

# Morgaine's Story

by morgaine\_dulac

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

## I: Morgaine of the Lake

Chapter 1 of 35

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### Chapter I: Morgaine of the Lake

*I am standing at the edge of the Forbidden Forest. The setting sun has cast a blood red veil over the hilltops. Everything is silent, I can hear the wind whisper in the treetops, and I imagine that there is another whisper. A voice I have always known, it seems: a voice of comfort and trust. But I know that I am imagining things. I will never again hear his voice. Severus is gone. He laid down his life in the Final Battle. But still I know that he will never really leave me. He will always be there at my side, just as I stood by his until the very end.*

*If you don't know that it is there, you will easily miss the small slab of dark granite at the edge of the forest. Already it is partly covered by grass and wild flowers. But if you kneel down and part the grass, you will be able to read the inscription.*

*What do you write on the headstone of a man like Severus Snape? Here lies a brave man? A hero? He would have laughed at this. So I chose something else, a simple phrase that means so much. At least, to me it does. And I hope he would like it, too: 'Never Forgotten'. For that's one thing Severus Snape will never be: forgotten. He will always be in my heart.*

*Fourteen years we have shared. Not always together, not always in harmony. There were times of love, and there were times of hate, times of laughter and times of sorrow. But whatever we went through, in times of need we always stood at each other's side.*

*But let me tell you how it all started. I was fourteen years old and finally, finally, I was on my way to Hogwarts. I had been dreaming of this place for three years, ever since I had been told that I was a witch. But I had not been allowed to go then. My guardians had decided that the Magical World was not for me.*

*But now, finally, I was on my way.*

*I had left my grandmother's house two weeks ago. The only home I had ever known, the place where I had been trained and schooled since the age of six. I had left to discover a new world.*

*My introduction into the Magical World had been gradual. Remus had taken me to Diagon Alley, where I saw the things I only knew from books and things I had not even*

known existed. Then he brought me to the Burrow where I was welcomed with open arms.

And now I was sitting on a train that would bring me to Hogwarts. I was not nervous, just excited. I had been well-prepared and was eager to see all the things I had learnt about.

I had only been given two pieces of advice on my way: always follow your heart and never cross the Potions master.

~ ~ ~

Severus Snape was walking along the corridors of Hogwarts Castle, his black robes billowing behind him. The Headmaster had called all the teachers back to school three weeks prior to the start of term, not giving them any more information than that they were to discuss the admittance of a new student. Now it was time for all teachers to meet this student, and so Severus was on his way to the Headmaster's office to find out more.

'Ah, Severus, right on time,' the Headmaster announced in his most cheerful tone as Severus entered the office. 'I hope you had a nice summer.'

Severus shrugged. Nothing that had happened this summer was worth talking about. He had spent most of his time in his house at Spinner's End, reading old books, perfecting potions and trying out new ones, just as he had done every summer since he had started teaching at Hogwarts three years ago. Rather dull, actually, but the people he had associated with prior were either in Azkaban or busy keeping a low profile. Severus didn't miss his so-called friends very much, to be honest. But the summer months did tend to get a little boring. He had therefore been quite glad when he received the Headmaster's note.

'Well, the reason I called you back here in the middle of summer is a new student,' the Headmaster started. 'A rather special young lady, if I may say so.'

He smiled and his blue eyes were sparkling when he continued. 'Morgaine duLac should have started her magical education here at Hogwarts three years ago. But her guardians didn't like the idea of sending her into our world. You see, so far Morgaine has been raised in Iceland.'

'Iceland?' Professor Sprout asked. 'Now what would a young witch be doing in Iceland? Sounds a bit like the end of the world.'

The Headmaster chuckled. 'Well, the place where the girl was raised is a rather secluded one, and to some people it might seem like the end of the world indeed. As a matter of fact, it is known to more Muggles than wizards. Many of them visit the place for spiritual guidance.'

'What is a young witch doing there?' McGonagall repeated Sprout's question.

'There are still priestesses there who practice the Old Ways and live by the Old Religion,' Dumbledore explained. 'Many of them know as much of Herbology and Potions as some of our best wizards and witches. It had been planned that Morgaine should become a priestess as well, but I couldn't let such talents go to waste.'

'You know this girl then, Albus?' McGonagall wondered.

Dumbledore smiled mysteriously. 'As a matter of fact, I do. She is my great-granddaughter.'

Severus raised an eyebrow. *Lovely*, he thought. *A protégée. Just what I'd been hoping for.*

'I don't want anybody to think that Morgaine gets any special treatment just because she's a relative of mine,' Dumbledore said. It was as if he had been reading Severus' mind.

'That is why I called you here. Morgaine will arrive at Hogwarts tomorrow, and I want all of you to test her over the next two weeks in order to see if she has what it takes to join the other fourth year students. Minerva here has put together a schedule for all of you.'

Severus glanced at the parchment McGonagall had put in his hand. It wouldn't be his turn to test the girl before the end of the second week.

'I ask you to test Morgaine as you would test any other student at the end of their third year. She has been tutored by a skilful wizard, but there might be several gaps in her knowledge. Remember, the point of the following two weeks is to figure out whether she could keep up with the other fourth-years.'

When the teachers were dismissed in order to prepare the girl's tasks, Severus returned to his office in the dungeons. So Dumbledore thought that his great-granddaughter was ready to join the fourth year without having studied at Hogwarts before? Severus shook his head. Most of his third year students didn't even live up to his expectations. Hence, he wasn't going to make it easy for the girl. As from the rest of his students, he would demand nothing less than perfection.

He took a copy of the third years' potion book from the shelf on the wall and started flipping through the pages, looking for suitable tasks. If he were to take this girl into his class, she'd better prove herself worthy.

~ ~ ~

As usual, Severus woke early the next morning. And as the meeting with the new student wasn't scheduled until after lunch, he decided to take a walk around the grounds. Maybe, he would even make an excursion into the Forbidden Forest to look for herbs.

On his way out, he ran into Dumbledore.

'Ah, good morning, Severus. Just on my way to Hogsmeade station to pick up Morgaine,' the old wizard announced. 'I hope you have some nice tasks in store for her.'

Severus nodded curtly. He had picked the tasks carefully. The girl would have to earn her place in his class.

~ ~ ~

*When I left the train, I entered a new world. It felt as if every step I took towards Hogwarts was a step away from my old life and towards a new one. And it felt good to have my great-grandfather by my side even though I didn't know him well.*

*I had only met him a couple of times. He had been the one who had given me the greatest gift ever. He had told me that I was a witch. He had sent Remus to teach me when my guardians had refused to send me to Hogwarts. He had seen to it that they changed their minds. And I loved him dearly for it.*

*Hogwarts Castle was the greatest building I had ever seen, and I shuddered when I stepped into its shadow. But when entered, I was surprised. It felt as if I were coming home.*

~ ~ ~

Severus returned to the castle in good time before the meeting. He had to admit that he was curious to meet the girl.

When he entered Dumbledore's office, the rest of the staff had already arrived although there were still five minutes left to the appointed time. And so had Dumbledore and the girl.

Severus' eyes were immediately drawn to her. He had expected her to be taller, being Dumbledore's great-granddaughter. But she was quite short, just about five feet, Severus guessed. Her chestnut hair was shoulder-length and rather bushy. She was wearing a midnight-blue robe, and around her neck she wore a leather string with a

Witches' Star attached to it.

'Ah, Severus,' Dumbledore exclaimed and smiled. 'Come here, let me introduce you. Morgaine, this is the Potions master, Professor Snape. Professor, Morgaine duLac.'

'Good afternoon, Professor.'

Morgaine smiled and stretched out her hand, and for a second, Severus was slightly taken aback. He normally didn't shake hands with his students. But it was good manners, after all, and all his colleagues were looking at him. He had no other choice than taking the girl's hand.

He held onto her hand a second longer than he had planned. The firmness of her handshake had surprised him. The girl had obviously self-confidence.

When they had released each other's hands, Dumbledore directed the girl towards a chair. 'I think everybody is quite curious to know how your education has been so far, Morgaine. Why don't we all have a seat and you can answer the teachers' questions.'

Severus chose a chair by the window, a little apart from his colleagues. He wanted to observe the girl. She had made a good first impression and appeared confident, but now she was definitely nervous. And Severus noticed that she was chewing her lip.

As Morgaine faced the teachers' questions, Severus had to admit that she was no brainless girl. Obviously, she had done her homework, and whoever had been teaching her so far had done a fine job. However, Severus refused to get too impressed. After all, anybody could memorise spells and charms from a book. Using them was a completely different matter. It would be a pleasure to test the girl.

## II: The Testing

### Chapter 2 of 35

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

### Chapter II: The Testing

Ten days had passed since Morgaine had arrived at Hogwarts. She spent her mornings studying in the library under McGonagall's supervision, and in the afternoons, her knowledge was tested in more practical ways. And despite her inexperience, she was making quite a good impression. She had obviously been tutored well.

'She is quite knowledgeable in Herbology,' Professor Sprout told the other teachers one evening. 'And most of all, she is interested. I don't recall ever having a student who asked so many questions.'

Severus hadn't tested the girl in Potions yet, and he refused to get impressed by what his colleagues were saying about her. As a matter of fact, he found it quite annoying how delighted they all were. The girl had surely done her homework, but if she wanted to impress *him*, she would have to do a damn fine job in Potions.

First on Thursday afternoon was it time for Severus to test Morgaine. He had prepared her task well and decided to assess her theoretical knowledge of potion ingredients first. And only if she did a good job, a thoroughly good job, would he even consider letting her get close to a cauldron.

~ ~ ~

*Time flew by, and my first ten days at Hogwarts passed in a blink of an eye. It was a wonderful time. Being surrounded by people who did not frown upon magic was a new experience for me. I had been used to studying in secluded rooms, but now I could openly show what I had learnt and loudly ask to learn more. I was grateful that Remus had done such a thorough job. He sure has taught me well. Yet I knew there was much more to learn, and I wanted to start right away.*

*Potions was next. I knew that I had learnt as much as I could and that I would do well. But there was something about the Potions master that made me not want to disappoint him. And when I entered his classroom, my heart was beating so hard that I was convinced that he would be able to hear it from across the room.*

~ ~ ~

Their first meeting was scheduled at one o'clock in the afternoon, and Severus had been waiting in his classroom for a quarter of an hour, ready to reprimand Morgaine in case she showed up late. He wanted her to know from the start that it was him who laid down the rules and that he wouldn't accept sloppiness. But he didn't get the chance. At two minutes to one, there was a firm knock on his classroom door.

'Enter,' he said in his most commanding voice.

Morgaine stepped inside and closed the door behind her. 'Good afternoon, Professor.'

Severus curtly nodded towards her. At least she was punctual.

He wordlessly beckoned her to take a seat in the front of the classroom. 'You will identify some potion ingredients for me,' he instructed her in a cold voice. 'And to each one, you will give me an example of a potion in which you would use the ingredient.'

The girl slightly inclined her head. 'Yes, Professor.'

She was again chewing on her lip. Severus found this habit of hers rather annoying. And he decided to give her something to be nervous about.

He held up a dried flower with violet leaves. 'Well?'

Morgaine squinted at the flower. 'I believe it is belladonna, sir. It's a hallucinogenic.'

Severus raised an eyebrow. 'You *believe*?'

He saw the girl bite her lip and was surprised when she looked him straight in the eyes a second later.

'No, sir,' she stated. 'I know.'

Severus oppressed a smirk. *What do you know*, he thought. *The girl has some confidence.*

He picked up a glass jar and held it up before her. 'And this?'

'Fluxweed, sir. When picked at Full Moon, it can be used in Polyjuice Potion,' Morgaine said in a firm voice, an almost defiant look on her face.

And Severus nodded, satisfied. At least, the girl was no push-over.

It was almost dinner time when he sent her away. He had to admit that the girl had done her homework well. She had identified most of the ingredients correctly and seemed to know their properties. With some luck, she wasn't going to blow up the classroom the next day.

~ ~ ~

*I tried. Merlin knows, I tried.*

*I did everything he asked me to do, I answered his questions as good as I could. But he didn't seem to be pleased. Every answered question was followed by a new, harder one. There was no friendly word, not a single gesture of goodwill and definitely no praise. It didn't seem fair.*

*But what confused me the most was that I could not figure out why I was so desperate to please Severus Snape.*

~ ~ ~

The next morning, Severus woke up with a pounding headache. He had slept poorly, as he did so often during the night of the New Moon. He made his way to the bathroom and took a bottle of Headache Potion out of the cabinet. To his annoyance, it was almost empty, and he decided to save the last few drops until later that day and to brew a new batch in the evening, hoping the headache would disappear by itself.

But his condition didn't improve during the morning. Any loud noise made him jump, he felt nauseous, and by midday he was in a really foul mood. And when Morgaine knocked at his classroom door at one o'clock, he was ready to rip somebody's throat out.

He directed her straight to a workstation in the front of the classroom and instructed her to brew a Shrinking Potion. There was not much that could go wrong with that potion, and with any luck, he could let the girl work on her own and tend to his headache.

He observed her examining her ingredients, noting that she sorted them according to when they would have to be added. This was obviously not the first time that she brewed a potion.

Then he watched her chopping the daisy roots. She took her time, chopping them evenly.

'Are you always that thorough?' he asked in a low voice.

Morgaine looked at him and smiled. 'If the task requires it, yes, sir.'

Severus raised his eyebrow in surprise. He had obviously underestimated the girl. She knew what she was doing.

After a while, he decided that he could indeed let her work on her own and went to sit behind his desk in the darker side of the classroom. Morgaine was standing with her back to him, which he welcomed, as he could close his eyes to try to block out the searing pain in his head. But something was disturbing him. Several times he felt as if Morgaine was looking at him, but when he opened his eyes, he found her still standing with her back turned to him. Severus frowned. Was he hallucinating?

After two hours, Morgaine had finished, and her Shrinking Potion had exactly the bright acid green colour that it was supposed to have. She had cleaned up after herself, too. Nothing on her workstation indicated that somebody had been working there: the knives were clean and the table dry. Severus watched her closely. She seemed to be quite pleased with her work and eager to show him more, but Severus was tired. The pain in his head had, if possible, increased over the last hour. He just didn't have the energy to come up with a difficult potion to test the girl with.

'Surprise me,' he growled. 'You have two hours, and you can use any ingredient you might find in this cabinet.'

He returned to his desk to sit down. The pain in his head was now so severe that it was almost unbearable. All he wanted was to hear and see nothing, just drift away. He picked up the bottle containing the Headache Potion. There wasn't any point in waiting any longer to drink it. The pain couldn't possibly get any worse.

He filled a goblet with water and added the potion, making the water turn light blue. He brought the goblet to his lips and drank its content greedily, hoping that it would bring some ease.

When he put the goblet down, he noticed Morgaine looking at him from across the room.

'Is there anything you would like to ask, Miss duLac?' he barked, annoyed with himself that he had let her see that he was not feeling well.

The girl didn't even flinch but shook her head. 'No, sir, not at all.'

'Then get to work. You have already wasted five minutes.'

He sat down behind his desk. He had to calm down. He couldn't let the girl see that he was out of balance. He took some deep breaths and closed his eyes.

'Think of something else,' he told himself. 'Concentrate.'

It was no use. It felt as if someone had split his head open with an axe. Normally, the potion worked at once, but he would need a bigger dose. Why had he not brewed a batch when he saw that he was running out?

Severus was angry with himself. He seriously considered starting at once, but his hands were shaking too much. He would just have to put all his mental power to ignoring the pain. He concentrated hard but there was once more something disturbing him: he still had the feeling that Morgaine was looking at him.

Two hours later, the girl was suddenly standing in front of him, holding a phial in her hand.

'Leave it on my desk,' Severus instructed. 'I will have a look at it later.'

He just wanted her to leave, but Morgaine didn't move. She just kept looking at him, and Severus wished she would stop.

'Well, what are you waiting for?' he snapped. 'You are dismissed, Miss duLac.'

To that, Morgaine slightly inclined her head, wished him a good night and left the classroom as he had told her.

Severus looked towards her workstation. She certainly knew how to clean up after herself: the table and cauldron were clean, and she had returned all the jars and bottles

exactly to the place where she had taken them.

Curious, Severus picked up the phial she had placed on his desk. The potion inside was shimmering light blue, and as he opened the bottle, he noticed a faint scent of peppermint. No, this couldn't be. How on earth had the girl managed to produce the exact potion he had intended to make himself?

He poured some of the potion into a cauldron, and waved his wand over it, murmuring an incantation that made the potion split into its basic ingredients. He shook his head in amazement. No doubt, the girl had succeeded in producing a Headache Potion.

He took a goblet from his cupboard, filled it with water and added seven drops of the potion which made the water turn light blue. Then he lifted the goblet to his lips, drained it and walked towards the door. Dumbledore would want to know how Morgaine had preformed.

By the time Severus reached the headmaster's office, the pain in his head had disappeared.

~ ~ ~

*There had been a whisper inside my head all afternoon. I knew it was his voice, Severus Snape's voice, but he wasn't talking to me. His voice was just there, inside my mind. And I did not know what to do about it.*

## III: The Sorting

*Chapter 3 of 35*

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Author's note: Thanks to JKR for some wonderful characters. Thanks to Daedalus Plum for beta reading.

### Chapter III: The Sorting

Severus was the first of the teachers to arrive in the Headmaster's office where Dumbledore was standing by the window, evidently amused by something he was watching on the grounds below.

'Ah, good evening, Severus,' Dumbledore greeted the Potions master and beckoned him to join him. 'I just let Fawkes out for his evening flight. It looks like he has made a new friend.'

Severus peered out the window and caught sight of the Phoenix flying in and out of a veil of mist that kept changing colours, and he had to step closer to the window to see who was making the colours change. It was Morgaine.

She was lying on her stomach on one of the stone benches, the setting sun causing her chestnut hair to shine in a warm, golden-red tone. And every time the Phoenix disappeared in the mist, she made the colours of the mist change with a flick of her wand. She seemed to be having just as much fun as the bird. Severus imagined hearing her laugh. If her laughter was anything like her smile, it must simply be adorable.

Then he frowned. Why on earth was he thinking about how the girl's laughter sounded? How had this thought come to enter his mind?

Dumbledore seemed to notice his confusion. 'An enchanting little witch, isn't she, Severus? Her great-grandmother had the same powers.' He smiled mysteriously.

Severus scowled and turned away, secretly wondering if Dumbledore would think it inappropriate if he asked how he had come to father a child. But before he could even decide whether to ask or not, there was a knock on the door. The other teachers had arrived to discuss Morgaine's abilities.

'My dear colleagues, welcome.' With a sweeping motion, Dumbledore pulled up chairs for everyone. 'Do make yourselves comfortable.'

Then he walked towards the door.

'Aren't you joining us, Albus?' McGonagall wondered.

'Alas, no, my dear,' Dumbledore replied. 'I am dying to find out how it feels to run through coloured mist.' And without any further explanations, he left the office.

Severus observed his colleagues from his place by the window. Despite the Headmaster's mystical answer, nobody seemed to be surprised. They were all used to him being a little peculiar at times.

'Well then, we all know what we are here for,' McGonagall started. 'We have all tested Morgaine over the last two weeks. I for one think that she has done a wonderful job, and I do not object to her admission to our school.'

Professor Sprout burst out in praise: 'I simply love this girl! Her knowledge of plants is so extensive. I do hope she will be sorted into my House.'

Professor Flitwick agreed and was, if possible, even more pleased with the girl's achievements than Sprout was.

Severus, however, was not. *Why do they have to be so annoyingly positive?* he wondered silently. He for one would keep his praise to himself. Certainly, Morgaine had done her homework well, and to be completely honest, he was impressed by her skills. But he didn't deem it necessary to share his thoughts with his colleagues. They seemed all rather smitten by the girl anyway, and he had no intention of contributing to that.

'Well, your verdict?' Dumbledore asked as he re-entered his office. He didn't seem to have noticed that his white beard was tinted with green and blue specks. Or maybe he just didn't care.

'Gifted, simply gifted,' Professor Sprout exclaimed.

Severus raised an eyebrow. This woman had absolutely no idea about how to restrain herself. The girl had certainly performed well, but this was no reason to flip out like that. Thankfully, McGonagall was showing more self-control.

'She is curious and willing to learn,' she said. 'I think the only thing she'll need is a bit of tutoring in the beginning.'

Dumbledore nodded. 'And what do you think, Severus?'

'I agree with Professor McGonagall,' Severus replied in a sober voice. 'The girl has potential.' He didn't deem it necessary to say more.

Dumbledore nodded again. 'Then I think we should let her know.'

He opened the door and beckoned Morgaine to enter his office. She looked serious, and Severus noticed a flicker of insecurity in her eyes. And again, she was chewing her lip. Severus frowned. Why did this habit of hers annoy him so much?

Professor Sprout couldn't hold herself back. 'Welcome to Hogwarts, Miss duLac, welcome.'

Morgaine's face lit up with a smile, and she turned to look at her great-grandfather.

'Yes, welcome to Hogwarts, my child. You have done well.' Dumbledore gave her a quick hug. 'Tonight, you will sleep in your House dormitory. But for that, you will need to be sorted first.'

McGonagall had already taken the Sorting Hat from its shelf. Everyone looked excited. Everyone but Severus, that was.

*What a no-brainer*, he thought as McGonagall put the Hat on Morgaine's head. With her brains, the girl would do well in Ravenclaw, but considering her family tree, she would undoubtedly be sorted into Gryffindor.

He had barely finished his thought when the Sorting Hat announced its decision.

'Slytherin!'

Severus raised an eyebrow in surprise. Had he just heard right? Had Dumbledore's great-granddaughter just been sorted into Slytherin? How had that happened?

He was not the only one who was surprised. He noticed that his colleagues looked slightly taken aback as well. Only Dumbledore was smiling as he took the Sorting Hat from Morgaine's head.

'You will do well, my child.'

Morgaine nodded, but there was a sceptical look on her face. Obviously, she had not expected this decision either.

Then Dumbledore turned to Severus. 'Severus, as her Head of House, I put Morgaine into your charge. I expect you to help her in any way you can. May I now ask you to escort your student to her dormitory?'

Severus inclined his head in acknowledgement and then turned on his heels, wordlessly beckoning Morgaine to follow him.

They went down the stairs without either of them saying a word, and it was not until they had arrived in the Slytherin common room that Severus turned to look at his new charge. There still was a puzzled look in her eyes. And she was chewing her lip again.

'You should really stop that annoying habit of yours,' Severus hissed at her.

The girl flinched, and Severus realised at once that his words had sounded unnecessarily harsh. Hence he tried to find something else to say. 'It is not good for your teeth.'

Morgaine raised an eyebrow. Then she grinned. 'Not good for my teeth, sir?'

Severus felt himself blushing, and swiftly turned around and strode towards the door that led to the girls' dormitory.

*Not good for your teeth. What a stupid thing to say*, he thought, inwardly rolling his eyes at himself. But the comment had made the girl smile, and he had to admit that he liked her smile.

In the girls' dormitory, he pointed towards the bed closest to the wall.

'Your belongings have already been brought down. Make yourself comfortable and rest,' he instructed. 'You will meet me tomorrow morning for your first tutorial, and I want you to be in a good condition. My office, eight thirty sharp.'

Morgaine nodded, and Severus gazed into her eyes. He could see that she was still trying to figure out what had happened up in Dumbledore's office. But there was something else in her eyes, the same look she had had in his classroom earlier that day. A look that suggested that she was waiting for something, that she had something to tell him. Severus couldn't quite put a finger on it, but this look made him edgy. And he quickly turned to walk towards the door.

'Have a good night, Miss duLac.'

And without looking back, he left the dormitory.

He retired to his private chambers where he, with a flick of his wand, lit a fire in the fireplace and then poured himself a glass of wine.

This had certainly been a strange day. When Morgaine had entered his classroom on Thursday afternoon, all he had seen was a young girl from whom he hadn't expected much. But she had proven to be knowledgeable and eager to learn more. And now she was suddenly a Slytherin. Severus shook his head. Dumbledore's great-granddaughter in Slytherin. He still couldn't really believe it.

His eyes fell on the phial containing the Headache Potion Morgaine had brewed in the afternoon. How could she have known? Sure, that he had been suffering from headache wasn't the most difficult thing to figure out. But how had she known which potion he usually brewed? And why had he all afternoon had the feeling that she was looking at him?

~ ~ ~

*Slytherin. I had been sorted into Slytherin. Was this good or bad? I didn't know what to think. From what I knew, there had not been a single dark witch or wizard who had not been in Slytherin. And now, I had been sorted into this House, too.*

*And if the reputation of Slytherin House wasn't enough to make my skin crawl, the Head of House certainly was. I felt nervous whenever I was close to Severus Snape. Not really uncomfortable, just a little uneasy.*

*He had been observing me from the very first moment. I felt his eyes following me, scrutinising my every move. I had never seen eyes like his. Looking into them was like staring into the depths of an enchanted lake. You can stare for ages and never find out any of its secrets. Severus Snape's eyes were just the same. Once they caught you, you could not turn away. You stare and stare, trying to read them, but never getting anywhere. And they stare back at you, right into your very soul. And I didn't know what the wisest choice was: to avoid his gaze or to bravely return it. I had felt his eyes on me all afternoon, but whenever I had looked up, he had had his back turned to me.*

*And then there had been this whisper. At first, it had been nothing more than an undefined murmur, insignificant and at the same time annoying like a buzzing fly. Over the hours, the murmur had become more distinct: it had turned into a whisper, and then I had recognised his voice, alluring and scary at the same time.*

*My mind told me to turn away and ignore both his eyes and his whisper. But my heart came to choose otherwise.*

## IV: The Start of Term

*Chapter 4 of 35*

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### Chapter IV: The Start of Term

*The first night in my House dormitory wasn't the best. I hardly slept. There were too many thoughts on my mind.*

*Slytherin. Why Slytherin? I couldn't understand it. Slytherin House was said to be home to Dark and evil wizards and witches. How had I come to be sorted into this House? Surely, I was no Dark witch. I was the great-granddaughter of Albus Dumbledore. Surely, I did not belong in Slytherin House.*

*And why did I have the feeling that Severus Snape was the reason I had ended up there?*

~ ~ ~

Severus woke early. While dressing, he recalled the events of the last evening. Dumbledore had been the only one who hadn't seemed to be surprised by the Sorting Hat's decision. Did he know something the others didn't? Had he planned to have his great-granddaughter in Slytherin?

Severus shook his head. Why would the headmaster plot something like this? Morgaine had proven to be a smart young witch, and the way she had fought to impress all her professors over the last two weeks had shown that she knew what she wanted and how to get it. And ambition had always been highly valued in Slytherin House. But still, something felt wrong.

When he entered the Great Hall, Morgaine and Professor McGonagall were already sitting at one of the long tables.

'Good morning, Severus,' McGonagall greeted him. 'We have just finished putting together Morgaine's timetable. And we have ordered her books. They should arrive tomorrow. The Headmaster expects you to bring the girl up-to-date over the next week, so she won't have any problems when the term starts.' She rose and patted Morgaine on the shoulder. 'Well then, good day to you two.'

Morgaine timidly looked up at her Head of House, and Severus noticed dark shadows under her eyes. Obviously, the girl hadn't slept too well.

'Have you eaten?' he asked.

Morgaine shook her head. 'No, sir, Professor McGonagall caught me here before I got a chance.'

'You better eat before we get to work. We have a lot to do this week, and you don't have the time to be in bad shape, Miss duLac.'

He had meant to say something encouraging, but it had come out wrong. Severus noticed this at once when he looked at Morgaine's face. She looked rather uneasy, and again, she was gnawing at her lip. He pushed a plate filled with toast towards her. 'Have a piece of toast instead,' he suggested. 'Surely, it will taste better than your lip.'

Morgaine blushed and lowered her eyes. But Severus was content. Her lips had turned into a smile, and that was exactly what he had wanted to see.

He sat down opposite her. Normally, he didn't join any of his students at the breakfast table, but for some reason, he didn't want to leave the girl alone right now. He noticed Morgaine peering at his breakfast: a cup of black coffee and a bowl of porridge. A depressing sight, he knew that himself. But he wasn't a breakfast-person. He stared at Morgaine's breakfast in turn, and when his eyes met hers, Morgaine quickly lowered her gaze, realising that he had noticed her staring.

There was no sound in the Great Hall except the scraping of their spoons against the porridge bowls. Morgaine kept her eyes on her porridge, and Severus could see her holding onto her bowl like a drowning person holding onto a lifebuoy. He had not meant to make her uncomfortable, and once more he tried to find something to say, something that would make her relax. Once more, he failed. So he decided to stick to a teaching-related topic and to leave as soon as he had finished his coffee.

'When your books arrive, we will have to make sure that you can follow the first chapters without any problems. We will start with Potions today. I will lend you a book. Finish your breakfast and then come down to the classroom.' And without waiting for an answer, he rose and left the Great Hall.

On his way down to the dungeon, Severus wondered if he had been too cold, too distant. Morgaine was just a girl after all. Quite a lonely girl at the moment, surrounded only by adults she didn't know. Severus knew how it was to be a lonely. The situation must be intimidating, and for a moment, he wondered how he could make Morgaine feel more at ease. But then again, life wasn't easy, and it was just as well that she learnt that lesson early.

At eight thirty sharp, there was a knock on his classroom door.

*So maybe I have been too harsh,* Severus thought. Morgaine had looked so confident when she had entered his office two days ago, but now she actually looked a bit scared.

He handed her a Potions book. 'You are going to brew me a potion today. Page twenty-four.'

Morgaine opened the book without looking at him. Severus, on the other hand, didn't take his eyes off her. He wanted to see her reaction.

'A Laughing Potion?' There was a slight hint of disbelief in Morgaine's voice. She looked up at her Potions master and smiled. And Severus was pleased, had gotten what he wanted.

Without taking his eyes off of Morgaine's face, he nodded and lit the fire underneath her cauldron.

When Morgaine's books arrived the next morning, they systematically went from subject to subject, checking if there were any knowledge gaps to be filled. Severus wasn't making it easy for her, but Morgaine seemed eager to fulfil his expectations. And he truly enjoyed seeing how her eyes brightened every time she knew the answer to one of his many questions.

September arrived and with it the first day of the school year. That morning, Severus noticed that Morgaine was not her cheery self. She was working well as usual, but she was pale and unusually silent.

'Are you not well, Miss duLac?'

'I'm alright, sir. It's just ... tonight all the other students will arrive, and I don't know anybody in my House.'

Severus looked into her eyes. 'You will do fine.'

~ ~ ~

*Something had changed. A week ago, Severus Snape seemed like the kind of teacher that would put you in detention just for breathing too loudly. A week ago, I wouldn't have dreamt of talking to him about anything but potions. If I had dared to talk to him at all. But today, he asked me if I was alright. Did this mean there was actually a caring human being underneath all of the coldness and black robes?*

~ ~ ~

As usual, the new students were sorted into their Houses at the beginning of the feast. Then, the Headmaster welcomed them all to the new school year.

'Other than our first-year students, there is also an addition to Slytherin House. They welcome tonight a new fourth-year student. To all of you: welcome.'

Severus peered down the Slytherin table and saw Morgaine shaking hands with some of her classmates. She was smiling, and Severus was pleased. He had known that she would do just fine.

The first class for the Slytherin fourth-years the following day was double Potions with Gryffindor. When Severus entered the classroom, he scanned it quickly for Morgaine. She was sitting with a red-haired Gryffindor boy: Bill Weasley. Severus frowned. What was she thinking, sitting with a Gryffindor? And a Weasley, above all? But he didn't say anything.

Morgaine and Bill proved to be a perfect Potions team. They finished first, and their Murtlap Potion was the only one to reach the right shade of yellow. But Severus was thrifty with praise. Bill Weasley was, after all, in Gryffindor.

After class, Severus asked Morgaine to stay behind.

'Don't let him put you in detention,' Bill whispered.

Severus saw Morgaine grin.

'Making friends in other Houses, I see,' he said in a reprimanding voice as the last student had left the classroom.

'Actually, no, sir,' Morgaine replied. 'I met Bill this summer. I spent some weeks with his family before I came to Hogwarts.'

Severus didn't say anything to that. 'I have cleared my schedule for a tutorial meeting on Friday evening. Eight o'clock.'

Morgaine nodded in acknowledgement. And for Severus, the conversation was over.

'Your next class is with Professor McGonagall,' he said as he escorted her out of his classroom. 'You do not want to be late.'

Morgaine gave him a fleeting smile and hurried up the stairs to the Transfiguration classroom.

'And, Miss duLac,' Severus called after her. 'Do not forget to make friends in your own House as well.'

~ ~ ~

*It had not been as bad as I had feared. Despite their reputation, the Slytherins proved to be a nice bunch. But maybe this was just because I was now one of them.*

*I was still glad to see that Slytherin and Gryffindor were sharing a couple of classes. Bill was, after all, the only one among the students I knew. I was glad to have a friend at Hogwarts. It seemed, however, as if Severus Snape did not approve of this friendship.*

## V: A Light on Halloween

*Chapter 5 of 35*

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Author's note: Thanks to JKR for some wonderful characters. Thanks to Daedalus Plum for beta reading and the wonderful discussion about red wine versus whisky.

### Chapter V: A Light on Halloween

At eight o'clock sharp on Friday evening, there was a knock on the door of Severus' office. He was careful not to open it too quickly. He had been waiting for her, but Morgaine didn't need to know that.



Going through her schoolwork didn't take more than two hours, but Severus felt reluctant to let her go. Instead, he offered her a cup of tea and a chair by the fireplace, and they talked: about schoolwork, Slytherin, Hogwarts, nothing important really. Severus found Morgaine to be open-hearted and frank, and she had a quick tongue. More than once, he had to hide a smirk behind his teacup. He hadn't misjudged her. She surely was poised.

It was almost midnight when he sent her to bed. He escorted her to the door and watched her walk down the corridor towards the Slytherin dormitory before he returned to his office. She had done well so far. She wasn't the best student Hogwarts had ever seen, but she was hard-working and eager to prove herself.

She came to see him every Friday evening. The tutoring part of their meetings took up less and less time for every week, and Severus soon noticed that the girl didn't really need any tutoring. But Morgaine didn't seem to mind coming to the dungeons every Friday, and as long as she didn't object, Severus wasn't going to either. He had to admit that he had come to enjoy her company.

He was proud to have Morgaine in his House, but he was careful not to show it. He treated her just as any other student and criticised her work heavily in an attempt to build her abilities. He had noticed that the more he criticised, the harder Morgaine would work. There were times, however, when he wondered if he overdid it, if he treated her more harshly than her classmates just so nobody would notice that he had a soft spot for her. But then again, he had seen the fire in her eyes. She was not an easy target. She knew when she had to stand up for herself. Severus liked the way she looked at him when he criticised her work, the way she narrowed her eyes and gave him a dirty look that sooner or later would break into a grin. And he enjoyed it when she returned his biting sarcasm just as good as he dished it out.

Yes, he had to admit to himself that he liked the girl.

~ ~ ~

*I owe the Icelandic priestesses thanks. They had taught me well, and my knowledge of herbs and potions made me earn both House points and the approval of my teachers. And approval was what I was seeking, not at least from Severus Snape. And he was not easy to please.*

*Bill often asked me what I had done to deserve the Potions master's contempt. I never really understood this question. Sure, Severus Snape was a nasty piece of work, and if someone was looking for a kind word of praise they had certainly come to the wrong man. He was tough, harsh and quite unfair at times, but for some twisted reason I enjoyed his wicked ways.*

~ ~ ~

Fall arrived and with it the Halloween celebrations. The Great Hall was decorated in black and orange, the tables were creaking under the weight of all the cakes and sweets, and Hagrid had somehow managed to bring his whole pumpkin patch into the castle.

Severus was overlooking the Great Hall from his seat at the staff table. Everyone seemed in good spirits, but the cheerful mood did not affect him. He had never liked Halloween, not even as a child. And the older he grew the more unhappy memories seemed to attach themselves to this holiday.

It had been a Halloween night when he had first seen his father beat his mother. She had made the mistake of decorating the house with pumpkins and witches. His father had always despised anything magic, and he never let his wife forget it.

It had also been on Halloween when Severus had first joined Lucius Malfoy. He had been young and impressionable, and being part of a powerful society like the Death Eaters had been more than he had ever dreamt of. Then a year later, again on Halloween, he had been branded with the Dark Mark.

And then there was Lily. She had died on Halloween. Lily, the woman he had loved all his life. She had been killed by the man to whom Severus had pledged allegiance. She had been slaughtered, and he had not been able to protect her.

Severus noticed that his hands were shaking. He had to calm down. He could not let anybody notice that he was out of balance. He had to think of something else.

He let his eyes wander to the Slytherin table. He noticed that besides the usual Halloween decorations there were even colourful parcels lying on the table. Usually he didn't care about his students' birthdays, but he was desperately looking for something to occupy his mind with. So he decided to join his students in their celebration.

'Now, whose big day is it?' he asked in an indifferent tone as he arrived at the Slytherin table. It was Morgaine who raised her hand.

'You know, Miss duLac, certain people would consider it a bad omen to be born on Halloween,' Severus said.

Morgaine grinned. 'Yeah, Professor Trelawney mentioned something like that. She also predicted that I am going to die a most horrible and painful death.'

The Slytherin table erupted with laughter. Obviously, they had been through this topic before. Severus oppressed a grin.

'Be that as it may, Miss duLac, enjoy your birthday.' And with no further comment, he turned and left the Great Hall for the dungeons.

