

Learning to Trust

by ArtemisofEphesus

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Juliana, whose mother was killed in the war and who lived on her own for a year after her death, has never learnt many things, magic and trust are two of them.

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First Chapter

Chapter 1 of 4

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Professor Severus Snape stood in front of the glass doors of the London Wizarding Adoption Centre, immobile, an expression of purest disgust on his face. From the moment he had received the letter from the Ministry of Magic two weeks ago, he had been dreading this day, every moment, every second of it. Because of the large amount of orphaned children in the wizarding world due to the war against the Dark Lord and his minions, every person or couple over twenty and younger than eighty had been forced to take in a child. No one was exempt, not even the foul-tempered Hogwarts Potions master.

Severus grimaced and marched forwards, through the sliding doors and into an airy atrium. Doors with brass plaques lead into adjoining rooms, separating the children into groups. He could hear laughter and screaming from one of the doorways, which made him scowl more fiercely than usual.

"Your name, please?" a young witch asked him as he approached the reception desk.

"Professor Severus Snape," he replied curtly.

"Come this way, please, and I'll take you to the children to choose one. Do you have a preference of boy or girl?"

Severus thought about this for a moment. He couldn't bear to have a little Potter or Weasley running around him, however, he didn't want a miniature Lavender Brown or Pansy Parkinson either.

"Girl," he said with hesitation. "And not too young. At least eight or nine."

"Follow me then." The witch opened a door which read Girls, 8-17.

He followed her into a room with a multitude of bunk beds lining the walls, a large window at the end and a few playthings lying around on the floor. On two bunks at the end of the room, two younger girls were having a pillow-fight, screaming and giggling. Severus wished this was over. He definitely wasn't going to adopt one of those brats.

"Now, have a look around, talk to some of the girls and let me know when you've come to a decision. I'll be at the reception desk." She bustled out and left an increasingly bad-tempered Severus alone.

He started walking along the middle of the long room, deliberately making every footstep ring out through the cacophony of giggling. The effect was immediate. The room fell quiet, and girls sat on their beds, whispering, no doubt about his greasy hair and hooked nose. Several times he paced the room, the girls becoming increasingly edgy and annoyed that their realm had been invaded. So far there was no one who had seemed acceptable to him; they were all far too noisy and rambunctious. *No, they wouldn't do*, he told himself. *I need someone who can shut up and not get in my way while I'm brewing. Someone who understands that I am a Potions master first and foremost, not a* he grimaced at the word *father*.

His eyes wandered from occupant to occupant, flicking over them with his hard stare and then dismissing them. He heard a loud whisper from one of the pillow-fighters: "I wouldn't want to be the girl who gets him as a father." He scowled in the whisperer's direction and she shut up. He wouldn't want to have himself as a father either, he decided. He had had too many experiences as a Death Eater which had turned him off parenthood for good.

He reached the end of the rows of beds and frowned. In a whole roomful of girls, he had not been able to find one he wasn't repulsed by. He turned around and swept one last glance across the rows of bunks, hoping there had been someone he had missed.

There was.

She was sitting on a bottom bunk near the door with her knees drawn up to her chest, reading. She had long blonde hair, and when she looked up, he noticed she had eyes the colour of faded Jacaranda blossoms. She wasn't very pretty, but to Severus this didn't matter in the least. A phrase flicked through his mind like father, like daughter. He grimaced. Well, at least she wasn't noisy and she did like to read, he figured from the pages she was hiding behind, and she was older than the others. He guessed she was about thirteen. He strode up to the bed and stood in front of it. The girl scrambled to her feet in front of him. Severus almost chuckled to himself. Someone had obviously taught her manners.

"What's your name and how old are you?" He asked brusquely, crossing his arms and looking down at her. She didn't seem intimidated by him, and he liked that. But she respected him, so much was obvious.

"Juliana, sir, and I am fourteen," she replied quietly. Severus stared at her long and hard. It crossed his mind to ask why she wasn't at Hogwarts, but he decided to ask her later.

Ask her later, he scoffed at himself. *That means there's going to be a later, Severus. Are you sure you want her and not something a bit prettier?* After a moments thought, he decided that, yes, he did want her. She was old enough not to bother him, quiet and liked books. And she had enough manners to call him sir and stand when he spoke to her. She would have to do. It was the best he would get. For the fact that they were orphans, the other girls all had decidedly too much energy.

