

Hatred and Hope

by Sephia

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Chapter 1 of 1

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"Severus," said Dumbledore, turning to Snape, "you know what I must ask you to do. If you are ready... if you are prepared...."

"I am," said Snape.

He looked slightly paler than usual, and his cold, black eyes glittered strangely.

"Then good luck," said Dumbledore.

Snape gave a nod and turned on his heel, sweeping out of the room. *If I am prepared, indeed. No one can ever be prepared for this...* He remembered the tense meeting he had had with the Headmaster, soon after the Yule Ball. It had been clear even then that the Dark Lord was regaining his strength and it was only a matter of time.

"What will you do, Severus?" Albus Dumbledore had asked with his annoying habit of asking questions to which there was only one answer.

"Why ask me, Headmaster? We had an agreement, as I recall. You have saved me from Azkaban, and I have agreed to become your personal spy within the Death Eater ranks." His voice was as calm as he could make it. *How to explain to the Dark Lord why I've been at Hogwarts all this time? Why I haven't been in Azkaban?*

The Headmaster looked at him, seeming to listen to his unspoken words far more than the spoken ones. It had also been a part of the agreement that Severus would not use Occlumency in front of Dumbledore. He had sworn a wand oath not to do so. "Will you be able to convince Tom to let you back, Severus?" Dumbledore had asked.

"I cannot see the future, Headmaster. As you no doubt remember, I achieved a D in Divination."

"Indeed, I do remember, Severus, and yet, your information and your conjectures about Tom's movements have usually been right."

"That comes from having information, Headmaster, and all of mine is fourteen years out of date."

"Severus, I have long wondered at this formality of yours. Can't you call me Albus?"

"I would prefer not to."

He sighed. "Very well, my boy. But back to the matter at hand. What will you do if your Mark burns?"

Another statement, phrased as a question. "Whatever you tell me to, Headmaster. Though it would be in your best interest to let me return to continue my spying."

"And what will you tell Tom?"

"The truth, of course. Even I cannot lie completely and fully to the greatest..." he paused, looking at those twinkling blue eyes, "...the second greatest Legilimens of the age," he corrected himself.

"You flatter me, Severus."

"Never. And I do not intend to start now."

"Very well."

They had turned to other topics, and there had been little mention of what was surely at the forefront of both their minds until the night of the third task. Having watched Harry Potter enter the maze, Dumbledore had beckoned to Snape, who was about to start his patrols, and walked with him as he started circling the maze. "Severus, I am getting concerned."

"Only now?"

"You know what I mean. This is the last task, the last chance for them to get at Harry. What do you think?"

"Nothing. How can I when I do not have the necessary information? I still do not know the entire prophecy. I would imagine that the Dark Lord would want to kill him personally, but I do not know how he would accomplish that." He scratched instinctively at his left arm. The Mark was rather clear now, almost as clear as it had been before the Dark Lord had lost his body. "I also do not know how he can hope to make a new body, though I believe I do know how he has managed to stay alive."

"Do you, Severus?" The twinkle had left Dumbledore's eye and his eyes were cold and penetrating.

He almost considered prevaricating, but he could never lie to this man. Not only would that break his oath, but after almost two decades, he probably would not be able to at all. "I told you what he used to say...that he had traveled further than anyone along the road to immortality. That and what happened two years ago is enough for anyone to figure it out. The Dark Lord obviously made a Horcrux, and seeing that the thrice-damned Mark on my arm is itching though the diary was destroyed makes me think he made more than one."

Dumbledore sighed, suddenly looking every one of his hundred-something years. "Very good, Severus. Yet, I would ask that you keep these findings to yourself. I, too, have long suspected this, but I have never met anyone else who thought of it. Horcruxes are hardly common topics of conversation."

"Hardly," Snape repeated, wishing he had been wrong. "Especially since you have removed all mention of them from the Hogwarts library." His arm twitched again, and he scratched at it with more force.

Dumbledore, who missed nothing, looked at this for a few seconds and then said, "Severus, if your Mark burns tonight, as I very much suspect it might, I ask that you do not go. Or, not yet."

"As you wish. Though you may want to know that if I do go back later, the Dark Lord will most likely kill me on sight."

"I do not think he will do that before giving you a chance to explain, Severus. He does not have so many followers that he can afford to lose them, and a spy is a useful thing to have."