Back in his office he poured himself a glass of Firewhisky. He had the feeling that it would not be the last one that night. He knew that he shouldn't be drinking. Alcohol made his mind wander. But at the moment, all he wanted was distraction.

He was just about to pour himself a second glass when there was a knock on his door. To his surprise, it was Morgaine. He saw her eyes flicker in the direction of the whisky bottle, and he quickly put it away. She didn't need to know.

'I'm sorry for intruding, sir,' Morgaine said. 'I was wondering if you had any Melissa Brew in store.'

'Melissa Brew? For what?'

'Well, as it turns out, the combination of Halloween sweets and birthday cake doesn't agree well with certain people. We have some severe cases of bellyache in the common room.'

Severus beckoned towards the potions cabinet. 'I am sure you know where to find it. After all, you are down here often enough.'

Morgaine nodded and went to open the cabinet. Having found what she was looking for, she thanked him and turned to leave. But when she had reached the door, she stopped and turned to face her mentor. At once, Severus recognised the look in her eyes. It was that questioning look he had noticed before.

'Are you alright, professor?' Her voice sounded concerned.

Damn her, why was it that she could read him so well? Severus decided to ignore her question. Instead he raised his glass and toasted towards her.

'Happy Birthday, Miss duLac.'

After Morgaine had left, Severus kept staring at the door that she had closed behind her. Why had she come? Medical potions could be obtained in the hospital wing. Why had she not gone there? And why had she stopped at the door on her way out?

He started to wonder if the potion had just been an excuse to see him. Maybe she was honestly concerned about him. He put down his glass and smiled. For a change, this Halloween had not been all that bad.

~ ~ ~

*I had already noticed that something was wrong when he came to the Slytherin table. First of all, Severus Snape was normally never seen socializing with students. And second of all, the mysterious whisper had entered my head again. I was now certain that it was his voice.*

*What was this whisper? The first time I had noticed it had been the day after the New Moon. And now it was Halloween. I had been taught enough about Ancient Magic to know that days like these were filled with powerful magic. I could however not figure out why it was on days like these that Severus Snape's voice entered my mind.*

## VI: Look at Me

*Chapter 6 of 35*

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Author's note: Thanks to JKR for some wonderful characters. Thanks to Daedalus Plum for beta reading.

### Chapter VI: Look at Me

It was the first Christmas holiday in years that not a single student had stayed at Hogwarts. Severus welcomed the blissful silence that had settled over the castle. He had a lot of things to think about.

It was the day before New Year when Dumbledore came to see him in his office.

'Severus, we haven't spoken in weeks,' the headmaster started. 'Tell me, how are you doing?'

'I am fine, Headmaster. Thank you,' Severus answered. 'But I am sure that my personal well-being is not the reason you came down here.'

'Ah, perceptive as ever, dear Severus.' Dumbledore was smiling. 'And you are right. I came to speak with you about Morgaine.'

Severus nodded. He had expected something like that.

'Tell me, Severus. How is the girl doing?'

Severus frowned. Dumbledore could not be talking about Morgaine's grades. As headmaster, Dumbledore had access to all the students' files. He wouldn't need to come and ask about them.

Dumbledore seemed to have read his mind. 'I ask because the transfer to Hogwarts must have been a big change for Morgaine. She isn't used to being around so many people. Have you noticed anything unusual about her?'

Severus still didn't understand where the headmaster was going. Why couldn't the old man just come to the point?

'You see, Severus,' Dumbledore continued, 'many of the women in Morgaine's family are quite empathic and easily pick up on other people's emotions. I was just wondering if Morgaine has shown any evidence of this talent.'

Suddenly, Severus understood. That was why he sometimes felt as if Morgaine was looking at him even though her back was turned. Why hadn't he realised before that she was not looking with her eyes but with her mind?

Now he felt Dumbledore's intense gaze upon him instead. But he wasn't ready to share his observations with Dumbledore just yet.

'She does seem to pick up on people's mood swings, but that's a talent many women possess,' he replied in a rather indifferent tone. 'Otherwise, I cannot say that I have noticed anything.'

It wasn't the whole truth. But for the moment, Severus didn't feel like disclosing more. Luckily, Dumbledore seemed content with the answer he had been given.

'Please, Severus, do keep an eye on her, and inform me if you notice any signs,' he said. 'She is just a child, after all. If she is able to sense other people's emotions, it could be very confusing, and we will need to help her to handle her gift.' And without saying any more, Dumbledore left.

Severus was puzzled. Had Dumbledore just told him that Morgaine might have a natural aptitude for Legilimency? He tried to recall on which occasions he had sensed her presence.

The first time had been in his classroom. He had been suffering from a severe headache. He had had to focus all his mental energy on blocking out the pain that day.

The second time had been on the night of her Sorting. Severus had to admit that his mind had been very preoccupied that night, trying to figure out how Albus Dumbledore's great-granddaughter had come to be sorted into Slytherin.

And the third time had been on Halloween. He hadn't been quite himself that night either.

Could it be that Morgaine could pick up on his emotions in times when his mental barriers were weakened?

Severus knew that he didn't have any choice. If Morgaine had the ability to read other people's minds, he would have to find out soon in order to help her control that power. He himself had experienced how disturbing it could be to involuntarily connect with other people's minds. He had learnt to control the power, but many other wizards had not, and they were often driven into madness by it. He would have to test Morgaine as soon as possible.

He took his chance during the first Potions lesson in January. Morgaine was working with Bill Weasley as usual in the front of the classroom. The lesson was almost over, and the students were already cleaning up after themselves when Severus decided that it was time to act.

He positioned himself in the back of the classroom, as far away from Morgaine as possible, and mentally scanned the classroom. There was a buzz of thoughts and whispers, but he had no trouble finding Morgaine. While the other thoughts were just a blur, hers were easily distinguished by their clearness.

He focused on Morgaine and sent out a simple thought:

*Look at me!*

He heard a phial smash on the floor and saw Morgaine spin around. Her eyes were widened with fear. She had heard him.

'Class dismissed,' he barked. 'Miss duLac, you stay.'

Everybody quickly gathered up their belongings. They all knew how much the Potions Master hated it if somebody dropped something. Bill laid a sympathetic arm around Morgaine's shoulder.

'Now you've earned yourself your first detention. Don't let him bite you.'

Morgaine didn't react. In fact, she didn't move at all. Her eyes were still fixed on her teacher.

Severus closed the door after the last student and locked it. What he was about to tell Morgaine wasn't for anybody else to hear.

'Have a seat, Miss duLac.'

He could see that her hands were shaking when she pulled up a chair.

'This isn't about the smashed phial, is it?' she asked, her voice trembling.

Severus sat down opposite her.

'No, it's not,' he said in a calm voice. He tried to look into her eyes, but she was avoiding his gaze. 'You heard me, did you not?'

Morgaine nodded.

'Has this happened before?'

She didn't answer. Severus repeated his question, in a more severe tone this time. Morgaine needed to understand that this was important.

'Miss duLac, has this happened before? Have you ever heard another person's thoughts?'

'Just yours.' Her voice was so feeble that Severus could barely hear what she was saying. But he didn't need to, he already knew the answer.

'Miss duLac, look at me.'

Morgaine raised her head. Severus noticed that there were tears shining in her eyes. She looked scared.

'Only a handful of wizards can do what you can do: see into other people's minds. This power is called Legilimency. Some wizards have learnt to control this power and are, under certain circumstances, able to look into the minds of others and to interpret their findings correctly. Aurors, for example, are known to use this power to decide whether somebody is lying to them.'

Severus noted that Morgaine hadn't taken her eyes off him while he was speaking. The tears had disappeared, but she still looked scared.

'It takes years to master Legilimency,' he continued. 'It is a skill that by far exceeds the abilities of a fourteen-year-old. You seem to have been born with this power, and now you have to learn how to control it. As I understand it, your experiences of Legilimency have so far only been of involuntary nature?'

Morgaine nodded.

'So you have never actively tried to enter another person's mind?'

Morgaine just shook her head.

'You will have to learn how to shield your mind then. This skill is called Occlumency.'

~ ~ ~

*Look at me.*

*These words came to haunt me in my dreams for weeks after Severus Snape had planted them in my mind. He had scared the living daylights out of me that day in Potions.*

*I had heard his voice before, but it had always been just a whisper. And now, it was talking to me. He was talking to me. It was a terrifying feeling to have somebody trampling around in my mind. For a moment, I thought I had gone insane.*

*But Severus took care of me. He worked tirelessly with me all through spring. He was a good teacher.*

*By the time summer arrived, I had learnt how to close my mind and only to open it to those I wanted to enter. Severus was one of them.*

## VII: Ghosts from the Past

### Chapter 7 of 35

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Author's note: Thanks to JKR for some wonderful characters. Many thanks to Trickle Woo for beta reading.

## Chapter VII: Ghosts from the Past

The start of term feast was abundant as usual. The Great Hall was filled with the buzz of hundreds of voices and the clatter of plates and silverware. From his seat at the staff table, Severus was peering towards the Slytherin table, hoping to catch a glimpse of Morgaine. He could sense her presence, but as hard as he was looking for her bushy hair, he couldn't find her.

Just when he was about to give up, he caught sight of her. She was standing at the far end of the table, animatedly talking to another fifth-year Slytherin.

She certainly had changed over the summer. Severus guessed that she had grown about three inches. Or was she just carrying herself taller? And she had cut her hair. The bushy mane had given way to a wild and spiky short-haired cut. It suited her well.

Suddenly Morgaine turned her head and gave her Head of House a radiant smile. He quickly lowered his eyes. He had just realised that had been looking at her far too long for it to be appropriate.

~ ~ ~

*I had done my homework well over the summer. For each day, it became easier to empty my mind of all emotions and to concentrate only on my mental barriers. Not once did I sense any other person's presence. But then again, I had never sensed anything with anybody other than Severus Snape.*

*And sure enough, his voice was there, in my mind, from the second I entered the Great Hall on the first of September. I didn't have to look for him at the staff table to know that he was sitting there, looking at me. I tried to shut him out, but my attempts were only half hearted. I found myself wondering what would please him more: me being able to shield my mind even from him or an invitation to join my thoughts.*

~ ~ ~

After the fifth-years' first Potions class, Morgaine lagged behind her classmates. Severus knew at once that she had something to ask. He wasn't mistaken.

'Professor, there is something I don't understand.'

'Yes?' he knew that there was no point in denying her answers. He knew her well enough by now to know that she wouldn't rest until she got one.

'Why is it that I only sense *your* thoughts?'

Severus had been pondering that same question. He wasn't sure of the answer, but at least he had a theory.

'For some reason, Miss duLac, our minds seem to have connected during our second meeting after your arrival. A connection between two minds, no matter if it is voluntary, always leaves a trace. Once you have listened in on another person's thoughts, they will never really leave you.'

Morgaine narrowed her eyes, and Severus could feel that she was not entirely satisfied with his answer. Sure enough, she continued her pursuit.

'But, sir, you are an accomplished Occlumens. How did I manage to break through your barriers?'

Severus raised an eyebrow. 'That, Miss duLac, I cannot tell you.'

It was a lie. He knew exactly what had happened. He had neglected his mental barriers. Normally, there was no need to shield his mind when he was surrounded by students since none of them possessed the abilities to read other people's thoughts. But Morgaine *had* this ability, and Severus was still slightly annoyed by the fact that he hadn't noticed it before. Yes, he knew why, but he wasn't ready to let her in on it.

He could see in her eyes that she wasn't satisfied with the answer he had given her, but for the moment she would have to be content. He shielded his mind and dismissed her.

~ ~ ~

*He was lying. I wasn't trained in Legilimency, but I still knew. I tried to read his thoughts, but Severus had, of course, anticipated that. He raised his mental shields, and that told me quite clearly that he did not wish to discuss the matter.*

*But why, why was he lying to me? Why did he not want me to know why I had thrice managed to break into his mind?*

~ ~ ~

Morgaine still came to see him every Friday night. He bombarded her with mental signals which she was supposed to block, and she did fine. As a matter of fact, she did more than fine for a fifteen-year-old.

Severus sometimes wondered where her talent came from. He knew that Dumbledore was no stranger to the arts of Occlumency and that magical powers were sometimes hereditary. But he had the impression that there was something more behind it.

He should get an answer to his questions on Halloween night. Morgaine had come to see him shortly after the feast.

'Professor, I want to know what I would have to do if somebody deliberately tried to invade my mind.'

He could hear the determination in her voice. He knew that she wouldn't rest until he told her.

He tried delaying an answer.

'Why do you want to know, Miss duLac?' he asked.

He could see her chewing her lip.

'Well, I've been reading some books on Occlumency, and they mentioned that keeping your mind shielded from the people around you and fighting off an actual attack on your mind are two completely different things.'

She was right of course, Severus couldn't deny that.

'Are you asking me to teach you how to fight off such an attack, Miss duLac?'

'Yes, I am, sir.' She sounded determined.

'Proper Occlumency is not something that is normally taught in fifth year, Miss duLac,' Severus replied.

'So you think that I am not ready for it?'

Severus oppressed a smile. Her stubbornness amused him. Of course, she was ready.

'And by the way,' Morgaine continued, 'today is my birthday. I'm entitled to a wish.'

How cheeky! This time, Severus couldn't hide his amusement.

'I have seldom encountered a little witch as stubborn as you are.' He saw her open her mouth, but he raised his hand in a yielding gesture. 'You shall get your birthday wish. But be warned. Having somebody wandering around in your mind is not a pleasant experience.'

'That's why I want to be prepared.'

She surely knew what she wanted. No wonder she had ended up in Slytherin. But still, Severus couldn't help but wonder why she wanted to be prepared.

'Well then', Severus said. 'I will attempt to penetrate your mind, and you will attempt to resist. For this to work, Miss duLac, I need you to clear your mind of all emotions.'

Morgaine nodded. She had done this before, she knew what to do.

'Legilimens.'

He hadn't really given her enough time to prepare, and therefore, Severus experienced no trouble whatsoever in penetrating her mind. He wanted her to get a little shock. He had after all warned her. He wouldn't go too far, though. He just intended to scrape a little on the surface of her conscious to give her a feeling of what was awaiting her.

Hogwarts, an Icelandic village, Dumbledore, Severus himself, places and people that had mattered to Morgaine over the last couple of years flashed through her mind and his. It gladdened Severus to see that he wasn't entirely irrelevant to her.

'Concentrate, Miss duLac, focus.'

He saw the face of a young woman with Morgaine's eyes. She was turning away from a little child. This had to be Morgaine's mother. Suddenly, Severus realised that he didn't know anything about Morgaine's parents.

He stopped his attempts. Morgaine was looking at him, slightly paler than only a couple of minutes ago.

'Was this your mother, Miss duLac?' he asked.

Morgaine nodded, chewing her lip. 'Yes. This must have been the night she left me with my grandmother.'

Severus sensed a hint of disappointment in her voice.

'How old were you?' he asked.

'Six, I think. I don't really remember,' Morgaine said in a cold tone. 'I haven't seen her since.'

Severus looked at her. There was a look on her face that he didn't recognise. Was it anger? Sadness?

'Do you want to continue, Miss duLac?' he asked.

Morgaine nodded.

'Very well, now concentrate,' he ordered. 'Legilimens.'

Severus found himself in a dark room. The woman he had seen before was cowering on the floor, naked from the waist up. Her back was covered with bloody streaks, and there was blood running down over her chin from her cracked lip. She was sobbing. There were hooded figures standing around her. Death Eaters. Severus felt his heart beat faster. How had Morgaine come in contact with Death Eaters?

He saw little Morgaine hiding in a dark corner. She couldn't be more than five or six years old. A tall young man with long blond hair dragged her into the circle. Severus recognised him at once. It was Lucius Malfoy. He pushed the girl into the arms of an imposing dark figure. The Dark Lord. Severus felt the blood in his veins turn to ice.

Little Morgaine was squirming in the Dark Lord's arms, trying to break free, but he held her in a firm grip. He lowered his head and murmured something into Morgaine's ear, and Severus could see her eyes go blank. Then the Dark Lord thrust a wand into the girl's hand and made her point it at her mother. And the woman screamed in agony.

Death Eaters, Morgaine's mother in their midst, the Dark Lord himself, Severus broke the connection. He was gasping for air. He had not been prepared for a vision like this.

He jerked up his head to look at Morgaine. She had risen from her chair. Her jaws were clenched, and there were tears glittering in her blue eyes.

'Morgaine, what ...'

He didn't get to finish his questions. He saw Morgaine sinking to her knees, and he hurried towards her to grab her by her shoulders.

'I had forgotten,' she said in a choked voice.

Slowly, it dawned on Severus what must have happened. He had obviously managed to access a memory Morgaine had long since repressed.

He laid his arm around the girl, felt her shaking. And then her self-control crumbled. He could see the tears streaming down her face and felt her gripping the hem of his robe. She was clinging to him for support. But as much as Severus wanted to comfort her, the words were stuck in his throat. He didn't know what to say. Clumsily, he pulled Morgaine towards his chest, stroking her hair with his free hand.

They were kneeling on the cold stone floor for what seemed like hours. Severus held the weeping girl in his arms, rocking her like a baby. He couldn't think of anything to say to console her. All he could do was keep her in his arms, keeping her safe.

Eventually, her sobbing subsided. There were still tears running down her face, but she seemed calmer. Severus helped her to her feet. When her knees gave way, he laid a supportive arm around her shoulders.

'Dumbledore needs to know about this.'

~ ~ ~

They found the Headmaster in his office. Severus was looking for words to explain why he brought Morgaine there in such a state, but Dumbledore beat him to it.

'I have been expecting you two', he said.

Severus was confused. How could Dumbledore have known?

'You forget, Severus, that I am no novice at Legilimency either,' Dumbledore explained. 'I knew Morgaine would ask you for a proper lesson tonight.'

'You have expected this?' Severus felt his temper rising. How could Dumbledore expose his great-granddaughter to something like this?

Dumbledore didn't answer. Instead, he turned towards Morgaine. She was still pale, but she had stopped crying.

'Morgaine, what do you remember about your mother?' Dumbledore asked.

Morgaine took a deep breath. 'Just that she brought me to my grandmother when I was about six. And that she left me there.'

'Morgaine, listen carefully now. Your mother didn't abandon you. She didn't have a choice. She did what was best for you. Your mother has made some decisions that in retrospective weren't the best. She fell in love with a young wizard, and she followed him without caring about where.'

'Morgaine's father,' Severus slowly asked. 'Was he a Death Eater?' He wasn't really sure that he wanted to know the answer to this question.

Dumbledore shrugged. He still didn't meet Severus' eyes but focused on Morgaine. 'I don't know who fathered you, Morgaine. I am not sure that your mother knew either. But yes, we have to consider the possibility that your father might indeed have been a follower of Lord Voldemort.'

Severus flinched. He knew how Death Eaters used to treat young women who had stumbled into their midst. He, too, had taken parts in their wicked games. If Morgaine's mother had followed her lover to a secret meeting, each and every one of the men present would have had his way with her. And if Morgaine had been begotten at one of these meetings, there was surely no way of knowing who had fathered her.

Dumbledore had sat Morgaine down on a chair and was kneeling before her. He was holding her hands.

'My child, when I came to Iceland on your eleventh birthday, I noticed that you possessed talents witches your age normally don't. This is why I fought so hard to persuade your guardians to send you to Hogwarts. I knew that your talents would sooner or later show themselves and that you would need to be properly trained.'

'The power to see into other people's minds is rare. I reckon this is a talent you have inherited from your father,' Dumbledore continued. 'Being able to read minds is both a blessing and a curse. That's why I asked Professor Snape to help you. He is one of the best Legilimens I know and also an accomplished Occlumens. If anyone can help you to handle your powers, it is him.'

Morgaine's eyes flickered towards Severus then back to Dumbledore. 'What is it that I have seen?'

Her voice was nothing more than a whisper, but Severus knew that she would not yield before she got an answer.

'My child, when your mother brought you to Iceland, you were both in a terrible state. You had been held captive by the Death Eaters for weeks. How your mother managed to escape is beyond my understanding.' Dumbledore's voice was annoyingly calm. He could have been reading a bedtime story. 'She told us what had happened, and we thought it best to make you forget what you had witnessed.'

'But I didn't forget. I remembered everything tonight. Everything I've seen, everything I've done.' Morgaine had found her voice again. Now her tone was almost accusing.

Dumbledore nodded. 'Yes, your guardians and I discussed whether we should remove these memories completely from your mind. We decided to just block them. I think it has worked quite well until now. But it seems like Severus here has managed to break through our barriers. It was, however not his fault.'

*Not my fault? Of course it was not my fault!* Severus felt the urge to shout these words out loud, but he kept silent. The girl had been through enough tonight, she didn't need to see him lose his temper as well.

Dumbledore rose and took Morgaine by the hand.

'Come, my child, there is no point in discussing this matter further tonight. I will escort you to the infirmary where Poppy can keep an eye on you.' For the first time, he turned to Severus. 'I'd like to speak to you when I return.'

Severus looked after Dumbledore and Morgaine as they left the office. He couldn't believe it. Dumbledore had known all this and hadn't deemed it necessary to say anything? How could he expose this child to such terrors? Severus clenched his fists. It took all his self-control not to smash any of Dumbledore's possessions. How could Dumbledore have made a decision like this?

When Dumbledore re-entered his office, Severus couldn't restrain himself.

'What kind of wicked game is this, Albus?' His voice was filled with anger. 'Why did you let me discover all this?'

'Because, Severus, I knew that you would make sure that Morgaine will choose the right path.'

'What?' Severus didn't understand a thing. And all he wanted to do right now was to punch the old man right into his face.

'You have been a Death Eater yourself,' Dumbledore continued.

Severus snorted. As if he needed to be reminded of that.

'You have seen all the evil the Death Eaters were capable of,' Dumbledore continued. 'Help Morgaine understand her heritage.'

Severus frowned. 'Just how exactly am I supposed to do this?' he asked in a bitter voice.

'Show her the right way. Teach her to make the choice between good and bad.'

And without any more explanations, Dumbledore dismissed the Head of Slytherin house.

Severus was fuming with rage. What was the old man expecting from him?

He had a good mind to turn himself around, go back to Dumbledore's office, and tell him to mind his own business. But then he remembered Morgaine. She must be so confused right now, and scared. He just couldn't let her face her demons alone. So instead of telling Dumbledore off, Severus turned and went up to the infirmary.

He found Morgaine sitting on a bed by the window. She had drawn her knees up to her chin and wrapped her arms around them. She was staring at something only she could see.

When Severus pulled up a chair beside her, she didn't seem to notice him at first. After a while, however, she spoke.

'What have I done?' Her voice was so feeble that Severus almost didn't recognise it. 'I pointed a wand at my own mother. I cursed my own mother.'

There was a hint of pure desperation in her voice.

Severus reached for her hand. It felt cold. He didn't know what to say. He just wanted to show her that he was there for her.

'What if I am bad?'

This question shocked Severus more than anything else he had seen and heard that night. How could the girl believe something like that? How could she blame herself for what had happened?

He pulled her hands towards him in order to make her look at him. But she turned away her head.

'Listen carefully, Morgaine,' Severus started. 'There was nothing you could have done to resist. You were probably under the Imperius Curse. You were just a child.'

Morgaine turned her head to look at him. Once more, there were tears running down her face.

Severus wanted to dry them off. He wanted to see her smile, and the fact that he couldn't do anything made him burn inside. 'You are a good person, Morgaine,' he started. 'And nothing will ever change that. I am going to take care of you.'

## VIII: Saved

*Chapter 8 of 35*

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Author's note: Thanks to JKR for some wonderful characters. Many thanks to Trickle Woo for beta reading.

### Chapter VIII: Saved

*I should have known better. Teaching Occlumency to a fifteen-year-old, what was I thinking?*

A thousand thoughts were racing through Severus' mind that Halloween night. And no matter how much Poppy was nagging him, he refused to leave Morgaine's side.

The girl had finally fallen asleep. She had crawled up under the covers like a cat hiding from a raging storm. Severus could see her eyelids flicker and her face twitch. He knew that she was reliving all her terrible memories in her sleep and felt the cold hands of guilt grip his guts. He had been the one who had awakened her sleeping Legilimency talents when he had neglected his own mental barriers. He had been the one who had awakened memories which Dumbledore had hidden away years ago. If it hadn't been for him, Morgaine would still have that innocent smile on her face. Yes, Severus felt responsible, and therefore, he wasn't going to leave Morgaine alone this night.

He wouldn't find any rest anyway. What he had seen in Morgaine's mind had awakened his own demons as well. He had made so many bad choices, done so many despicable things. He regretted each and every one of them.

He sighed. He couldn't get the look on the face of Morgaine's mother out of his head. The fear, the shame, he had seen it all before. There had been so many innocent women. Many of them had, just like Morgaine's mother, stumbled into the Death Eaters' midst without knowing what was awaiting them. Few of them had been allowed to leave again. They were broken, shattered, both physically and mentally.

Severus closed his eyes. He had taken part in this, too. He had never enjoyed it. He had seen the look on the women's faces, heard their pleas for help. But there hadn't been anything he could have done. There had only been two choices: made them suffer or suffer himself. And Severus knew all too well that the Cruciatus Curse was only one of the painful punishments for a Death Eater who stood up against the group. And even if he had refused, none of the women would have been saved.

~ ~ ~

*I was afraid, so afraid. The memories that came back to me that Halloween night haunted my dreams for years to come. What I had witnessed the Death Eaters do to my mother wasn't anything a six-year-old child is supposed to see.*

*And the things I had done. The things they had made me do. I had only been six years old, under a spell, led by older and Dark wizards, but all these explanations didn't comfort me that night. I felt so guilty, and I was so afraid.*

*What if I was bad? What if I was capable of evil?*

*Dumbledore had known. He had known what had happened to my mother and me, and he had decided not to tell. He had also known that Severus would gain access to these memories, and he had let it happen.*

*Dumbledore said that I needed to know about my past to understand my present and to make the right choices for the future. I believed him. I trusted him then. I thought that he had made the right decision. I was too young to know any better.*

*Today, I know that Dumbledore was using us. He was using Severus. He was using me. We were all part of his master plan, and neither of us understood. I was too young to understand then, and Severus, well, Severus had always been Dumbledore's man, through and through.*

~ ~ ~

*What if I am bad?*

Severus jerked awake, the memory of Morgaine's words ringing in his ears. It took him a second to realise where he was. He had fallen asleep in his chair in the infirmary. Dawn was breaking.

He turned to look at Morgaine. She was sitting with her back against the headboard, with her knees pulled up and her chin resting on them. Her blue eyes were inquisitively fixed on him.

'Have you been here all night?' she asked.

Severus cleared his throat. 'Yes, I have.'

He saw Morgaine chewing her lip. 'So all this hasn't just been a bad dream, has it?'

He slowly shook his head. He wished it had been.

'It's still early, Miss duLac. Try to get some more sleep.' He got up to leave. 'Come to my office tonight, eight o'clock. There is something you need to see.'

Severus left for the dungeons. He needed some time to think. There were a thousand questions on his mind.

Who was the Death Eater Morgaine's mother had fallen in love with? Who was Morgaine's father? Why had Morgaine's mother stayed with the Death Eaters for six years before fleeing with her child? And what had happened to her afterwards? Had she returned to the man she loved? Had she returned to the Death Eaters?

There were so many questions and so few answers. And Severus knew that there was no point in asking: Morgaine didn't have any answers, and Dumbledore wouldn't tell.

But why hadn't Dumbledore said anything? Why had he let Severus discover Morgaine's memories? Why wouldn't he say anything about Morgaine's father? He claimed not to know anything, but Severus had the strong suspicion that Dumbledore knew much more than he disclosed.

He frowned. He didn't understand. Morgaine was scared, terrified by the thought that she might be bad. How could Dumbledore look into her eyes, see her desperation and still not tell?

Severus remembered the promise he had given Morgaine last night. He had promised to take care of her. And he intended to keep this promise. He was determined to do anything in his powers to prove to Morgaine that she was not and would never be bad.

He let his fingers trail over the books on the shelf behind his desk. He knew exactly which ones to choose *Advanced Defence Against the Dark Arts*, *White Magic*, *The Power of the Light*. He would teach Morgaine all the White Magic he knew.

She knocked at his office door at exactly eight o'clock. She was punctual as usual. Severus noticed that she was still pale. She hadn't been to any classes today. And she hadn't been to dinner either.

'Have you eaten today, Miss duLac?' he asked.

Morgaine nodded. 'Yes, I had dinner with the headmaster.'

Severus raised an eyebrow. So she had spent time with Dumbledore. He couldn't help but wonder if Dumbledore had told her anything more about her past, her mother, even her father maybe. But he didn't ask. The girl had been through enough. She didn't need him interrogating her.

He pointed towards the three books on his desk. 'White Magic, Miss duLac, what do you know about it?'

For a moment, Morgaine looked confused but then her expression changed. Severus knew that look on her face. She was ready to learn. And he was ready to teach her.

'White Magic is good magic,' Morgaine said. 'It's protective magic, healing magic.'

Severus nodded. 'Yes. And that is what I want you to learn now.'

She was talented and curious. As soon as she had mastered one protective spell, she asked for another one. Severus was pleased. Teaching her felt like making amends to her. And he was glad to see that now and then a smile lightened up her face.

~ ~ ~

Morgaine had changed. Severus sensed that clearly. It seemed to him as if she had grown up over night. Her childish innocence had disappeared, and he often saw her walking through the grounds on her own. He was worried about her. She was brooding too much.

When the Christmas holidays arrived, Morgaine was one of the few students to remain at Hogwarts. Severus tried to talk to her in private a couple of times but she seemed to be avoiding him. It wasn't until three days after Christmas that he managed to catch her. She was standing at the shore of the lake. He had seen her from the castle.

He almost expected her to run away when he approached her but she didn't even turn around.

'Have you been avoiding me, Miss duLac?' He opened with a direct question. This wasn't the time for empty phrases.

Morgaine took a deep breath before she spoke. She still wasn't looking at him. 'Magic is strong at this time of the year, Professor. I was feeling weak.'

'And you were afraid you would not be able to hold up your mental barriers around me,' he finished her thoughts.

She nodded, and Severus could see her chewing her lip. He didn't know what to say. He was so sorry that he had been the one who had caused her this pain and even sorrier that there was nothing he could do to make it go away.

'Be assured that I will never touch your mind again, Miss duLac. Not unless you ask me to.'

Her eyes were fixed on the rippling surface of the lake. Severus could see her shiver. He took off his cloak and laid it around her, and for a moment, his hands lingered on her shoulders. It felt good to protect her, even if it only was from the cold. There, at the shore of the Black Lake, Severus promised himself that he would take care of Morgaine, that he wouldn't let any harm come to her.

When they turned to go back to the castle, Morgaine spoke: 'My grandmother is arriving tonight. She will want to talk to you.'

Sure enough, Severus was called to the headmaster's office shortly after dinner. He entered to find Dumbledore sitting at his desk. Opposite him sat an elderly woman with short, grey hair and sparkling blue eyes. So Morgaine had inherited her eyes from her grandmother.

Severus looked around the office and caught sight of Morgaine. She was standing by the window, petting Dumbledore's Phoenix. He noticed that her cheeks were slightly flushed. He couldn't read her face. There was a look on it that he hadn't seen before.

'Morgaine, would you mind taking Fawkes outside?' Severus heard Dumbledore say. 'He has been sitting in here all day.'

He saw Morgaine shooting an icy look in the direction of her great-grandfather. Obviously she didn't like being dismissed at the moment. She picked up the Phoenix without protesting, but instead of heading directly towards the door, she took some steps in Severus' direction. Her eyes met his just as they had so many times before.

'Help me.'

It wasn't more than a whisper, but it rang in Severus' ears like a cry.



~ ~ ~

*She had come to take me away. And Dumbledore didn't seem to want to do anything to stop her.*

*How I hated him then. If it hadn't been for him, Severus would not have taught me Occlumency and we wouldn't have discovered those hidden memories. Yes, Dumbledore had started this game, and now he didn't want to play anymore.*

*Now Severus had gotten the first opportunity to keep his promise. If he didn't fight for me, I would have to leave Hogwarts that very night. I needed him to save me. And I hoped that he understood.*

~ ~ ~

'Severus,' Dumbledore began as Morgaine had closed the door behind her. 'Let me introduce you to Morgaine's grandmother. She is also one of Morgaine's guardians.'

Severus politely bowed to the women. 'Madam.'

'You make it sound as if I were a hundred years old. Please, call me Margaret.'

She offered him her hand and smiled. Severus noticed that Morgaine had not only inherited her eyes from her grandmother but also her smile.

'So you are Morgaine's Head of House,' Margaret continued. 'She speaks very highly of you.'

'Margaret has come here,' Dumbledore interrupted, 'to discuss Morgaine's future education.'

Severus frowned. Dumbledore's voice sounded unusually cold, even snappy. He turned to Margaret again in order to hear what she had to say.

'As you might know, we, meaning Morgaine's guardians, have never been too happy with sending Morgaine into the Magical World. When her mother brought her to us, we promised that we would protect her from her past. Albus convinced us that she would be in good hands at Hogwarts. But now it seems as if her past has caught up with her.'

Severus nodded. He knew exactly what Margaret was talking about. Morgaine's mother had brought her child to a secluded place to hide her from the Death Eaters. Morgaine had clearly not been supposed to know but now, because of him, she did.

'After recent events, some of us don't think that Morgaine should spend any more time in the Magical World,' Margaret continued. 'She has seen too much already. We want to take her home.'

She stepped closer to Severus and looked into his eyes.

'I want you to know that we are not all of the same opinion. I for one am convinced that no harm will come to Morgaine at Hogwarts,' she continued. 'You are Morgaine's Head of House and as I understand also her mentor. I would like to hear your opinion in the matter.'

'It would be a big mistake to make Morgaine abandon her studies at this point,' Severus said calmly. 'When discovering her past, she also discovered talents she did not know she possessed. She needs proper training.'

'Then what do you suggest?' Margaret asked.

Severus was looking for the right words. He had to convince Margaret to let Morgaine stay. He couldn't let her go now, there were still so many things he wanted to make right again.

'I offer you my services,' he finally said. 'I will personally take care of Morgaine's education and teach her everything she needs to understand her past and her talents.'

Margaret smiled. 'I am convinced that you would take good care of my little girl. But the decision lies not with me alone. I will have to discuss this with Morgaine's other guardians. We will let you know.'

And with these words, Severus was dismissed from Dumbledore's office.

He went down the stairs to his own office. He was hoping to bump into Morgaine, but she was nowhere to be seen.

*I should have said more, Severus thought. I should have convinced Margaret that it would be outright dangerous for Morgaine to abandon her education now.*

For a moment he considered going back to the headmaster's office but decided not to. He had been dismissed, and storming in there would only mean that he would make a fool out of himself. But he had also promised Morgaine to take care of her. He couldn't fail her now. In his frustration he smashed a couple of phials and sent a cauldron flying into the wall. But it did nothing to diminish his frustration.

After what seemed like hours, there was a knock on his office door. With a flick of his wand, he cleaned up the broken glass and the cauldron, straightened up and went to open the door. It was Dumbledore.

'Well, a decision has been made,' Dumbledore announced.

Severus tried to read the old man's face but without success. He had no idea what had been decided, and Dumbledore didn't seem to be in a hurry to tell him. Instead, the headmaster seemed suddenly very interested in the bricks of the dungeon wall.

Severus felt his temper rising. Why was it that Dumbledore enjoyed keeping people on tenterhooks?

'Well, dear Severus,' Dumbledore finally continued. 'How would you like to teach some extra lessons? Mainly Defence against the Dark Arts?'

Severus gave the headmaster a puzzled look. Now, what did this question have to do with anything?

Finally, Dumbledore turned to face Severus. His eyes were sparkling mischievously. 'Well, Severus, if you don't mind some extra lessons, I would like to hand over your protégée to you now.'

He held out his hand. Severus turned to see Morgaine stepping out of the shadows of the corridor.

'Her guardians have decided that Morgaine will be well taken care of here. She will be allowed to finish her magical education under your guidance, Severus. Teach her well. Goodnight to you two.' And humming merrily, the headmaster returned to his office, leaving Severus and Morgaine standing in the corridor. Neither of them really knew what to say.

'It's late, Miss duLac. Go and join your classmates in the common room.'

Morgaine inclined her head and turned to leave.

*Thank you for saving me.*

Severus wasn't sure if these words had come from the girl's lips or if her thoughts were echoing in his own mind.

But the thought that formed in his mind when he watched her walking down the corridor towards the Slytherin common room was crystal clear:

*I have saved the both of us.*

Severus returned to his office, his heart considerably lighter than only a couple of minutes ago.

Morgaine couldn't have any idea of how much it meant to him that she was allowed to stay.

## IX: Dark Magic and Dark Secrets

*Chapter 9 of 35*

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Author's note: Thanks to JKR for some wonderful characters. Thanks to Trickle Woo for beta reading.

### Chapter IX: Dark Magic and Dark Secrets

'I'd like you to continue teaching me Occlumency,' Morgaine announced without any warning.

Severus almost choked on his tea. After what had happened during their last Occlumency lesson, he had been convinced that Morgaine would not want anybody to touch her mind ever again, especially not him.

She had come to see him every Friday evening since the Christmas holidays. He had been keeping his promise and taught her White Magic. Some weeks ago, they had started with the Patronus Spell, powerful White Magic, actually far beyond the abilities of a fifth-year, but Morgaine did well. This very evening, she had managed to produce her first Protective Shield. Not a corporal Patronus yet, but she was getting close.