"Come with me," he said curtly to her, walking out of the room and up to the desk. The young witch smiled at him, but her expression faded as she saw who he had chosen.

"Ah, we've chosen someone? Juliana, I see." Her voice was flat, and she added in a quieter tone: "You might want to be warned, Professor, that she has been adopted once before and her family couldn't... well... They didn't know what to do with her. She's never learnt magic. Never been to school. No discipline at all. Doesn't even know one end of a wand from the other. But she has power. A lot of it."

Severus frowned and looked back at Juliana. Her expression remained void, as cool and composed as one could manage. He managed a small smile.

"I will take her in regardless. I teach at Hogwarts, I have no doubt that I will be able to... control her." He scowled at the witch. She smiled warily, mistrusting, and handed him a sheaf of papers.

"Well then, take these, you can fill them out on the table over there, and give them back to me when you're done." She pointed to a table in the corner with two chairs. He beckoned Juliana over and began to fill out his section of the form. When it came to Juliana's information, he passed the quill to her and watched as she filled in her name, age, that she had no magical education (which Severus found quite confusing), and that she agreed to the adoption. For witches and wizards over the age of eleven, this was necessary. When she came to the section on name changing, she paused and looked up at him.

"Do you want me to be Juliana Snape?" she asked with slight hesitation. He thought about it for a moment.

"Only if you want to," he said at last. He enjoyed bullying people, so much was true, but he felt he could not bully Juliana into using his name.

She thought for a moment and then wrote down Juliana Aliena Snape. She lay down the quill and looked at what she had written, her expression critical. She looked at Severus. When he managed a grim smile, she smiled back, picked up the forms and placed them on the desk.

"That seems to be all in order then, Professor. Juliana, go and collect your things." Juliana walked off, returning a moment later with a cardboard box which looked to be very heavy. Severus walked up to her and took it from her and nearly swore. It was heavy! What on earth did she have in there, bricks? He peeked inside and saw that it was filled with books and a few items of clothing that looked quite bedraggled. He decided he would go with her to Diagon Alley as soon as they had finalized the adoption.

They left the adoption agency walking side by side, keeping a respectable silence which was only broken when she looked up at him.

"Professor?"

"Yes?"

"Thank you," she said quietly. Severus almost smiled to himself, though careful not to show it. Although he didn't want to admit it, this girl didn't drive him insane.

"You're welcome. And please, call me Severus. I don't think I'd like being called Daddy and frankly you're too old for that. Professor sounds too formal."

"Ok."

They continued to walk in silence. There would be time to get to know one another later, and Severus was tired. He had booked them rooms at the Leaky Cauldron for that night so they could go shopping for anything she needed in the morning before going to Hogwarts. He was exhausted when he arrived, and both of them went straight to bed after having tea brought up to them by Tom the barman, who was curious to find out why Professor Snape was accompanied by a young girl. Juliana had noticed and sent the barman a smile so like that of the dark figure next to him that the glass he had been holding had shattered on the floor. He wasn't curious after all.

Second Chapter

Chapter 2 of 4

Severus and Juliana go shopping in Diagon Alley, and we find out a little about Juliana's past...

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The next morning dawned shrouded in mist and grey clouds. Severus was awake before the sun rose, as was normal for him. Dressing and relishing the cold morning air (for he loved the cold, he always had), he made his way down into the bar for an early breakfast, curtly placing his order with the bleary-eyed barman. To his great surprise, Juliana had beaten him to the table in the corner. She was almost invisible in the black muggle attire that the orphanage had given her: only her light hair and those disturbing, pale eyes glowed as she looked up and saw him standing there. She nodded once in his direction, as if a silent gesture for him to sit. He greeted her quickly and, pulling a copy of the Daily Prophet towards him from the next table, proceeded to read and eat in silence. He was not one for talking in the mornings. Juliana did not object. She finished her breakfast quickly and then continued to sit for a while afterwards, gazing out into the bleak greyness that was outside. When Severus had also finished, he laid aside the *Prophet* and looked at her.

"We will be going into Diagon Alley this morning and then returning to Hogwarts in the afternoon." Severus surveyed her face and found her expression blank and uncomprehending.

"Hogwarts? Diagon Alley? What are they?" Juliana asked, letting confusion cross her face for a brief moment. Severus wondered inwardly how she could not have heard of Diagon Alley and Hogwarts, being a witch. He would have to question her about that at a later point in time. For now it was easier to simply explain.