"It is up to you, as you very well know. I have sworn it." He looked back at the older man, who was still waiting for an affirmation. "Very well, Headmaster. And if I do see him again, how much am I to tell him?"

"Stick with the truth when you can, my boy, as long as it does not endanger Harry. Now, I must go back to the stands."

Severus bowed his head and continued patrolling, doing so even when his Mark burned into his skin. He had kept walking, trying in vain to ignore the raging fire on the inside of his left arm.

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These thoughts occupied his mind as he made his way quickly from the Hospital Wing to his own chambers in the dungeons.

Walking towards the wardrobe in the corner, he pushed aside his many sets of teaching robes and reached into the back where, carefully cleaned and mended, the black robes of a Death Eater still hung. He had wanted to throw them into the fire once he heard of his Master's disappearance, over a dozen years ago, but Dumbledore had prevented it. Even then, he knew that the Dark Lord would be back. So, their relationship had continued as it always had with Dumbledore telling him only what was necessary for him to know. That damned prophecy, Albus had informed him, had not yet been carried out.

Pulling on the robes, he went over to his personal lab and filled an inner pocket with a few shrunken vials of the strongest pain-relieving potion he had. It would not negate the effects of the Cruciatus, but it was better than nothing. Checking to make sure the white mask was still in the other pocket, he left the castle.

Walking along the edge of the Forbidden Forest to the edge of the Hogwarts grounds, Snape felt the memories of his previous life coming back to him. Immediately, he Occluded his mind, trying not to feel too much. Irrationally, a part of him wanted to walk faster, to run, as if coming back almost two hours late was better than doing so two hours and ten minutes late. He passed Hagrid's hut, trying not to remember the first month of his working for Dumbledore, barely trusted, when Hagrid had escorted him to and from the Apparition spot.

Finally, just outside the grounds, Severus Snape put on the white mask and, taking a calming breath and imagining an impenetrable darkness covering his thoughts, touched his wand to the Mark still burning on his arm. He Apparated.

His feet hit the ground somewhere dark with no hint of either torchlight or Muggle electricity. He looked around, eyes quickly becoming accustomed to the lack of illumination. Still, he felt, rather than saw, the Dark wizard turn towards the sound of Apparition. Immediately, Snape fell to his knees, leaning over, head almost to the ground, hands by his sides.

"Well, well, and what is this?" he heard the Dark Lord hiss. He did not hear a spell, but his body suddenly stiffened, and he could not move a muscle. The air felt cool around him as he felt himself being lifted from the ground by the spell. "Severus Snape." On the Dark Lord's lips, his name felt like a curse. He was dropped to the ground again, and as he tried to get back to his knees, he heard, "Come to kill me for your new master, Dumbledore, have you?"

Abandoning the effort, he let his body lay flat on the grass, lifting his head just enough to make his words audible. "Never, Master. I have never lost faith."

"No, Severus? I've heard that tonight, many times in fact. But do not fear; I will let you tell me your lies as well as I have heard theirs. But first *Crucio!*"

It had been many years since he had last suffered the effects of the Cruciatus, and time made him forget the effects. Forget how every muscle clenched, contorting as the ligaments stretched and ripped. Forget how every nerve suddenly flared with an incandescent pain. Forget how every bone felt as if it were broken a hundred times over. He had forgotten the utter agony, the loss of time and space and dimension as he screamed without will or volition, writhing at the Dark Lord's bare feet. He was not sure when the pain ended nor how long it had lasted. All he knew was that at some point, coherent thought returned, documenting to his mind the residual pain in every part of his body.

"Now, now, Severus. Is that any way to greet your Master? On your knees before me, Half-blood!"

His eyes were still not functioning correctly; vision was hazy and indistinct, though he could make out his Master's burning red eyes on his. Quickly looking down, he managed to force himself onto his knees again, and as the Dark Lord approached him, he bent to kiss the hem of his robes.

"Very well, Severus," the hissing voice then commanded, sounding almost bored. "Do tell me why you have lived in luxury at Hogwarts for all this time, why you were late tonight, and why," the hiss grew softer, more dangerous, "you tried to stop me from getting the Philosopher's Stone three years ago?"

"My Lord, I did not know you could come back..."

"Did you not, Severus? You are, I think, among the more intelligent of my followers. You heard me when I said that I have conquered death."