Severus didn't know what amazed him more: her skills or her stubbornness. Morgaine wouldn't rest unless she made some progress. More than once, he literally had to throw her out of his study so she would go to bed. And now, she was asking him to teach her Occlumency again.

'May I ask why, Miss duLac?' Severus was genuinely curious.

'Because, Professor,' Morgaine answered, 'I need to know if there is more. I want to understand my past.'

He could see her chewing her lip. She had been doing that a lot lately.

'Whatever memories are hiding in my head, they can't be worse than the last one,' she continued with a bitter tone in her voice.

*I would not be too sure of that,* Severus thought, but he held his peace. He had still not really processed what he had seen on Halloween night, the Death Eaters, the Dark Lord. He too was wondering what else Morgaine had experienced, but to be completely honest, he wasn't sure that he really wanted to know.

'What is it you are looking for, Miss duLac?'

'I once pointed a wand at my own mother. I need to know if there is more.'

Severus understood. Obviously, Morgaine was still looking for an answer to the question of whether she was capable of evil. He sighed. What could he do to convince the girl that she was good?

'You are inches away from producing a corporal Patronus, Miss duLac,' he explained in his most authoritative voice. 'A dark witch would never be able to produce something that pure.'

But he knew that there was no point arguing. He had seen the defiant look on her face: she had made up her mind. She had been sorted into Slytherin for good reason. She would get what she wanted. Somehow, she would get all the information she was looking for, and when she did, he wanted to be there for her. So he agreed to teach her Occlumency again.

He was careful. He wanted Morgaine to learn how to protect her memories and to give him access only to what she wanted him to see. It was tiresome work, but she did well despite her young age. When summer came, she had a couple of times managed to block his attempts to enter her mind.

Severus was pleased with her. She was a good student, diligent and thirsty for knowledge. And he enjoyed spending time with her. More than once, he invited her to stay for a cup of tea after their lessons. He had to admit that he liked her. And when she waved at him from the Slytherin table at the End of Term Feast, he realised that he was going to miss her over the summer.

~ ~ ~

*Severus was a demanding and at times harsh teacher, but he meant no harm. He always kept a close eye on me, assessing my reactions. And when he felt that he had gone too far, he would immediately abandon his attempts. I was grateful for his caution. I am not sure how I would have handled another memory like the one we discovered that Halloween night. But then again, with Severus at my side, I felt safe.*

*We didn't encounter any more disturbing images, but I sensed that there was more, and I wanted to know.*

*It felt strange to leave Hogwarts for the summer. And it felt strange to leave Severus. Everything we had shared over the last months had changed our relationship. He was more than my teacher now. I trusted him completely.*

*When I left Hogwarts for Iceland, I had no idea yet what kind of dark secrets he was keeping from me.*

~ ~ ~

Severus was about to unpack his trunk after having returned to Hogwarts at the end of August when there was a knock on his door. It was Dumbledore.

'Welcome back, Severus. Did you have a nice summer?'

Why did Dumbledore have to insist on asking him this question every year? His summer had been just as dreary as every other.

'Are my summer activities important enough for you to come and see me down here in the dungeons, Headmaster?' Severus asked.

Dumbledore smiled. 'Well, I do care about your wellbeing, Severus. But actually, I came to show you something.'

He placed a leather-bound book on Severus' desk. Severus picked it up.

*Secrets of the Dark Arts?* Severus frowned. Why would Dumbledore give him a book about Dark Magic?

Dumbledore answered his unasked question. 'This is a dangerous little book. Three weeks ago, I caught Morgaine with it.'

'She did not get it from me.'

'I haven't accused you of anything, Severus,' Dumbledore said in a mild tone.

Severus was himself a little surprised at his reaction. Why did he feel the need to defend himself?

'Morgaine confessed to having purchased this book in Knockturn Alley,' Dumbledore explained. 'Do you realise what this means, Severus?'

Severus nodded. 'She is taking matters in her own hands.' It was quite clear.

Dumbledore nodded. 'She has decided to dig in her past, and she is under the impression that learning about the Dark Arts will help her to understand it. Quite reasonable really, since her father was most likely a Death Eater.'

Severus felt a chill go down his spine. 'You have to put an end to that, Albus. You have to stop her. The Dark Arts are not something a girl her age should be meddling with.'

Dumbledore was annoyingly calm. 'Tell me, Severus, what will Morgaine do once I forbid her to learn about the Dark Arts?'

'She will do it in secret.'

Again, it was crystal clear. Morgaine hadn't been sorted into Slytherin by accident. She knew what she wanted, and once she had made up her mind, there was no way anyone could hold her back. Damn her stubbornness.

Dumbledore nodded. 'That's why I want you to help her, Severus.'

'You want me to do what? Are you asking me to teach the Dark Arts to Morgaine?' Severus couldn't believe what he had just heard. 'With all due respect, Albus, have you lost your mind?'

'No, Severus, of course not.' Dumbledore was still smiling. 'But as you pointed out yourself, if we forbid her, she will work in secret, and only the Gods know what can happen. I want you to continue teaching Morgaine White Magic. I want you to keep an eye on her. I want you to make sure that she doesn't do anything stupid.' And without another word, Dumbledore left the dungeons.

Severus stood staring at the door Dumbledore had closed behind him. He was still holding Morgaine's book in his hand.

What had the girl been thinking? And what was Dumbledore thinking? He didn't understand. Dumbledore had made him renounce the Dark Arts when he came to Hogwarts. He wasn't even allowed to teach Defence Against the Dark Arts. And now, he was supposed to teach Morgaine. No, not teach her, he corrected himself, but guide her, protect her. He shivered, still staring at the door and not knowing how he was going to handle the situation.

He didn't get a lot of time to think about what the headmaster had asked him to do. He had just returned to his office after the start of term feast and sat down at his desk, when there was a knock on the door. He knew that it was Morgaine. He had sensed her a while ago.

She didn't waste any time with polite phrases.

'I assume Dumbledore has already tattled about my excursion to Knockturn Alley.'

Her straightforwardness didn't surprise Severus. He knew her well enough to know that she wasn't one to beat about the bush. He crossed his arms in front of his chest and nodded.

'And?' Her voice was demanding.

Severus stared at her. 'Do you have any idea what you are meddling with, Miss duLac?' His voice was harsh, but Morgaine didn't even flinch. 'The Dark Arts are dangerous, unpredictable and detrimental.'

He saw the defiant look on her face.

'I am aware of that, Professor. That's why I am asking for your help.'

He took a deep breath. Morgaine had no idea what she was asking of him. How he wished he could talk her out of this. But her mind was made up, he could sense this clearly.

'Have a seat, Miss duLac.' He beckoned her towards the chair on the other side of his desk. He wanted to look into her eyes. She held his gaze as he spoke.

'You have to understand the destructive nature of the Dark Arts, Miss duLac. They are a dangerous enemy. Many wizards, both older and more skilled than you, have been destroyed by them. You must be aware of that.'

Morgaine nodded. 'That's why I came to ask for your guidance, sir.'

'I will not teach you how to use the Dark Arts, Miss duLac.'

'I've never asked you to.'

'Then be here Friday night, eight o'clock,' he said in a harsh tone. 'And now, to bed with you.'

She did as she was told, bid her mentor goodnight and left his office.

Severus buried his face in his hands. What had he done? He should have talked her out of this. But it was too late now. He had agreed to teach her. There was no turning back. All he could do was to make sure that she wouldn't fall for the Dark Arts.

He planned their first lesson carefully. He would start by showing Morgaine what Dark Magic could do, what terrible effects it could have. By Friday evening, he had filled his office with shadowy, ghastly pictures depicting the horrors of Dark Magic: a witch shrieking in agony, a blank-eyed wizard crouching in a dark corner, the bloody remains of a human body spread out on the floor. These were the sights that greeted Morgaine when she entered the office. Severus was relieved to see nothing but repulsion in her eyes. He didn't know what he would have done if she had shown the slightest sign of fascination.

He continued teaching her about the Dark Arts all throughout the autumn. He was relieved to see that she showed a deep understanding of their gruesomeness. Back in September, he had for a moment feared that she would come to take after her alleged father, that she would be fascinated by the Dark Arts, that she would embrace them wholeheartedly. But nothing like this had occurred. On the contrary: for every curse he showed her, she asked for a counter-curse; for every poison he showed her, she asked for an antidote. White Magic obviously attracted her more than the Dark Arts. She would make a good Auror one day.

~ ~ ~

Christmas came and with it the holidays. Morgaine was once more one of the few students to remain at school. Severus was looking forward to being able to spend more time with her than a couple of hours every Friday evening. He had planned to teach her to brew some very powerful healing potions.

The day after Christmas, he was informed by Filch, the caretaker, that there was a Boggart hiding in one of the classrooms on the third floor, and he decided to let Morgaine get rid of it. She would certainly find it amusing. And he hadn't seen her smile for quite some time. Morgaine, however, didn't seem to like the idea.

'I don't really feel like meeting a Boggart right now, sir.'

Severus frowned. Now, that was just ridiculous. Over the last couple of months, Morgaine had seen more blood and terror than any other sixteen-year-old in this castle. She couldn't be afraid of a Boggart, could she? To be honest, he felt a little disappointed.

'As you wish, I will get rid of it myself then,' he said.

He saw Morgaine's lips twitch. He wasn't sure what it meant, but he was certain that it wasn't intended to be a smile. He heard her take a deep breath.

'Well, if you insist. Where is this Boggart?'

Severus suppressed a smile. He had known that she would not be able to resist this little treat. He led her to the classroom where he had locked the Boggart into a trunk and beckoned at it.

'It is all yours, Miss duLac,' he said, and with a flick of his wand he unlocked the trunk.

He didn't know what shape he had expected Morgaine's Boggart to take, but it certainly had not been this one. It was like looking into a mirror. Severus didn't understand. Why would Morgaine's Boggart look like him?

Then the Boggart changed. It pulled up a hood and put on a mask. A Death Eater mask. And Severus felt all the blood leave his face.

'Riddikulus.'

Morgaine's voice was clear and firm. Obviously, she wasn't surprised by the shape her Boggart had taken.

The Boggart shrank to the size of a gnome and started running around Morgaine's legs. She picked him up by the neck and threw him unceremoniously into the trunk where he had come from. Then she turned to face her teacher.

Severus swallowed. Her face didn't show any kind of emotion. She just looked at him.

He desperately wanted her to say something. Anything. The silence was unbearable. But she didn't say a word.

Some minutes passed before Severus found his voice. 'How did you find out?'

He almost didn't recognise his own voice. It seemed to come from far, far away.

'Did you really think I wouldn't do any research, sir? When I learnt that my mother had associated with Death Eaters, I went to find out as much as I could.'

Of course she did.

'I found out about you this summer.'

Severus could see the questioning look in her eyes. She was waiting for him to speak, to explain himself. But what was he supposed to say?

They stood silent for a while just gazing at each other.

'Why didn't you tell me?' Morgaine's voice cut through the silence like a sharp knife.

The answer filled Severus' mind like the light of a candle fills a dark room.

*I was afraid you would turn from me.*

But he couldn't tell her. He didn't dare. What if she'd turn from him? He lowered his eyes. He couldn't stand the way Morgaine was looking at him.

He heard her leaving the room, but he didn't have any words to call her back. He felt as if all the energy had been sucked from his body.

How had she found out? And why hadn't she said anything? Why hadn't she confronted him when she had returned to Hogwarts? A thousand questions were zooming around in his brain, but then, a thought that was louder than any of the others made him sink to his knees:

*I have let her down. She trusted me, and I betrayed that trust by not telling her the truth. She will never forgive me.*

He buried his face in his hands. Losing Morgaine's trust was the worst thing he could imagine at this moment.

~ ~ ~

*Severus Snape had been a Death Eater.*

*I found out when I was reading about the rise and fall of Voldemort during the summer. I didn't understand. How could the man who had been teaching me White Magic for over a year be a Dark wizard? I went on reading and learnt that Severus had turned from Voldemort, that Dumbledore had vouched for him, that he had renounced the*

*Dark Arts, that he had made a choice.*

*All throughout the fall I wanted to ask him about his past, but I didn't have the courage. What if he got angry with me for snooping around? What if he told me that it wasn't any of my business? I was just a child, his student, and he was my teacher. What right did I have to ask about his past, his motives?*

*But I was disappointed. Why hadn't he told me? Did he trust me that little?*

*He knew that I was looking for answers. He should have known that I would read up about Death Eaters. And he should have known that I, sooner or later, would stumble across his secret.*

*I told him that I did not want to meet the Boggart. I knew it would turn into him wearing a Death Eater mask. But he had insisted.*

*This was not how I had wanted him to find out that I knew about his dark past.*

## X: Mistakes Forgiven

*Chapter 10 of 35*

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Author's note: Thanks to JKR for some wonderful characters. Thanks to Trickle Woo for beta reading.

### Chapter X: Mistakes Forgiven

Almost two weeks had passed since Severus had seen Morgaine's Boggart turn into him and then into a Death Eater. He hadn't spoken to her since. She hadn't come to see him in his office, and whenever their eyes had met in the classroom or the Great Hall, he had turned away. He couldn't stand the questioning look in her eyes.

He was ashamed. Not of being a former Death Eater, he had come to terms with that years ago. No, he was ashamed that Morgaine had found out about his dark past on her own, that he hadn't had the guts to tell her himself. He felt that he should have told her; on Halloween maybe, or the night when he had promised to take care of her. But he hadn't, and now it was too late. The secret was out.

He let his eyes wander towards the Slytherin table. There she was, deeply immersed in a discussion with one of her fellow Slytherins. For a moment Severus considered reaching out for her, letting her hear his thoughts, but he did not dare. What if she did not want him to touch her mind?

Suddenly, Morgaine was looking straight at him, candlelight reflecting in her blue eyes. And there it was again, the questioning look in her eyes. She wanted answers. And once again, Severus turned away. He wasn't ready yet.

~ ~ ~

*Severus avoided me. Whenever I tried to catch his eyes, he turned away. My potions were just acknowledged with a curt nod. No bantering, no sarcastic comments, nothing. Only silence.*

*Once or twice, I tried to touch his mind, but he had raised his shields. He made it very clear that he did not want me to come close. But my heart told me to ignore his wishes. He was my friend. I couldn't leave him alone with his demons.*

~ ~ ~

January's full moon approached and with it Severus' birthday. Severus had never seen his birthday as a cause for celebration, but as every year, Dumbledore had gathered all the teachers in the staffroom to celebrate.

Severus hated this yearly party. He hated it when people patted him on the back, telling him what a good guy he was. Because he didn't feel like a good guy, and this year he felt even lousier than usual.

He excused himself from his own party before the cake was served. He needed to be alone.

Back in his private study, he opened his cabinet and took out a bottle of Firewhisky. He was going to spend yet another birthday alone, and he sure as hell wasn't going to spend it sober. He let himself fall into his armchair by the fireplace and poured himself a glass. The amber liquid shone golden in the light of the fire. Who would have thought that something that beautiful could be so dangerous?

He drained the glass and poured himself another one. The alcohol warmed his cold body, but, unfortunately, it also made his thoughts run free. All those thoughts that he normally didn't allow himself to think; thoughts of the mistakes he had made and memories of the friends he had lost.

Morgaine's face kept going in and out of his vision. He imagined her smiling at him, and he imagined looking into her eyes. Those eyes were begging for answers that he couldn't give.

He buried his face in his free hand. He had let her down. Why was it that he always had to disappoint his friends?

After about an hour, there was a gentle knock on the door, but Severus decided to ignore it. Nobody knew that he was there, and nothing could be so important that it couldn't wait until the morning. He drained yet another glass of Firewhisky, and when he reached for the now half-empty bottle, there was another knock. He clenched his fist. Whoever this was, if they didn't go away he would hex them into oblivion.

Then he saw the doorknob turn. He cursed under his breath. He should have locked the door, but it was too late now. He almost dropped his glass when he saw who had been knocking.

'Miss duLac.' The Firewhisky had made his voice hoarse. What was she doing here?

'The headmaster said you weren't feeling well, sir.' There was a note of actual concern in her voice.

Severus felt her eyes upon him. For a moment, he considered shielding his mind, but he couldn't master the strength to bother. The moon was full, and he was drunk. If Morgaine had wanted to, she could have read his mind like an open book. But she kept her distance, and Severus was grateful for it.

'I am fine, Miss duLac,' he lied, trying to keep his voice formal. 'It is just the full moon.'

Morgaine nodded, and he saw her chewing her lip. She didn't believe a word he said, he could sense that clearly.

'Well, I just thought I'd look in. Goodnight then, Professor.' She turned to leave.

Severus swiftly rose from his chair. 'Please, Morgaine, stay.'

He had gotten up too quickly, the Firewhisky made him dizzy, and he had to hold onto his armchair. Morgaine turned to look at him.

'Are you sure you're alright, sir?' She took some tentative steps towards him. There was a worried look on her face.

'I have been celebrating my birthday,' Severus said in a mocking tone, pointing at the half-empty whisky bottle. 'Have a drink with me.'

Morgaine shook her head. 'I don't drink. And neither should you anymore, Professor.'

'Professor!' Severus repeated, his voice suddenly bitter. 'I do have a first name, you know.'

Morgaine ignored his comment. 'How about a cup of strong tea?' she asked instead, and without waiting for permission, she went to the cabinet where Severus kept his tea and his kettle.

He sank back into his chair, watching her closely. All her movements had become so familiar to him: the way she tilted her head when measuring ingredients, the way her lips moved when murmuring an incantation. He had watched her many times before, but right now it seemed to him as if he was watching her for the first time.

A couple of minutes later she handed him a steaming cup. There was a faint scent of peppermint, and Severus couldn't help but smile, remembering the first potion she ever presented to him. It had been peppermint-scented as well.

Then Morgaine took a seat opposite of him. She was looking at the flames that were dancing in the fireplace. Severus couldn't take his eyes of her. Why had she come?

For a long while, neither of them said a word, but then Morgaine broke the silence.

'Why?'

She didn't have to specify her question. Severus knew exactly what she was asking about, and he was ready to give her an answer.

'I was young, impressionable,' he began. 'I felt a sense of belonging with the Dark Lord and his followers. I had never belonged anywhere before.'

Calmly, he told Morgaine about the years after he had left Hogwarts, how he had come to join the Dark Lord. And with every word a big weight seemed to be taken from his shoulders.

'I have seen things I wish I had not seen, Morgaine. I have done things that I am not proud of. But at the time, everything seemed right.'

'But you left.' Morgaine's voice was warm and calm. Severus would have understood if she had run away, if she had never wanted to talk to him again, but she stayed put.

He didn't know what made him feel this way. Maybe it was the Firewhisky, maybe it was the moon, or maybe he was just tired of keeping secrets. But right there and then, Severus felt that he, for the first time in many years, could let his guard down.

'Morgaine, what I am going to share with you is not known to anyone except Dumbledore. I never thought I would let anybody else know, but I want you to understand.'

He reached out and took her hands into his. They looked into each other's eyes. In this very moment, Severus felt closer to Morgaine than he had to anyone for many years. This night she wasn't his student, she was the only friend he had. He was finally ready to share with her the memories he had hidden away years ago. Memories which he had sworn never to reveal to anyone. But he was going to share them with her because he trusted her.

'Take my memories, Morgaine.'

He took a deep breath, closed his eyes, opened his mind, and showed her everything.

His childhood, the mother he loved, the father he feared, and whom he could never please.

His years at Hogwarts, they were the happiest and at the same time worst years of his life.

His time with the Dark Lord, a time he wasn't proud of. They had been a time of betrayal, lies and pain.

And then there was Lily, dear, sweet Lily. Severus showed Morgaine the friendship he and Lily had shared, the hurt he had felt when she had turned from him and, most of all, the bitter agony he had felt when he realised that Lily had died because he had told the Dark Lord about the prophecy.

Then Severus broke the connection. It still hurt so much, and the pain would never disappear.

'You've paid dearly for your mistakes.' Morgaine's voice caressed his mind like the gentle hand of a mother caresses her newborn child.

Severus looked at her. He didn't know how he had expected her to react, but what he saw in her eyes brought him to the verge of tears. She understood and most of all, she accepted.

He turned his head and stared into the darkness. He didn't want Morgaine to see the tears that were filling his eyes.

Her voice wasn't much more than a whisper when she spoke. 'My grandmother used to say that a friend is somebody who takes a step closer towards you and holds your hand when everybody else turns their back on you.'

For a brief moment, Severus felt her fingers close around his. It was the simplest of gestures, but it meant so much. Then she let go of his hand, rose from her chair and walked towards the door.

He wanted her to stay, but he didn't have the words to tell her. She had already reached the door when she spoke.

'Don't push me away, Severus Snape.' And with his name on her lips, she left.

He stared at the door that she had closed behind her, tears burning in his eyes. What was it about this girl that made him feel this way? What was it that had made him share all this with her?

He cared deeply for her. She meant more to him than any other student. She had become his friend. The feelings he experienced around her were similar to how he once had felt around Lily: happy, free, even loved. But with Morgaine, there was something more.

Acceptance.

Lily had pushed him away, when he had chosen the wrong path, but Morgaine accepted him, despite all his failings, despite all his flaws. He could feel that she had taken him into her heart, and whatever he had done in his past, whatever he would do in the future, she would not turn from him.

*How have I earned her trust?* Severus didn't understand.

He drained his glass and blinked back the tears. Tears he would not allow himself to cry.

Tears for the mistakes he had made, and which he regretted every single day.

Tears for the friend he had lost and couldn't let go.

And tears for the girl he had shared his innermost secrets with and to whom he didn't dare telling just how much she meant to him.

~ ~ ~

*He shared his deepest and darkest secrets with me that night. I still don't know how I earned his trust.*

*Yes, Severus Snape had made mistakes, terrible mistakes, and he had paid dearly for them. I often wondered how much pain a human being can endure, how much sorrow they can carry in their hearts. A weaker man would have taken his life, but Severus Snape had chosen to live.*

*That night, I gave him a promise. I promised that I would not leave his side.*

*Severus Snape deserved a friend. A friend he could count on. A friend who wouldn't turn from him. A friend who would let him make his own choices and support him. And if he wanted me, I would be this friend.*

*It wasn't always easy. There were times when he pushed me away. But I stood by and waited, and when he reached out his hand in the dark, I was always there to hold it.*

## XI: About to Lose Another Friend

*Chapter 11 of 35*

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Author's note: Thanks to JKR for some wonderful characters. Thanks to Trickle Woo for beta reading.

### **Chapter XI: About to Lose Another Friend**

Severus was casually leaning against a bookshelf in his private study, his arms crossed in front of his chest. He was observing Morgaine, who was working on the other side of the room. Her movements were smooth and thought-through, and she handled her potion ingredients with the same care and concentration as he did. Severus allowed himself a faint smile. He had taught her well, he was proud of her.

'Do you have to stare at me like that?' Morgaine asked without taking her eyes off her cauldron. There was an amused tone in her voice.

Severus grinned. Yes, he had to. For a matter of fact, he found it hard to take his eyes off Morgaine nowadays.

Ever since his birthday, she had come to see him several nights every week. They brewed potions, played Wizard Chess or just spent hours talking in front of the fireplace. Severus was glad that they had found their way back to each other. He had missed having her around.

Their relationship had changed. Only a couple of weeks ago, Morgaine had just been his student, one for whom he cared deeply but still a student nonetheless. And then came the night when he had bared his soul, the night when she had held his hand in the dark. That night they had become friends.

There were days when Severus found himself wondering how it would be in a year's time, when Morgaine would take her exams and leave Hogwarts. He dreaded that day. Morgaine was the first person in years he could call a friend. He didn't want to lose her.

Little did he know how close he would come to losing her this year.

~ ~ ~

It was in the middle of March, and the whole school seemed to be infected by some kind of spring fever: all the students were giggly, chatty and, in Severus' opinion, simply insufferable. He had dished out so many detentions that he would have to look for a bigger classroom in order to have enough space for everyone.

The last lesson of the week, sixth year Potions, wasn't any better. The whole class was bubbly and distracted, and there was the smell of a burning potion in the air. Severus was slowly but surely losing his patience. How hard could it be to remove the cauldrons from the heat after the right amount of time? He was just about to tell off a pair of Gryffindors when their potion burst into flames.

*Just typical for these nincompoops,* Severus thought as he pointed his wand at the flames in order to extinguish them. He took his time since he was secretly enjoying the panicky look on the students' faces. He liked to let them sweat a little longer.

And then all hell broke loose.

He heard the cauldron crack, saw the students run for cover and felt someone push him away from the table. The force of the explosion knocked him off his feet, and he

felt pieces of pewter rain on his back. If he had been standing in front of the cauldron, it would have exploded right into his face.

It was over in a heartbeat. Severus got up, brushing the dust off his robes. The students were slowly emerging from under their desks. They were all rather pale, and nobody was talking.

Severus was just about to reprimand the two Gryffindors for their carelessness when he noticed that everybody was staring at something behind him. He spun around and caught sight of Morgaine. She was standing with her back against a shelf, her face white as chalk, clutching the right side of her stomach with both hands.

Severus felt a chill run down his back. 'Miss duLac, are you alright?' he inquired.

Morgaine shook her head. There was blood seeping out from between her fingers.

Severus reached her with four swift strides. 'Weasley, get the nurse,' he bellowed. 'McKenzie, find the headmaster. The rest of you, get out of here! Now!'

With fumbling fingers, Severus pulled apart Morgaine's hands and found a big pewter splinter protruding from her stomach. The wound was bleeding heavily. He swallowed dryly.

'You should have taken cover, you silly girl.' He tried to keep his voice calm, but he heard it tremble. It was obvious that it had been Morgaine who had pushed him out of harm's way.

Slowly he lowered her onto the floor and knelt down beside her. What should he do? Should he remove the splinter and try to close the wound? Or would removing the splinter just make everything worse? He felt panic rise inside him. Where was this damned nurse?

Finally, the door flew open and both Madam Pomfrey and Dumbledore came running in.

'Dulcamara, that is what was in the cauldron.' Severus couldn't hide the panic in his voice. He didn't attempt to either.

The nurse quickly assessed the situation. 'Albus, we will need help from St. Mungo's. Call the Healers.' Then she turned to Severus. 'I will attempt to remove the splinter. Make sure the girl holds still.'

Severus turned towards Morgaine's face. If possible, she was even paler than before.

'Listen carefully, Morgaine,' he said, taking her right hand into his. It was cold and clammy. 'I want you to look at me and concentrate on my eyes.'

She bit her lip and nodded. Her blue eyes locked onto his dark. Severus could sense her pain, her fear, and he knew that she could hear his thoughts.

*It is going to be alright. Everything will be fine.*

Morgaine's face contorted as Madam Pomfrey removed the splinter.

'See, it was not that bad,' Severus said in a comforting voice, tenderly wiping away a tear from her cheek.

For a moment, Morgaine relaxed, but then her eyes widened in fear, and she started gasping for air. Severus looked over his shoulder at Madam Pomfrey.

'The wound is closed,' the nurse whispered. 'I reckon there was enough potion on the splinter to affect her breathing.'

She started murmuring incantations under her breath, and Severus felt a knot in his stomach. He knew that there was no point in having Morgaine take an antidote now, not if the potion had contaminated her blood. He turned back to face her again. He needn't be a Legilimens to sense her fear. He had to calm her down. If she panicked now and started hyperventilating, this would only make matters worse.

He placed his free hand on her cheek. 'Morgaine, look at me and concentrate.'

He heard Dumbledore and at least two more persons enter the classroom, but he didn't take his eyes off Morgaine. 'Come on, Morgaine, you are doing well. Small breaths, steady.'

A spasm went through Morgaine's body, and he could feel her nails digging into his forearm.

'Breathe with me, Morgaine, small breaths. Do you hear me, Morgaine? Morgaine?'

But she didn't hear him, and she had let go of his arm. She had lost consciousness.

Severus found himself being pushed out of the way and saw the two Healers levitate Morgaine out of the dungeon. He wanted to follow but Dumbledore held him back.

'There is nothing you can do now, Severus. Let them do their job.'

At first, Severus tried to break free from the headmaster's grip, but then he gave in. Dumbledore was right of course. There was nothing he could do.

Robotically, he started to dry up the blood on the floor. He was working in a kind of trance. He didn't even hear Dumbledore leaving. It was first when he had restored the classroom to its usual order that he realized that he was alone. He sank onto a chair.

Morgaine had been hurt in his classroom, while she was in his care. She had been hurt because she had tried to protect him. Severus bit his lip. This should not have happened.

He went through the events of the afternoon in his head over and over again, wondering what he could have done to prevent them.

*I should have noticed earlier that the cauldron was overheating. I should have put the flames out at once. Why did I think that it would be fun to see the Gryffindors tremble?* He closed his eyes, shaking his head. He felt that all of it had been his fault.

After what seemed like hours, he got up and went to change his singed and blood-stained robes. He would have to show himself in the Great Hall.

The mood there was subdued. The whole school knew by now what had happened in the dungeon. Severus walked by the Slytherin table, trying to avoid the curious looks. A small part of him was hoping that everything had just been a bad dream and that he would see Morgaine sitting among her classmates, but he knew she wouldn't be there. When he reached the staff table, he noticed that Dumbledore wasn't there either.

'They have taken Morgaine to St. Mungo's,' McGonagall informed him. 'Dumbledore went along.'

Severus didn't even sit down. He turned on his heels and made his way back to his office. He would Floo to St. Mungo's at once. He needed to see Morgaine. He needed to see her *now*.

Outside the Great Hall he bumped into Dumbledore. The headmaster looked tired. 'They haven't woken her up yet. So far, she isn't able to breathe on her own.'

For a moment, Severus just stared at the older man, not really taking in his words. Then he turned wordlessly and left for the dungeon. He couldn't face the old man right



now, he needed to be alone.

He hurried down the stairs and locked himself in his study. For a while, he was just pacing the room. When he caught sight of the empty armchair in front of the fireplace, he stopped dead in his tracks. Just last evening, Morgaine had been sitting there. She had defeated him miserably at Wizard Chess and hadn't been able to wipe her smug grin off her face the whole evening. And as bad a loser as he was, he hadn't minded because it had been *her*.

He sank into the armchair opposite the one she used to sit in, his mind strangely empty. And all he did was stare at the empty cushions opposite him.

When morning dawned, he was still sitting there. He had not bothered going to bed, as he wouldn't have found any rest anyway. He showered, changed his robes and went up to the Great Hall. He realised at once that Dumbledore wasn't there. This couldn't mean anything good.

He emptied his mind of all emotions, and his face became an inscrutable mask. But under his robes, he was clenching his fists. He didn't know how he would be able to cope with losing yet another friend.

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A/N: Dulcamara is a potion brewed of the leaves of bittersweet (solanum dulcamara, hence the name of the potion). The Dulcamara Potion is a medical potion used to clean the body, as it has a sudorific effect.

If overdosed, solanum dulcamara will cause numbness, cramps and fever and eventually paralyse the respiratory system.

## XII: Goodbye for the Summer

*Chapter 12 of 35*

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Author's note: Thanks to JKR for some wonderful characters. Thanks to Trickie Woo for beta reading.

### Chapter XII: Goodbye for the Summer

Severus retired to his private study directly after breakfast. He would bury himself in his work, so he wouldn't have time to think. But he couldn't really concentrate on anything. As soon as he heard footsteps in the corridor, he paused to listen if the steps sounded familiar. As soon as he heard a log crack in the fireplace, he spun around to see if there was somebody trying to contact him via the Floo network. But he never recognised any footsteps, and there wasn't anything in the fireplace other than logs, flames and ashes.

He sighed and rubbed his burning eyes. He had been up all night, brooding, and it had not changed a thing. Morgaine was still hurt, and he was still the cause of her injuries.

'You are aware of the fact that you have missed lunch, aren't you, Severus?'

The sound of Dumbledore's voice made Severus spin around. He had not heard him enter. The headmaster looked tired, just as tired as Severus felt, but there was also a faint smile on face. Did this mean ...?'

'Yes, my dear boy,' Dumbledore answered the unasked question. 'Morgaine is awake. She is doing fine.'

Severus let himself fall onto the nearest chair, and his heart was suddenly much lighter than it had been only a couple of minutes ago.

~ ~ ~

April brought windy weather and heavy rain. Every morning, when the owls arrived, the Great Hall was showered with icy water drops. However, only a few people were cruel enough to send their owls out in that weather. Severus was therefore quite surprised when one morning a drenched owl landed beside his coffee cup, carrying a roll of parchment.

He recognised her handwriting at once, the slender, artistically curved letters that covered so many labels on his potion shelf. With slightly trembling fingers, he unrolled the parchment.

*Dear Professor Snape,*

*I hope these lines find you well.*

*As you surely know, I am still at St. Mungo's. It is awfully boring here. My roommate isn't able to talk, as she has managed to hex her own tongue off, and I am not allowed to leave the ward, as the Healers are afraid that my wound might break open.*

*My dear great-grandfather has kindly enough provided me with some books, but to be honest, the 1001 Uses of Knitted Socks and Magical Me by Gilderoy Lockhart are not exactly page turners.*

*That's why I beg you to send me some of my text books. And please, do not tell my great-grandfather. He has some silly idea about me needing to rest.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Morgaine*

*P.S. I really hope that you are planning to have something to eat for breakfast. Black coffee is not considered food.*

Severus couldn't help but smile. He remembered their first breakfast together, a few years ago. Morgaine had looked suspiciously at his coffee that morning, too.

So she was doing fine, she was even making jokes. It was almost as if he could hear her laughter. Severus shook his head. Now, what way was that to think of a student?

After breakfast, he made his way down to the Slytherin common room. He found it empty. Of course, at this time of the morning all the students had classes. He strode through the common room towards the girls' dormitory. He hadn't been here for almost three years, not since the night he had brought Morgaine here after her Sorting. She had been standing there before him, chewing her lip, and both of them had been wondering why on earth she had been sorted into Slytherin. But she had proved that the Sorting Hat had been right: she was cunning, ambitious and surely stubborn enough to achieve anything she wanted.

It wasn't hard for Severus to figure out which bed belonged to Morgaine. It was almost amusing how much her bookshelf resembled his: Potions books to the left, followed by Defence Against the Dark Arts, then Herbology. He chose a couple of books and put them into Morgaine's book bag that was hanging beside the bookshelf. Then he returned to his study. Morgaine would want her books as soon as possible.

He had meant to Floo directly to St. Mungo's. His first lesson wasn't until after lunch, so he would have plenty of time. But as his hand reached for the Floo powder, he froze.

What would he say to Morgaine when he saw her? That he was sorry that she got hurt while she was in his care? That he missed her? ~~He~~ was sorry, and he *did* miss her, but how could he put his feelings into words without them sounding ridiculous? He was her teacher, for heaven's sake. Why would she care how he felt?

He let his hand sink down and left for the Owlery. Let the bird deliver the package. After all, Morgaine had asked for her books and not her Potions professor.

~ ~ ~

It was the first Sunday in May. Everybody had left the castle to enjoy the warmth of the sun out in the grounds. Well, not everybody. Severus Snape could, as usual, be found in his private study. He had been spending a lot of time there lately.

From what Dumbledore had told the staff, Morgaine was recovering nicely. Soon, she would be allowed to leave St. Mungo's. He had also told them that she was looking forward to getting some visitors.

Severus knew that both McGonagall and Sprout had been to St. Mungo's. They had asked him to come along, but he hadn't dared. He was well aware of the fact that he, as Morgaine's Head of House, was expected to take care of his students, but still he could not get himself to go and see her. He wasn't even sure if she wanted to see him. After all, she had been hurt in his classroom, while she had been in his care. What if she was blaming him?

'Shame to be hiding down here on a sunny day like this, Professor.'

Severus almost dropped the bottle he was holding into his cauldron. He recognised her voice at once. Slowly, he turned around, afraid that his mind had been playing tricks on him, afraid that she wouldn't be there.

Morgaine was leaning against the doorframe. She was pale, and there were dark shadows under her eyes. She looked awfully fragile.

'Mo... Miss duLac.' Severus didn't know what else to say.

'Oh, you remember my name, lovely.' There was a slightly mocking tone in her voice. But then she smiled.

It was as if somebody had ripped open the roof and let the sunlight enter his gloomy office. And Severus could only stare. He had missed her smile so much.

'Poppy gave me permission to leave the hospital wing for a while,' Morgaine said as she walked towards the nearest chair. Severus noticed that she was moving very gingerly. She was obviously still hurting.

Suddenly, he felt a strong urge to pull her into his arms, to hold her and tell her how sorry he was, but he kept his distance. It wouldn't be appropriate. He was, after all, her teacher.

'You haveve been missed,' he said instead, trying to keep his voice steady and formal.

I *have missed you*, his heart screamed, but his mouth wouldn't utter the words.

Morgaine tilted her head and looked at him. She wanted to hear more, Severus could see it in her eyes, but the words were stuck in his throat. Why was this so hard? Why couldn't he just tell her that he had missed her? What was he afraid of?

The uncomfortable silence was broken by a knock on the door. Dumbledore entered the study.

'Ah, I thought I would find you here, my child,' he said as he carefully kissed Morgaine on her cheek. 'Poppy told me that you had gone to see your friends. Naturally, I assumed you came here.' The old man smiled, his eyes twinkling. He sure could read both his great-granddaughter and his Potions master like an open book. 'She also told me to make sure you wouldn't strain yourself too much. And she made me promise to bring you back.'