"Hogwarts is the school at which I teach, a boarding school for young witches and wizards. Diagon Alley, where we will be going now, is the wizarding part of London. You will be able to get everything you need for yourself and for school there."

Juliana looked at him. "So I am to be a student at your school?"

"Yes," Severus answered slowly. "It is usual for children to begin their magical when they turn eleven; however, for whatever reason it may be, you did not begin at that age. We will have to see the headmaster to see which year we will place you in. Have you ever learnt any sort of magic?"

It took a while for Juliana to answer. When she did, her words were carefully measured.

"No. I have never... studied... magic. I have no experience with it other than what I saw at the orphanage and the previous family I stayed with. But I can do things. Small things. I can make small things change and move, and I can..." She broke off, as if she had gone too far. Severus' eyes narrowed, but he chose not to pursue the subject further. There would be plenty of time to find out everything about this unusual girl later. For now, they needed to get going, if they wanted to be at Hogwarts before nightfall. With the rags that were the contents of Juliana's box, she was going to need a lot of things.

Half an hour later Severus and Juliana stood in the back yard of the Leaky Cauldron. Severus quickly tapped the bricks of the wall, and they opened to reveal wizarding London stretching out in front of them. He could sense Juliana's surprise, but he thought he also detected tension. He laid a hand gently on her shoulder. She flinched, but seemed not to mind.

"Come," Severus said to her, his voice surprisingly gentle. "We will need to get you a wand. This way."

He steered her towards Ollivander's, which was still run by the man himself, even after the war had ended. Juliana looked around her as she entered, and for a moment Severus saw wonder written over her face. The next minute it was once again the guarded blankness he knew. Severus walked up to the counter, the girl following behind him. Ollivander came out from the back room, smiling kindly at Juliana and nodding at Severus.

"Severus Snape. What can I do for you?" Ollivander looked over his spectacles at Juliana. "A wand for the young lady? Rather late for a first wand, do not you think?"

"The circumstances are unusual. Juliana here is indeed after a wand. Perhaps you can point her towards something while I duck into the apothecary across the road?" He looked at Juliana. "I won't be long. Mr. Ollivander will sort you out."

"Severus... How am I to pay? My mother left me nothing but her collection of books." Severus almost laughed at the bluntness of the question.

"Juliana, you are officially under my care. I will pay for all your needs. All you need ask is that the money be charged to my name." When she nodded, he left with a billow of his black robes. Juliana turned to face the old wizard behind the counter.

"Now then, my dear, how about we get started? Which is your wand arm?"

* * *

An hour later, Severus and Juliana had already come far in their shopping. Severus had acquired fresh stock for the school potion stores and for his own stores, and Juliana had her wand, two sets of black school robes and the usual uniform items as well as much needed recreation clothes--several sets of Muggle clothing and a few sets of robes for everyday wear. Flourish and Blotts had left Juliana dumbstruck, and several books on easy magic for adults (for she was not a child anymore, so much was certain), had been purchased. Juliana started to read them as she sat down for lunch, chewing thoughtfully. She seemed so absorbed in her world, so cut off from him and everything around her that Severus could not help but probe gently into her thoughts, as subtly as he could without her noticing. But her mind was smooth and blank; Severus' probing could not get through to its depths.

How interesting, he thought, she must know a basic degree of Occlumency. The subject was added to his mental list for questioning that night.

After the quiet lunch, Severus and Juliana finished their shopping by visiting the Magical Menagerie to pick up a snowy owl. Even though she had no one to owl, Severus figured that she might like a pet to keep her company. Juliana seemed to form an immediate bond with Cybele, as she had named the animal. Severus remembered his own first owl, a present from his father to "make up" for his absences from home. He winced at the memories of his childhood and brushed the thoughts aside quickly.

The two silent figures made their way to the station, their luggage shrunk by Severus to fit into the pockets of their robes. They made an odd couple, standing all alone on the platform waiting for the train that would go to Hogsmeade: a tall, dark and billowing figure next to a blonde haired, fourteen-year-old witch with eyes of a piercing, unsettling colour. When the train arrived, they boarded and found an empty compartment down the isle and sat in silence until Severus' voice broke through both their thoughts.

"So tell me, Juliana, how is it that you have never attended a wizarding school? It is almost unheard of for a child not to receive their Hogwarts letter."