"I did, my Lord, and I knew that you were not dead. However, I am sorry to say I could not imagine how you would be able to return." He paused, waiting for the Cruciatus curse or death, but his master stayed silent. "I never heard of you, not for these fourteen years, though I had asked Lucius more than once. His sources of information far exceed my own. I did not know until last summer, my Lord, when I felt your Mark on my arm grow steadily darker. I knew then that I had been wrong to doubt your return."

"Did you? And yet, you are here, Severus, over two hours late. Do use your superior linguistic skills to explain this little oversight as well."

"My Lord, I knew your return was imminent, but Dumbledore also knew. He seemed to know about the Marks growing stronger...I can only assume Karkaroff told him...and would have seen me leave."

"And yet, here you are. Look at me, Severus, and tell me this: did he send you?"

There was no other option. The truth was the only possible explanation. "He did, my Lord."

"Interesting. And yet, you are here and you do not wish me to kill you. Explain."

Severus kept looking up. He knew he had to be careful of what he said, and he also knew that he had to think exactly his words and nothing more. "My Lord, upon your disappearance, Dumbledore was convinced that I was on his side. He protected me from Azkaban, and over the years, he has come to trust me. Not completely, he still will not tell me the rest of the prophecy, nor anything else he may have learned. However, he relies upon my judgment. I let him do so. He came to me a few months ago and asked if I was ready to continue spying for him, to continue my work as a double agent on the side of his Order. I knew, by then, that you would soon be back, and I knew that I must not let him stop trusting me. I agreed. Upon Potter's return to Hogwarts, he told me to return to you." He wanted to stop, but knew that leaving his thoughts unsaid would be death. "He wants me to curry your favour as best I can so that I may bring back information to him."

"I see. So you return for fear of Dumbledore, do you?"

"No, my Lord, I..."

"No. So you return for fear of what I would do to you otherwise, Severus? Are you like that sniveling cretin there?" he asked, pointing to a figure behind him, who stood very still, looking back between the standing and kneeling wizards.

Severus looked at the figure and felt his heart slow momentarily. While older, the face was unmistakable. Images of torment during his years at Hogwarts threatened to overwhelm the barriers years of Occlumency had built in his mind. "Pettigrew," he breathed out. "So Potter was telling the truth..."

"What, Severus? Have you been having conversations with that little brat?"

"Never, my Lord. I loathe the idiotic boy. But last year, he said that Pettigrew was still alive and that Black was innocent. I always wondered, since Black's escape from Hogwarts, if he did not help the mongrel." He lowered his eyes, as if in confusion.

"You will tell me what you know about Potter later. For now, my other question remains: Why did you stop me from getting the Stone?"

"I did not know it was you, my Lord. I saw only Quirrell, who was an idiot and weak."

"And saving Potter at the Quidditch match? Oh, yes, Severus, I know it was you who did so."

"My Lord, at the time, Dumbledore's word was all that was keeping me out of Azkaban. Letting his favorite die would have been a bad way to keep his trust."

"Indeed. So the question remains, Severus. Why are you here? Are you so scared of me that you came crawling back to ensure my good graces? Or so scared of Dumbledore that you will not disobey his orders? And why should I ever trust you again?"

This was it. Here, he had to be absolutely honest, or else the Dark Lord would know instantly. He felt the prickling in his mind and called forth images of Dumbledore, complaining about his treatment of Potter. "My Lord, I despise Albus Dumbledore. For all the world thinks of him, he manipulates those around him for no purpose other than his grand design of peace. He believes," he let himself sneer at the thought, "that love will somehow tie us all together happily and refuses to acknowledge the reality of life." He paused for just an instant. This would be a risk. "You know what I crave, my Lord, and Dumbledore will not and cannot provide it."

"You want power, Severus, and knowledge. That I have long known. In fact, I have long trusted you because of that. You do not seek to tell me tales of your unquestionable loyalty. I admit I find that refreshing." He paused.

Snape, shifting his attention down to the ground again, took a moment to calm and order his thoughts. The Dark Lord's next thoughts would probably determine his fate. Yet, he found that he could consider that question rather objectively. Either he would die, or he would go back to serving two masters, hating both for what they did to him and admiring both for the power they yielded over the loyalties of other wizards. Both would use him for their own purposes. Yet, if one side won.... He forced himself to stop thinking the thought, reinforced his mental barriers and waited until the Dark Lord spoke again.