He took Morgaine by the hand and led her out of the study. In the door, he turned. 'By the way, Severus, might I ask you to tutor Morgaine once or twice a week while she has to stay in the hospital wing? We wouldn't want her to lag behind, would we?'

Severus inclined his head. It would be a pleasure.

~ ~ ~

*When Poppy told me that I was allowed to go and see my friends, I had first been thinking about going down to the lake. I was sure everybody would be there, it was such a sunny day. But somehow, I ended up in the dungeons.*

*I had been a little disappointed that Severus never came to visit me at St. Mungo's. He was, after all, my Head of House, my mentor. But seeing the look in his eyes made me forget my disappointment. He didn't say anything, but I could sense that he had missed me just as much as I had missed him.*

~ ~ ~

Summer arrived too soon. After her accident, Morgaine had spent one month at St. Mungo's and another one in the hospital wing. And somehow, Severus felt deprived of this time with her, even though he had gone to see her almost every evening. Having Madam Pomfrey listening in on their conversations all the time had been very trying, and he would have preferred to be alone with Morgaine.

On the morning of the last school day, Severus was tidying his office, bottling potions and preserving ingredients. He would be leaving Hogwarts at noon and so would Morgaine. He was hoping that she would come down to the dungeon to say goodbye.

As she knocked on his office door, he took his time to answer it. After all, he didn't want her to know that he had been waiting for her.

She was already wearing her travelling cloak. 'I came to ask you which of these plants you would like me to bring back from Iceland in September, sir,' she said, handing her teacher a roll of parchment.

Severus took it out of her hand. 'I see you are ready to leave, Miss duLac,' he said, eyeing the list absentmindedly.

Morgaine nodded. 'Dumbledore organised a Portkey. I'll be leaving within the hour.'

'Then I will not waste your time,' Severus said. 'You know enough about herbs to know which ones will be useful here. I trust your judgement.' His voice sounded colder than he had intended it to. He had wanted to tell Morgaine to take care of herself, to send an owl now and then, but all of a sudden it seemed silly.

'I'll do my very best, sir,' she said as she put the roll of parchment into her bag. 'I hope you'll have a nice summer then.'

She gave him a fleeting smile and turned to leave and had already opened the door when Severus called after her.

'Morgaine, wait.'

Severus caught up with her and came to a halt only inches behind her. Her hair smelled of sandalwood and honey. Strangely enough, he had never noticed it before.

Morgaine turned to look at her mentor. Her blue eyes met his dark ones, and for a while, they were just gazing at each other.

'You will be missed, Morgaine,' Severus finally said and then, without really knowing what he was doing, he bent and placed a quick kiss on her lips.

*What are you doing, Severus?* The thought formed in his mind the same instant as his lips met hers. He pulled back quickly, not really knowing what to say. He saw her chewing her lip. Should he apologise? But before he could even open his mouth, he felt Morgaine's fingers close around his.

'I'll miss you too, Severus.'

And without another word, she let go of his hand and left, leaving him standing in his office doorway.

Severus kept looking after her as she hurried along the corridor. He felt confused. What had he just done? How could he have kissed a student?

But it had felt so right at the moment.

Emerged in his thoughts, Severus didn't hear Dumbledore approaching from the opposite side of the corridor.

'Saying goodbye for the summer, I see.'

Severus spun around and met the headmaster's gaze. How long had the old man been standing there? Had he just seen him kiss Morgaine?

'Headmaster, I ...' Severus began, but Dumbledore's raised hand cut him short.

'Ah, Severus, don't apologise for love. It's too rare a gift. Have a nice summer.' And with these words, Dumbledore left, humming merrily.

Severus frowned. Love? No, it couldn't be. He liked Morgaine. They were friends. But love? No. By Merlin's beard, the girl was his student. But then again, all he had wanted to do lately was be alone with her, touch her, hold her in his arms. And now, he had kissed her.

Severus was confused, and all of a sudden, he wasn't sure what he felt.

~ ~ ~

*He kissed me.*

*Looking back, I think this was the most innocent kiss I've ever gotten, but at the time it was utterly confusing. Severus Snape was my teacher. Sure, we knew things about each other no one else did. We spent more time together than any other student and teacher. We had become friends over the last year. But still, he was my teacher.*

*I left Hogwarts in a puzzled state of mind that summer. I didn't know what to feel.*

~ ~ ~

Severus left for Spinner's End in the afternoon. He hadn't gotten a chance to talk to Morgaine anymore, but maybe this was just as well. He wouldn't really have known what to say anyway.

When he closed the front door of his house at Spinner's End behind him, the silence hit him like a sledgehammer. It had never been a very welcoming place, but this time his home seemed even colder, even emptier than usual. He sighed. This was going to be a long summer.

He spent his time reading and testing new potions, but none of it really satisfied him. By the end of July, he was bored out of his mind. He would have written a letter to Morgaine, but he couldn't find the right words. Everything he wrote seemed silly. Just when he had thrown the tenth piece of parchment into the dustbin, there was a knock on his front door. It was Dumbledore.

'Ah, Severus, I thought I would find you locked up here. I came to make you a proposition.' The old man's eyes were sparkling mischievously. 'How would you like to come to Iceland with me? I think a certain young witch would be very glad to see you.'

## XIII: And Now We're Even

*Chapter 13 of 35*

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

*Thanks to JKR for some wonderful characters. Thanks to Trickie Woo for beta reading. You really are my knight in shiny armour.*

**Chapter XIII: And Now We're Even**

With a loud crack Dumbledore and Severus Apparated to the outskirts of a small Icelandic village.

Severus looked around, the landscape was fascinating: dark lava rock made up small hills that were covered with moss, and the dim light of the never-setting sun cast ghostly shadows over the hills. It wouldn't have been surprising if one of these strangely shaped rocks had suddenly come to life and turned into a dragon. Severus could sense the power the place held, the magic that hung in the air. It was an ancient kind of magic, long since forgotten by most, but still alive.

There was a woman approaching them from the village. Severus recognised her as Morgaine's grandmother. She embraced Dumbledore heartily and shook Severus' hand.

'Welcome to Iceland, both of you,' she said. 'You came just in time for dinner.'

Margaret led the way towards the village. While walking she explained to Severus what kind of place he had come to.

'You won't find many magical people here. Most of them are what you would call Muggles. They come here for spiritual guidance, to re-charge their batteries or to learn about herb lore. Some stay only for a couple of weeks, others for years.'

Severus was intrigued. 'If this is a place mainly for Muggles, Margaret, how come you are here?'

'Well, that I am witch is entirely my father's fault,' Margaret answered, winking in Dumbledore's direction. 'But I am, first, a priestess of the Old Faith. As was my mother, and her mother before her. Centuries ago, women like us were prosecuted as witches and burned on the stake. It was harder for us to hide than it was for your kind. That's why we came here, to a secluded place far away from the world you know.'

They had reached the centre of the village and entered a small white house. Margaret was just about to lead Severus to a chair at the already laid table when he heard a familiar voice. Morgaine had entered the room, carrying a big casserole.

'I hope you like fish, Professor.'

Severus was relieved to see her smiling at him. From the moment Dumbledore had come to pick him up at Spinner's End, he had been wondering if it was such a good idea to come and see her. What if she didn't want to see him? What if she found the whole experience utterly embarrassing? But his fears had been unjustified. He could tell by the look in Morgaine's eyes that she was actually glad to see him.

Dinner was delicious. Dumbledore gave his great-granddaughter an appreciative pat on the back, and Morgaine smiled. Severus wasn't surprised by her cooking skills. He was well aware of the fact that she knew her way around a cauldron. With a smile he accepted the cup of peppermint scented tea she offered him after dinner.

'It's time to think about your sleeping arrangements,' Margaret said. 'Albus will be staying in my guestroom. Morgaine, have you prepared appropriate quarters for Professor Snape?'

'Yes, Grandmother.' Morgaine inclined her head slightly, smiling.

'Tomorrow, you'll be relieved of your chores, my child. Show Professor Snape around,' Margaret continued. 'And now, be gone, you two! So we old people can go to bed.'

Morgaine kissed her grandmother and her great-grandfather goodnight and beckoned Severus to follow her. 'You'll be sleeping over there,' she said, pointing towards a little white house across the yard. 'Would you like to go for a walk before you turn in, Professor, to digest dinner?'

'Only if you stop calling me Professor,' Severus answered. 'If I am not mistaken, we are on a first name basis, Morgaine.'

It was still light enough for him to see her blush. Then she laughed. 'Well then, Severus,' she said, stressing his name exaggeratedly. 'Would you like to go for a midnight stroll with me?'

Severus nodded, of course he would.

The sun was still above the horizon, casting a soft light over the moss-covered hills. Severus had never experienced the midnight sun before, and it was fascinating. In the distance, he could hear the hissing of a geyser.

'Beautiful, isn't it?' Morgaine asked.

Severus just nodded. He wished he had the words to express just how beautiful he found the place, but since he didn't have any, he kept silent.

'Now, let me show you your quarters.'

She led him towards the small house she had shown him before. He stepped inside to find a bed covered with dark green linen sheets and a bookshelf filled with heavy leather-bound books. He also noticed a softly simmering cauldron on the table by the window. He eyed it curiously. It wasn't hard to identify the potion.

'Wolfsbane?'

'Yes. I hope you don't mind it standing here,' Morgaine replied. 'It's just about done and it should not be moved.'

'Who would be brewing Wolfsbane in a place like this?' Severus inquired.

'Why, me of course. This is my room.'

'Your room?' Severus raised an eyebrow in surprise.

'Yes. It's custom here to give your room to your guest. And I do hope you came to see me and not my grandmother.'

Severus felt himself blushing slightly. What was he supposed to say now?

Morgaine spared him the trouble. 'When you're up tomorrow morning, come down to my grandmother's house for breakfast.' Then she turned to leave. 'Goodnight, Prof... goodnight, Severus.'

She gave him a last smile, and then she left him in her room.

Severus looked around. So this was Morgaine's room. He should have noticed. If not the cauldron, the books should have given it away *Advanced Potion Making, Advanced Defence against the Dark Arts, Hogwarts A History, The Power of the Light*. He had given her most of these books.

And then there was the potion. He examined it closely. He was impressed. Wolfsbane wasn't an easy potion to brew, but Morgaine had done nicely, even if she hadn't succeeded. He smiled, suddenly feeling proud. He had taught her well.

~ ~ ~

*I was very glad that Severus had followed Dumbledore's invitation.*

*After our last encounter at Hogwarts, I felt confused. And I was also a little scared. What if he thought the kiss to be a mistake? What if he regretted it? I certainly didn't.*

*I knew that we, sooner or later, would have to talk about it, and this would best be done far away from Hogwarts, in a place where he was not my teacher and I was not his student.*

~ ~ ~

When Severus awoke the next morning, he felt more rested than he had in years. For a fact, he couldn't recall the last time he had slept so soundly. He got up to dress and found that his robes had been replaced by a pair of black linen trousers and a black shirt. Without thinking about how the clothes had gotten there, he dressed and then went to get some breakfast.

He found Dumbledore, Margaret and Morgaine already sitting in the garden. They had courteously waited for him to join them for breakfast. Normally, Severus didn't like breakfast, but even he couldn't resist the freshly baked bread. And again, there was peppermint scented tea.

'Well, where are you youngsters off to today?' Dumbledore wondered over his second cup of tea.

'I was thinking about taking Severus up to the Well,' Morgaine replied.

Dumbledore chuckled. 'Ah, that is an excellent choice. But be warned, Severus, this is a place of Old Magic. You never know what can happen there.'

~ ~ ~

Severus followed Morgaine over the moss clad hills. He hadn't been hiking in years and actually experienced some difficulties keeping up with the girl. But every time she turned towards him to see if he was still behind her, she gave him one of her lovely smiles, and they were worth having a stitch.

By mid-afternoon, they had reached the Well, a tiny stream of water that sprang from the moss clad hills. Severus sensed at once that this was a place of powerful magic.

'It has been a place of rituals for hundreds of years,' Morgaine explained. 'It's a sacred place. Those who are schooled in Divination can see the future in the Well.'

Severus nodded. He didn't believe in the arts of Divination, but the magic of the place made his skin tingle. He couldn't help but wonder why Morgaine had brought him there.

They shared lunch on the hill, not far from the Well. Morgaine was telling him about the island and the Well, but Severus was only listening with one ear. He heard her voice, but didn't take in the words. He found that he couldn't take his eyes off her. He studied her face closely, her well-shaped eyebrows, her cheekbones, her sparkling blue eyes, her smiling lips.

'Why are you looking at me like that?' Morgaine suddenly asked.

Severus turned his head away from her. Maybe what he had to say would be easier if he weren't looking at her?

'Morgaine, what happened on the last day of school ... it was not appropriate. It should not have .../should not have ...'

'Should not have what?'

'I should not have kissed you.' There, he had said it. Hesitantly, he turned to look at Morgaine again. The stern dark eyes met the sparkling blue ones. He heard her giggle.

'Did anything suggest to you that I didn't like it?' she inquired.

'That is not the point, Morgaine,' he replied in a serious tone. 'I am your teacher. You are my student. It was not appropriate.'

She laughed heartily. 'Well, right now it is summer, and that means that you're not my teacher, Severus.'

She leant in, and before he knew what was happening, he felt her lips on his.

It was over in a heart-beat. They broke apart and Morgaine looked straight into his eyes. 'And now we're even,' she said, grinning at him.

There were only inches separating them. The sweet and heavy scent of her hair filled Severus' nostrils, sandalwood and honey. He just had to touch her. He couldn't resist.

Carefully, his fingers brushed over Morgaine's cheek, her hair. She wasn't what people in general would call beautiful, but there was something about her that made it impossible for him to take his eyes off her. His fingers brushed over her neck, down her arm. And then, Severus suddenly didn't care about school etiquette and proper behaviour anymore. He pulled her into a tight embrace, and their lips met once more. She tasted so sweet.

He shifted his weight and pushed Morgaine down into the grass, his left arm around her waist, his right hand supporting her head. He could feel her warm hands on his back, and closed his eyes. The whole world around him seemed to have disappeared. Morgaine's lips tasted of honey, and they were warm and welcoming. And it was so wrong.

*I should not be doing this.* The thought rang clearly in his head. *She is just a child. She is ten years younger than me. She is my student.*

Abruptly, he let go of her and sat up, once more turning his face away from her. He had to be strong. He had to resist.

After a while, he felt Morgaine's hand on his shoulder. 'We should get back,' she said. 'We'll be late for dinner.'

She stood up and put her hand out towards him. Severus took it and let her pull him up. They came to stand close to each other, only inches apart. He felt her hand taking his, and silently they went down the hill.

~ ~ ~

It had been a wonderful day, Severus thought lying in bed later that night. He enjoyed spending time with Morgaine. She made him feel ... well, happy. And he sure hadn't felt happy for a long time.

When he closed his eyes, he could see her face. He had memorised it carefully today: her eyebrows, her cheekbones, her sparkling blue eyes, her lips. Her lips that had tasted of honey.

For a moment he felt slightly guilty. He had kissed a student, twice. He should have resisted the temptation. He should have been stronger. But then again, how could something that felt so right be wrong?

*Don't apologise for love,* Dumbledore had said.

Severus smiled. Love? Was he actually falling for the girl? Was he, Severus Snape, falling in love?

He pulled up the blanket and snuggled down. And he couldn't help but wish that Morgaine were lying there with him.

# XIV: Old Enemies

Chapter 14 of 35

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Thanks to JKR for some wonderful characters.

Thanks to Trickey Woo for beta reading.

And thanks to you for reading and reviewing.

## Chapter XIV: Old Enemies

Time seemed to run differently in Iceland. Severus had been there for only about a week, but he felt strangely relaxed and rested, as if he had been away from his dungeons for months.

He spent as much time as possible with Morgaine. Whether she was working in the garden, carrying out her duties among the priestesses or climbing the moss-clad hills, he was never far away.

He had discovered a side of Morgaine he hadn't known before. He had long known that she was studious and hardworking, but here, in the place where she had grown up and where she knew every tree and stone, where she was in her element, he had discovered a serenity about her which some days made him wonder if it had been right of Dumbledore to bring her to Hogwarts. Morgaine seemed to belong there, in Iceland. But then he would never have gotten to know her, and Severus was surely glad that he had. Whenever she smiled at him, he felt as if he were bathing in sunlight after a long and dark winter, and whenever she touched him, he felt the ice melt in his heart.

More than once, he found himself staring at her, wondering how she had managed to break through the protective walls he had so carefully put up around himself, wondering why he had decided to let her in. He was glad that he had. She made him feel good. She made him forget about the memories and sorrows he had been trying to hide for years. Around her, he didn't have to pretend; Morgaine took him as he was, with all his flaws and shortcomings.

She had been right, here in Iceland he was not her teacher, and she was not his student. They were friends, and there were moments when Severus felt that they were becoming more than that. It was an unfamiliar yet wonderful feeling, but at the same time it made Severus uneasy. He knew that it wasn't right, that he shouldn't feel this way, because Morgaine was his student and he was her teacher, but most of all because he did not know to handle his feelings.

When he went down to Margaret's house for breakfast one morning, he found Dumbledore sitting alone in the garden.

'Ah, Severus, finally I get some company,' the old man greeted him. 'The girls are busy preparing for the Harvest Feast. They left me here all by myself.' He gave a theatrical snuffle.

'The Harvest Feast?' Severus inquired.

'Yes, you see, Severus, the women here live by the rules of the Old Faith,' Dumbledore explained. 'They celebrate the beginning of winter at the end of October, the return of the light in February and the beginning of spring in May, and now, at the end of summer, they thank Mother Earth for the harvest.'

Severus nodded. He had a faint memory of having studied this subject in History of Magic. It had, however, never really captured his full attention.

'These celebrations are connected with powerful magic,' Dumbledore continued. 'Centuries ago, the priestesses of the Old Faith often chose these days for important rituals. It's said that children who are begotten on these days will show extraordinary talents. And most Muggles who come here are quite interested in ... ah ... reproducing.' He chuckled.

'You would know all about that, wouldn't you, Albus?'

Severus hadn't noticed Margaret entering the garden.

'Now, for this, my dear, I put the entire blame on your mother,' Dumbledore replied, blushing slightly. 'I warn you, Severus, be careful about what you drink at the feast. It could just be a love potion.'

Severus didn't know what to make of Dumbledore's words. They sounded dead serious, but at the same time the old man's eyes were twinkling mischievously.

'Don't listen to him, Severus. He just wants to scare you,' Margaret said, smiling. 'And don't worry about the love potions. I am sure you would recognise them. You are, after all, the Potions master of Hogwarts. Why don't you go and have a look at them? For the sake of precaution. The girls are working in the red painted house at the end of the village. Morgaine will be there, too.'

Severus understood the hint at once. Supervising a bunch of girls brewing potions was the perfect excuse for him to spend some more time with Morgaine. He excused himself and went to find the red painted house Margaret had been talking about.

He found Morgaine among twenty giggling teenage girls. And sure enough, they were brewing love potions. Not the kind of potions that could be found in any of the Potions books at Hogwarts but simple aphrodisiacs that could be brewed without any magic. Severus eyed the different potions with amusement. Most of the girls had stuck to simple and harmless ingredients like balm, basil and cardamom seeds, but others were busying themselves with more potent and more dangerous plants such as henbane and wormwood.

Morgaine handled the bunch of chatty, giggly teenage girls well. They were definitely more interested in talking about boys and the Harvest Feast than learning about herb lore, but Morgaine always found a way to turn their attention back to their potions.

Severus was used to unfocused, work-shy students, but a room full of adolescent girls with their hormones running wild was still very nerve-racking. By mid-afternoon, he found himself just as tense as after teaching first-years at Hogwarts. And the worst thing was that the girls here seemed to get even sillier every time he entered the room.

'They might be a bunch of nincompoops, but they do recognise a good-looking man when they see one,' Morgaine whispered to him, grinning.

Severus raised an eyebrow. This was the first time Morgaine had commented on his appearance, and he did not know whether he was supposed to say anything or not. He was saved by Margaret entering the room.

'Talking about good-looking men', she said, 'you have a visitor, Morgaine. Go and say hello. I'll take care of your hens. And take Severus with you. I cannot guarantee his safety here.'

They left the chatty bunch of girls and walked through the village to Margaret's house.

'I wonder who would come to visit me,' Morgaine said. 'At this time of the year, people usually only come here for the Harvest Feast, and I think they have all arrived already.'

Severus peered towards the hedges in Margaret's garden. He caught sight of a man with light brown hair and shabby clothes. He seemed familiar.

'Remus!' Morgaine yelled and broke into a run.

The man in the garden opened his arms and embraced her affectionately. Severus, however, felt his stomach clench and considered turning around and walking away. The man had looked familiar already from a distance, and Remus wasn't such a common name. This was definitely not someone he was looking forward to meeting again. But it was too late to leave. Morgaine had already taken Remus by the hand and was pulling him in Severus' direction.

'Severus, I'd like you to meet a good friend of mine. Remus, this is Severus Snape. Severus, Remus Lupin.'

Severus stood tall and rigid, his arms crossed in front of his chest, his eyes slightly narrowed. He ignored the hand Lupin had extended towards him. 'Lupin,' he said curtly.

Why Lupin? Of all the people in the world, why did just Lupin have to come here? Severus felt the rage building up inside him. He truly despised this man. His first impulse had been to turn and leave. The second had been to strangle Lupin. He didn't know how long he would be able to keep his control, but since he did not want to lose his face, he decided to follow his first impulse.

'I will see you at dinner, Morgaine,' he said briskly, turned on his heels and left without another word. He could feel her eyes on his back when he walked away, and he heard her talk to Lupin.

'Do you two know each other, Remus?'

'Yes, we went to school together,' Lupin replied.

'Oh,' Morgaine sounded surprised. 'He doesn't seem glad to see you. What did you do? Blow up his Potions set?'

The last thing Severus heard was Lupin's sigh. 'That's a long story, Morgaine, a very long story.'

~ ~ ~

*I had never seen Severus in such a state. He did his best to control himself, but I had known him long enough to sense that he was furious. That he left in such an unceremonious fashion just proved my suspicion.*

*Remus told me his side of the story. They had been at school together, Remus in Gryffindor, Severus in Slytherin. Remus had made friends, Severus hadn't. And the friends Remus had made really enjoyed bullying Severus whenever they got a chance.*

*Remus was truly sorry that he never stood up to them, but who could blame him? He had never had many friends. Why should he risk losing the few he had by sticking up for a Slytherin? A Slytherin who would probably never have thanked him.*

*But Severus did blame him. Even now, over a decade later, he had not forgiven him. However, all this still did not explain the hatred I had seen in Severus' eyes.*

~ ~ ~

Walking away had done nothing to cool Severus' temper. He was still fuming with rage when he arrived at his quarters.

'I should not have lost control like this,' he said to himself.

But how could he not have? This was one of the men he despised more than anyone else. Lupin was one of the Marauders, one of Potter's best friends, one of the people who had made his life miserable for seven long years. And Morgaine obviously considered him a friend.

Again, Severus felt his stomach lurch. This scenario was just too familiar. He had been through this before, and he had already once lost his best friend to a Marauder. Would it happen again? He could feel his hands shaking and tried to steady himself by holding on to the bookshelf. He was just considering ripping it from the wall when Morgaine entered the room.

'Are you alright?' she asked. Her eyes locked onto his the moment he turned to face her. She was leaning against the doorframe, her arms crossed in front of her chest. She wouldn't leave before he explained himself. Severus sensed that clearly.

'How did you come to know Lupin?' he inquired. His voice was surly and cold.

'He is one of my oldest friends. I've known him since I was a child. He sometimes came to spend some weeks of his summer vacations here. And after my eleventh birthday, Dumbledore hired him to tutor me.'

'Do you have any idea how dangerous this man is, Morgaine?' Severus could hear his voice tremble with anger.

'You mean do I know that Remus is a werewolf?' Morgaine asked calmly. 'Of course I do.'

Yes, of course she knew. That's why she had been experimenting with the Wolfsbane Potion. Severus snorted. How could it have taken him so long to figure that out?

'That's why Remus is here,' Morgaine explained. 'He sometimes comes to spend the Full Moon here during the summer. Up here, the nights are shorter, and the transformation isn't that painful.'

The compassion in Morgaine's voice made Severus lose his temper. He glared at her, and his voice wasn't much more than a hiss when he spoke.

'He tried to kill me, Morgaine.'

'I beg your pardon?'

'Ha, good Lupin has not told you about the Marauders' most glorious prank?'

Severus' voice was almost triumphant as he told Morgaine about the night Black had lured him to the Shrieking Shack where Lupin had been waiting, fully transformed. Now, this little piece of information would surely make her see Lupin in a different light.

But Morgaine's voice was annoyingly calm when she spoke again. 'A werewolf has no idea about who he's attacking. He'd kill his best friend if he crossed his path. It wasn't Remus's fault.'

So now she was defending him! Severus felt his heart pound in his chest. He turned to face the bookshelf again, unable to look at Morgaine any longer.

'You should not associate with the likes of him.'

He regretted his words the moment they had left his lips, but he would not apologise for them.

He never saw Morgaine's reaction, and he didn't hear her leave. When he turned to face her, she had gone.

~ ~ ~

*I didn't know Severus as a man who could lose control like that. I was confused after his outburst. I needed a friend. So I went straight to Remus.*

*'You care a lot for him, don't you, Morgaine?' Remus asked after I had told him what Severus had said. And I nodded.*

*Then Remus looked at me with those sad eyes that always reminded me of the eyes of beaten dog, those sad eyes that made my heart ache.*

*'Are you in love, Morgaine?' he asked. 'Are you in love with Severus Snape?'*

*I remember that I just stared at Remus for a while. Back then, I didn't know what he was talking about. Severus and I had become friends over the years, best of friends, but I couldn't be in love. Or could I? I was sixteen. I had never had a crush. I had never seen two people in love. How was I supposed to know?*

*I don't remember if I gave Remus an answer that day. I don't know if I even had one. All I know is that something drew me away from him. I had to find Severus.*

~ ~ ~

Severus was sitting under a birch tree at the edge of the river. He had gone there to calm down, to let his thoughts run free. Surprisingly enough, it had worked. His breathing had slowed down, and his hands had stopped shaking. And he truly hoped that Morgaine would forgive him his outburst.

He didn't need to open his eyes to know that she was approaching; he had sensed her a while ago. He had also sensed that she was confused and hurt. And he regretted having lost his temper. He regretted having yelled at her.

Her shoulder brushed slightly against his when she sat down beside him. She didn't speak. And neither did he, although he was aching to ask her forgiveness. But Severus Snape had never learnt how to apologise. He didn't know what to say. After a while, he decided to just state the obvious.

'I should not have flared up like that.'

'No, you shouldn't.'

'I have no right to tell you whom to associate with.'

'No, you haven't.'

Morgaine's voice was calm and warm. Severus could tell that she was not angry. He knew, however, that she was disappointed. Eyes still closed, he reached out for her hand.

*Forgive me, Morgaine.*

The thought was echoing in his mind, but he was incapable of putting it into words.

He did not know if she was listening in on his thoughts that afternoon, he did not know if she would even allow his thoughts to enter her mind, but when he felt her fingers close around his, he knew that his apology had been accepted.

~ ~ ~

*Some wounds never heal.*

*I still didn't understand why Severus had decided to hate Remus so much, but I accepted that they would never be friends. I was truly sorry for that because I loved them both, and I knew that I could never turn from either of them.*

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A/N: Plants and herbs mentioned in this chapter:

In folklore, balm, basil and cardamom seeds are said to act as aphrodisiacs when added to food.

Wormwood: Infusion of wormwood can be used as stimuli, for example in love potions.

Henbane: Modern witches no longer work with henbane because of its poisonous attributes. In the Old Days, however, certain parts of henbane were used in love-stimulating potions.

## XV: The Harvest Feast

Chapter 15 of 35

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.



A/N: Thanks to JKR for some wonderful characters.

Thanks to Trickey Woo for beta reading.

## Chapter XV: The Harvest Feast

Severus didn't know how many hours they had spent sitting under the birch tree by the river. He didn't care either. Actually, the whole world could have burst into flames around him and he wouldn't have cared. All he cared about that evening was the girl who was sitting beside him.

He didn't understand how he had come to deserve her friendship. She was like the first warm breeze of spring that warms the heart of people after a long winter. And he was like a grumpy old wolf who had been rejected by his pack and who was now roaming around in the dark forest, growling at the sunlight, refusing to let the spring breeze affect him.

But Morgaine *had* affected him. She had managed to break through the walls that he had so carefully built up around himself over the years. She had awoken feelings in him that he had long since forgotten. When she was around, he felt that he could experience friendship, that he could care.

She was good for him. But he didn't have the words to tell her. Damn his pride, damn his stubbornness, damn his fears of getting hurt.

Severus bit his lip. What would happen in a year's time when she graduated? She was going to leave Hogwarts, and he would once more be alone. Would she take the warm breeze with her? Would winter creep back into his heart? He shuddered. He didn't want to think about this. Not now. His fingers closed tighter around Morgaine's. He wanted to hold onto her, afraid that she would slip away.

'We should go back.' Her voice was warm and tender, with just a hint of sadness in it. 'It's getting late, and it's going to be a long day tomorrow.'

The Harvest Feast, Severus had forgotten all about it. It would be their last day together this summer. After the feast, Morgaine would have to stay with her grandmother and the other priestesses for three weeks, and he wouldn't see her again until the start of term. And then she would once more be his student and he her teacher.

Severus opened his eyes and turned his head only to find Morgaine looking at him. She smiled when their eyes met, and he smiled back, shyly.

'You should smile more often, you know,' she said. 'It becomes you.'

She reached out and carefully brushed a strand of hair from his face. Her fingers felt warm and tender on his skin.

Severus took hold of her wrist and brought her hand to his lips, placing a tender kiss on her palm, feeling her pulse against his fingers. He wanted to pull her into his arms and hold her, but he hesitated. She was his student, she was just a child, and he was her teacher, a grown man. It wasn't right. He had to resist. But how could something that felt so right, be wrong?

'Will I see you tomorrow?' he whispered.

Morgaine shook her head slightly. 'I will have to spend the day with the priestesses.'

Severus felt a sudden stab in his chest. This could just be the last time they saw each other before the start of term. They had only had a week together, but it had been one of the most carefree weeks in his life. He was going to miss her. And all he wanted to do now was wrap his arms around her and hold her until the morning, but he knew that it was time to return to the village.

'We must go back,' he said, his voice so soft that he barely recognised it himself.

Morgaine just nodded and let him pull her up. She came to stand only inches away from him, and he stared into her blue eyes, wishing that she were not his student, wishing that he were not her teacher.

When she smiled at him, Severus couldn't resist. He reached out for her and placed a tender kiss on her forehead. It was the most innocent gesture of affection, but at the moment, it meant the world to him.

The sun hadn't set yet as they returned to the village, and thus it was easy to make out the person who was sitting on the bench in front of Severus' quarters. It was Dumbledore.

'Beautiful night, isn't it?' the old man said, pointing at the full moon that was barely visible at the horizon. 'No wonder you two youngsters are still outside.'

There was a serene smile on his face, and Severus couldn't help but wonder why the old man had chosen just this bench to sit on.

'I should go check on my girls,' Morgaine said. 'I'm sure they're all giddy about the feast tomorrow. Sleep tight.'

A quick smile and a wink was all Severus got before she turned, and he just watched her walk away. This was not how he had imagined the end of the evening.

'Charming young witch, isn't she?' Dumbledore's voice seemed to come from far, far away. It took Severus a moment to realise that the old man was talking to him.

'There aren't many of her kind,' Dumbledore continued. 'Morgaine has the gift of being able to love people with all their flaws and shortcomings. And once she has taken someone into her heart, she will never let them go again. Her great-grandmother possessed that gift as well.'

There was a strange tone in the old man's voice, a mixture of sadness, regret and longing which Severus didn't quite understand. He sat down beside Dumbledore on the bench, and since he didn't know if he was supposed to say anything, he kept silent.

'Morgaine will come back here once she has finished her magical education,' Dumbledore went on. 'She has promised her grandmother.'

Severus nodded. He had feared something like that.

'Tell me, Severus, what will you do when she leaves?'

It was a simple question. The answer, however, was not as simple. Severus looked at Dumbledore, desperately hoping that the old man would have one in store.

Dumbledore placed his hand on the younger wizard's shoulder, and his voice was calm and assuring as he spoke. 'A word of advice, Severus, don't just let her go. She will need to know what is going on inside your heart.'

And then Dumbledore left, leaving Severus alone on the bench in the moonlight. And he just stared after the old man, wondering if he himself even knew what he was feeling.

~ ~ ~

*My great-grandfather had chosen a good time to sit on that bench. I think he had been keeping a watchful eye on us all week.*

*It almost seemed cruel. He had brought Severus and me together, and at the same time, he was keeping us apart. I didn't understand it then, I was too young, too innocent.*

*Back then, I still trusted him. Today I know that we were all just pawns on his chessboard.*

*What would have happened that night if he hadn't been sitting on that bench?*

*Probably nothing. I was Severus' student, and he was not only my teacher but also too honourable a man to ever even make a move. But if Severus had asked me to spend the night with him, what would I have done? I think I would have said yes, although I knew I wasn't ready, although I knew it wouldn't have been right. But sometimes, the heart doesn't do as the mind tells it to.*

~ ~ ~

The next day, by nightfall, people started gathering by the Well to await the start of the Harvest Feast ceremony. Severus could feel the tension in the air. It was filled with Old Magic.

He had positioned himself a little apart from the crowd. He wasn't going to take part in the celebrations. He had just come to see Morgaine. She would have to stay with the priestesses for three weeks after the ceremony, and he would return to Spinner's End the next morning. If he wanted to say goodbye, he would have to do it tonight.

The sound of chimes announced the arrival of the priestesses. Morgaine made up the rear together with her charges. As all the other girls, she was wearing a dark green robe, and around her neck she was wearing the Witch's Star. The dim light of the midnight sun caused her hair to shine in a warm, golden-red tone. To Severus, she looked beautiful.

'She is remarkable, isn't she?'

Lupin's voice made Severus spin around. His old schoolmate looked tired. It was the day after the full moon, and despite the nights being shorter up here on Iceland, the transformation seemed to have taken its toll on him.

For a moment, Severus considered his sentiments towards the man who was standing in front of him. If Lupin hadn't been a Gryffindor, if he hadn't been one of the blasted Marauders, he and Severus might just have gotten along when they were at school. They would never have been friends, Severus knew that, but at least, they could have respected each other. And, maybe, he would not have come to hate Lupin the way he did now.

But Lupin had been a Marauder. Sure, he had never taunted Severus. But by standing by and never preventing Potter and Black, he had still chosen sides, and Severus would never forgive him for that. So he just gave Lupin an icy look and then turned his back on him.

'She likes you very much, you know,' Lupin continued. He had either not noticed the way Severus looked at him or he didn't care. 'Treat her well, Severus. She deserves it.'

Severus watched as Lupin went down the hill. And as much as he disliked him, he couldn't deny that Lupin was right: Morgaine was remarkable, and she did deserve to be treated well. His eyes came to linger on her again, once more wondering why she had chosen him. There was nothing he had to offer.

Even before the ceremony had come to an end, he saw various couples sneaking off into the darkness to find an undisturbed spot to celebrate the Harvest Feast on their own. He heard the giggles, saw the hugs and the kisses, and he almost envied the young people for their carefree attitude.

But he left them all behind and directed his steps towards the river, towards the place where he had spent some of the most peaceful hours of his adult life. He sat down under the same birch tree as the day before. If Morgaine was looking for him, she would come and find him there.

And so she did. She came to sit by his side just as she had done the day before. And again, they sat in silence. There was no need to talk.

When the chill of the night started creeping up from the river, Severus reached out and laid his arm protectively around Morgaine's shoulder, pulling her towards his chest so his chin came to rest on her head. He inhaled the scent of her hair. It smelled of sandalwood and honey. All Severus wanted to do that night was to hold Morgaine close. And if it had been up to him, he would never have let go of her again.

~ ~ ~

*How many people can point out the exact moment they fell in love?*

*I left the ceremony with trembling hands. I had seen Severus standing a little bit away from the crowd. I had seen him talking to Remus. And I had felt his eyes on me. How I hoped that he would be waiting for me.*

*I saw him sitting under the birch tree later, and that was when I fell in love.*

*What if either of us had dared to speak that night? What if any of us had had the courage to tell the other how we felt? How much heartache could we have avoided?*

*But neither of us had spoken. Not that night and not for years to come. Because neither of us dared to speak of what we felt.*

## **XVI: See but Not Touch**

*Chapter 16 of 35*

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Thanks to JKR for some amazing characters. Thanks to Trickie Woo for beta reading. And thanks to you for reading and reviewing.

### **Chapter XVI: See but Not Touch**

Severus was unpacking his trunk: Potions books, a new cauldron, some herbs, nothing unusual, just necessary things. Outside, the rain was pouring down, and that kind of weather fitted his mood perfectly.

After leaving Iceland, he had returned to Spinner's End, to an empty house, an empty life. He would never have thought that he would miss Morgaine so much. He had spent some of the most peaceful days of his adult life with her that summer, and now, every moment away from her felt like a moment lost.

He hadn't been able to cope with the emptiness of his house, and so he had decided to return to Hogwarts, three weeks prior to the start of term. And now he was there, unpacking and trying to settle in again.