Juliana took her time in answering. "My mother never practised magic; she kept it hidden from me that she was a witch. I... never knew... my father. When I was ten years old I moved to Germany. I did not know that I was a witch before my mother... died." Severus could see her tensing up and decided to change the subject.

"When we arrive at Hogwarts, we will see the headmaster, Professor Dumbledore. He will decide how we shall deal with you." Seeing her eyes narrow, he explained his meanings. "I mean that we will figure out how to place you in the school. It is uncommon to have new students in the higher years."

For a few minutes after this, silence fell once again, the rhythm of the train only punctuated by its whistle as they approached different wizarding villages. This time it was Juliana who spoke.

"Tell me about Hogwarts. I would like to know as much as I can before I arrive."

Severus was pleased that she showed some interest, but he masked it behind his practised calm and began to tell her about the school.

"Hogwarts castle was built hundreds of years ago. Its founders were two witches and two wizards, named Helga Hufflepuff, Godric Gryffindor, Rowena Ravenclaw and Salazar Slytherin. They founded four houses, named after themselves, each having particular traits. Gryffindors," he tried to say the name without contempt, "are brave and loyal. Ravenclaws are intelligent and studious, dedicated and determined. Hufflepuffs are nurturers by nature, and Slytherins are cunning and devious. I am head of that house."

He watched her carefully for a reaction. When none came he continued.

"On arrival, new students are sorted by the Sorting Hat, a hat imbued by the powers of the founders. I suppose you will be sorted separately to the others, as we still have a week before the beginning of term."

Juliana looked questioningly at him. "What house..." she asked hesitantly, "do you think I will be sorted into?"

Severus pondered on this for a moment. He could not quite place what he saw in her: she probably had a sharp mind, but there was something about her that did not fit in any of the four Hogwarts houses.

"I do not know," he replied honestly. "You will have to wait and see."

She thought for a moment before asking her next question. "What am I going to learn at this school?"

The rest of the trip was spent by Severus explaining the various subjects, the timetabling and the general Hogwarts proceedings. Juliana listened intently, taking in everything he said, and Severus found that he was beginning to like the girl. But there was something about her that was still an enigma, something that he couldn't pinpoint, for all the skills he had learnt in Dumbledore's service as a spy. But he would have all the time in the world to find out.

If she wanted him to.

Third Chapter

Chapter 3 of 4

Severus and Juliana arrive at Hogwarts, and we see another flash of Juliana's past.

A/N: First of all, I'm sorry this has taken so long to get up. I've been so busy lately that I've hardly had time to breathe... But I hope you will like this chapter. I must admit, I'm not to good at the subtle thing, but I hope you'll enjoy anyway.

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It was dusk by the time the train drew up at Hogsmeade Station. Severus had sent a message ahead to Dumbledore asking him to have a carriage pick them up in the village instead of having to walk all the way up to the castle in the quickly approaching darkness. Sure enough, a Thestral-drawn carriage was waiting for them, the skeletal, horse-like creature pawing the ground impatiently as he and his young companion approached. Severus stopped in front of the carriage to stroke its nose, for he respected the creatures. They were a reminder of the countless deaths he had seen in his time as a Death Eater and as a spy. The countless deaths where he had stood there and watched, watched without intervening. The countless deaths he had brought about.

Juliana came up and stood next to him. Hesitantly she reached out her hand, and when it touched the leathery skin of the Thestral it exhaled appreciatively. Continuing to run her hand along its neck, she looked up at Severus.

"What are they?" she asked quietly.

"Thestrals," came his curt reply. "Carnivorous horses who can only be seen by those who have seen death." He silently wondered whether she had watched her parents die.

He turned and climbed into the carriage, beckoning her to follow. The Thestral moved off without any further prompting; they had, after all, been pulling students' carriages for a very long time. The ride up to Hogwarts Castle passed quickly. Juliana said nothing as they passed through the huge wrought-iron gates and into the grounds. The carriage drew to a halt in the courtyard outside the entrance hall, where Severus was greeted by Hagrid.

"Severus, good ter see yer. Who's that with yer? New student, eh? Bit early, don't yer think?" Hagrid greeted him, unhitching the Thestral and stroking its back.

Severus scowled. "This is my adoptive daughter, Juliana Snape. Juliana, Rubeus Hagrid, Hogwarts gamekeeper."

