy nodded. "Something about his father had an opportunity to go to India for a year."

"Which means Slytherin is in need of a new Quidditch captain. Urquhart may be a seventh-year, but you have been on the team longer." When the young man didn't reply, Severus gritted his teeth and decided to state his intentions bluntly. "I would like to offer the position to you first."

"I think I'll decline, sir." He grabbed his school bag and moved toward the door.

Severus pointed his wand at the door and it sealed with a squelching noise. "I didn't dismiss you, Mr. Malfoy."

Draco faced him; indignation radiated from him like an over-heated cauldron.

"Frankly I'm surprised you would turn down such an opportunity to keep on equal status as Potter." Severus hoped such a comment would goad the boy into accepting the offer. If Malfoy was captain of the team he would have to speak with him between now and the start of the Quidditch season. "You are still planning to remain on the team, aren't you?"

"Since it's my first N.E.W.T. year, I was going to decide that after I've been to all of my classes. Extras may need to go, depending on how much work I have for classes."

"Is that why you're no longer a prefect?" Severus asked, keeping his tone bland.

Draco shrugged. "Maybe."

"Were you required to step aside by the headmaster or was it voluntary?" He had a flash of insight. "Or did Auntie Bellatrix make the suggestion?"

At the mention of her name, a slight sneer tugged at the corner of the young man's mouth. "Out of the loop are you?"

"Answer the question, Draco," he demanded impatiently.

"Does it matter?"

Severus couldn't believe even Bellatrix could overlook something so glaringly obvious. "Yes, it does."

"I gave it up on my own," he said, scowling. "No point in being part of something that won't matter come the end of the year."

"Never the less," Severus began, lowering his voice to a conspiratorial whisper, "dropping too many of your normal activities will only draw undesired attention. People will begin wondering what you're doing with your newly acquired free time. Unless you were commanded by the Dark Lord, doing so was tantamount to declaring your alliance to..."

"That happened when Potter got my father arrested!"

"I understand you're..."

"No," snarled the young man, swinging his bag to his shoulder and storming towards the door. "You don't understand anything. Now open the damn door!"

"Sir," Severus snapped, not willing to let the boy get away with such a gross display of impertinence.

"FINE! Open the damn door, *sir!*"

Grudgingly, the Potions master complied. He unsealed the door, and Draco Malfoy made a hasty exit before Severus could change his mind and detain him for more

questioning. The door was nearly closed when a rather bemused Callista Hawkins pushed it open and entered the classroom.

"Isn't it a bit early in the term to cause your N.E.W.T. students to have mental breakdowns, Severus?" she asked sarcastically. "And one from your own House at that."

He stood his ground and resisted the urge to curse her. "Mind your own students, Miss Hawkins, and I'll mind mine."

Before she could open her mouth to reply, he turned on his heel and swept out of the classroom and into the sanctuary of his office.

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A/N: Draco, I love you, my dear boy, but you were such an uncooperative little brat during the writing of this chapter. Don't be surprised if I decide to kill you off in a bizarre Quidditch accident.

Thank you to the nice person who emailed and let me know K+ was the default rating!