A knock on the door made him lift his head.

'Good afternoon, Severus,' the headmaster said in his soft voice. 'I saw you arrive, and I thought I'd come down and have a chat with you.'

Severus looked at the headmaster, who had already made himself comfortable in one of the armchairs by the fireplace.

'I assume you are here to inquire about my summer, Headmaster,' Severus stated in a slightly mocking tone. After all, that was what Dumbledore usually came to see him about at the end of summer.

The old man smiled. 'My dear Severus, for once, I know perfectly well how your summer has been.' His eyes were twinkling. 'No, Severus, I have not come down here as your headmaster but as a concerned great-grandfather.'

Of course he had. Severus abandoned his trunk and sat down opposite Dumbledore. If the old man had come down here to tell him off, he would have his defence ready. He had not done anything indecent, and it had, after all, been Dumbledore himself who had invited him to come and visit Morgaine on Iceland.

'She is a charming little witch, isn't she?'

Severus nodded, holding Dumbledore's gaze steadily.

'Quite ... engaging.'

Again, Severus nodded. And at the same time, he was getting annoyed at the old man. Why could he never come to the point straight away?

'Just seventeen summers.'

There it was. Dumbledore had come to remind him that Morgaine was just a child.

'And you are her teacher,' Dumbledore continued.

Yes, he was. Severus knew this all but too well.

'She is your student.'

'Are you telling me to stay away from her?' Severus heard the bitterness in his own voice, but he did not care. He had lost his patience with the old man. Somebody had to address the matter, and as long as Dumbledore was beating about the bush, he could just as well be the one to do it.

To his surprise, Dumbledore chuckled. 'Telling two Slytherins not to pursue their goals? Severus, please, I might be old but I am not naïve.' He leaned forward, looking at the younger wizard.

'And as I have already told you, love is too rare a gift to cast it aside. No, Severus, I am not asking you to stay away from Morgaine. That would be straight out cruel, since both of you seem to blossom in each other's company. I am simply asking you to be ... discreet. She is still your student for one more year.'

'And I am her teacher. We have been over that already, Headmaster.'

'Good. Then we understand each other.' Dumbledore rose from his chair. 'One day you will have to tell me where you bought these chairs, Severus. They are amazingly comfortable.'

Severus arched an eyebrow in surprise. Dumbledore had an astonishing talent of being able to change the subject in a heartbeat.

'I will find out if they are still in production, Headmaster,' he answered.

'Lovely. Now, dear Severus, continue unpacking. I will see you at dinner. The house-elves have made a delicious lamb casserole.'

Dumbledore had already reached the door when he turned around to look at Severus once more. 'And do remember that Morgaine will have to return to Iceland next summer. That decision is final.'

Severus nodded in acknowledgement. He was aware of that, far too aware.

~ ~ ~

Seventh-year Slytherins and Gryffindors had their first joint Potions lesson of the term on Tuesday morning.

Severus was pacing the classroom several minutes before the lesson was about to begin. He felt unusually nervous. He had only caught a glimpse of Morgaine at the start of term feast, and he hadn't had any chance to speak to her yet. He wondered if Dumbledore had been talking to her as well.

At eight o'clock sharp, he opened the door to his classroom. The seventh-years streamed inside, chatting and giggling. Severus spotted Morgaine at the end of the line, beside Bill Weasley. When she passed him, she smiled at him, just as she always did.

'Good morning, Professor Snape.'

He nodded politely into her direction. Just as he always did. Now, that hadn't been too difficult.

He closed the door after the last student and strode across the classroom, his black robes billowing behind him. Morgaine was sitting in the front row, beside the Weasley boy. Yes, everything was just as usual.

Severus spent a good part of the seventh-years' first lesson lecturing them about their upcoming N.E.W.T.s. He expected nothing more than perfection from them, and they had to be aware of that from the start of the school year.

For the rest of the lesson, they worked silently and once more, Bill and Morgaine finished first. And once more, Severus found nothing to criticise.

'Miss duLac, a word,' he said at the end of the lesson when the students were already filing out of the classroom.

Morgaine turned and walked back towards him, coming to a halt about three feet away from him. She looked straight at him with her blue eyes, and for a second, Severus felt his knees go soft. Then he straightened and cleared his throat.

'Miss duLac, are you interested in earning extra credits for your N.E.W.T.s?'

He had chosen to address her with her last name. She was, after all, his student as Dumbledore had pointed out just a couple of days ago.

'What do you have in mind, Professor?' Morgaine asked in a matter-of-fact tone.

Professor? Now, that didn't feel right. He wanted to hear her say his name. He wanted her to talk to him in the warm and loving tone he had gotten used to over the summer. But he knew that it was better this way.

'You would be assisting me with some advanced potions. Are you available Friday evenings at eight o'clock?'

Severus bit his tongue. What a lousy invitation. He could just as well have put her in detention.

He was relieved to see her smiling at him when she inclined her head in acknowledgement. Obviously, she had understood what he had meant to say. When she turned to leave, he called after her once more.

'Morgaine.'

Her name felt so sweet on his tongue.

She turned to look at him, the look in her eyes somewhat softer than before.

'Has Dumbledore been talking to you?' he inquired.

Morgaine nodded, chewing on her lip.

'So we know where we stand?' He paused. 'Miss duLac?'

'Yes, we do, Professor Snape. We do.'

~ ~ ~

*It wasn't easy. Dumbledore had made it quite clear that he expected us to be discreet. Of course we would be. I was Severus' student, and he was my teacher. An appreciative glance in class, a handshake at the door, that was all, and we both knew that it was for the best.*

*But there were days when all of it just felt wrong. There were days when I longed to be back in Iceland, the place where we had spent some carefree weeks together that summer. There were days when I longed for his embrace.*

*But we both knew the rules, and we would follow them.*

~ ~ ~

Severus was idly flicking through a stack of parchment lying on his desk. Grading papers was the last thing he felt like doing at that moment. His eyes kept darting towards the clock on the wall: twenty to eight, nineteen to eight, the minutes seemed to be stretching into hours. He had told Morgaine to come at eight as usual, but he sincerely hoped that she would come earlier.

Half the school year had already passed. It was the first Friday of January. Morgaine had spent the Christmas holidays with her grandmother, and since she had returned to Hogwarts, he had only seen her once, during Potions class. Now, he had invited her to brew a potion with him over the weekend. All with Dumbledore's blessing.

He had chosen Plagium Mentis, a potion that was normally not taught at Hogwarts. But he had been searching for a potion to suit his protégée, and Plagium Mentis fitted perfectly. First, it was complicated enough to be a challenge for her. And second, he had seen her eyeing his books about the Dark Arts. Obviously, she was getting interested again. As a matter of fact, even her DADA teacher had pointed out just how interested Morgaine was. And Severus knew that she was not only interested and curious but also incredibly stubborn. Sooner or later, she would try one of these potions, and when she did, he wanted to be able to keep an eye on her.

Finally, there was a knock on the door. Seven to eight, Severus smiled; she was always early.

'Good evening, Professor Snape.'

'Good evening, Miss duLac.' It still felt strange to call her by her last name, although he had been doing it the whole year. 'Are you ready for your first thirty-six-hours potion?'

She nodded.

'Then have a look at the ingredients.' He pointed at the ingredients he had already laid out on the table.

After having examined them for a while, Morgaine looked at him, frowning. 'Some of these ingredients are restricted, sir.'

'Yes, they are. They are not to be handled by underage wizards and witches. But if I am not mistaken, Miss duLac, you came of age two months ago.'

Morgaine nodded, but the look on her face told Severus that she had more to say. 'This is a Dark potion.'

'What makes you think that, Miss duLac?'

'It's the night of the new moon. You don't exactly start healing potions on a night like this.'

Severus nodded. She had certainly done her homework.

'This potion, Miss duLac, is not listed as a Dark potion and hence not restricted. It is, however, not part of the curriculum. It will enable the brewer to bewitch the mind of any person. For it to work, the brewer has to pour his or her very soul into it. This will irrevocably link the brewer and the drinker. You must be aware of that.'

'For all you do comes back to you.'

'What was that, Miss duLac?'

'Nothing, sir.'

He saw her bite her lip and frowned. It had not been more than a murmur, but he could have sworn that she had been citing the age-old Counsel of the Wise Ones. He did not, however, pursue the matter further.

They spent the first couple of hours working in silence. Morgaine treated the ingredients carefully, using as little magic as possible so she wouldn't diminish the magical power of the plants and herbs they were using. Severus was pleased. She had learnt a lot over the last four years.

By four o'clock on Saturday morning, the potion was well on its way, and all they had to do for the next couple of hours was to make sure that it wouldn't boil over. Severus could see that Morgaine was tired, but he knew that she was too stubborn to admit it.

'Sit down and have a cup of tea, Miss duLac. The elves will bring sandwiches.'

Once more, his tone was much harsher than he had intended it to be. Why ever would he make an invitation sound like an order? But it seemed to bother him more than it did Morgaine.

'I'll brew the tea,' she said, smiling. 'Never trust an elf with tea.'

Severus sat down and watched her closely. She handled the tea leaves with just as much care as she treated potions ingredients. After a couple of minutes, she handed him a steaming cup. He took in the scent.

'Violets, lavender, and what else?'

'Elderflower,' Morgaine replied. 'It clears the mind.'

'Your knowledge of herbs and flowers never ceases to amaze me, Miss duLac.'

Morgaine laughed. 'It is nice to be able to surprise you now and then, Professor.'

Saturday passed without any disturbances. They worked on their potion, drank tea, ate sandwiches and talked. It was a peaceful day, and Severus wished that it could always be that way.

By midnight, they had come to the part of the process that demanded uttermost concentration: the spell work. It required not only complete attentiveness but also great physical and mental strength. Morgaine did well, and Severus was pleased with her. He knew that this was an exhausting kind of work, and he was therefore not surprised when she asked to be excused.

He noticed her swaying slightly when she walked to the door, but he didn't worry. They had been working for thirty hours, of course the girl was tired. But when she hadn't returned from the bathroom after ten minutes, he decided to go and check up on her.

The door to the girls' bathroom was ajar and light was streaming out into the corridor. There was no answer when he knocked.

'Miss duLac?' Severus called and knocked again.

Still no answer. He pushed the door open. There she was, bent over one of the sinks, clinging to it, her face chalky white.

'Morgaine.'

He approached her silently. And as she didn't turn to face him, Severus wondered if she had even noticed him. She flinched as he touched her. He could feel her tremble. She was completely exhausted.

With his free hand, he grabbed a towel, moistened it and handed it to her. She took it from his hand and pressed it against her face. After a couple of deep breaths, she straightened up, and her eyes met his in the mirror.

'I'm sorry,' she said with a tear-filled voice.

Gingerly, Severus put his arm around her shoulders. 'Let me take you back.'

Back in his study, he sat her down in the armchair by the fireplace and handed her a goblet.

'Drink.'

She did as she was told. When she had drained the goblet, the colour was returning to her cheeks.

'I'm sorry, sir,' she said again, rubbing her eyes. 'It seems as if I don't have what it takes.'

The note of disappointment in her voice annoyed Severus. Silly girl, she had been doing just fine. 'I am impressed that you made it so far,' he said. 'I should have made sure that you drank and ate properly while we were working. And now, I should send you to bed.'

He saw her opening her mouth in protest and cut her short by raising his hand. 'However, as I know how stubborn you are, Miss duLac, I just ask you stay seated for a while.'

'Yes, sir,' Morgaine said with a slightly mocking tone in her voice. But she did take off her shoes and crawled up in the chair. And Severus knew that she appreciated his suggestion. Within minutes, she had fallen asleep.

Severus smiled. The effect of the Sleeping Potion he had given her would wear off just in time for her to finish their potion in the morning.

He pulled a blanket out of a cupboard and wrapped it around Morgaine. Then he sat down in a chair opposite her. He had watched her sleep only once before, the night he had discovered her dark memories. That night there had been tears running down her cheeks all night. But tonight, she slept peacefully. And he just sat opposite her, watching her, memorizing her face. In only a couple of months, she would be leaving Hogwarts, leaving him, and already he dreaded the day they would have to say goodbye. Would he dare telling her how much she meant to him? Or would he just let her go?

Their potion was almost ready when Morgaine woke up.

'Did I fall asleep?' she asked, terrified.

'Actually, I made you fall asleep,' Severus replied with a slightly amused tone, waving the empty goblet in front of her. 'You should know better than drinking a potion you do not know.'

Morgaine tightened her lips and tried to give him an angry look, but then she laughed. 'You're not playing fair, Professor.'

Severus smirked. 'No, I am not. And now, if you are feeling better, I want you to finish our potion.'

By the time they were sealing the last phial of the potion, Sunday morning was dawning.

'You have done well, Miss duLac,' Severus said. 'You should consider a career in Apothecary.'

She sighed. 'I wish I could.'

'You will return to Iceland this summer?'

'I don't really have a choice, do I, Severus?'

Hearing her saying his name hit Severus right in the heart. This wasn't fair. Why did she have to leave?

He silently took Morgaine's hand into his, and for a brief moment he just held it, looking into her eyes. He hadn't touched her since last summer, and this little gesture was all he dared.

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A/N: Plagium Mentis, kidnapping of the mind: derived from the Latin words mens mind, spirit and plagium kidnapping

'Take caution of the next law too. For all you do comes back to you.' Wiccans will recognise this line as a part of the Wiccan Rede. It can however even be found in other religions.

## XVII: A Bittersweet Farewell

*Chapter 17 of 35*

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

This chapter is dedicated to all those who have loved and lost.

Thanks to JKR for creating Severus Snape.

Thanks to Trickle Woo for beta reading.

And thanks to you for reading and reviewing.

### **Chapter XVII: A Bittersweet Farewell**

The year had passed all too fast. Severus had tried to spend as much time as possible with Morgaine, but it had been too little. He had been busy preparing lessons, and she had been studying for her N.E.W.T.s. Apart from their occasional potion brewing on Friday nights, they had hardly spent any time alone together since January.

But maybe, this had been for the best. Severus didn't trust himself around Morgaine. He was longing for the closeness they had shared last summer, for her touch. Many times, he had wanted to take her into his arms, just to hold her, nothing more. But he knew that he mustn't. She was his student, and he was her teacher. And they both knew the rules.

Morgaine had done well, earning Outstanding in both Potions and Defence Against the Dark Arts, and Severus was proud of her. He had talked to Dumbledore about the possibility of taking her on as his apprentice, but the headmaster had said no. Morgaine was to return to Iceland, and there was nothing either of them could do about it. It had been decided years ago.

The end of term celebration was glorious as usual. Slytherin had won the House Cup, and the Great Hall was decorated in green and silver. As Head of Slytherin House, Severus would usually have taken pride in Slytherin's achievements and rubbed McGonagall's nose in it, but this year, he couldn't care less. The only thought on his mind was that Morgaine would be leaving the next morning.

He retired early from the feast. He wasn't in a festive mood. Down in his study he poured himself a glass of wine, a wine so heavy that even the deepest sorrow could be drowned in it, and emptied the glass in one big gulp. The alcohol warmed his body, but it didn't warm his soul. He felt cold and alone that evening.

From his drawer, he took a small box covered with black velvet. It contained his farewell present to Morgaine. He had never given any student a farewell present before, but Morgaine was not just any student. For some reason, which he himself couldn't really understand, Severus wanted her to remember him. His thumb caressed the smooth fabric, and for a moment he feared that Morgaine wouldn't come to see him, that she wouldn't come to say goodbye.

He was so occupied by his thoughts that he didn't hear her enter the room. Suddenly, she was just standing in front of him. She was wearing a dark green, laced gown, her hair was messy as always, and around her neck she wore the Witch's Star. There was a sad smile on her face.

'I came to say goodbye.'

Severus felt a lump in his throat. He wanted to tell her just how much he would miss her, but the words didn't come.

'You have done well, Morgaine,' he said instead. 'This calls for celebration.'

He handed her a glass of wine and proposed a toast. 'To an extraordinary witch.'

Morgaine toasted back at him. 'To an extraordinary teacher.'

She sipped on her wine and wrinkled her nose. Severus could tell that she didn't enjoy it, but he knew that she would drink it because he had offered it to her.

They settled into the armchairs by the fireplace where they had sat so many times before. It had been here that Severus had shared his innermost secrets with Morgaine, and it had been here where she had held his hand in the dark for the first time.

Once more, the light of the flames gave her hair the warm golden-red shine he loved so much. And once more, Severus couldn't take his eyes of her.

'You will be leaving in the morning?' he asked.

'Yes,' Morgaine replied in a low voice. 'Dumbledore arranged a Portkey. I'll be leaving before breakfast.'

Severus just nodded. He knew that she would be leaving. He had known it for a long time. And he knew that there was nothing he could do. But still, he desperately wanted her to stay.

They sat a long time in silence. Morgaine was staring into the flames, and Severus wondered if she was avoiding his gaze. As the clock struck midnight, she turned to look at him, smiling. But the smile didn't reach her eyes.

'Now the school year is over,' she said. 'And I need to go and pack.'

When she rose, Severus reached for her hand. 'Wait.'

He went to fetch the black velvet box from his drawer and pulled out a simple leather necklace. There was a silver dragon dangling from it.

'A Wyvern,' he explained. 'It is a charm. It is supposed to give its owner the skills to get what they want.' He cocked an eyebrow. 'Not that you have ever had any problems with that.'

He led Morgaine towards the mirror where he laid the necklace around her neck. 'It is like it was made just for you.'

His hands lingered on her shoulders, and their eyes met in the mirror. The minutes ticked by as they stood there, gazing into each other's eyes. Neither of them spoke.

Finally, Severus turned Morgaine around and pulled her into a tight embrace. He hadn't held her that close since their last evening on Iceland. When his lips found hers, they were warm and soft and tasted of honey and wine. How he wished he wouldn't have to let go of her.

'Stay with me tonight.'

It had sounded like an order, and for a moment Severus thought that he saw a flicker of uncertainty in Morgaine's eyes, and he was afraid that she would say no. But then he felt her hand close around his, and this simple gesture meant more to him than any words she could have spoken.

He led her into his private chambers. She had seen his study, but this was new territory. He never brought anybody here, it was his sanctuary. He offered her another glass of wine.

'Are you trying to get me tipsy, Professor?' she asked in a slightly mocking voice. And then she laughed. It was the loveliest sound Severus could imagine. It spread through his chambers just as the light of a newly lit candle enlightens a dark room.

'This is the first time in many years these walls have heard laughter,' he said, looking into her sparkling eyes.

Once more, he pulled her close. The warmth of her body was just as comforting as the sound of her laughter. He placed yet another tender kiss on her smiling lips and let his hands slip down her back. He could feel her shiver under his touch.

Suddenly, Severus started feeling slightly uneasy. He had had his fair share of women, but he had never cared for any of them, rarely even asked their name. They had been pleasurable distractions for some hours, and he had often left before dawn, leaving them behind, never to be seen again.

But for Morgaine, he *did* care, he cared deeply. She would still be there in the morning and so would he. What if he made a fool out of himself? What if he pressured her too much? What if he hurt her?

'Are you having second thoughts, Severus?' Morgaine whispered into his ear. She had always been able to read him like an open book. She had sensed his insecurity.

He looked into her eyes, shaking his head.

'Good,' she said, her voice calm and firm. 'Because I'm not.'

Severus frowned slightly. He was the one who should have been reassuring her, not the other way around. But then he felt her hand close around his once more, and without any more doubts he led her into the bedroom.

Her chestnut hair and her pale skin contrasted beautifully with the silken black colour of his bed sheets. And Severus wished he were a painter, so he could capture the beauty of the moment.

He kept his eyes on hers the whole time. It felt as if he could see right into her mind. He could sense her emotions as clearly as if they were his own. After every kiss, every touch, he paused to read her. He let her reactions guide him and made sure to caress every inch of her body. This night wasn't about him, it was all about her.

As his hand slid up on the inside of her thigh, he felt her stiffen, and suddenly, he detected a flicker of fear in her eyes.

'I will not do anything that you do not want me to do, Morgaine,' he whispered. 'There is no need to hurry, we have all night.'

He kept his eyes fixed on hers as he let his hand wander over her body. He was delighted to see how his touch made the blood go to her cheeks. Once more, he let his hand slip down over her belly and in between her legs. He knew that she was prepared this time, the look in her eyes had given her away. He heard her gasp as he shifted the angle of his hand slightly and smiled. Obviously, he was doing something right.

'Do you want me to stop?' he asked with a slightly mocking tone.

She didn't need to answer, and her kiss made it very clear that she wanted him to continue. He sped up the movements of his fingers and felt her hips press up against his hand in response. He saw her eyes fly open and felt her nails dig into his shoulders. And when she called out his name, he knew that she was ready. He positioned himself between her legs, his eyes still locked onto hers.

He knew that he would have to be careful. It had been quite a while since he had been with a woman, and he didn't want this to end too quickly.

For a brief moment, he considered telling Morgaine that this was going to hurt, but then he changed his mind. She was, after all, not a stupid girl, and she had followed him to his bed on her own account. She must have known what had been waiting for her. He heard her soft whimper, he saw her eyes fill with tears, but what good would it do to stop now?

He tried not to rush, he wanted it to last, but the sweetness of her lips and the warmth of her body made him lose control, he couldn't hold back. Soon, far too soon, he felt his own movements go from smooth to erratic. He heard himself call out her name, and then he collapsed, burying his face at her neck, his whole body tingling from the sensation of his orgasm.

When he had caught his breath again, he shifted his weight and rolled over onto his back beside Morgaine. For a while, he didn't move nor talk but silently stared at the ceiling, feeling slightly sorry and slightly embarrassed at the same time.

Then he felt Morgaine brush a streak of hair from his face, and when she kissed him, he realised that there was nothing to be sorry for. He wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her body close to his, inhaling the scent of sandalwood and honey.

When he kissed her goodnight, he had no idea that he would wake up alone the next day.

~ ~ ~

*Leaving Severus in the dead of night was one of the hardest things I ever had to do. How I wanted to stay. How I wanted to be there when he woke up. How I wanted to see that loving look in his eyes again.*

*But I had to leave. Actually, I should never have gone down to the dungeons that night at all. I should have known better.*

*But I had gone there, and I had stayed, and I had willingly followed Severus to his bed. He had spilled my maiden blood just when the crescent of the New Moon had appeared in the sky, at a time of most powerful magic.*

*I knew the Ancient Magic. If I had stayed until the morning, if Severus had laid eyes upon me again, he would have been bound to me forever.*

*I was tempted to finish the spell, but what would anyone have gained? I was to return to Iceland, and Severus was to stay at Hogwarts. The spell would only have brought heartache and sorrow.*

*So I chose to give Severus his freedom. If we met again, he would have a choice. He would be able to choose whether to love me.*

*I, however, left my heart behind that night. I would never love another man. But then again, that was a promise I had given long before we had ever even kissed.*

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A/N: The Wyvern is a winged dragon found in medieval Europe. The name 'Wyvern' is derived from the Saxon word 'Wivere', meaning serpent. The Wyvern is a violent and fierce but also very intelligent creature, related to the Basilisk. It symbolises conquest, strength and endurance but also destruction, envy, famine, war, hatred and pestilence. The Wyvern has often been depicted in heraldry on shields, banners and coats of arms.

## XVIII: The Girl He Once Knew

*Chapter 18 of 35*

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Thanks to JKR for some amazing characters, to GuitarBoy and AppleBlossom for beta reading and to you for reading and reviewing.

### **Chapter XVIII: The Girl He Once Knew**

'Severus.'

He awoke with a jerk. His gaze darted around the room, looking for the origin of the voice that had interrupted his sleep. But there was no one in his room. Of course not, it had just been a dream. But why? Why had her voice entered his dreams now?

He hadn't seen Morgaine for more than three years, not since the night they had spent together in the very same bed he was lying in now. She had been gone when he had woken up the next morning. And although it had been three years, Severus still didn't understand why she had left.

With a sigh, he let his head fall back onto the pillow. He had been over the events of their night together over and over again. Had he pressured her? Had he misread her? Had she left because she regretted their night together? But no matter how he racked his brain, he could not understand why he had woken up alone that morning, why Morgaine had left without saying goodbye.

He had received an owl from her only days after the end of term. He had ripped the letter open as soon as he had recognised her handwriting, hoping for an explanation. But she had only written to let him know that she had arrived safely at her grandmother's. And he had chosen not to reply. Because the only thing he had wanted to ask her was why she had left in the dead of night, and that was the only question he hadn't dared asking.

The next time she had written to him had been a couple of months later, at the start of term. She had sent him a bottle of peppermint-scented Headache Potion. That had made him smile, but again he had not replied.

Once a month, an owl had arrived. Morgaine had always let him know where she was and what she was doing. She sent him dried plants and herbs for his potions, from Iceland, Greece, Egypt, and Romania. She had been studying hard to expand her knowledge of magic, and Severus had been proud of her. But still, he hadn't replied, not once.

And then, a year ago, she had stopped writing, and Severus felt that he couldn't blame her for it. Why would she continue sending him owls? He had never replied to any of her letters.

Oh, he had wanted to. He had started to write a dozen of them. He had even finished some. But he had never sent them. None of them had done any justice to the way he felt for her. However hard he had tried, he had not been able to put his feelings into words; he had not been able to phrase how much he missed her; his words just sounded silly to him. And in the end, he had given up. And now, all his unsent letters were lying, neatly folded, in the bottom drawer of his nightstand, together with the letters she had sent. There was also the very first letter she had sent to him years ago, when she had been at St. Mungo's. She had made fun of his breakfast habits then.

Severus didn't know why he kept the letters. He never re-read them. But every time he picked them up to throw them away, his hands started to shake, and in the end, he always put them back into the drawer.

He sighed. Three years had passed, one year without any kind of contact. And now, Morgaine's voice had ripped him out of his sleep. Why?

Finally, he decided that there was no point pondering, so he got up and dressed. In his mind, he went over the day to come. Tonight, the students would arrive. And not just any students. Harry Potter would be among them. The famous Harry Potter, the Boy Who Lived, the boy who vanquished the Dark Lord, the son of blasted James Potter.

Severus felt his mood dropping.

Dumbledore had come to see him after his return to Hogwarts two weeks ago. He had reminded him of a promise he had given a decade ago, that he would help protect Potter's son. No, not Potter's son, Severus corrected himself, but *Lily's*. The son of the woman to whom he had given his heart when he had been just a boy. The woman he still held dear although she had turned away from him.

He still did not know what the boy needed protection from, though. The Dark Lord had gone, and his followers were locked up in Azkaban or keeping a low profile. What dangers were there to the boy? And why would Dumbledore think that he of all people would be able to protect the boy from anything? He hadn't been able to protect Lily



either.

Severus cast a look into the mirror. The lines around his eyes and on his forehead were becoming deeper, his skin had a sickly, pale tone, and his hair was hanging around his face like curtains of black velvet. He sighed. He knew what kind of nicknames the students had given him. Overgrown bat was one, and he could certainly see their point.

Frowning, he gave his reflection a last disapproving glance and then started his way to the headmaster's office.

Dumbledore always held a staff meeting on the morning of September first. Not so much as to discuss new students or the year's curriculum, but more to get his teachers together for some friendly chatting. Severus hated these meetings. He felt no need whatsoever to share his summer anecdotes with his colleagues. Not that he had anything to tell anyway. His summer had been a drag, as usual. And he would have preferred to spend his last student-free day in his study, enjoying those last blissful hours of peace. But he knew that Dumbledore would personally come and drag him to the meeting if he didn't show up.

They were all already there when he entered the headmaster's office. McGonagall, Sprout, Flitwick, Hagrid - all of them stood with their backs to the door, chatting animatedly. There was the smell of freshly-baked crumpets and newly-brewed tea hanging in the air, as there was every year.

Severus felt his stomach lurch. He hated breakfast passionately, and today, even the smell of it was too much. But then he caught a whiff of another scent. It was the scent of sandalwood and honey.

He stopped dead in his tracks. He knew this scent, but he was sure that he was imagining things, just as he had imagined hearing her voice. She couldn't possibly be here.

Then he saw the golden-red shimmer of her chestnut hair, her blue eyes, and her smile. He had missed Morgaine's smile so much and now, there she was, smiling at him.

'Ah, Severus, finally,' Dumbledore's voice pulled Severus out of his trance. 'We were just about to come looking for you. Have a crumpet.'

'You do remember Morgaine, I assume?' Dumbledore asked, his eyes sparkling mischievously.

What a stupid thing to ask. Of course Severus remembered her. He wouldn't forget her in a thousand years. He had, however, not expected to see her. He cleared his throat and took the hand that she had extended towards him.

'Miss duLac.' He kept his voice cold, his expression stern. He didn't want her to know just how surprised he was to see her.

'Professor Snape.'

Her blue eyes locked onto his dark, and for a fraction of a second, Severus felt her mind brush his, softly, whispering, like spring's first warm breeze brushes the frozen grounds. Swiftly, he fortified his mental barriers, suddenly feeling hurt. He would not let her inside his armour today. She had lost the right to share his thoughts the night she had abandoned him.

'Now, why so formal, you two?' Dumbledore said as he put his hand on Severus' shoulder. 'Morgaine is not your student anymore, you know. She's your colleague now, dear Severus.'

'Colleague?' Severus tried hard not to sound surprised. He was, however, not sure if he was succeeding.

'Ah, yes, you were not here yet when I told the others,' Dumbledore continued. 'Morgaine will join the staff this year. She has decided to take up teaching and will work as a teacher's assistant this year to learn the trade. It will be your turn to take care of her in January, I think.'

Severus just nodded in acknowledgement. And to his own surprise, he had still not let go of Morgaine's hand.

~ ~ ~

*He was so cold, so distant. The man who was standing in front of me in Dumbledore's office that September morning wasn't the Severus Snape I remembered. He had never been very cordial, but now he seemed not only reserved but also cold and distant. He had changed. He looked older. There were deep lines in his forehead. He had obviously been frowning a lot over the last three years.*

*But his eyes hadn't changed. They were just as bottomless and unfathomable as ever. Three years ago, I had been able to read them, to look into his mind. But now, his walls were up, stronger than ever, and I sensed clearly that he was not ready to let me in again.*

*I had myself to blame for that. Three years ago, I had chosen to give him his freedom. I had no right to demand his affections now. But I have to admit that it hurt to be rejected.*

~ ~ ~

Severus returned to his private chambers after the staff meeting. Seeing Morgaine had bewildered him more that he wanted to admit even to himself. Now he needed time to think and get himself together.

He had been staring at her the whole morning from his place by the window. The contours of her face had become more distinct, she carried herself taller, and her hair wasn't as unruly as it had been when she was a teenager.

But the look in her eyes was still the same. She had been looking at him the same way she had three years ago, with those blue eyes that seemed to be able to look right into his very soul. But this time, he had not let her in he had shut her out. She did not have the right to see into his mind anymore.

Without even noticing, he had opened the bottom drawer of his nightstand and taken out the pile of letters. He stared blankly at them, a thousand questions zooming around in his mind.

Why had Morgaine left? Why had she not said goodbye? Why had she abandoned him?

Severus didn't have an answer to any of these questions, and he definitely did not know how he was going to conduct himself around her.

He wanted to embrace her and tell her all the things that he had been unable to write down. He wanted to tell her how much he had missed her, how much she meant to him. And at the same time, he wanted to push her away, because he was afraid that she might, once more, be gone when he woke up in the morning.

# XIX: Like a Candle in the Dark

Chapter 19 of 35

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Thanks to JKR for some amazing characters.

Thanks to my beta Apple Blossom.

And thanks to you for reading and reviewing.

In this chapter, you will recognise passages from Rowling's 'Hallowe'en' (Philosopher's Stone). I am just borrowing.

## Chapter XIX: Like a Candle in the Dark

'Mediocre, attention-seeking, impertinent ...' Severus' voice was filled with contempt, but his face was an inscrutable mask.

Dumbledore had called his staff to his office in order to discuss Harry Potter. The boy had been at Hogwarts for a month now, and Dumbledore wanted to know how he was doing. In Severus' opinion, the headmaster couldn't have chosen a worse day. He had woken up with a pounding headache, and discussing his least favourite student didn't improve his mood.

'I find him very likable,' Professor Sprout said, beaming at Severus.

Of course she did, gullible little woman. Severus glared back at her.

'Considering the fact that he has been brought up by Muggles and hasn't had any magical education whatsoever, I'd say he is doing quite well,' McGonagall said. 'Morgaine here has been keeping an eye on him.'

Severus saw Morgaine chew her lip. He knew that she did this only when she was nervous or concentrating very hard. How come that she had still not given up on this uttermost annoying habit?

'I know how it is to come to Hogwarts without having had any contact with the Wizarding world. It can be rather confusing at times. But Harry is doing all right. He is not the most hardworking student Hogwarts has ever seen, but he is not lazy. He wants to learn. And he does his best.'

Severus shot Morgaine an icy look. Why couldn't she just have called Potter an insufferable brat? Why did she have to take his side? As a matter of fact, he thought that Morgaine had been spending way too much time with Potter anyway. And what was even worse, she seemed to like the boy.

He didn't take his eyes off her as Morgaine continued reporting her observations, but he didn't really hear what she was saying. His thoughts were elsewhere.

Morgaine had been back at Hogwarts for a month now, but Severus had barely spoken to her. They greeted each other politely whenever they met in the corridors and exchanged some collegial words at the staff table but nothing more. And despite the fact that he saw her daily, Severus had to admit that he missed her. Every time when there was a knock at his office door, he hoped that it would be her, that she had come to sit in the armchair by the fire, that she would defeat him miserably at wizard chess, just as she had done years ago. But it was never her.

Severus sensed clearly that they had grown apart, and he blamed himself for it. After all, Morgaine had tried to keep in touch, but he had never replied to any of her letters. And now, she was back, and he was too proud to apologise and too scared that she might turn from him.

He was so immersed in his own thoughts that he barely noticed that the staff meeting had ended. It was when Dumbledore spoke his name that he first realised his colleagues were leaving.

'Severus, a word.'

He stayed seated. When the door had closed, Dumbledore spoke again.

'Don't be too harsh on the boy, Severus.'

He opened his mouth, but Dumbledore cut him short.

'You see what you want to see, Severus. But keep in mind: Harry is not only the son of his father. He is Lily's son as well.'

Then Dumbledore turned a page in the paper that was lying on his desk and said, without looking up, 'Keep an eye on Quirrell, won't you?'

~ ~ ~

*I could have sworn that Severus avoided me. I had been back at Hogwarts for a month, and we hadn't spoken once. A polite greeting here and a collegial word there, that was all. He had raised his mental shields and made it very clear that he did not wish me to approach.*

*At first, I had been disappointed, even hurt. Did all the things we had shared years ago mean so little to him?*

*I could have gone down to the dungeons, I could have knocked at his door, but I was scared that he wouldn't open. And thus I stayed away and waited for him to reach out.*

*I wasted time. We both did. Precious time that we could have shared together. But we were both too proud and too scared to take the first step.*

~ ~ ~

It was only with great effort that Severus could force himself to attend the Halloween feast in the Great Hall. He truly hated this holiday. Too many dark and painful

memories were attached to it, memories that he wanted to forget.

There was only one Halloween night that he wanted to remember. It hadn't exactly been a happy occasion either, but it had been the first time Morgaine offered him her company: she had abandoned her birthday party to come and check on him, and her smile had lightened up his dark dungeon. Back then, he had not known that she would come to mean so much to him.

One year later, they had spent another Halloween night together. Morgaine had been crying that night. He had uncovered her darkest and most painful memories that night, and then he had stayed by her side until the early morning and promised to protect her.

And now he did not even dare talk to her. All of a sudden, the whole situation seemed utterly ridiculous.

When Severus entered the Great Hall, his eyes darted at once towards the staff table. There she was, talking to McGonagall. And then, she suddenly turned her head in his direction and looked straight at him with a smile on her face. Had she sensed him? Was her mind still in tune with his, although he was trying so hard to keep his barriers up? He held her gaze steadily and politely nodded into her direction before he continued his way towards the staff table.

He had only just sat down, when all hell broke loose. Quirrell came running into the Great Hall, shouting something about a troll in the dungeon, and Dumbledore sent all the students to their dormitories. Nobody took care of Quirrell. He had fainted in the middle of the Great Hall, and suddenly, he was just gone.

Severus knew at once that something was amiss. He had never trusted Quirrell. So while all the other teachers were running to the dungeons, he decided to head for the third floor. And sure enough, there he found Quirrell, who was desperately trying to close the door that was separating him from Hagrid's three-headed dog and its sharp teeth. And as much as Severus would have enjoyed seeing Quirrell being ripped to pieces, he knew that he would have to help him to close the door, unless he wanted Hagrid's beast to run wild in the castle.

He quickly learnt that his colleague was not a grateful man. As soon as Quirrell noticed him approaching, the stuttering fool shot a hex at him that made him stumble and fall right into the gap of the open door. He felt a piercing pain in his leg. The three-headed dog was obviously not picky and had now targeted his leg instead of Quirrell's. With some advanced spells, Severus made the dog let go of his leg and slammed the door shut.

The pain in his leg was excruciating, and he was shaking. He knew that the danger of three-headed dogs was not only that they had three sets of teeth to bite, but that the bacteria in their mouths made wounds infect very quickly and the flesh rot within an hour. He also knew that the wisest choice would be to immediately return to his study to start brewing a healing potion, but he had to follow Quirrell. Who knew what other vicious plans he had in store?