"Nice ter meet yer, Juliana. Welcome to 'Ogwarts."

Juliana nodded solemnly in his direction. "Thank you."

Severus cleared his throat. "If you will excuse us, Hagrid, we have to see the headmaster now. Good evening." He turned and beckoned Juliana to follow, which she did. As he led her through the corridors and up staircases, she took in every detail of the castle and its passages and intricacies she possibly could retain in such a short amount of time. The castle was huge, and she could not help admiring Severus for the self-assured and powerful way in which he strode through its halls. By the time he stopped and muttered something at a door which swung open, she was completely disoriented. At the top of a spiral staircase was another door, on which he knocked before entering.

"Come in," a wizened but strong voice called.

Severus opened the door and held it open for Juliana. She entered the room and looked around her in amazement. The room was filled with portraits, and they were moving. On shelves were cluttered assortments of odd-looking instruments, and behind a huge oak desk at the end of the room, mounted on the wall, hung a heavy sword,

its hilt encrusted with rubies.

From a side door, an old wizard emerged, smiling at her with twinkling eyes. He sat down behind the desk.

"Severus, my friend, please, draw up a chair." Severus did so, and Juliana followed suit, still gazing around at the walls of the office. "And who have we here? I would never have thought you to adopt a girl, Severus. But then, even an old man like me can be mistaken," he said, his eyes twinkling a bright blue.

"I do doubt you did not know exactly whom I was going to adopt, Headmaster "

"Albus, please. No reason for unnecessary formality, is there?"

"Albus, then. This is Juliana Snape. Juliana, this is Professor Dumbledore, headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry." Severus looked over at her. "I'm sure you will get to know each other quite well over time."

"Juliana, what a pleasant surprise. It's about time Severus found someone to look after him." Seeing Severus' scowl, he chuckled lightly.

"It's nice to meet you as well, Headmaster." Juliana answered.

Albus smiled at her. The girl felt vaguely uncomfortable as he looked her up and down, as if he could see into her mind. A slight frown flickered across his face for a second before he smiled again, and Severus had a suspicion that Albus knew something he did not.

"Well, Severus, I'm sure Juliana has had quite a long day. Why not show her to her room? I have arranged one in the west tower for her, quite near your own chambers. I'm sure she will find it to her liking."

"There was one thing, Headmaster, about her schooling..." Severus began.

Dumbledore cut him off. "Nonsense, it can be nothing we can't discuss tomorrow morning. The girl is tired. I will see you tomorrow at eleven. Goodnight to both of you."

"Goodnight, then," Severus replied.

"Goodnight, Professor." Juliana echoed. She and Severus got up to leave, but as soon as he had gone out of the door, Juliana heard Dumbledore speak softly behind her.

"You will be good for him. And he will, no doubt, be good for you, my dear. Now have a good night."

She stared for a moment before silently leaving the room to catch up with Severus.

"Come this way," Severus called to her as she hurried after him. "My quarters are in the dungeons, but Albus has seen it fit to give you a room on the upper floors. There is a staircase leading down to my quarters which you are free to use at any time."

He walked up to a painting of a rather beautiful lake and tapped his wand against the wall twice. The painting swung aside to reveal a large room, a four-poster bed on one wall, a wardrobe and a dresser lining the other. A large window was opposite the door, probably looking out onto the grounds, Juliana guessed. It was roomy but comfortable with dark wooden furniture, and to the side was a small bathroom tiled in dark green and blue and a small study with a desk and bookshelves. She thought it perfect, and Severus was happy to see her smile.

"The door will set itself to whatever password you wish. Just tap it twice and say your password, it will set automatically," he told her. Pointing to the door in the corner, he continued, "You can access my rooms through that door. There is a staircase and a short passage you will need to follow, but you can't get lost. I'll leave you to settle in. Come down in an hour and we will eat." When she did not reply, he turned and walked out, closing the door quietly behind him. It would be best to leave her for a while.

* * *

Dinner was a subdued affair, and neither Juliana nor Severus felt much like talking. Severus had chosen to eat in his own chambers, where it would, he figured, be quieter than at the staff table. Even though the students had yet to come back from their summer holidays, the Great Hall had an air of openness, the memories of many a food fight and the echoes of laughter and chatter. He preferred to dine with the girl where they could have some peace.