"You had abandoned me fourteen years ago, Severus, and from you as well as from the others, I require constant service to repay that lapse. I do not forgive treason easily, especially from those as intelligent as you. Yet, I will admit that your actions during the last few months have been useful to me. I still need a spy on the old fool, and you are well placed for it. You did not lie to me tonight. I would have known if you had. I will call you within the next week and will expect your instant attendance no matter what Dumbledore may say. But I will let you live."

Snape bowed forward again, his knees and back stiff from the cold settling into his fatigued and sore muscles. "Thank you, my Lord."

"I will also say that your waiting tonight will be helpful to me. Still, though, you missed a general meeting. That is not permitted. So, perhaps a small taste of my annoyance? Crucio!"

Snape once again lay squirming on the ground, screaming. He once again realized with a jolt that no memory of the Cruciatus prepared one for the real thing. However, a small part of him was almost grateful. Screaming on the ground, he could not think. He could not anticipate or worry. Until it stopped.

"Go, Severus. And remember, Lord Voldemort does not tolerate tardiness, not even from spies." Two pops told Severus that his Master and Pettigrew had both gone. He stayed on the ground for a few more minutes, breathing heavily as he slowly recovered the use of his senses and his body. His mind, too, started thinking again, though it was slow and one thought blocked out the others. I'm alive. Not sure how he should react to this piece of information, he downed one of the pain potions in his pocket...all the vials were spelled to be unbreakable...and Apparated back to the gates of Hogwarts.

Landing a few feet from the griffin-embossed gates, he pulled another potion from his pocket and drank that too before walking stiffly inside. There was a useful path from the edge of the woods to a little-known entrance close to his rooms. Once inside, he let his mask fall onto a side table and went immediately to the fireplace. Throwing a

handful of Floo powder into the flames, he called out, "Dumbledore's office."

A second later, Dumbledore's head appeared in the flames, telling him to come through. He did so, sat down in a comfortable armchair by the headmaster's desk, and accepted a large tumbler of whiskey. Drinking it in two swallows, he took out a wand and extracted the memory of the night's events, putting them into the Pensieve the headmaster had waiting. He waited while Dumbledore put his long, crooked nose to the swirling mist inside, falling into the memory.

After a few minutes, Dumbledore returned and gestured for him to retrieve his memory, which he did. The headmaster sat down behind his desk and looked carefully at the younger man. Snape looked back impassively. Finally, the headmaster spoke. "I assume you meant every word of it when you told Tom that you hate me, my boy. I cannot tell you how sorry I am about that."

"Don't waste your breath, Headmaster. It does not matter."

"Doesn't it?"

"And please, do not ask questions for which you already know the answers. You know I hate you. And the Dark Lord. What difference does it make if I do what you wish?"

"All the difference in the world, my boy. And I hope that, someday, you will understand this."

"It is immaterial. Do you wish to ask me the same question my other master demanded of me tonight? Why am I doing this? It is because while he can give me forbidden knowledge and the power to cause death, only you can find a way to end this war and give me the freedom to use my power on my own behalf."

"I am sorry, Severus. I know how much my wishes cost you, and I know how tied you are by the oaths you insisted on making to me, all those years ago."

"I needed your trust, Headmaster. Those oaths are not nearly as binding as his Mark."

"No. But they bind you to me, just the same."

"They do." They looked at each other for a moment; Severus let his Occlumency fall and let Dumbledore sift through his thoughts. He did not even let himself clench his teeth, though he knew that the headmaster knew how much he hated this. Finally the old man looked away.

"You will not accept my apologies, Severus. Will you accept my thanks?"

"You do not thank someone for doing what they are forced to do, Headmaster." He stood. "Now, unless you have something else for me to do tonight?"

"No, my boy. Sleep well. I would insist you go to Poppy, but there is nothing to cure the after-effects of Cruciatus. Do you want me to find a substitute for you for tomorrow?"

"No. I can handle it, just as I have done before." He turned and returned to his rooms, wondering if death would have been the preferable option. Both of his masters knew of his general pessimism, and both used his relentless drive. Only one, however, knew of the faint hope that kept him alive. It was that, more than anything else, that made him feel weak. But apart from his hatred, it was all he had.

Disclaimer: I am not JKR. I did not create Severus Snape. No money or anything else was made.

Author's note: I realize that this is not quite compliant with DH, since I did not mention Lily anywhere, but I do think it is mostly compliant with the story and Snape as he was portrayed in canon.

The first few lines were taken directly from Goblet of Fire, from chapter 36: The Parting of the Ways

Reviews are appreciated!