He overtook Quirrell somewhere between the third floor and the girls' toilets, where Potter and his friends had managed to knock out a full-grown mountain-troll. McGonagall was already there when he arrived, and shortly after Quirrell showed up as well, looking as if butter would not melt in his mouth.

Severus knew that he should inform Dumbledore about Quirrell's attempt to make his way past the three-headed dog, but the pain in his leg reminded him that he needed to treat his wounds. Dumbledore would have to wait.

He limped down to his study where he at once started to prepare a healing potion. He needed silverweed, alder, agrimony and sanicle, four delicate plants which had to be freshly cut and boiled immediately in order to have any effect.

His hands were shaking so much that he could barely chop the ingredients for the potion. His leg seemed to be on fire, and there were now spasms going through his body. The cauldron in front of him shifted in and out of focus, and then his knees gave way. He realised that he would crash headfirst into the table, but there was nothing he could do to stop his fall.

Then he felt someone grab his shoulders, and for a second, he saw her blue eyes in front of him. And then everything went black.

~ ~ ~

*As all the other teachers, I had been looking for the troll when I had sensed him. At first, I had felt a wave of anger rush over me, and then there had been the sensation of excruciating pain. I didn't know what was happening to Severus. I just knew that I had to find him. And I did not care anymore whether he wanted me to find him or not.*

*He was pale as a ghost and shaking like a leaf in the wind when I found him in his study. I only had time to catch him in my arms when he collapsed.*

*At first, I didn't understand. I saw the wounds on his leg, but I couldn't figure out how he had gotten them. I was about to call Poppy and Dumbledore when I noticed the potion ingredients on the table: root of silverweed, twigs of alder, leaves of agrimony and root of sanicle. Not many wounds are treated with those plants, only wounds inflicted by certain magical creatures. And then I understood that Severus had been bitten by Fluffy.*

*Of course I wondered what had he been doing on the third floor while everybody else had been looking for the troll in the dungeon. But I didn't have time to ponder that question. I had a potion to brew.*

~ ~ ~

When Severus came around, it took him a couple of seconds to realise that he was lying in his bed. He tried to sit up but was immediately thrown back onto the pillow by a wave of pain. He hissed angrily.

'I'd hold still if I were you.'

He recognised her voice immediately. Gingerly, he turned his head and caught sight of Morgaine. She was sitting at the foot end of his bed, leaning against the bed post. She looked tired.

'What time is it?' Severus asked in a raspy voice.

'About two thirty in the morning. You've been unconscious for almost three hours.'

Then he remembered. He had seen her eyes before he had passed out. She had kept him from crashing into the table. But what had made her come down to the dungeon?

'You needed help.' Morgaine answered his question before he had phrased it. So the connection between their minds did still exist. 'Now, I have to change your bandages and wash your wounds. This is going to hurt.'

Despite her warning, Severus wasn't prepared for the pain that shot through his leg when she applied the disinfecting potion. Instinctively he jerked away, but she held his leg in a firm grip.

When the pain had ceased and his sight had become clear again, Severus looked at Morgaine. She was working with great concentration, her eyes on the task and her teeth gnawing at her lip. She looked just the same as she had years ago when preparing potions.

'That will do,' she said as she carefully put his injured leg on a pillow. 'Would you like me to give you a Sleeping Potion?'

Severus shook his head.

'Then I'll be back in the morning to change your bandages. Sleep tight.'

She turned to leave, but he called her back before she had reached the door. 'Morgaine, please, stay.'

She turned to face him, cocking her head. Once again, she was looking straight into his eyes.

'Morgaine, I ...' He wanted to tell her that he was sorry for not having replied to any of her letters, but apologising had never been a big talent of his, and the words got stuck in his throat.

She came to stand at the side of the bed, eyebrows raised, arms crossed in front of her chest. 'Yes?'

There was a slightly mocking tone in her voice, and Severus bit his lip. There was so much he wanted to tell her.

'You have been missed, Morgaine.'

Finally, the words he had been longing to say since the day she had come back to Hogwarts had formed. Now, that had not been so hard.

Morgaine sat down at the edge of the bed and took his hand into hers. Carefully, she brushed a strand of hair from his sweaty forehead and looked into his eyes.

'I have missed you, too, Severus.' And then she smiled, just for him. 'You should sleep now.'

Relieved, Severus closed his eyes, knowing that Morgaine would not leave his side tonight, knowing that she would still be there when he woke up in the morning.

~ ~ ~

*Once more, everything changed on Halloween. Severus reached out his hand, and I was there to take it, just as I had promised years ago. I was there by his side, watching over him. And he let me.*

*Suddenly, the wall between us seemed to have disappeared. Suddenly, the closeness we had shared three years ago was back. Suddenly, it felt as if I had never left. And I was unspeakably grateful for it.*

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A/N: Plants and herbs mentioned in this chapter:

Infusions of silverweed are used to reduce cramps.

Infusions of alder are used to wash wounds and lower fever.

Infusions of agrimony are used to disinfect wounds, so are infusions of sanicle.

## XX: New Year's Ball at Malfoy Manor

*Chapter 20 of 35*

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Thanks to JKR for some amazing characters. I love borrowing them.

Thanks to Apple Blossom for beta reading.

And thanks to you for reading and reviewing.

### **Chapter XX: New Year's Ball at Malfoy Manor**

December had not only brought heavy storms but also the first snow. It was chilly in the dungeons. Severus was sitting in his armchair by the fire with a cup of hot peppermint-scented tea in his hand. He was looking at Morgaine, who was sitting opposite him with her feet on the chair, her arms wrapped around her knees. The dancing flames in the fireplace were reflecting in her eyes, and her hair was once more shining in the golden-red tone Severus loved so much.

They had spent a lot of time together since Halloween. At first, Morgaine had come down to the dungeons to change Severus' bandages. Although they both knew that he was perfectly able to change them himself, neither of them said anything. And once his wounds had healed, her visits to the dungeon had become so natural that neither of them needed an excuse for them anymore. It was just like it had been years ago, when she had been his student. They discussed and brewed potions, played wizard chess, drank tea, and now and then, she even managed to make him smile.

Severus was glad that she had returned to his dungeon. For some frightful weeks at the beginning of the school year, he had thought that he had lost her. There had been an invisible wall between them, and he knew perfectly well that it had been him who had built it. How stupid he had been.

Morgaine never asked him why he hadn't returned any of her letters, and Severus was grateful for that. As much as he had missed her, something deep inside him made it impossible for him to tell her.

'That is really annoying, you know.'

Her voice ripped him out of his thoughts. Whatever did she mean?

'The way you are staring at me,' Morgaine answered his unasked question. 'If there is anything you'd like to say, just say it.'

For a moment, Severus was slightly taken aback. What was he supposed to say now? But then he saw the grin on her face and realised that she was messing with him.

'I will be going to London after Christmas to buy potion supplies,' he announced, changing the subject. 'Would you like to join me?'

~ ~ ~

Diagon Alley was packed with witches and wizards trying to get rid of unwanted Christmas presents. Severus hated the crowd. Too many people in a confined area always made him jumpy. He was therefore quite relieved when Morgaine offered to go into the Apothecary to buy all the supplies while he waited outside.

He was watching her through the window when a well-known voice reached his ear.

'Severus, dear friend, I haven't seen you all year.'

Severus turned to face the tall, blond-haired wizard. 'Lucius,' he said, slightly inclining his head.

'Terribly crowded, isn't it?' Lucius' voice was as silky as ever. 'I'd never come here on my own account, but Narcissa more or less forced me. You know how persuasive she can be. I managed to escape her when she made her way into the jewellery store down the road. It will probably cost me a small fortune. Would you like to join me for a drink at the Leaky Cauldron, Severus?'

'I have to decline, Lucius,' Severus replied. 'I am here with one of my colleagues.'

'Colleague, is it?' Lucius asked as he eyed through the window of the Apothecary. 'This wouldn't be Albus Dumbledore's great-granddaughter, now would it?'

Severus nodded.

'So she has returned to Hogwarts?' Lucius continued. 'Did you take her on as an apprentice after all? I thought Dumbledore had said no to that.'

Severus frowned. How could Lucius know?

'My dear Severus, you seem to forget that families like mine always keep an eye on other pure-blood families. And *your colleague* in there,' he said, stressing the word unnecessarily clearly. 'She is sprung from a most powerful and influential line. She is worth keeping an eye on. She might be very useful one day.'

Before Severus got a chance to ask Lucius what he meant, he heard the bell of the door of the Apothecary ring. Morgaine was leaving the store. When she caught sight of Lucius, she stopped dead in her tracks.

A chill went down Severus' spine. Morgaine must have recognised the man who had thrust her into the arms of the Dark Lord when she had been a child. How was she going to react?

But if she had recognised Lucius, Morgaine didn't show any sign of it. She put on one of her most charming smiles and approached the two men with steady steps.

Severus cleared his throat. 'Lucius, may I introduce my colleague to you? This is Morgaine duLac. Morgaine, this is Lucius Malfoy, Draco's father.'

Lucius took Morgaine's outstretched hand and kissed it.

'Enchanté, Miss duLac,' he said in his most silky voice. 'It is always a pleasure to meet Severus' friends, especially if they are as lovely as you are.'

Morgaine politely responded to Lucius' flattery, but Severus sensed that she was uncomfortable. There was, however, nothing in her behaviour that gave her away.

'I am awfully sorry that I cannot stay to chat. My wife is expecting me,' Lucius said, turning towards Severus. 'Are you staying in London over New Year's?'

Severus nodded.

'We must catch up, old friend,' Lucius continued in an exaggeratedly friendly tone. 'And I would sure like to see more of you, Miss duLac. You are staying at the Leaky Cauldron, I assume?' he asked, once more facing Severus.

Again, Severus nodded.

'Well, I will contact you there then. Miss duLac, Severus.' He bowed theatrically and with a swirl of his black robes, he disappeared in the crowd.

Severus looked at Morgaine. He sensed that she was upset, but the look on her face made it very clear to him that she did not want to discuss the matter right now.

When they returned to the Leaky Cauldron, Morgaine excused herself, saying that she had a headache. Severus knew perfectly well that she was lying, but he left her alone. He would see her at dinner, and if she felt like talking then, he would listen.

But she didn't talk, and they ate their dinner in silence. Well, Severus ate. Morgaine mostly busied herself with picking at her food with her fork and chewing her lip.

Severus didn't know what to say, and he was quite glad when the bartender came to their table to deliver an envelope. He opened it and pulled out a dark green card with elaborate writing in silver ink.

'It is an invitation to the Malfoys' New Year's Ball,' he said as he stuffed the card back into the envelope and put it on the table. Morgaine stared at it as if it were a poisonous snake.

'We do not have to go,' he said.

For the first time this evening, Morgaine looked straight at him. There was a defiant look on her face, and the tone in her voice made it clear that her decision was final.

'Oh yes,' she said as she put down her fork. 'We do have to go.'

~ ~ ~

Shortly before eight o'clock on New Year's Eve, they Apparated outside the wrought-iron gates of Malfoy Manor. Morgaine looked pale, but perhaps it was just because of the moonlight. Her face was unusually stern, and Severus couldn't help but wonder what she was up to, why she wanted to meet Lucius Malfoy. But he knew better than to ask.

When Lucius' house-elf took their cloaks, Severus gasped. Morgaine was wearing a long, black satin skirt with a black underbust corset and a see-through spiderweb top. The pale skin of her shoulders clashed violently with the dark fabric. Around her neck, she was wearing two simple necklaces, the Witch's Star and the Wyvern Severus had given her as farewell gift when she had graduated.

He reached out for the Wyvern and eyed it carefully. 'You kept it.'

She looked into his eyes and nodded. 'I've never taken it off.'

'You look stunning, Morgaine.'

She gave him a fleeting smile, but it didn't reach her eyes.

'Yes, you certainly do look stunning, Miss duLac.' Lucius came sweeping down the stairs and took Morgaine's hand to kiss it.

'Welcome to my humble domain, Miss duLac,' he said as he bowed. 'Let me steal her from you for a moment, Severus. I just have to introduce this dazzling creature to some people.'

And without waiting for a response, Lucius led Morgaine into the ballroom.

Severus lingered at the door, letting his eyes sweep over the room. Lucius had only invited the crème de la crème of the wizarding society: members of pure-blood families, people in high positions at the Ministry, members of the Wizengamot. Yes, Lucius Malfoy certainly knew who to rub shoulders with. And now he had cast an eye on Morgaine. Of course, she was Dumbledore's great-granddaughter, kin of one of the greatest wizards alive and with that somebody to be seen with. But Severus couldn't help but wonder if there was anything more Lucius knew about Morgaine. Was there a possibility that he had recognised her?

It wasn't hard to make out Lucius among his guests; he was in the centre of the attention. He seemed to be introducing Morgaine to some governors. Severus felt his stomach clench. He didn't like the lusty look in Lucius' eyes.

'Now, who is my dear husband trying to seduce today?'

The sound of the woman's voice made Severus spin around. 'Narcissa.'

'Good evening, Severus,' Narcissa greeted him warmly. 'I am glad that you accepted our invitation. It's been too long.'

Severus bowed curtly and then turned to observe Lucius and Morgaine again. Narcissa let her gaze follow his.

'I gather from your reaction that it is your lady friend Lucius has chosen as prey tonight,' Narcissa said in a cold voice. 'As I understand, she is Dumbledore's great-granddaughter.'

Severus nodded.

'No wonder he is trying to charm her. You know how Lucius likes to make friends with influential people,' Narcissa continued. Then she took Severus' arm. 'Come, let's spoil his fun.' And with a light tug, she led him in the direction of her husband.

~ ~ ~

*He disgusted me. Every time Lucius Malfoy touched me, my skin crawled and my stomach lurched. But I have to admit that he was a fascinating man. He sure knew how to wrap people around his little finger. He had a way with words that could make even the most stubborn person change their mind.*

*I let him play, I let him believe that he was succeeding. It would have been dumb to turn him down. I had been sorted into Slytherin as well. I, too, knew how to get what I was after. That New Year's Eve, I was determined to find out about my past, and Lucius Malfoy was just the man to tell me about it.*

~ ~ ~

Lucius had just finished introducing Morgaine to some very influential people when Severus and Narcissa reached the small group in the middle of the ballroom. He was showing her off like a trophy, holding her left hand close to his chest while his right arm encircled her waist. For someone who didn't know better, the two could have passed as lovers.

When the music started, Severus could see Lucius tighten his grip around Morgaine's waist. It was obvious that he didn't intend to let go of her anytime soon. And she didn't seem to resist at all.

Severus turned away. He just couldn't stand looking at the two. How could Morgaine let herself be charmed by Lucius Malfoy?

He went out onto the terrace. If he didn't want to punch Lucius right in his pretty face, he would have to calm down. He paced the terrace, breathing deeply and seriously considering hexing some of Lucius' white peacocks when he heard steps behind him. It was the master of the manor himself.

'Charming young witch, your colleague.' Again, Lucius was stressing the word unnecessarily clearly. 'Allow me to congratulate you, Severus.'

'Congratulate me on what?' Severus snarled.

'Oh, come on, dear friend, give me some credit,' Lucius snorted. 'I have noticed the way you look at her. I have to hand it to you, seducing the great-granddaughter of Albus Dumbledore is a smart move. And as she is quite charming, the task can't be too repellent. Merlin's beard, I would bed her if I had the chance.'

Severus ground his teeth and clenched his fists under his robe. So that was what Lucius was thinking. That he, Severus, was courting Morgaine in order to get to Dumbledore.

'Smart move indeed, dear Severus,' Lucius repeated. 'As I said in Diagon Alley, she might be useful one day. Keep her close.'

And without explaining just what Morgaine might be useful for one day, Lucius turned on his heels and went back inside.

Severus stared after his host for while, not really knowing what to make of his insinuations. What he was sure of, however, was that he would not go back inside. He had no desire whatsoever to see Lucius continue his courting of Morgaine.

He cast one more glance through the window and saw Lucius standing behind Morgaine, whispering something into her ear. When she laughed, Severus decided that he was indeed superfluous, and without excusing himself, he Disapparated from the terrace of Malfoy Manor.

## XXI: Found and Lost Again

Chapter 21 of 35

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay

by his side until the bitter end.

Thanks for JKR for creating some amazing characters.

Thanks to Apple Blossom for beta reading.

Thanks to you for reading and reviewing.

## Chapter XXI: Found and Lost Again

Severus left Malfoy Manor without saying goodnight to anyone and Apparated directly to the Leaky Cauldron, where he picked up a bottle of Firewhisky at the bar and went straight up to his room. He didn't even bother to light a fire or even a candle. He just let himself fall into one of the armchairs in front of the empty fireplace and poured himself a glass.

He was sure that he wouldn't be missed. Morgaine had seemed to be enjoying herself rather well without him. He frowned. He had expected more from her. How could she let herself be charmed so easily by a man as slippery as Lucius Malfoy? But then again, who could resist him?

Severus himself had once admired Lucius, the good-looking, sophisticated, eloquent, powerful wizard who was everything Severus had wanted to be. Lucius had taken him under his wing when they had been at Hogwarts, and Severus had gladly done everything Lucius asked of him. And when he had realised that Lucius never did anything without an ulterior motive, that he always put himself first and that he would literally step over dead bodies to get what he wanted, it had already been too late. Lucius had already introduced him to the Dark Lord, and he had already become tangled up in the web of Darkness.

And now, Lucius had sunk his fangs into Morgaine. Severus clenched his fists. How could she be so stupid? Couldn't she see beyond the pretty façade? Didn't she realise that Lucius was only trying to gain her trust in order to use her? And what the hell had Lucius meant when he had said that Morgaine would be useful one day? Useful for what? It must have something to do with the fact that she was Dumbledore's great-granddaughter. Was Lucius planning to use her to get to the old man?

Severus poured himself another glass. He intended to drain the whole bottle before morning. He just wanted to forget about tonight. He wanted to forget Lucius' insinuations, the way he had looked at Morgaine and, most of all, the way Morgaine had looked at Lucius. Because seeing her in the arms of Lucius Malfoy had awoken feelings in Severus which he didn't quite know how to handle. He felt jealous, disappointed, hurt, everything at once, and he didn't know how to react.

He had already emptied half the bottle of Firewhisky when there was a knock on his door. He knew that it was Morgaine. Who else would knock at his door in the middle of the night? In a hoarse and raspy voice, he told her to enter.

She slipped soundlessly into the room and settled down in the chair opposite him. Since he hadn't bothered lighting any candles, Severus couldn't see her face in the dark. But he could feel her eyes on him.

'I guess you had your reasons for leaving,' Morgaine stated after a while.

'I did not think I would be missed,' he answered, his voice just a tad more bitter than he had intended it to be. 'You seemed to be enjoying yourself rather well, and I did not want to disturb you and Lucius.'

'I wish you had. Lucius is rather possessive. It wasn't easy to get away.' Morgaine sounded tired, but Severus was not in the mood to react to her feelings; his bitterness was getting the better of him.

'Then you did not find the invitation to his bedroom tempting?'

'I beg your pardon?'

Severus couldn't quite make out whether Morgaine sounded amused or upset, so he decided to push the matter further.

'Lucius Malfoy is one of the most influential wizards alive, and he certainly showed an interest in you tonight. Why would you not take your chance to advance in society?'

'By sleeping with him?' Now Morgaine definitely sounded upset.

'Lucius would gladly have bedded you tonight. He made that quite clear.'

'And that's why you decided to leave? So you wouldn't be in his way?'

Severus chose not to answer. To be honest, he wasn't sure anymore why he had even started to say anything.

'Well, I am very glad that you and Lucius were discussing who I would spend the night with,' Morgaine continued in a mocking voice. 'You hadn't intended asking me about it though, had you?'

'Why would you come with me when you could stay with Lucius Malfoy?'

There, he had said it. He had finally verbalised the feeling that had been bugging him the most all evening. He had never been able to rise to Lucius' standards, and he would always be the one standing in the shadows. Lucius would always get what he wanted while he, Severus, would have to be content with what he was given.

For a while, there was only silence. Severus could feel Morgaine staring at him, but he didn't meet her gaze. He did not even look up when she rose from her chair and took a step closer towards him. When she spoke, the sound of her voice surprised him: it was distant, almost cold.

'If I had any intentions of advancing in society, as you put it so nicely, dear Severus, I would not need the help of the likes of Lucius Malfoy. I have my own family tree to fall back on.'

She certainly had. She was next of kin to Albus Dumbledore, one of the greatest wizards alive.

*Yet another reason not to associate with me, Severus thought. I am not good enough for you. You deserve better.*

But he would never tell her that.

For a brief moment, he felt Morgaine's mind brush his. Had she sensed his insecurity? Hastily, he fortified his mental barriers, although he knew that it was too late, that she had already read his thoughts.

When she spoke again, her voice had lost its cold tone, but Severus could sense a note of disappointment in it.

'You know, Severus, it would be much easier to stay by your side if you didn't push me away.'

Then he saw her turn, heard her walk towards the door, and he panicked. He couldn't let her go. If he let her go now, she might never come back, and that was one thing he couldn't risk.

He jumped up and cut off her way to the door, surprised by his own agility. He had, after all, consumed half a bottle of Firewhisky.

'Stay.'

He saw her straighten and felt her eyes on him once more. 'Give me a reason, Severus. Just one.'

'I need you tonight, Morgaine.'

He wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her closer, and his body responded immediately to her warmth. He wanted her, he needed her. He buried one hand in her hair and pulled her into a fierce kiss, crushing her mouth with his. The taste of her lips hadn't changed, they still tasted of honey. He tried to coax her lips open with his tongue, but felt her stiffen in his arms. Slightly startled, he let go of her, bracing himself for being slapped in the face. He hadn't been fair tonight, he had said stupid things which he now regretted, and if Morgaine decided to leave, he would understand. But he desperately hoped that she would stay.

She didn't slap him, and she didn't leave. For a moment, she just looked at him with those blue eyes that held so much warmth and understanding, and Severus felt his knees go weak. Then he felt her hands on his back, felt himself being pulled into a tight embrace.

'If you even for a second believed that I would fall for Lucius Malfoy, then you are an idiot, Severus Snape,' she whispered into his ear, and the sensation of her breath against his neck sent shivers down his spine.

When she placed the first kiss on his neck, Severus was lost. He pushed Morgaine up against the wall, kissing her, touching her, his whole body screaming for her embrace. He did not even have the patience to undo the laces of her dress but just ripped it open and let it drop to the floor. It didn't matter.

The warmth of her body almost drove him insane, and he could not hold back. He heard her sharp intake of breath as he thrust upwards, and for a brief moment, he considered pausing, carrying her to the bed and doing this properly. But the way her skin felt against his and the taste of her lips made it impossible to have any coherent thoughts. He felt her hot breath against his skin, her nails on his back, and when she screamed out his name, Severus knew for certain that Morgaine was his, his alone.

~ ~ ~

When Severus awoke the next morning, he had no idea how he had ended up in his bed. There were actually a couple of things he didn't remember clearly. The half bottle of Firewhisky he had drunk might have had something to do with it.

He rolled over to his side to pull Morgaine into his arms, but as he reached out for her, all his hands could seize were the empty bed sheets. Abruptly, he opened his eyes. The sheets were still warm, still smelling of sandalwood and honey, but they were empty.

'Pity you woke up. You looked so peaceful.'

Severus sat up in a swift movement and turned his head in the direction from where her voice had come. Morgaine was sitting on the faraway edge of the bed with her head resting against the bedpost, knees drawn up towards her chin. Thank heavens, she was still there.

Severus moved towards her, reached out to pull her into an embrace, and that was when he saw the bruises on her arms. His heart skipped a beat. He didn't remember much about last night. Had he hurt her?

She must have seen the confused look in his eyes. 'It wasn't you,' she said and smiled faintly as she pulled the blanket over her bruised wrists.

Severus felt the rage build up inside his chest. 'Malfoy?' he spat.

Morgaine started chewing her lip. 'As I said, Lucius is rather possessive. He didn't like the idea of me going after you.'

Severus leaped out of bed and grabbed his clothes. In his mind, he was already at Malfoy Manor, Cruciating the living daylight out of Lucius. But Morgaine held him back.

'There is no need to avenge me, Severus,' she said, looking straight into his eyes. 'I have grown up. This time, I knew how to defend myself.'

~ ~ ~

*I never told Severus what happened after he had left Malfoy Manor. This was my battle, and I had to fight it alone.*

*Lucius Malfoy was a charming man, and he knew how to use his charms to achieve his goals. Bedding the great-granddaughter of Albus Dumbledore was one of them. And if it hadn't been for my memories, if it hadn't been for my deep hatred, he might just have succeeded.*

*But I turned the tables on him. If he wanted anything from me, he would have to give me something first.*

*It wasn't hard to sweet-talk him into telling me about my mother. He remembered her well, far too well. He remembered her blindly following the man she loved and that she had been greeted with open arms. A woman of her bloodline voluntarily wandering into the midst of the Death Eaters was more than they had ever hoped for. She had not been allowed to leave after her lover had died. And then some power hungry Death Eater had come up with the idea of planting a seed of Darkness in the bloodline of Albus Dumbledore.*

*Yes, Lucius willingly told me everything I wanted to know, and when he realised that I had tricked him, that he had given away the Plan of Darkness, and that I was not going to keep my end of the bargain and climb into his bed, he became furious.*

*I got away with some bruises that night. But if I ever thought that I would not have to pay for my deceit, I was sadly mistaken.*

~ ~ ~

They returned to Hogwarts the same afternoon. During the whole journey, Morgaine was unusually quiet, and the expression on her face was unusually severe. Or at least it was when she thought that Severus wasn't looking. He had been trying to make her look at him ever since he had sat down opposite her on the train, but she kept her eyes on her hands which lay folded in her lap. Now and then, she met his gaze for a moment and smiled, but the smile never reached her eyes.

Severus tried to convince himself that she was just tired. After all, neither of them had gotten a lot of sleep that New Year's night. But he didn't really believe in it himself, and he couldn't help but wonder if there was something that she was not telling him.

When they entered the castle, Dumbledore greeted them outside the Great Hall, wishing them a Happy New Year. The look Morgaine shot her great-grandfather made Severus flinch, but Dumbledore didn't seem to notice. In fact, he embraced Morgaine in the usual hearty way, and Severus started to wonder if he was imagining things.

~ ~ ~

*Dumbledore knew. He must have known. He knew what happened to my mother, he knew why I had been born, and he knew why the Death Eaters had not wanted to let either of us go. And he let it happen.*

*He always let everything happen. He had known that Severus would gain access to the memories I had long since forgotten, and he had let him teach me Occlumency. He had known that I was meddling with the Dark Arts, and he had let Severus teach me about them. He had known that we would fall in love, and he had brought Severus to*



*Iceland. Sometimes, I wonder if he had interfered with my Sorting as well.*

*In the middle of January, an owl from the Ministry arrived. Apparently, the School Governors did not find it appropriate for me to undergo my training at the school where my great-grandfather was headmaster. Therefore, I was to transfer to Durmstrang. As if the Governors would even care. It was quite clear to me that Lucius Malfoy had something to do with this. He had brought his influence to bear and made sure that it hit me where it hurt. He tore me away from the only place I had ever called home and from the only man I had ever loved.*

*And again, Dumbledore just let it happen.*

## XXII: Friends and Foes

*Chapter 22 of 35*

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Thanks to JKR for some amazing characters.

Thanks to Apple Blossom for beta reading.

And thanks to you for reading and reviewing.

In this chapter, you will recognise passages from Rowling's 'The Dementor' and 'Grim Defeat' (PoA). I am only borrowing.

### Chapter XXII: Friends and Foes

Yet another year of teaching dunderheads. Yet another year of taking care of the famous Harry Potter. Severus pulled the blanket over his head. He really did not want to get up. As far as he was concerned, there was absolutely nothing to look forward to on this first day of September. But he knew that he had no choice other than to get up. If he didn't, Dumbledore would personally drag him to his office. Reluctantly, he crawled out of bed, got dressed and then started his ascent to the headmaster's office to attend the mandatory start of term staff meeting.

He heard her laughter already in the staircase. It washed over him like the first warm rays of sun in spring. Severus froze. For a terrifying moment, he was convinced that he was dreaming. Morgaine was at Durmstrang. Surely, Dumbledore would have told him if she had come back to Hogwarts. But then again, Dumbledore seemed to immensely enjoy keeping him on tenterhooks whenever Morgaine was concerned.

Severus found it hard not to embrace her, hard to keep his hands from trembling when he shook hers, but he did not want his colleagues to know how much he had missed her. The feelings he harboured for Morgaine were private, of no one's concern but his.

Her smile was hearty as ever, and her eyes were sparkling. But she also looked pale and tired. And Severus couldn't help but wonder what she had been up to for the last year and a half.

He only knew that she had been teaching Potions at Durmstrang. It had worried him deeply to know that she was working at a school where the Dark Arts were appreciated, under a headmaster who had been a Death Eater. He had begged Dumbledore to get her away from there, but the headmaster had said that it was out of his hands.

Lucius Malfoy had mentioned once or twice how grateful Headmaster Karkaroff was that Morgaine had been sent there. And it had taken Severus all his self-control not to punch the complacent smile off Lucius' face.

Morgaine had never told him what exactly had happened between her and Lucius that New Year's Night. All Severus knew was that they had gotten into a fight, but he didn't know what it had been about. Neither did he know how Morgaine had managed to get away. But whatever she had done, it had infuriated Lucius enough to take revenge. Her transfer order had not carried Lucius' signature, but Dumbledore, Severus and Morgaine knew that nobody at the Ministry would have bothered about Morgaine being at Hogwarts. The whole affair had been a personal retribution. Whatever she had said or done, Lucius wanted to punish her, and he knew that banishing her from Hogwarts would sting more than anything else.

Yes, it had stung. Severus remembered the tremor in Morgaine's voice when she had told him that she would have to leave. And he remembered how he had withdrawn from her embrace. He had never been good with goodbyes.

It had just not been fair. They had just found their way back to each other, and he had not wanted her to go. And since he had known how much it would hurt to see her leave, he had kept his distance. On the evening of her departure, he had been in Dumbledore's office just as the rest of the staff had. He had wished her the best of luck and shaken her hand, but he had not said goodbye.

And now she had returned to Hogwarts.

Severus desperately hoped that the staff meeting would be short. He wanted to take Morgaine aside, talk to her in private, apologise for his silence and tell her how much he had missed her. Maybe he would even find the words to apologise. But Dumbledore had other plans.

'My dear colleagues,' he began. 'I would normally not bother you with any tiresome subject on your last student-free morning, but this year, I am afraid, you will need to bear with me for some moments.'

The chatter died away immediately. Despite Dumbledore's light tone, they all realised at once that he was about to address a serious topic.

'I am confident you have all read about Sirius Black escaping from Azkaban.'

Everybody nodded. Of course they had.

'There is reason to believe that Black is after Harry Potter.'

A murmur went through the staff, and Morgaine phrased the question that was on everybody's mind. 'Why would Black be after Harry Potter?'

Severus listened only half-heartedly to Dumbledore's explanation. He knew what had happened twelve years ago. He knew why Black had ended up in Azkaban. And he had truly hoped that Black would rot there forever. But unfortunately, he had managed to escape and was now on his way to Hogwarts to hunt down Harry Potter. And surely the little brat would sooner or later stumble into harm's way. Severus almost wished that Black and Potter would finish each other off, so he wouldn't have to bother with either of them. But then again, he had given Dumbledore a promise. He had promised to do anything in his power to protect the boy. Well, if protecting Potter resulted in sending Black back to Azkaban, he could live with that.

It wasn't until Dumbledore addressed the subject of the new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher that Severus became attentive again. Dumbledore had, once more, turned him down for the post, and he was eager to know who had landed the position he desired so much. The announcement came as a shock.

'Remus Lupin?' He couldn't believe it. 'The werewolf?'

'Yes, I am aware of Remus' condition, thank you, Severus,' Dumbledore said, smiling. 'However, Remus has gathered a great deal of experience over the years, and this will make him an excellent Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher. As to him being a werewolf, Severus, I was rather counting on you to provide Remus with Wolfsbane Potion every full moon. We could buy it, of course, but I would prefer a potion that is made by somebody with your skills.'

Severus just nodded, scowling. He wasn't in a position to refuse.

Potter, Black, Lupin. He couldn't decide which of them he wanted to go to hell first. It was as if his worst nightmare had come back from the past to haunt him.

But what annoyed Severus the most at the moment was the smile that had appeared on Morgaine's face when Dumbledore had mentioned Lupin.

~ ~ ~

*This just wasn't Severus' day. His expression went from slightly annoyed to angry when Dumbledore spoke about Black. And when Remus' name came up, his expression went from angry to murderous in a blink of an eye.*

*I knew that Severus hated Remus. And now, he would not only hate him for everything that happened when they were at school together but also for having landed the Defence Against the Dark Arts position, a position that Severus had desired for so many years.*

*Dumbledore had known this, and still he had decided to bring Remus to Hogwarts. And I couldn't help but wonder what he was playing at.*

~ ~ ~

The tumult started about an hour before the students were scheduled to arrive when a drenched owl came crashing into the staff room, carrying a message from Remus Lupin. Evidently, a Dementor had entered the Hogwarts Express and mounted an attack on Harry Potter.

One hour later, at the Start of Term Feast, Severus was sitting at the high table, glaring down at the boy. Of course the Dementor would have chosen Harry Potter. Why not? Even without trying, the brat managed to get himself into trouble and with that into the centre of attention.

Severus saw Lupin smiling down at Potter from the staff table. Now, that was just lovely. The father's best friend had come to mother the son. He shot Lupin an icy, hateful look, but the new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher did not even seem to notice.

But Morgaine had. She was sitting at Lupin's side, her eyes fixed on Severus, her teeth gnawing at her lip. Severus would have given a fortune for her thoughts, but she had raised her shields. Tonight, she was not going to give him access to her mind. And Severus withdrew, fortifying his own barriers and fixing his best scowl on his face.

~ ~ ~

*Severus had avoided me all day. When I had arrived at Hogwarts that morning, I had been looking forward to spending the day with him. I had imagined that we would sit by the fire, drink tea, maybe play wizard chess. Hopelessly romantic, I know, but I was young then.*

*But Severus said he was busy, that he had to prepare Lupin's potion. I accepted his wishes and kept my distance. But I have to admit that it hurt.*

*As did the way Severus was staring at Lupin during dinner. I also noticed the way he was staring at me. The look in his eyes could have made the sun turn to ice.*

*Then I felt another pair of eyes upon me. My great-grandfather was looking knowingly at me, then at Severus and at last at Remus, his blue eyes sparkling. And as he raised his goblet towards me, it dawned upon me that my main task this year would not be teaching Laws of Ancient Magic, but making sure that Severus and Remus didn't slit each other's throats.*

~ ~ ~

After the feast, Dumbledore called the whole staff to his office. Severus had already positioned himself by the window, a little apart from his colleagues, when Lupin arrived with Morgaine at his side. Severus felt his stomach lurch. The two looked so at ease together, and Morgaine looked so happy, much happier than she ever had at his side, he thought. He had seen the smile on her face when Dumbledore had announced that Lupin would join the staff. He had seen her fall into Lupin's arms when he had arrived in the staff room. But, most of all, she had been distant all evening. Severus clenched his fists. Why, why did Lupin have to come to Hogwarts?

The arrival of the headmaster set a temporary end to Severus' brooding.

'Dear colleagues,' the headmaster began. 'I normally let you spend the first evening of the term in peace, but as you must have noticed, this year is going to be somewhat ... chilly.'

He looked around the staffroom, and his eyes came to a halt on Lupin.

'Remus already had the displeasure of encountering one of the Dementors, and I think we can be certain that this is not going to be the last incident of that type. Consequently, we need to be prepared. It is not in the nature of a Dementor to listen to arguments. If any of them should approach one of our students, I count on you to drive them forth. Therefore your Patronus Charms must be up-to-date.'

Once more, the headmaster's eyes scanned the room. 'Morgaine, do you know how to produce a Patronus?'

'Of course, she does,' Lupin burst out. 'It's a wonderful ...'

'How would you know, Lupin?' Severus interrupted, his voice cold as ice.

'I taught her this summer,' Lupin replied, smiling.

This summer? Severus felt the blood leave his face. Had Lupin been with Morgaine this summer? But he didn't say anything.

'Well, my child,' Dumbledore continued calmly. 'Will you show us?'

Morgaine nodded and pulled out her wand. Severus saw her chewing her lip.

*'Expecto Patronum!*

A silver vapour erupted from her wand, slowly taking the shape of a winged dragon. It flew twice around the room, breathed fire and vanished.

'A Wyvern?' Dumbledore nodded knowingly. 'This is a powerful opponent, my child. Congratulations.'

And for the first time this evening, Severus felt triumphant. It might have been Lupin who had taught Morgaine to produce a corporal Patronus, but the one who had clasped the Wyvern pendant around her neck five years ago had been him, Severus Snape.

~ ~ ~

Once again, Halloween proved to be one of those days when Severus wished he had never gotten out of bed in the morning. This time, the cause of the disturbance had been neither a mountain troll nor a basilisk but Sirius Black. He had entered the castle and forced his way into the Gryffindor dormitory. The whole staff had spent the night searching the castle, but unfortunately, Black had managed to escape. Pity, Severus thought. He had been looking forward to handing Black over to the Dementors.

But what annoyed him even more than Black's escape was the fact that nobody would listen to his theories about how Black had managed to enter the castle in the first place. He couldn't have done it without help, Severus was certain of that. And who else would Black choose as an accomplice but his old friend Remus Lupin? But nobody would listen.