Juliana did not at all seem surprised at his chambers. They were suited to him, with their mahogany furniture and comfortable armchairs in a shade of dark blue, shelves upon shelves of books and magazines on every topic imaginable, but they were not the chambers of a bat of the dungeons. Quite the contrary to a bat, Severus liked natural light and had several tall, charmed windows inserted in the walls to show the lake and the Hogwarts grounds.

They ate quietly, and Juliana savored the rich taste of the Hogwarts food. At the first pop and Apparition of a house elf to take their dishes back into the kitchen, she jumped, but quickly got used to its comings and goings. When they had finished their dessert, she yawned, and Severus decided to send her to bed. She stood up and bade him goodnight before making her way up the stairs. Severus watched her until he heard the click of the door being pulled shut, and then pulled the book he was currently reading towards him. Before he could notice his eyes grew heavy and the pages slipped from his fingers, and he fell asleep in his armchair. He briefly remembered debating whether or not to go to his bedroom, but decided against it. If something happened to Juliana he wanted to be as close to her as possible.

* * *

He was awoken by a terrified whimpering coming from above. Grabbing his wand from the floor to which it had fallen in his sleep, he bolted to the staircase that lead up to Juliana's room. He flung open the door with his wand held out at arms length to find the girl writhing under her sheets, still asleep, but terrified and shaking. Severus leapt over to her and shook her, calling her name. As soon as his hands touched her, he saw images in his head, darkness, lights, and then a cruel flash of polished steel. She let out a scream that chilled Severus to the bone as here eyes opened, terrified. The pitcher of water on the dressing table shattered, spilling water and glass everywhere.

Juliana gasped, trying to control her breathing, and her body shook uncontrollably. Severus cradled her in his arms as he sat on the edge of the bed, and she held on to him as if for dear life. He didn't know what to say, so he said nothing, only stroking her back reassuringly with one hand. Very slowly, her breathing went back to normal and she ceased to shake. He sat there holding her for a few minutes more and then gently extricated himself from her grip. She looked up at him, her eyes no longer glassy but still fearful. A whisper.

"Don't go."

Severus sighed imperceptibly, but whispered back.

"I won't. Trust me. Just sleep now, Juliana. Sleep."

Her eyes closed and she drifted back into sleep, still holding his hand. Severus didn't go, but sat up next to her for a good part of the night, watching her like a silent guardian. When the sun began to peek through the curtains, he stood up to catch an hour of sleep himself. Before closing the door to her room, he paused and turned to look at her sleeping form one more time.

"Trust me, Juliana," he spoke quietly into the room. "Trust me."

Fourth Chapter

Chapter 4 of 4

The Sorting Hat and Juliana have a discussion with a surprising and not-so-surprising end.

A/N: In the discussion between the Sorting Hat and Juliana, the hat's comments are not italicised. However, they are thoughts that can not be heard by either Severus or Dumbledore. I only chose not to italicise so that it would be easier to follow.

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At promptly eleven am the next morning, a rather tired looking Severus escorted an even more tired looking Juliana to Dumbledore's office. The night had taken its toll on both of them, for Juliana's nightmare and Severus' single hour of sleep had unsettled them both.

Even after the events of the previous night Juliana was wary of him, perhaps even more so than before. Her stiff posture and wary eyes showed her mistrust of everything around her, as if her nightmare had awakened in her the idea that even here, she could not trust anyone. Breakfast had been silent and uncomfortable; Severus had not had the courage to break the atmosphere by talking to her. *Tonight*, he resolved, *I shall talk to her properly. Try to find out what the content of her nightmare was* But at the moment, Dumbledore was waiting for them.

Severus raised his hand to knock, but before his fist made contact the door swung open, and Dumbledore's silvery voice greeted them.

"Severus, Juliana. Good morning. I trust you both had a pleasant night. Especially you, Juliana?"

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled as he asked about their sleep. Juliana's face stayed resolute, and she answered him in her ever polite and yet carefully detached voice.

"I slept well, thank you Headmaster."

Dumbledore raised his eyebrow ever so slightly at Severus, but continued to smile at Juliana.

"Very good. Now, I see that we have to attend the matter of your education, Juliana. As you are already above the normal age for beginning your education, I feel it would not be the best of ideas to put you in first year, and yet placing you in fourth or fifth year would not work out at the moment either. Tell me, can you do any magic at all?"