It was about three-thirty in the morning when Severus returned to his chambers. He had, once again, tried to talk to Dumbledore about his theory, but the headmaster had dismissed him. The old fool always chose to see the best in people.

Severus let himself fall into his armchair by the fire and grabbed the whisky bottle that was standing on the table. He almost dropped it when there was a knock on the door.

Disbelievingly, he stared at the door. Dared he hope? Dared he hope that it was Morgaine? She had not come here once since her return to Hogwarts.

At the second knock, he rose to answer. There she was, still wearing her black velvet dress, her hair the usual unruly mess, a tired look on her pale face.

'May I come in?' she asked.

Wordlessly, Severus stepped aside to give her access to his study. She slipped inside and settled at once in the armchair she had sat in so many times before.

'You couldn't sleep either, I see,' she said, pointing at the glass and the Firewhisky.

Severus just nodded as he sat down. This scene seemed familiar: Morgaine sitting opposite him, her hair shimmering in a golden-red tone, everything was just as it was supposed to be.

For a while, they sat in silence. Morgaine was staring at the flames in the fireplace, and Severus, well, he was staring at her, still wondering why she had come.

'How do you think Black managed to get into the castle?' she asked after a while without taking her eyes off the flames.

'I believe someone let him in,' Severus replied.

'I assume you have a suspect,' Morgaine stated. She was still not looking at him.

'I did express my concerns already at the start of term ...' Severus began, but the words got stuck in his throat when Morgaine turned to look at him. Her blue eyes locked onto his dark ones, and for a moment Severus had the familiar sensation that she was looking right into his soul.

'Dumbledore trusts Remus,' Morgaine pointed out.

'Dumbledore trusts many people,' Severus retorted, his voice suddenly filled with contempt.

He saw Morgaine chew her lip and heard her sigh deeply before she spoke again.

'Dumbledore trusts you.'

'What are you implying?' he snapped.

Morgaine raised her hand in a yielding gesture. 'Nothing, Severus, nothing at all.' She suddenly sounded tired. 'I should go.'

He felt her hand slightly brush his back as she passed his chair on the way out. When she had reached the door, she turned to face him once more.

'Don't you think that it is time to let the past rest, Severus? You've both grown up, you've both changed.'

'You and your great-grandfather both have the annoying habit of giving people second chances,' Severus stated in a bitter tone.

And once more, he heard Morgaine sigh. 'Yes, we do, Severus. Especially to those who believe that they do not deserve a second chance.'

~ ~ ~

For some days in the beginning of November, Severus felt that everything was just as it was supposed to be.

After her short visit on Halloween night, Morgaine seemed to look at him differently: the warm and tender look had returned to her eyes. She had chosen to sit beside him at dinner a couple of times, and she had even spent some evenings in the dungeon. And most importantly, she had been spending considerably less time with Lupin. Severus felt victorious. Maybe she was the only one in the castle who took his warnings about Lupin seriously. Maybe she too had her suspicions. Maybe she too thought it possible that Lupin had been helping Black into the castle.

But with November's full moon, everything changed again.

Severus couldn't explain it. His Wolfsbane Potion had been perfect, but still, Lupin had transformed that night. It had been a lucky coincidence that Dumbledore had decided to pay him a visit in his study that evening. He had arrived just in time to conjure a cage before the transformation had been complete.

The teachers had been supposed to guard Lupin that night. Not to make sure that he didn't escape, they all trusted Dumbledore's magic, but to make sure that no student accidentally wandered in. However, Morgaine decided that she alone would stay all night. After all, she had seen Lupin transform several times before, she knew how to take care of him once the sun had risen again.

Severus was not happy with her decision, but he didn't argue. He knew how stubborn Morgaine was. But when she decided to take care of Lupin during his recovery, he became furious. Why? Why did she prefer the werewolf's company over his?

Seeing Lupin enter the Great Hall at breakfast time three days after the full moon did nothing to lighten Severus' mood. Not only was Morgaine by Lupin's side, but the entire Great Hall, except from the Slytherin table, broke into applause. The little brats had surely missed their wonderful Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher.

Lupin looked awful. His face was ashen, his hair seemed greyer, and he was supporting himself with a cane. With his other hand, he held on tightly to Morgaine's forearm. She didn't look too well either. She was pale, and Severus noticed dark shadows under her eyes. She smiled at him as she and Lupin passed his end of the staff table, but Severus pretended that he didn't notice. And without even touching his coffee, he got up and left the Great Hall.

~ ~ ~

*No one knew why the potion had not worked and why Remus had transformed that night. And Remus, of course, had been mortified by the fact that he had not recognised the signs earlier and taken security measures. I heard him mumble in his sleep. He was so afraid that one day he would attack a student. He even offered his resignation, but Dumbledore refused. It took me three days to make Remus leave his quarters, to come out and face his colleagues and his students. I offered him my arm and lead him to breakfast.*

*The look Severus shot me when we entered the Great Hall could have killed someone, and I didn't understand it. I didn't understand what I had done to upset him. I didn't understand why he did not want me to spend time with Remus. As far as I was concerned, I was taking care of my oldest friend who was hurt and scared.*

*I didn't understand then that Severus took it as a personal betrayal. I didn't know then that one of his greatest fears was losing me to a Marauder. How was I supposed to know? It's not like he ever opened his mouth anyway.*

~ ~ ~

Severus didn't find any peace in the dungeon. He tried to brew a new batch of Headache Potion, but as he added the peppermint leaves, he lost his focus. However hard he tried, he could not block the image of Morgaine's face from his mind, her smile, her eyes. And there was this whisper in his mind:

*A friend is somebody who takes a step closer towards you and holds your hand when everybody else turns their back on you. Don't push me away.*

Severus didn't know why these words had chosen to pop up into his head just now. He remembered the night Morgaine had spoken them and held his hand in the dark. She had promised never to leave his side. And over and over, she had been there when he had needed her, and still he had done the only thing she had asked him not to do: he had pushed her away.

What an idiot he had been.

He put down the peppermint leaves and left for the second floor. He had to go and see her.

There was no answer when he knocked at her office door, and he was just about to leave again when he noticed a small, emerald plaque beside the door: 'Greenhouse three.'

He turned on his heels and made his way to greenhouse three, but instead of Morgaine, he found Lupin there.

'Severus, what a surprise to see you here,' Lupin's voice did not match his worn looks ... he sounded rather cheerful. He waved some monkshood seedlings in front of Severus' nose.

'Come for these?' he asked.

Severus slightly wrinkled his nose at Lupin's dirty hands.

'Have you seen Professor duLac?' he asked in a cold tone.

'Morgaine? Well, as a matter of fact, I have,' Lupin responded. 'We were repotting monkshood. She left just a few minutes ago for her class.'

Severus picked up one of the pots and eyed it absentmindedly. Only a couple of minutes ago, he had wanted to apologise to Morgaine, but now, his temper was rising again.

'Repotting monkshood,' he repeated. 'Of course you were. Everything Morgaine has been doing lately seems to be related to you.'

Lupin stared at him. 'Now, what is wrong about caring for your friends, Severus? What is wrong about being there for them when they need you?'

Severus didn't answer.

Lupin was still staring at him, and there was now an angry look on his face. 'Why do you insist on pushing away everyone who comes close to you, Severus?'

'What are you talking about, Lupin?' Severus spat.

'You know exactly what I am talking about,' Lupin replied with a tone much angrier than Severus had ever heard it from him. 'You are really good at it as well. The last time somebody tried to stick up for you, you called her a Mudblood.'

Severus felt all the blood leave his face. 'How dare you?' he hissed.

'Oh, I think it's time somebody told you,' Lupin went on. 'Did you know that Lily spent several days crying in the common room after that incident? Did you know how much you hurt her by pushing her away? And now you're doing the same thing all over again.'

Why did Lupin have to tear open old wounds? Of course Severus knew. He knew exactly how much he had hurt Lily. He had tried to apologise, but she had not listened. And then she had turned from him for good. She had left him, abandoned him, not caring what would happen to him. She had turned from him when he had needed her the most. What if Morgaine was about to do the same thing?

Severus just stared at Lupin, unable to find a biting retort.

'I thought as much,' Lupin said, misinterpreting Severus' silence.

With a loud bang, he put down the pot he was holding, turned on his heels and stalked out of the greenhouse. For a while, Severus just stared after him. He had never seen Lupin like this. The man had never stood up for anything, not even as a prefect. And now, suddenly, he had released the Gryffindor lion within him and taken a stand for Morgaine. Just how much did she mean to him?

Absentmindedly, Severus picked up the pot Lupin had been working on and started repotting Monkshood seedlings, not allowing himself to feel the emotions Lupin's words had awoken. But he couldn't concentrate. Lupin's words were still ringing in his ears:

*Why do you insist on pushing away everyone who comes close to you?*

Yes, he had been pushing Morgaine away. He had never returned any of her letters, he had not even said goodbye to her when she had left for Durmstrang. And when she had been nursing Lupin, he had not seen this as an act of friendship, but taken it as a personal insult. He had not meant to hurt her. But pushing her away was easier than

to see her turn away, turn to Lupin.

Suddenly, Severus felt stupid. How could he ever have thought that Morgaine was turning away from him? Maybe she had given Lupin the same promise she had given him? After all, Lupin and Morgaine had known each other since she was a child. Lupin was her oldest friend. Of course she would care for him.

With shaking hands, Severus put down the pot and left the greenhouse. He had never needed to see Morgaine as much as he did now.

Her lesson hadn't ended yet, and instead of bursting into her classroom and enduring the students' curious looks, Severus lingered in the corridor, observing her through the glass door. When she spotted him, she smiled, and with a slight nod of her head, she beckoned him to come in. But he shook his head. He would wait until the class was over and secretly savour the smile she had given him.

When the students filed out of the classroom, he still stood in the corridor, nodding curtly in the direction of those who mumbled some kind of greetings. Then Morgaine appeared in the doorframe.

'Professor Snape,' she said and bowed slightly. 'Welcome to my humble domain.'

This time, Severus followed her invitation. Her classroom was a bright room with big windows through which the morning sun was shining, making her hair shimmer in that warm golden-red tone that fitted her so well.

'I have a proposition for you,' Severus started. 'I cannot explain why the Wolfsbane Potion failed to keep Professor Lupin from transforming. Therefore, I will require a second pair of eyes when starting the next batch. Since you are the most suitable lab partner in the castle, I want you to assist me.'

He saw her raise an eyebrow. 'Is that an invitation, Severus?'

For a second, he stared at her. Did she have to make this situation even more embarrassing than it already was? Couldn't she just give him an answer?

Then her lips curled into a smile. 'Yes, Severus, I would very much like to brew that potion with you.'

'I will be expecting you on Friday evening then, eight o'clock.'

And without waiting for an answer, he swept out of the room, robes billowing behind him and his heart considerably lighter than it had been only an hour ago. She would come down to the dungeon on Friday, and everything would just be as it was supposed to be.

## XXIII: They Win Again, They Always Do

*Chapter 23 of 35*

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

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Thanks to Apple Blossom for beta reading.

And thanks to you for reading and reviewing.

In this chapter, you will recognise passages from Rowling's 'The Servant of Lord Voldemort', 'Hermione's Secret' and 'Owl Post Again' (PoA). I am only borrowing.

### **Chapter XXIII: They Win Again, They Always Do**

Severus swore and Vanished the broken glass with a flick of his wand. Seven phials had fallen victim to his rage so far. He had smashed them into the floor, one after the other, and for the tiniest of moments it had actually felt good. But this moment had passed ever so quickly.

How he hated the world right now. How he hated Sirius Black. How he hated Remus Lupin. How he hated the blasted Marauders. Would he ever be free of them?

He reached for yet another phial, but a knock on the door made him spin around.

'Severus, open up.'

He flinched slightly as Morgaine's voice cut through the silence of the dungeon. He had not expected her to come down. He put down the phial and listened.

'Severus Snape, open the door.'

There was a demanding tone in her voice, but Severus didn't open. In fact, he didn't make a single sound. Maybe, if he kept silent, she would think that he wasn't there and leave.

The minutes ticked by, and he moved towards the door, slowly, quietly. He hadn't heard her walk away. Was she still there?

'Severus, please. Open up.'

Her voice had become somewhat softer. If he closed his eyes, he could see her face. He could see the concerned line between her eyebrows and the questioning look in her eyes. He knew that she was worried about him.

Severus placed the palm of his hand against the door. As much as he wanted to let Morgaine in, as much as he needed a friend at this moment, he couldn't open the door. Not yet anyway, he had to get himself together first. If he let her in now, he might say things that he would later regret. And hurting her was the very last thing he wanted to do.

With a sigh, he turned away from the door and sat down at his desk, burying his face in his hands. He had come so close tonight. He had almost gotten his revenge, but once more, the universe had plotted against him, and once more, the Marauders had won: Black had somehow managed to escape, and nobody even showed the slightest

interest in Severus' theories about how he had done it. Damn them, damn them all.

One more time, Severus let the night's events go through his head. Could he have done anything different? It had started out so nicely, after all.

When he had arrived at Lupin's office to give him his potion, Lupin hadn't been there. But the Marauders' Map on his desk had given away his whereabouts, and Severus had seen his chance to prove the suspicion he had had all year: that Lupin had been the one helping Black into the castle.

And then he had come across Potter's Invisibility Cloak at the base of the Whomping Willow. Fortuna had certainly been smiling at him. He had hurried through the tunnel towards the Shrieking Shack, and there he had found them, both Black and Lupin, caught in the act. All he had to do was grab them. Oh, sweet vengeance. But Saint Potter had interfered.

Yet another knock made Severus face the door again.

'Severus, open the door. I'm begging you.'

He heard the anxiety in Morgaine's voice. She wouldn't leave, he knew that. If he didn't open, she would spend the night in the cold corridor outside his door. He was endlessly grateful for her devotion, but he just couldn't let her in. Not yet, not when he was full of hatred and disdain.

Gods, how he despised them all. He could have put an Unforgivable Curse on every last one of them had they crossed his path. Black, Lupin, any of them, even Potter! How dare the brat point a wand at his teacher? Severus raised his hand and gingerly probed the wound on his head. It had stopped bleeding but was still throbbing. Maybe, he should have Madam Pomfrey examine it?

He looked towards the door, and for a moment he held his breath and listened. Yes, Morgaine was still there, still waiting outside the door. She had stopped calling for him, but he knew that she was still there. He could sense her presence.

Yes, she was still there, just as she always was.

She had been by his side from the moment he had entered the castle with three injured students and a captured convict. She had not asked any questions. She had fetched Dumbledore, taken the children to the hospital wing, and then she had returned to the headmaster's office and stood there right beside him while he had been giving his report.

Everything had gone so well, but then, Black had escaped. Severus had at once known that Potter had had something to do with it. He couldn't explain it, but he was convinced that Potter had somehow helped Black get away. But nobody had listened. Fudge had told him to stop talking nonsense, and Dumbledore had just looked at him with those annoyingly twinkling eyes of his. They both thought that the blow to his head had made him imagine things. They hadn't even cared when he had stormed out of the ward. Only Morgaine had gone after him. And now, she was still there, standing outside his door.

Once more, Severus buried his face in his hands. Why did she stand by him? Why did she insist on believing him when no one else did?

'Severus, please.'

Her voice was filled with tears now, he could hear that clearly. And he was unspeakably sorry.

Then he frowned. She didn't need his permission to enter. She knew the spells he had put on his door. Why didn't she just come in?

*A friend is somebody who takes a step closer towards you and holds your hand when everybody else turns their back on you.*

The words she had spoken to him years ago were hanging in the air like a slivery mist, and suddenly Severus realised what Morgaine was waiting for. She was waiting for him to reach out his hand. With a flick of his wand, he unlocked the door.

He didn't look up when he heard it creak open but kept his face buried in his hand. He heard Morgaine's light steps on the cold stone floor, he felt her approach, but still, he didn't look up. She came to a halt right beside him, close enough for him to feel the warmth of her body. The slightest movement and they would have touched.

She didn't say anything. She just stood there by his side. Severus could feel her eyes upon him. Those blue eyes that never held anything but understanding for him. He couldn't look up. The look in her eyes would surely reduce him to tears.

He didn't know how long she had been standing there. It could have been minutes, hours, days, lifetimes. He inhaled the comforting scent of sandalwood and honey, absorbed the warmth of her body, and got lost in her presence. Finally, he reached out for her and pulled her close, burying his face at her chest.

His voice wasn't much more than a whisper when he spoke. 'They win again. They always do.'

He felt the touch of her hand on his head and shivered. It had been the slightest of touches, but it felt as if Morgaine had reached out to caress his very soul.

Then Severus Snape broke. He felt tears burn in his eyes, but he knew that those tears would never run down his cheeks. He didn't know how to cry. As dry sobs shook his body, he let Morgaine cradle him just as a mother would cradle her crying child. He felt her tender touch on his back, her warm lips on his forehead, and he knew that in her arms, he didn't have to be strong. She would hold him until the morning. She would be there for as long as he needed her. And he hoped that one day, he would even find the courage to thank her for it.

~ ~ ~

*What do you do when the only rock you've ever known starts to crumble?*

I had seen the triumph in Severus' eyes when he had brought Black to the castle. He couldn't have cared less about the Order of Merlin Fudge promised him, because he had won something much more precious that night. He had brought down his childhood nemesis. Yes, vengeance is sweet.

When we heard of Black's escape, the light of triumph in Severus' eyes was extinguished like a candle in the wind. And then the fire of fury broke out. He lost his composure completely. I felt his hatred burn inside my mind, and there was nothing I could do, nothing but stand by and wait until he let me in.

Yes, what do you do when the only rock you've ever known starts to crumble? What do you do if the one person you thought was untouchable breaks?

For me, the answer was very simple: you stand by and wait, and then you pick up the pieces.

~ ~ ~

Severus woke up alone the next morning. He didn't remember when Morgaine had left. He didn't know how long she had been holding him in her arms. They hadn't spoken, not a single word. There had not been any need. Severus knew that Morgaine understood.

Eventually, she had handed him a goblet containing a purple liquid, Dreamless Sleep Potion. He had drunk without protesting. He had let her take him into his chambers, let her take off his clothes and tuck him in like a child. The last thing he remembered before drifting off to sleep had been her tender touch on his forehead.

The potion had worked; Severus had slept soundly and dreamlessly. But now he was awake, and all his bitterness and resentment washed over him like a tidal wave. How he wished that the Dementors had caught Black. How he wished that the werewolf lay dead in the Forbidden Forest somewhere. And how he wished that Potter had been

expelled. But he knew that none of his wishes would come true. And he also knew that there was not a damn thing he could do about it. Scowling, he got dressed and started his way up the stairs towards the headmaster's office.

He heard Morgaine's voice already in the staircase. He had never heard her so angry.

'What do you mean, he is not going to get the Order of Merlin?'

'Dear Miss duLac, there is no reason to get so upset.' Severus recognised the second voice: Fudge was in the office.

'The Minister is right, Morgaine. Severus will understand.' Dumbledore's voice was calm and reassuring, but it seemed to have little effect on Morgaine.

'Will he? Well, good luck with that then.' Her voice was cold as ice. 'Headmaster, Minister, good day to both of you.'

She almost knocked him over when she came storming out of the headmaster's office. Severus caught her in his arms and looked at her. The tone of her voice matched the look on her face. He had never seen her so angry.

'Leave your wand out here, or you might just hex someone in there,' she hissed.

'What has happened?' he asked.

'Well, since the Minister is not supposed to know about Remus' condition, Dumbledore convinced him that Remus had been trying to save Potter's life last night after you had been knocked out.'

'Understandable,' Severus said, keeping his voice calm.

'Understandable? Severus, do you realise what this means?' Her voice was still trembling with anger. 'This means that nobody will thank you for anything.'

Severus nodded. He had gathered that much. But he would not lose control again. He wouldn't give anyone the satisfaction.

'Where are you going now?' he asked, trying to smooth things over.

Morgaine pressed her hands against her eyes for a second.

'Remus' quarters,' she answered. 'Hagrid found him at the edge of the Forbidden Forest shortly after sunrise. He's in a ragged state.' She reached out and placed her hand on the side of Severus' arm. 'Please, don't be angry, Severus.'

'About you caring for Lupin?' He was himself surprised how calm his voice was. But then again, he had expected nothing less of Morgaine than that she would go and be there for her friend, just as she had been there for him the night before.

He heard her sigh and saw her chew her lip. Then she shrugged. 'About all of it, Severus. All of it.'

He looked after her as she hurried down the stairs. No, he wouldn't be angry. Not with her anyway. She had done more than he could ever have asked of her. She had stayed by his side when no one else had, and he knew that she would always be there, even if she now hurried to care for Lupin.

For a brief moment, Severus closed his eyes and remembered her touch. Then he straightened and knocked at Dumbledore's door, ready to hear about Lupin's heroic deed, ready to hear Fudge making apologies, ready to hear that once more, the Marauders had won and that he, once more, was left to stand in the shadows.

## XXIV: Despite All Your Flaws

*Chapter 24 of 35*

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Thanks to JKR for inventing Severus Snape.

Thanks to Apple Blossom for beta reading.

And thanks to you for reading and reviewing.

In this chapter you will recognise passages from GoF 'The Dark Mark', 'Unforgivable Curses', 'The Yule Ball', and 'Padfoot Returns'. I'm only borrowing.

### **Chapter XXIV: Despite All Your Flaws**

Severus hissed angrily at the pain that had awoken him. Silently, he slipped out of bed, clutching his left forearm. This couldn't be. The Mark could not be burning. Not after all these years.

He shook back his sleeve and examined his arm in the pale moonlight that was falling through the window. The contours of the skull and the snake were still visible, but they had faded over the years. So he *had* been dreaming. If the Dark Lord really had been calling, the Mark would be clearly visible.

Severus shrugged and gazed up at the night sky, almost afraid that he would see the colossal green skull with the serpent protruding from its mouth suspended over the tree tops. But the stars shone peacefully, undisturbed.

'What is it, Severus?'

Morgaine's drowsy voice ripped Severus out of his thoughts. He had not meant to wake her.

'Nothing,' he lied. 'Go back to sleep.'

He saw her stretch out her hand towards him and slipped back under the covers, pulling her into his arms, making sure that his sleeve was covering his forearm again.

He slept soundly the rest of the night. He didn't even hear Morgaine get up. It was first the smell of freshly brewed coffee that awakened him. As he got dressed, his eyes lingered for some moments on his left forearm. The Mark was barely visible, it hadn't been for years. The pain he had felt last night must have been a dream. But still, he felt uneasy and chose a long sleeve shirt. Just in case.

He found Morgaine in the kitchen. She greeted him with a radiant smile and placed a cup of black coffee in front of him. Severus couldn't help but grin. She had finally given up on trying to feed him in the mornings. He notoriously hated breakfast.

He gazed at Morgaine from across the table. How long had she been here now? Two weeks? Three? He had already gotten so used to her presence in his house that he couldn't tell.

She had scared the living daylight out of him when she had showed up. He had been in the garden at the back of the house, tending his plants when he had heard her voice.

'I believe this is belladonna, sir. It's a hallucinogenic.'

He had almost dropped the plant he had been holding and stared at her in utter disbelief. Nobody ever came to see him, and Morgaine had been one of the last people he had expected that summer.

She had not been happy with him at the end of term. She had not said anything, but Severus had seen it in her eyes. And he couldn't blame her. She had every right to be disappointed. But then again, so had he. And he had taken his revenge.

He could have lived with not being rewarded for his almost-capture of Sirius Black. But the fact that Dumbledore had made Lupin the hero had been too much. Lupin would have to pay, and making sure that he never again would be able to teach at Hogwarts seemed the perfect revenge. So Severus had let Lupin's secret slip, right there at the breakfast table, just loud enough for everyone to hear. Yes, it had seemed perfect.

But he had, for a brief moment, forgotten about Morgaine. She loved Lupin dearly, Severus knew that, and when he had chosen to hurt Lupin, he had consequently hurt her.

At first, the cold fury in her eyes had made him duck. He had been convinced that she would hex him into oblivion right there at the breakfast table. But what he saw in her eyes just moments later, an instant before she turned her head away from him, made him wish he had held his peace: her eyes, her beautiful blue eyes which had always looked at him with understanding and love, had been filled with utter disappointment.

They had not talked to each other for the rest of the term, and Severus was not really sure who had avoided whom. All he knew was that he was unspeakably sorry that he, once more, had disappointed her.

Therefore, he had not expected her to show up at his doorstep. To be honest, he had not even dared to hope that she would make any kind of contact that summer. For over a month he had not received so much as an owl from her, and he had been too proud to write to her himself, too scared that she would not reply.

And then, that glorious afternoon, she had just shown up, unannounced. Suddenly, she had just been standing there, on the other side of his hedge, grinning at him. And he had been too perplexed to utter anything more intelligent than 'What are you doing here?'

'I guess you won't believe me if I said that I was in the neighbourhood,' she had replied, and Severus had shaken his head.

'Well, then let's say that I am here to buy you lunch.'

She had taken him to a dodgy Muggle pub down the road, and as they had been eating steak and kidney pie, he had repeated his question.

'What are you doing here, Morgaine?'

'I am visiting my best friend. Are you familiar with the concept?'

'Of visiting?'

'No, the concept of best friends.'

Then she had taken his hand and smiled at him, just for him. And Severus had realised that it really didn't matter why she had come. All that did matter was that she, once more, had forgiven him.

After lunch, he had invited her to his house. It had felt strange. He never invited anybody in.

'So, this is where you grew up?' she had asked, peering around the living room. 'Gloomy.'

'It is home,' he had replied.

'Yes, I guess it is. Actually, I haven't really been expecting pink wallpaper either.'

And then she had laughed. That, too, had felt strange. Nobody had laughed at Spinner's End for ages. But it had also felt incredibly good.

She hadn't stayed that evening but taken a room at the local inn. But she had come to visit again the next day, and the next. And one evening, they just hadn't said goodnight. Morgaine had fallen asleep in the armchair in his living room, and Severus had only woken her up lead her into his bedroom.

And again, this had felt strange. Strange but wonderful.

He remembered the first night they had spent together. He had been in control then, and she had been shivering under his touch. This time, it had been her who had made him shiver. The warmth of her touch had seeped through his skin and right into his heart. She had touched him in ways he had never allowed anyone to touch him before. She had made him give up control.

He hadn't slept that night. He had been too afraid that she would once again be gone in the morning. But she had stayed all night, and seeing her wake up and smile at him the first thing in the morning had been bliss.

'Are you going to pay the owl, or will you continue staring at me for the rest of the morning?'

Morgaine's voice had a slightly mocking tone, and Severus smirked at her. He had indeed been so absorbed in his thoughts that he had not heard the delivery owl arrive with the *Daily Prophet*.

He saw the headline before he even got a chance to pay the owl: Scenes of Terror at the Quidditch World Cup, complete with a photograph of the Dark Mark over the tree tops.

He felt all the blood leave his face. If the Death Eaters dared to attack right under the nose of the Ministry, that meant that they were sure that the Dark Lord would return soon. And that in its turn meant that he hadn't been imagining things last night. The Mark had burnt after all. Instinctively, he pulled down his left sleeve a little more. Then



he sensed Morgaine standing behind him, peering at the Prophet.

He sent out a silent plea towards her, hoping that she would hear. He couldn't talk about it. Not yet.

*Don't ask, Morgaine. Please, don't ask. Not now.*

He felt her hand on his shoulder and saw her taking the paper out of his hand. Then she directed him towards the table.

'Your coffee is getting cold.'

That was all she said, and Severus was grateful for it. She sat down opposite him, and as he drank his coffee, he noticed that for the first time in three weeks, Morgaine wasn't eating any breakfast either.

~ ~ ~

*Two and two equals four, even in the Wizarding world. And it is not hard to put two and two together.*

*I had seen Severus clutching his left forearm that night, and as I read about the Death Eater attack, I knew why. He had sensed the Mark.*

*He didn't talk about it, and so I didn't ask. I never did. The Mark was part of who he was, and thus not mine to mention, nor mine to judge. When he was ready, Severus would talk to me.*

~ ~ ~

'Then you have felt the Dark Mark burning?' Dumbledore asked. He was still gazing out of the window, just as he had done since Severus had entered the office.

'I might have been imagining things, headmaster. The outlines of the Mark are just as faint as they have been since the day the Dark Lord disappeared.'

'Harry's scar has been burning as well,' Dumbledore said, as if he had not even heard Severus' comment. 'This can only mean one thing, Severus. Voldemort is on the rise again.'

Severus nodded, clenching his jaw. He had been dreading this day for thirteen years.

'We have to protect the boy,' Dumbledore went on. 'The day Voldemort returns, he must not get his hands on Harry Potter.'

The old wizard turned around, and his blue eyes locked onto Severus' dark ones. And Severus realised that Dumbledore could read him just as well as his great-granddaughter did.

'Tell me, Severus, when Voldemort returns, what will you do? Whose side will you stand on?'

Severus straightened. 'I have sworn to protect the boy, Albus. I have sworn to bring the Dark Lord down. And I will keep my oath, whatever the price.'

'Whatever the price, Severus?' Dumbledore's eyes seemed to see right into his very soul, and Severus felt his knees go weak. But he held the headmaster's gaze steady.

'Yes, Albus. Whatever the price.'

Dumbledore nodded and turned towards the window again. 'Then you will have to prepare yourself, Severus. You will have to decide how much you are willing to give Voldemort this time. If you need any assistance, you know where to find me.'

Severus nodded, and as Dumbledore neither spoke nor turned from the window, he considered himself dismissed and left for the dungeons.

What was he going to give the Dark Lord the day he summoned him?

Thirteen years ago, when the Ministry had held trials against the Death Eaters, Dumbledore had publicly vouched for him, had told everybody that Severus Snape had turned from the Dark Lord and become a spy for the Order. It wouldn't take long for the Dark Lord to learn about this, and Severus knew that he would have to use every trick in the book in order to convince his old master that he, despite what Dumbledore might believe, never had left the Dark side.

Then there was Potter. The Dark Lord must never know that Severus had sworn to protect the boy. But then again, Severus hated James Potter's son enough to present the picture of an insolent, mediocre brat without even batting an eyelid. The Dark Lord would never know that this boy actually held the power to bring him down once more.

Yes, Severus knew what he was going to present the Dark Lord. And the day he was called back into the fold, he would be prepared.

When he entered his study, Morgaine was waiting for him, and with a bang Severus realised that there was no way he would be able to hide his beloved from the Dark Lord.

~ ~ ~

Once again, the sound of a glass phial crashing against the stone wall echoed through the dungeon. The rational part of Severus' brain was calculating the costs of the phials he had smashed this year, but then again, he had every right to smash things. It had surely been a dreadful year so far.

First, there was this blasted Triwizard Tournament. The Tournament per se was a pleasant enough distraction, but the fact that Potter had somehow managed to become a champion meant that Dumbledore had once more called upon Severus to keep an eye on the boy. Ruddy easy job that was! The little brat loved to be in the centre of attention and seemed not to care how much danger he was in or who had to drag him into safety.

And then, there was Mad-Eye Moody. Severus could live with yet again not being given the Defence Against the Dark Arts position, but why had Dumbledore hired Moody of all people? Moody had been an Auror and an original member of the Order of the Phoenix, and with that he knew about Severus' past. And he made sure that Severus would not forget it. More than once this year, Moody had made it very clear that he did not trust him, and Severus had deemed it wisest to simply avoid Moody's eyes, both magical and non-magical.

And last but not least, there was Igor Karkaroff. He and Severus knew each other well, far too well. They had both been Death Eaters, and they had both avoided being sent to Azkaban: Severus because he had spied for the Order, and Karkaroff because he had turned in some of his fellow Death Eaters during the trials. Karkaroff was now headmaster at Durmstrang and with that an honoured guest at Hogwarts during the tournament. He had been easy enough to bear in the beginning, but ever since the Yule Ball he had become jumpy. He, too, had the Dark Mark burnt into his flesh, and he, too, had noticed that it was getting darker. And, as a traitor, he was scared to death of the day the Dark Lord would return.

Severus was scared, too, oh yes. And he wished nothing more than that the Mark would stop getting darker, but he knew that the day of the Dark Lord's resurrection was getting closer. And he knew that when this day came, he had to be prepared and calm. And Karkaroff's panic attacks did not help at all.

Earlier that day, Karkaroff had actually had the nerve to confront him in the middle of class. The idiot had pulled up his left-hand sleeve in a classroom full of students just to prove that his Mark was getting darker. How could he be so stupid? Did he really think that Severus did not know this already?

Ignoring the broken pieces of glass on the floor, Severus let himself fall into his armchair and pushed up the left sleeve of his own robe and started staring at his forearm. Yes, the Mark was more distinct than it had been in many years. And whatever he had told Karkaroff, he only knew too well what the darkening Mark meant: the Dark Lord was on the rise.

Severus dreaded the day when the Mark would burn. On that day, he would have no other choice than to answer the call, fall to his knees and kiss the hem of the Dark Lord's robes. He shivered. He had long known that this day would come, but he had dearly hoped that it wouldn't.

When he heard the door creak, he didn't need to turn around. He knew it was Morgaine. She was the only one who knew how to get past the protective spells he had cast around his quarters. And she knew about the Mark on his arm. She had known about him being a former Death Eater for more than eight years. And on the night of the Quidditch World Cup, the night she had for the first time seen him clutch his left forearm, she had put two and two together. But she had never asked him about it, not once.

Severus felt her hand softly brush his shoulder as she settled down on the armrest of his chair. He didn't look up, but he could feel her eyes upon him. Instinctively, he shook his sleeve over the Mark.

'He's approaching, isn't he? The Dark Lord is on the rise again.' Severus could hear her voice tremble. He knew that she was looking for answers, but he hadn't any to give.

'I have seen the signs, too, Severus. I have heard the whispers. And I know why you woke up that night the Death Eaters attacked those Muggles at the Quidditch World Cup.' She reached out and touched his left forearm. 'You sensed it.'

Severus tried to pull his arm away, but Morgaine had a firm grip around it. And he knew that she wasn't going to let go anytime soon.

'You should not be here, Morgaine. You should not care.' His voice sounded tired. And he still avoided her eyes.

Then he felt her fingers tighten around his arm.

'The Dark Mark is part of who you are, Severus. It is part of your past, and your past has made you into the man you are today. This is nothing new to me. I have known for years.'

Yes, she had. And still she was there by his side, still she cared. And still Severus did not understand how he had deserved her affection.

He let his head fall against her shoulder and gratefully accepted her embrace. Tonight, she would help him forget. For some blissful hours, the Dark Mark would not exist, and the only thing in the world that mattered would be the woman in his arms. Yet he knew that when the morning dawned, he would start wondering if she would still be there for him the day he had to return into the fold.

## XXV: In the Arms of an Angel

*Chapter 25 of 35*

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Thanks go to JKR for letting me play around in her universe.

Thanks to my beta Apple Blossom.

And thanks to you for reading and reviewing.

In this chapter you will recognise passages from 'Veritaserum' and 'The Parting of the Ways' (GoF).

### **Chapter XXV: In the Arms of an Angel**

'He's back. He's back. Voldemort is back.'

Potter's whispers confirmed what Severus had dreaded for the last hour: the Dark Lord had risen again.

He had been patrolling the outside of the maze when the searing pain in his left forearm had made him sink to his knees. He would not have needed to, but he had still pulled back his sleeve. And there it was, the Dark Mark, the mark of sin etched into his flesh, dark and horrid. Yes, the Dark Lord had returned, and he was calling.

Severus was still cowering in the grass, clutching his arm, when Morgaine found him. She didn't need to ask any questions ... one look on the Mark was enough to make her understand. She pulled him up and more or less dragged him back to the start of the maze, to Dumbledore. They arrived just in time to see Potter appear on the ground, clutching the Triwizard Cup with one hand and the body of Cedric Diggory with the other.

'He's back. He's back. Voldemort is back.'

That was all the boy was able to utter. And Severus knew that he didn't have much time left before he would have to face his master.

~ ~ ~

They would be fighting alone. Fudge had made it very clear that he did not believe a word about the Dark Lord's return. In his eyes, Potter was too shocked by Diggory's death to know what he was talking about, and Dumbledore was either losing his marbles or trying to take over the Ministry. He could not even be convinced when Severus showed him the Dark Mark. No, they could not expect any help from the Ministry; the Order would stand alone against the Dark Lord and his followers.

And Severus knew all too well that they would have to stand united if they wanted to have any chance of succeeding. Reluctantly, he did as Dumbledore asked and shook Black's hand. Yes, he would have to get along with his childhood nemesis, his sworn enemy. They all had their role to play, their jobs to do, and they had to try to get along.

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

Severus nodded. Yes, he was prepared. But that didn't make it any easier. He almost smirked when Dumbledore wished him good luck. Luck was the last thing that could help him that night.

He swept wordlessly out of the hospital wing and descended to his private chambers. Everything was already prepared. His cloak and mask were lying on the chair, and Dumbledore's Pensieve was standing on his desk. He raised the tip of his wand towards his temple and systematically removed all the memories he did not want the Dark Lord to see, all the memories the Dark Lord *mustn't* see. He had prepared for this all year and knew exactly which memories to pick.

And suddenly, Morgaine was just standing there, looking at him. Severus had not heard her come in.

He saw the fear in her eyes. But as much as he wanted to tell her that everything was going to be alright, he couldn't. Because he didn't know if anything would be alright. He did not even know if he would return.