Juliana thought carefully before answering. "A little, sir. My mother... taught me some simple magic, and I've taught myself a little bit from the books that Severus bought me in Diagon Alley."

Severus was surprised to hear that piece of information. Had she really already looked though those books? Surely she couldn't have had much time yet to actually practice any of the spells in them.

Dumbledore peered over the rim of his spectacles. "Would you be so kind as to demonstrate something you know, Juliana?" He would have felt odd calling her Miss Snape.

Juliana took her wand out from her pocket and swished and flicked it at the paperweight on the headmaster's desk. "Wingardium Leviosa," she said firmly, and the paperweight rose steadily into the air until she lowered her wand. Dumbledore applauded.

"Well done. Wingardium Leviosa is one of the first charms that students here learn, but not with an object as heavy as a paperweight. I see that you are a fast learner." He smiled at her. Juliana stole a quick glance at Severus and noticed a tiny smile playing on his lips before he spoke.

"Well... Albus, what do you think we are best to do with her?"

Dumbledore thought for a moment. "I think, Severus, that Juliana is a quick learner and can no doubt fit a few years' study into a few months private tutoring. I have spoken to the staff, and they have agreed to tutor Juliana by herself in the afternoons and evenings. She can then catch up on homework and do theoretical work by herself during normal class times. In a month we can assess her again to see if she would fit in with her peers in the fourth year. What do you think of the idea, Juliana?" He looked at her, the seriousness of his face altered only by his twinkling eyes.

"I like the sound of that, Headmaster," she answered truthfully. She didn't want to be placed in a class of eleven year olds, neither in a class of students her age who were far ahead of her in their magic skills. She didn't really like the idea of having to be among other students at all.

"Then it is settled. I shall see at today's staff meeting that we draw up a timetable for you, Juliana. In the meantime, Severus can send for textbooks and school supplies for you from Flourish and Blotts." He leaned back in his chair, satisfied.

"Albus, there was one more thing that we should discuss," Severus said. "The matter of Juliana's sorting."

"Ah." Dumbledore sighed. "Yes, you are right, Severus. We do need to sort Juliana. But should we sort her now or with the rest of the first-years as they arrive tomorrow?"

Juliana shifted in her seat. "Headmaster, I would much rather be sorted now than in front of the rest of the school tomorrow, if that's suitable," she said, feeling self-conscious.

Dumbledore nodded. "If that is what you wish, then you can be sorted now. Severus, would you like to go and get the Sorting Hat?" Severus stood silently and retrieved the hat from its place on the top of one of the shelves. He was curious now as to which house Juliana would be sorted into. He hadn't been able to place her. She was Ravenclaw for her intellect, and a part of her was Gryffindor as well, because she had courage. But her mystery characterised her as Slytherin. And yet he could not say she really was any of the three. It just didn't fit.

Dumbledore took the hat from Severus' hands.

"This hat, Juliana, was created by the founders of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Each imbued it with their powers and characteristics, and ever since the school's founding it has sorted the students into one of the four houses."

Juliana nodded. "I know," she stated. "Severus has told me about the school a little, and about the Sorting Hat."

Dumbledore looked as if he had expected no less. "Very well then, shall we see which house you belong to?" He gently placed the hat onto her head.

For a moment, the only thing Juliana noticed was how nervous she was as Dumbledore placed the old and worn hat on her head. There was silence and she felt ridiculous. Her fingers gripped the arms of the chair she was sitting in.

Then she heard a small voice in the back of her head, faint at first and then becoming clearer.

"Juliana Aliena... Snape, it seems. And what an interesting student for me to sort. I remember you parents, I believe."

You remember my... parents? Juliana thought, shocked.

"Of course. I remember every student that I sort. Your mother... A true Ravenclaw she was. Studious and quick to think. Quite brilliant, really. And your father..."

Don't talk to me about my father! She hissed.

"And yet you are so like him."

I am nothing like my father. You don't know what my father did. You have no idea what he was.

"So defensive. A very Slytherin trait. Perhaps I should place you in that house instead of in your mother's house?"

No, Juliana thought angrily, clenching her eyes shut. *You can't put me in Slytherin. He was in Slytherin.*

"And so was the person who is now your father."

Severus? He isn't my father. He won't ever be. He doesn't even like me.

That hat mused for a moment. "I think you'd be surprised there. Severus just has trouble showing his feelings about people. He has been through a lot, you know."

Juliana was silent. She didn't like this hat, it was telling her things she didn't want to know. It continued.

"So, where shall I place you? You have the intellect, wit and dedication that you need to be in Ravenclaw. But you also fit the characteristics of Slytherin House, even if you don't think so yourself."

Not Slytherin. I am not Slytherin. You can't put me in Slytherin. Juliana was becoming frantic. She didn't want to be in Slytherin. The very thought that she could be like him terrified her.

"No? Well then, I can't force you. But one day you will have to face that not every Slytherin is evil. In fact, the one standing next to you would soon give his life for you. If you're sure..."

"RAVENCLAW!" the hat shouted, after what seemed like an eternity to Severus. He had never seen the hat take so long to decide on a house. Juliana was shaking as Dumbledore took the hat from her head.

"Congratulations, my dear. Ravenclaw it is. You will sit at the Ravenclaw table at mealtimes; however, I think you would be more comfortable staying in your own room instead of sleeping in the dormitory," he told her with a knowing look at Severus. Juliana silently thanked him for that insight.

She looked down at herself. Her previously plain uniform was now the bronze and blue of Ravenclaw House, and it suited her quite well, she thought. Better than green and silver would have. She glanced up at Severus. His face was impassive.

So she is a Ravenclaw, he mused. *I am not surprised, and yet I am. Why? And what had the hat told her to shake her so much?*

Dumbledore stood. "Now, for the rest of the day you are free to do what you please. If you get lost, any of the paintings will be able to point you to where you want to go. I'm sure there's a lot for you to explore. Severus, I need to talk to you for a moment, but Juliana, you can go. I'll see you at dinner in the Great Hall. Have a good day," he said with a smile.

Juliana excused herself, still shaken from what the hat had told her, and closed the door behind her.

* * *

The rest of the day she spent wandering the corridors of the castle. It was huge; much more intricate and mysterious than any building she had ever been in before. And yet, it felt like home: warm, welcoming and friendly, and for the first time in her life she felt safe between stone walls.

She located the library on her wanderings and promptly forgot all about her exploring as she saw the masses of tomes that filled the shelves. Walking along the shelves in wonder, she jumped as she heard a voice behind her.

"What are you doing here? School hasn't begun for the term yet, you shouldn't be here," the strict voice of Madam Pince burst through her cloud. She turned on the spot, and the librarian's stony expression changed.

"Oh, you must be the girl Severus adopted. The headmaster told us about you. Did you want to find something to read?"

Juliana nodded. "Do you have the first year textbooks? I'd like to look at them." Madam Pince bustled off, and she followed until she found herself in front of a shelf filled with first year textbooks.

"There you are. I'm sure you'll find something here." She bustled off again.

Juliana pulled one of the books off the shelf. Its worn writing read "The Standard Book of Spells, Grade One." She sat down with it at one of the tables and pulled out her wand.

The first spells were easy; she had mastered them in a few minutes. Thoughtfully, she examined the length of her wand. Eleven and a half inches, made of red cedar (very rare and hard to come by in Britain, Ollivander had told her when she had purchased it) and containing a phoenix tailfeather. A piece of wood with the feather of a highly powerful magic creature in its centre. And yet it could not do magic on its own. Was it really the complex wand movements that made a spell work? Or was the wand merely a tool for making it easier?

She decided to experiment a little. Laying her wand to one side, she focused on the book.

"Wingardium Leviosa," she intoned. Nothing happened. She tried again, this time with more intent. "Wingardium Leviosa." Still nothing. She closed her eyes and imagined a ball of magic forming in her mind, and threw it at the book with all her might, once again intoning the spell. The book levitated a few centimetres above the table before dropping.

It had worked! Juliana couldn't believe it. It had actually worked. Snatching her wand back up, she at once felt guilty. Was she meant to be able to do that? Why didn't anyone else do spells without a wand? It was the intent that made the spell. The wand only helped to channel it.

She went up to the counter with the book and borrowed it. Enough for today. Throwing her intent at that book had been draining, and she was still tired from not getting enough sleep. Clutching the book to her chest, she walked back down to her own rooms, asking one of the portraits for directions as Dumbledore had suggested.

Tomorrow the other students would be there, she thought as she walked. And she wasn't looking forward to it at all. She hadn't been able to make friends easily in the

past, and she didn't think now would be any different.

But I'll wait and see, she thought. Perhaps it won't be all bad.