'I suppose you will join the Order, Morgaine,' he said, his eyes locked onto hers.

'There isn't really any choice, is there, Severus?'

He shook his head. No, there wasn't any choice. This choice had been made the day the Dark Lord had thrust a wand into Morgaine's hand and made her curse her mother. Or even before that, maybe the day Morgaine had been conceived. Or even the day her mother had fallen in love with a Death Eater.

Severus reached out and gently let his fingers caress Morgaine's cheek. He wanted to tell her to be safe, to keep out of harm's way, but he knew there was no point. Nobody was safe anymore.

'I have to go,' he said instead and grabbed his cloak and his mask.

Morgaine simply nodded. She knew that Severus had no choice either. As he passed her on his way out, she grabbed his arm. Again, their eyes locked.

'I'll be waiting for you,' she said. 'When you return, I will be here.'

*When, not if.* She trusted him. She trusted his abilities to resist the Dark Lord. She trusted his loyalty.

For a brief moment, Severus rested his forehead against Morgaine's. He felt her assuring hand on his shoulder, the warmth of her body against his. Taking a deep breath, he inhaled the scent of sandalwood and honey. How he wished that he did not have to leave, that he could stay in her embrace for ever. But he knew that he couldn't. So he straightened, and without looking back at Morgaine, he swept out of the dungeon. He was to meet his master.

~ ~ ~

*How many women have sent their loved ones into battle and promised that they would wait for them? How many of them have waited in vain? How many of them have never seen their loved ones return?*

*We didn't say goodbye that night, Severus and I. It was a brave choice. If he hadn't returned, I would have regretted it forever. But right there and then I was convinced that he would return. And I would wait for him and be there when he needed me.*

~ ~ ~

Severus didn't know where he Apparated to. He never knew. Whenever the Dark Lord called, he had to follow the call and do what his master expected him to do. He had never been in a position to ask questions.

He found himself in a big room, a library he assumed. But where this room was, he didn't know. Around him stood his old companions: Malfoy, Macnair, Crabbe, Goyle, Nott and Pettigrew. They all wore their Death Eater robes, they all kept their eyes submissively on the ground. He saw their hands tremble and knew that they had already received their punishments. He could see the traces the Cruciatus had left behind.

And he stood tall, awaiting his own punishment. But it didn't come. No curses were thrown at him. For a while, nothing happened, nothing at all. Then he heard footsteps behind him.

'My most truthful servant has finally returned. Kneel, Severus.'

He didn't need to be told. As soon as he had sensed the Dark Lord's presence, Severus had sunken to his knees, head bent, ready to kiss the hem of his master's robe. 'My Lord.'

'Many of your companions have doubted your loyalty,' the Dark Lord continued, his voice cold and inhuman. They said you would not return. But I knew better. I told them you had your reasons for being late. And now I hope you won't disappoint me. Tell me, Severus, why *are* you late?'

The Dark Lord entered his mind with a force that would have thrown Severus off his feet, had he been standing. He felt icy fingers probe around in the corners of his mind, looking for answers. But he had been prepared for this, he knew how much he could disclose.

He gave the Dark Lord as much as he could, as much as he deemed necessary, as much as he and Dumbledore had agreed upon, ordinary things, everyday life. But he knew that the Dark Lord would not be content with ordinary things. He could not hope that the Dark Lord would believe that all he had done for the last thirteen years was rolling his thumbs, teaching Potions and scaring students. He had to give him more.

So he gave him Potter. He noticed the Dark Lord's joy as he showed him that Potter was nothing more than an average teenage wizard: impertinent, mediocre, prone to breaking the rules and with just too much luck than what was good for him.

He gave him Dumbledore. Oh, they had prepared this moment carefully. The Dark Lord would never find out just how much Dumbledore knew, just how much Severus had conveyed. He would never know how deeply his so called most faithful servant was involved in the plotting of his downfall.

And he gave him Morgaine. He didn't want to, but he knew that there was no choice. And the Dark Lord took everything he had to offer about Dumbledore's great-granddaughter, the daughter of a Death Eater, the girl who was tempted by the Dark Arts and who, by now, was the newest member of the Order of the Phoenix.

*She will be useful one day.* Lucius' words were echoing in Severus' mind, and there and then he finally understood their meaning. And it terrified him more than anything else.

He didn't know how long the Dark Lord had been examining his mind, but when the contact broke, Severus collapsed. He found it hard to breathe, his throat was tight, and he felt the urge to vomit.

'Rise, Severus.'

The tone in the Dark Lord's voice made it very clear that there was no other choice than to get up. Inch by inch, Severus picked himself up from the floor. His whole body was shaking. But he came to stand tall in front of his master.

'For now, I am content, my friend,' Severus heard the Dark Lord whisper. 'Your companions, on the other hand, might be harder to convince. Good luck, Severus.'

For the second time that night, this phrase made Severus smirk. No, luck was not what he needed. He stared after his master as he strode across the room and saw the door close. It was in this very moment that the first curse hit him in the back and made him fall to the floor once more.

~ ~ ~

It was near dawn when Severus returned to Hogwarts.

The Dark Lord had been right, his fellow Death Eaters had indeed been hard to convince of his loyalty. But Severus wondered if all the torture really had been about his loyalty or if they had just needed to find an outlet for their own frustration.

He had never stood a chance. He had been outnumbered, and when the first spell had hit him in the back, he had dropped his wand. They had cast spell after spell, and he had not had any means of defending himself. He hadn't screamed, not once. He would not have given them the satisfaction.

They had always disliked him, each and every one of them. Some feared him for his powers, some looked down on him because he was a half-blood, and some were jealous of him because the Dark Lord favoured him. And tonight, they had all shown him just how much they hated him.

They had let him go after what seemed to be an eternity. They had hurt him but not managed to break him. And as he had left, he had carried himself tall. And he had not looked back.

Now, he was stumbling down the stairs and along the dungeon corridor, supporting himself against the wall. He was indescribably thankful that he didn't meet anyone.

As he staggered into his chambers, he saw Morgaine stepping out of the shadows. Her face was pale, and her hands were shaking, and Severus knew that she must have felt his pain all night, his torment. She shouldn't have. He shouldn't have allowed it.

He took some steps towards her, and when he felt her grab his shoulders, he thankfully sank into her arms. And then everything went black.

When he awoke, the sun was setting. His whole body was aching. Every single muscle, every sinew seemed to be on fire. His head was spinning, and he felt like throwing up. He closed his eyes again, taking some deep breaths. Then he felt a hand on his left shoulder, a small hand with a warm and tender touch.

He opened his eyes and gingerly turned his head. The single candle on his nightstand gave just enough light for him to make out Morgaine's silhouette. She was sitting on the bed beside him with her back against the headboard and her knees pulled up to her chin. So he hadn't been dreaming. Morgaine was really there, sitting beside him, watching over him.

With the greatest effort, Severus moved his right hand to touch hers. Then he passed out again.

It was early morning when Severus regained consciousness. The candle had been extinguished and the soft light of dawn was filling his chamber. He was alone. He tried to sit up but quickly understood that it had been a bad idea to try. The pain was atrocious, and the whole room was spinning around him.

'You shouldn't be moving,' Morgaine said as she re-entered the chamber, carrying a washbowl.

Severus sank back onto his pillow and closed his aching eyes. He was relieved. For a terrifying moment, he had been afraid that she had left him.

He felt her charm off his sweat-drenched nightshirt, and then he felt warm water on his skin. He opened his eyes. Morgaine was sitting beside him on the edge of the bed with her back towards his head. She was holding a soft sponge in her hand and carefully washed his hurting body, his legs, his chest, his arms.

When she laid her hands upon his left arm, Severus jerked it away. Not the Dark Mark. He didn't want Morgaine to touch something that foul. But she calmly continued her work.

'What are you doing here?' His voice wasn't much more than a whisper. Even speaking hurt.

'Taking care of you, as I promised that I would.' Her voice was warm and calm, caressing his soul.

'I do not deserve being taken care of,' he responded in a bitter tone. 'I am back in the fold. Your Boggart has come alive. You should despise me.'

She put the washbowl onto the nightstand and turned to look at him. Her blue eyes met his dark ones. Her gaze was steady. 'I have promised to stand by your side, Severus. Don't push me away.'

As he closed his eyes, Morgaine's words were echoing in Severus' head. He had heard them before, many years ago, the night he had shared his darkest secrets with her. Yes, that night she had promised to always stand by his side. And he had pushed her away, so many times. And still, she was there, right by his side.

After a while, he heard her leave. She must have thought that he had fallen asleep. He opened his eyes to look at the door she had closed behind her and felt tears burn in his eyes.

~ ~ ~

It was mid-morning when Morgaine returned. She had entered so silently that Severus had not heard her. Suddenly she had just been standing beside his bed.

'How are you feeling?' she asked, her voice warm and calm just as it always was.

Severus shrugged slightly, and even this little movement sent daggers of pain through his body.

'I need you to drink this.' She held out two phials towards him, one containing a painkiller, the other a Strengthening Potion. 'Dumbledore wants to see you. The Order is here.'

Of course they were. And Severus knew that they were eagerly awaiting his report.

Morgaine helped him sit up, supporting him with her left arm around his shoulder. He gagged as he drank the potions. His body didn't react positively to the intake of the liquids. For a while, they were just sitting there. Severus leant heavily against Morgaine, and she cradled him at her chest, stroking his hair, warming him. Just as she had promised that she would.

'Are you ready?' she asked when he had stopped shaking, and he nodded, although he had preferred to stay in her arms just a little while longer.

She helped him to get dressed and led him up the staircase to Dumbledore's office. Again, the corridors were deserted. They didn't meet anyone on their way.

When they reached the headmaster's office, Morgaine stepped away from him. At first, Severus didn't know why, but as he looked into her eyes, he understood: she wanted him to walk into the office tall and proud, just as he always did.

'Thank you', he said in a soft voice, and Morgaine smiled at him.

He felt her thoughts brush his own, and as he opened the door, he heard her whisper: 'I'll be right there beside you.'

They were all there: Dumbledore, McGonagall, Hagrid, Moody haggard but in remarkably good shape for having been locked up in a trunk for nine months the Weasleys,

Figg, Fletcher, Lupin, Black, and a young witch with bubble-gum pink hair. They had all been deeply immersed in discussion when Severus and Morgaine entered, but immediately fell silent as they caught sight of them.

Dumbledore was the first to speak: 'Have you seen him?'

Severus nodded. 'Yes, Headmaster, I have seen him. The Dark Lord has returned.'

He kept his voice calm and steady as he gave an accurate description of the night's events. He stood tall and refused to sit down although it took an enormous amount of strength and willpower to keep his body from shaking. And all the time Morgaine was there, right by his side, just as she had promised. They all had thousands of questions, but after Severus had given his report, Dumbledore dismissed the rest of the Order.

When the door closed, Severus felt himself being pushed upon a chair. He didn't resist, he had no strength left. Morgaine made him drink another dose of painkiller and Strengthening Potion. And again, he didn't resist.

'Can't this wait, Dumbledore?' Severus heard her ask. 'He is exhausted.'

He felt her standing behind him. She couldn't be more than a few inches away from him, he could feel the warmth of her body. It seeped through his skin and seemed to ease the tension in his muscles.

'No, my child, it cannot wait. It mustn't. You may wait for him outside if you want to, but right now, I must ask you to leave.'

Morgaine did as she was told. She always did. She left and closed the door behind her, and Severus knew that she would be standing there, waiting for him when he left the office.

He heard Dumbledore pull up a chair beside him, and he opened his tired eyes to look at the older wizard.

'Severus, I must know. What did you show him?'

'I showed him what we agreed on, Headmaster,' he answered.

'Is this all, Severus?'

He felt his throat tighten. He wanted to scream, he wanted to rage, but he didn't have the strength. His voice wasn't more than a whisper when he spoke.

'Morgaine, I have given him Morgaine.'

Dumbledore nodded. 'I thought you might have.'

'It was a mistake, I should not have ...'

'No, maybe you shouldn't have,' Dumbledore answered, his voice somewhat softer now. 'But he would have found out about her sooner or later. Would you have preferred your friend Lucius Malfoy telling in about her?'

Severus shook his head. Again, Lucius' words were echoing in his mind. *She will be useful one day.*

He raised his gaze and stared at Dumbledore, suddenly realising that maybe, Lucius Malfoy was not the only one to have plans with Morgaine.

~ ~ ~

Morgaine was waiting for him when he left Dumbledore's office, just as she had promised. She took his arm and led him back to his chambers where she made him sit down in his armchair and drink another potion. Then she settled in the chair opposite him, and Severus felt her eyes resting upon him.

'How was he?' she asked. 'The Dark Lord.'

He had known that she would ask, but still he wasn't prepared. He sighed deeply.

'He is even colder now, appalling, totally inhuman.'

There were no words to describe what he had seen, Severus knew that. So he reached out for Morgaine's hands and opened his mind. The scene seemed oddly familiar. They had been sitting there once before. That night he had shown her things that were too terrible to put into words as well. And once more, Morgaine did not shrink away despite the evil he showed her.

But as thankful as Severus was, he knew that he had to push her away if he wanted to protect her.

'Morgaine, when the Order has established headquarters, I want you to go there for the summer. Or even better, go back to Iceland. You must not return to Spinner's End. You must not. It is too dangerous.'

He saw the questioning look in her eyes. He knew that she wanted to hear his reasons for keeping her away. But what could he say? That he loved her too much to see her come to harm? That he was scared of losing her?

Yes, that was exactly what he should have said, Severus knew that. But he did not dare. Instead, he took her face into his hands and looked deep into blue eyes.

'Swear that you will not come to Spinner's End, Morgaine. Swear.'

She took his hands into hers and held them to her chest, her eyes still locked onto his. She swore not to come to Spinner's End. But Severus knew that she would always be there for him whenever he reached out his hand for her.

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A/N: As there is no point in re-writing something that is already perfect, the line

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

is directly taken from 'The Parting of the Ways' (GoF, p.773) and thus belongs to JKR.

# XXVI: The Dragon and the Lily

Chapter 26 of 35

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Thanks to JKR for some amazing characters.

Thanks to Apple Blossom for beta reading.

And thanks to you for reading and reviewing.

## Chapter XXVI: The Dragon and the Lily

Severus arrived at Grimmauld Place almost an hour after the appointed time. The Order meeting had started without him. But he didn't care. What he had to report was for Dumbledore's ears only. Arriving on time would only mean that he would have to listen to Black going on about how useful he could be to the Order if he were allowed to leave the house. For all Severus cared, Black could be running around the Wizarding world as much as he wanted. And if he got caught, well, Severus didn't care what would happen to Black then either.

He felt at least five sets of eyes on him when he strode through the corridor that led to the meeting room. He knew that Potter and his gang were hiding on the first floor landing, eavesdropping, and his hand twitched towards his wand. It would be ever so delightful to hex the nosy brats. But then again, he didn't care enough to actually bother.

The members of the Order were gathered in the meeting room. For a moment, Severus wondered what they were discussing, but to be honest, he didn't care about that either. He was there to see Dumbledore, who to Severus' disappointment wasn't in the room.

'Oh, look who finally honours us with his presence.' Black's arrogant voice was loud enough to make everybody in the room abandon their conversations and turn towards Severus. 'Did Voldemort's lapdog have a hard time leaving his master?'

'At least, Black,' Severus replied in his most silky tone, 'I am doing some actual work for the Order, while you are hiding here, doing absolutely nothing of use.'

Black rose swiftly, his wand drawn. But Severus was just as quick to draw his own. Oh, it would be a pleasure to hex Black into oblivion.

Two other people had reacted fast as well: Lupin and Morgaine had placed themselves between the two fighters, their wands ready to disarm either of them.

'Put your wand down, Sirius,' Morgaine said, pointing her own wand at Black.

'What a surprise,' Black snorted. 'Morgaine springs to Snivellus' defence. Tell me, what kind of lies has he been whispering into your ears at night? Did he tell you that he is only kissing the hem of Voldemort's robe because Dumbledore told him to? And do you actually believe him?'

'Don't be childish, Sirius,' Lupin said in a calm voice.

'Be quiet, Remus,' Black barked. 'I want an answer. Tell me, Morgaine, do you have any proof of his loyalty?'

Severus' eyes darted towards Morgaine. What would she say? She had taken care of him when he had returned from his first meeting with the Dark Lord. She had washed his wounds and eased his mind. She had been there for him without ever questioning any of his actions. And since she had never asked any questions, he had not told her anything either. She had reached out her hand towards him, and sometimes he had accepted it. But most of the time, he had pushed her away. Black was right, she had no proof of his loyalty whatsoever.

Her voice was clear and firm when she replied, and her answer made Severus' heart jump in his chest. 'I trust Severus.'

'Ha!' Black laughed. 'That seems to run in the family. Dumbledore trusts him, too. But he hasn't given us any reason for it either!'

'There is nothing wrong with trusting people, Sirius.' Dumbledore had re-entered the room without any of them noticing. 'Now, gentlemen, unless you want Morgaine to hex one of you, which, I am sure, she would do without hesitation, I suggest you both put your wands away.'

Both Severus and Black followed Dumbledore's order, although reluctantly. It was obvious that neither of them wanted to be the first to put his wand away.

'Lovely,' Dumbledore said. 'Now, I'd like to have a word with Severus in private. Molly has already put out some sandwiches in the sitting room. Why don't you others all go there and ... ah ... mingle?'

The other members of the Order quickly left the room. In case Black and Snape started hexing each other, none of them wanted to be standing in the line of fire. Black, however, didn't seem to be tempted by Molly's sandwiches. He stood still, glaring at Severus. And Severus glared back, his eyes filled with just as much contempt as Black's.

'Don't behave like a five-year old, Sirius,' Lupin said as he passed his friend.

'Have you finally developed some backbone, Lupin?' Severus snarled. 'You would never have stood up against him when you were a prefect.'

Black's fingers tightened around the wand in his pocket, but Lupin stopped him by shaking his head.

'It's not worth the trouble, Sirius.'

Black gave Severus a last hateful look and then left the meeting room with Lupin. First when they had passed through the door did Severus notice Morgaine standing in the hallway. There was a disappointed look on her face. She must have heard everything. She never took kindly to him attacking Lupin.

Swiftly, Severus turned his back on her. He couldn't bear the look in her eyes.

~ ~ ~

*Sirius had a point. Why did I trust Severus Snape? Was it because Dumbledore trusted him? Or was it because I had seen the state Severus was in every time he returned from his meetings with the Dark Lord, beaten and bitter?*

*I held my promise and kept away from Spinner's End, but I made sure to be at Headquarters every time Severus was scheduled to deliver a report. If he wanted me to be by his side, he would not have to go looking for me. All he had to do was to reach out. I was there when he wanted me to be, and I kept away when he wanted to be alone.*

*There were days when I hardly recognised him, days when he hated himself so much that he thought everybody around him must hate him just as much. On these days, every single word from his lips was dripping with venom and hatred, and he didn't seem to care who heard them or who got hurt by them. On these days, I sometimes wondered if he was worth all the pain, and every time he pushed me away, it felt as if my heart would break.*

*But that pain was nothing compared to the agony I felt when I imagined him reaching out his hand in the dark just to realise that no one was there to take it, that he was all alone. So I let him rage, let him have his outbursts, and when he was done, when his whole body was shaking with exhaustion and unshed tears, when his armour finally crumbled, I was there to take his hand and hold him until the morning.*

*It took an enormous amount of strength to stay by Severus' side. He was as unpredictable as April weather. There were days when he accepted my help, but there were just as many or even more when he pushed me away. I never questioned his decisions.*

*The others asked me a thousand times why I put up with him, why I insisted on taking his side, why I took his harsh words. Molly, Arthur, Remus, even Sirius, they all saw how it consumed me, they saw how I suffered. But they did not understand that I had no choice.*

~ ~ ~

After their private discussion, Severus politely declined Dumbledore's invitation to Molly's sandwiches. He had no desire whatsoever to spend any more time at Grimmauld Place. He felt clearly that he wasn't welcome. But he needed to speak to Morgaine before he left.

He heard her laughter when he left the meeting room. It was coming from the kitchen. He was just about to open the door when he heard a second laugh. He froze. That laughter didn't belong to someone he felt like meeting right now. But even less did he want this person to be in the same room as Morgaine. With more force than necessary, he pushed open the door and entered the kitchen.

Morgaine and Lupin were sitting at the kitchen table, apparently looking at pictures in an old album. Their heads were close to each other, and Lupin had laid his arm affectionately around Morgaine's shoulders. He let go of her immediately when he saw who had entered the room.

'Severus.'

'By all means, put your arm back around her, Lupin. It was not my intention to disturb your little tête-à-tête,' Severus said in a venomous tone.

Lupin laughed nervously. 'Don't be silly, Severus. I was just showing Morgaine some of our old school photos.'

'Of course you were,' Severus replied. 'And what were you planning to do in five minutes' time? Nibble her ear off?'

Morgaine rose so quickly that she pushed over the chair she had been sitting on.

'What gives you the right?' she hissed.

'I reckon somebody has to warn you,' Severus retorted. 'As you are very well aware, werewolves mate for life. Once you take him to your bed, you will never get rid of him again.'

Morgaine's eyes were flashing dangerously, and Severus knew at once that he had finally gone too far.

'It's comments like these that make it easy to understand why people hate you, Severus Snape.'

Her words were like a slap in the face. But Severus had already lost control. He couldn't hold back his words.

'Go ahead then. Join up with Potter and Black and Lupin, and hate me. You would not be the first one to do so.'

He had gone too far. He knew that before the last syllable had left his lips. He hadn't meant to say this. Of course he didn't want Morgaine to hate him. He took a step towards her, reaching out for her hand, but she shrank away from him, and her voice was shaking when she spoke.

'What more do I have to do to make you trust me, Severus? Haven't I done everything to prove to you that I am on your side? That I am your friend, your best friend?'

What could he say? He *did* trust her, but he was so afraid that one day, she would turn from him. And this mere thought made him fortify his protective walls. He had been hurt before, and he did not want to be hurt again.

'I have heard these words before,' he replied, his voice still bitter.

For some moments, Morgaine was just staring at him. He felt her mind brush his, and he did not even try to shut her out. Her voice wasn't much more than a whisper, but her next words hit Severus like a clenched fist in the stomach.

'I am not Lily!'

A swirl of black robes, a slam of the door and Morgaine was gone, and Severus stood motionless, staring at the door.

'Smart move, Severus, alienating the few friends you have.'

'Don't get involved, Lupin,' Severus hissed.

'I *am* involved, Severus,' Lupin said in a tone that was much more determined than it usually was. 'Morgaine is one of the kindest persons I have ever known. One of the best friends I have ever had. *You*, if anyone, should understand that.'

Lupin's voice was determined but at the same time annoyingly calm, as if he were talking to a child. It did nothing, however, to calm Severus' temper. For a moment, he considered punching Lupin right in the face. But he didn't get the chance, Lupin had already reached the door. One last time, he turned to look at Severus.

'Do you have any idea what Morgaine is going through for you, Severus? Do you have any idea how many people are warning her from you, wondering why she insists on taking your side? Do you have any idea how much strength it costs her to stick up for you?'

Severus shrugged. 'I have never asked her to.'

'Never asked her to.' Lupin shook his head. There was a sad look in his eyes. 'This is exactly the point, Severus. You did not ask her to take your side. She chose herself, years ago.' He paused and looked Severus straight in the eyes. 'Do you have any idea just how much she loves you, Severus?'

And then he closed the door behind him and left Severus standing alone in the kitchen.

~ ~ ~

*At first, I wanted to cry. I was so disappointed. After all I had done for him, how could Severus trust me that little?*

*And then I wanted to scratch his eyes out. How dared he? How could he accuse me of sleeping with Remus?*

*It was just not fair. I had been there for him in his darkest hours. I had stood up for him and defended him at times when everybody else was questioning his loyalties. I had supported him in his decisions. And still, he wouldn't trust me, wouldn't believe that I was on his side.*

*I knew that I wouldn't be able to control myself. I knew that I would break. And I wouldn't give Severus the satisfaction. That was why I ran out on him.*

*I was still shaking when Remus entered my room. He didn't say anything for a while but just sat beside me on the edge of the bed, and the sad look on his face hurt even more than any of Severus' words.*

*After a while, Remus looked into my eyes. There they were again, the sad look and the even sadder smile.*

*'You really do love him, don't you, Morgaine?' he asked, and all I could do was nod.*

~ ~ ~

*... not Lily ... how much she loves you ...*

Morgaine's and Lupin's words were chasing each other in Severus' mind. At first, he couldn't make sense of anything.

What had just happened? Why had he lost control? Why had he felt the need to confront Morgaine? She had never given him any reason to mistrust her. She had always been there for him when he needed her. She was the person that stood closest to him, the only friend he had. Why had he hurt her?

He knew the answer, he had known it for years: he was afraid. He was afraid that that one day Morgaine would stop trusting him, that she would give up on him, that he would lose her. He had been afraid of that ever since he had seen her Boggart turn into a copy of himself wearing a Death Eater mask. Ever since that day he had been wondering why she didn't turn from him, how he had deserved her trust. Not a day had gone by that he didn't fear that she would turn her back on him one day. And he would rather *push* her away than see her *walk* away.

It had happened before. He had once had a friend. A friend he had held dearer than anything else, a friend that had meant the world to him. She had not trusted him. She had turned from him when he had made the wrong choices. She had abandoned him when he had needed her the most. He had lost her.

Severus clenched his fists. He couldn't let this happen. Not again.

He left the kitchen and climbed the stairs to the first floor. On the landing, he came to a halt and listened. The door to Morgaine's room was ajar, but there was not a single sound to be heard. Severus knew that Lupin had gone to see Morgaine, and he decided that he would wait out there on the landing until Lupin left her room again. He didn't know yet what to say to her anyway.

When Lupin finally left, Severus retreated deeper into the shadows. He didn't want to be seen. Thankfully, Lupin chose to go to his own room at the far end of the hallway. He never noticed Severus.

There was no answer when he knocked on Morgaine's door, and for a second Severus considered leaving. But he knew that he would regret it. So he entered the room without permission.

She stood with her back towards the door, gazing out of the window. She didn't show any sign of having heard him enter the room.

He approached her soundlessly and came to a halt only inches behind her. He stood close enough to smell her hair. It smelled of sandalwood and honey, just as it always had. How he wanted to reach out for her, sense her, touch her. But he didn't dare. All the things he wanted to tell her were stuck in his chest, trying to break free, but he couldn't find the words.

He didn't know how long they were standing there by the window, just inches apart and still so far away from each other. He opened his mouth a dozen times but always closed it again. Where was he supposed to start?

Finally, after what seemed like hours, three small words formed in his mind. They were the tiniest of words, but uttering them took more strength and courage than the most powerful incantation.

'I am sorry.'

Severus Snape had apologised only once before in his entire life. He had apologised to Lily the day he had pushed her away. It seemed fitting that he would now be apologising to Morgaine, since he had mistreated her in the same cruel way, since he had pushed her away, too.

When she didn't answer, he felt panic rise in his chest. Lily had never accepted his apology. What if Morgaine didn't either? What if she, too, turned from him?

In a desperate attempt to get her attention, he grabbed her shoulders. He felt her stiffen at his touch, but he didn't let go.

'Morgaine, please, forgive me.'

'Give me a reason, Severus. Just one.'

'I ...' Why was this so hard?

Then Morgaine turned to face him. Her eyes met his, and Severus shivered. He knew the look in those blue eyes. It was pleading for answers he couldn't give.

He remembered the first time Morgaine had looked at him that way. He had shared his innermost secrets with her that night, but he hadn't been ready to tell her then just how much she meant to him.

He felt his eyes fill with tears, tears he would never allow to run down his cheeks. He was afraid, so afraid.

'I cannot lose you, Morgaine. You are all I have left.'

'Then stop pushing me away, Severus.'

She could have hated him right now, she could have turned from him. But she kept the promise she had given years ago and stayed by his side.

Severus had no words left. He pulled Morgaine into his arms and buried his face at her shoulder. When he felt her hands on his back, he thankfully sank into her embrace. He knew that he had been forgiven.

How long they stood there by the window, Severus did not know, but when Morgaine asked him to stay the night, he didn't have to think. It didn't matter that they were at Grimmauld Place. It didn't matter that the house was filled with people he didn't like or even despised. Potter, Black, Lupin, none of them was of any importance right now. The only person that mattered that night was Morgaine.

It wasn't the first night they spent together, but they were careful like first-time lovers. Every touch, every kiss, every embrace felt like a promise of eternal love. They both



gave as much as they had to give. There were no secrets that night, no boundaries.

Severus wanted the night to last forever. Never again did he want to forget the feeling of Morgaine's fingers on his skin, the taste of her lips, the scent of sandalwood and honey.

She fell asleep in his arms shortly before dawn, but Severus didn't close his eyes. He couldn't bear the thought that she, once more, would be gone when he opened them again. So he held her close, listening to her heartbeat.

Why was he so afraid? Why did he not dare believing? Why did he not dare telling her that he loved her? She had given him her trust years ago. She had promised that she would never leave his side. And she had proven so many times, that she had meant it.

But still, he was afraid that one day, she would turn from him and that he would not have the words to change her mind.

~ ~ ~

*"Those who are afraid of love are afraid of getting hurt," my grandmother once told me. And if anyone had ever been afraid of getting hurt, it was Severus Snape. He had been hurt too deeply to take any risks.*

*I sensed his eyes on me the whole night. And I sensed his fears. I know I should have told him that night. I should have let him know just how much he meant to me. But I did not.*

*I guess that he was not the only one who was afraid of love.*

## XXVII: Daughter of Darkness and Light

*Chapter 27 of 35*

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Thanks to JKR for some amazing characters.

Thanks to Apple Blossom for beta reading.

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### Chapter XXVII: Daughter of Darkness and Light

Oh, blissful Christmas holidays. Severus warmed his cold and aching fingers on his coffee mug and let his gaze wander over the House tables in front of him. They were almost empty. There were only a handful of students remaining at Hogwarts for the holidays, and most wonderful of all Umbridge's chair was empty as well. He wouldn't miss the hag for a single second. That woman certainly had the talent to make him see red with her annoying little coughs and her even more annoying clipboard. Just a couple of weeks ago, he had overheard the Weasley twins discussing methods on how to poison her, and instead of deducting points from Gryffindor, he had crossed his fingers that they would succeed.

But as annoying Umbridge was, she had been the least of Severus' problems that term. He had had more important things to concentrate on: the Dark Lord and Dumbledore had demanded his whole attention.

There had been good days, days when the Dark Lord embraced him and called him his most loyal, most trusted and most valuable servant. On these days, all Severus had to endure were the jealous looks of his fellow Death Eaters and the suspicious looks of his fellow Order members when he returned to Headquarters.

But these days were becoming rare. The Dark Lord was getting more and more frustrated that his plans did not advance according to his wishes, that everything took much longer than he had anticipated, that he had still not been able to get into the Department of Mysteries. And this frustration made him unpredictable. At one moment, he was flattering and praising, and the next he was casting curses, not caring who they hit. But worst were the curses of which he was perfectly sure whom they were directed at. Curses that ripped the mind into pieces, curses that severed the flesh from the bones, curses that made the bravest of men wish he had never been born.

Severus had suffered these curses. He had endured the Dark Lord's icy cold fingers probing around in his mind. He had twitched on the ground, feeling his muscles being torn. He, too, had some days wished that he were dead. But he took it all, the pain, the humiliation. He took all of it, silently, and afterwards, he crawled in the dirt and kissed the hem of the Dark Lord's robe. And when dismissed, he dragged himself back to Dumbledore, his other master.

There were days when Severus wondered if all of this was worth it. There were days when he looked at Potter and wondered however this child would be able to defeat the Dark Lord. There were days when he considered giving in. It would be so easy to die, so easy to let others fight this battle.

But every time *she* looked at him, every time he felt her hand around his when he woke up screaming, every time he felt her fingers brush his hair from his sweaty forehead, Severus promised himself to go on.

Morgaine had been there waiting for him every time he returned. She had been there, right by his side, whenever he had reached out for her. And when he had not been ready, when he had pushed her away, she had simply taken a step back and waited.

Severus put down his coffee mug and looked at her. She, too, was clutching a cup and looked extremely tired. She had spent the night at Grimmauld Place, looking after the Weasley children as they were waiting for news of their father. She had returned to Hogwarts shortly before dawn. She couldn't have gotten more than an hour or two of sleep. But still, she smiled at him when she noticed him looking, and Severus smiled back shyly.

Then the owls arrived. For a moment, Severus stared at the dark green envelope that had landed on his plate, wondering who would send him a Christmas card. But when he picked it up, he recognised the slender handwriting at once: the letter was from Lucius Malfoy and surely contained the invitation to his famous New Year's Ball. Severus had been invited every year since Draco had come to Hogwarts, but he had only attended once. And that evening was not a memory he was too fond of.

'Now that was a surprise.'

Severus looked up from his letter to face Morgaine. She, too, was holding a dark green envelope in her hand.

'I see you have received an invitation to the Malfoys' New Year's Ball as well,' he pointed out.

'What is he playing at?' Morgaine stuffed her invitation back into the envelope. 'Lucius Malfoy hates me.'

Severus cocked an eyebrow. 'Lucius Malfoy never does anything without an ulterior motive. I am sure he has his reasons for inviting you.'

He saw Morgaine rub her wrists. She had not spent a very pleasant New Year's night at Malfoy Manor either.

'Well, I am not going,' she said as she slammed the letter onto the table.

'Yes, you are, my child.' Dumbledore's voice made Severus spin around. 'As a matter of fact, I want you both to go.'

'With all due respect, Dumbledore, you cannot give me orders in this manner.' Morgaine's voice was cold, just as it always was when she and Dumbledore were talking about private matters. And Severus wondered whatever had made her so bitter against her great-grandfather.

'No, I cannot,' Dumbledore replied. 'In that case, let me ask you a favour, my child. Accompany Severus to Malfoy Manor. Stand by his side, and make Malfoy believe that he is getting what he wants.'

Severus saw Morgaine's teeth gnaw at her lip. Dumbledore sure knew how to pull her strings. He knew perfectly well that standing by Severus' side was the one thing Morgaine would never refuse.

~ ~ ~

Nobody could ever have guessed that Morgaine and Lucius Malfoy were anything but best friends, if not more. Lucius had greeted her and Severus already in the hall, kissing Morgaine's hand, flattering her, and she had played along, smiling. Now, she was sitting beside Lucius at the dinner table while Severus sat opposite her, Narcissa Malfoy at his side. Severus never took his eyes off Morgaine. He had an uneasy feeling in the pit of his stomach. He was convinced that something was going to happen that New Year's night.

When the gentlemen went to the library for cigars and brandy, Severus went along, hoping that Morgaine would be safe with Narcissa. But as soon as the library door closed behind him, and he noticed that Lucius was not in the room with them, he realised that neither of them would be safe that night.

Macnair's spell hit him right in the chest, and he fell to the floor, gasping for air. He was dragged up by Crabbe and Goyle. There was no point in struggling: they held his arms in an iron grip.

'Some of us had a bet going, you see,' Macnair said in a drawling voice. 'Not many of us believed that you would have the guts to show up here tonight. I knew you would, though. I have to thank you, Severus. Thanks to you I made some Galleons tonight.'

The thanks consisted of another spell that made Severus' body shake. If Crabbe and Goyle hadn't been holding him up, he would have hit the floor once again.

'Tell us, Severus,' Macnair went on, 'why are you here tonight? Which of us are you spying on tonight?'

Then the door opened and in came Lucius, holding a struggling Morgaine by her arm. Severus felt a chill go down his spine. However was he going to get her out of there?

'Ah, I see you have started without us,' Lucius said in a silky voice. 'Has he talked yet?'

'Of course he hasn't,' Macnair shouted. 'What makes you think that he ever will?'

A cruel smile appeared on Lucius' face. 'It is easy to be brave when it concerns only yourself. But let's see how brave Severus is when it's about someone he cares for.'

He pushed Morgaine away from him and drew his wand, but she was faster. Lucius had either not anticipated her speed or simply supposed that she would not defend herself. Whatever the reason, he looked genuinely surprised when she blocked his spell.

'Tsk tsk tsk, Miss duLac,' he said in a disapproving voice. 'Shield Charms are for children. I expected better from you. Let's try again.'

He fired a second spell at her which she once more blocked.

'No,' Lucius yelled. 'No more Shield Charms.'

He spun around and pointed his wand at Severus. 'Cru...'

'*Sectumsempra.*'

Lucius never got to finish his spell. A deep gash appeared on his wand hand, and he whirled around to stare at Morgaine. She had now lowered her wand and looked shocked.

Severus was staring at her, too. He could not believe it. This could not have happened. Morgaine had not just used a Dark Curse on Lucius Malfoy. He tried to break free from Crabbe's and Goyle's grip, but was unable to.

A second ago, Lucius' face had been contorted by pain, but now there was a triumphant smile on his lips. With his handkerchief pressed against the bleeding cut on his hand, he slowly approached Morgaine.

'Now, now, look at this,' he said in his most silky voice. 'Dumbledore's little angel is using Dark Magic. Seems like we didn't send you to Durmstrang for nothing.'

Severus' eyes darted towards Lucius. What had he just said?

'However, my dear,' Lucius continued. 'I will teach you not to use your spells on me ever again.'

Morgaine never had a chance to react. Lucius' fist made contact with her jaw with a sickening crush. She sank to the floor, dropping her wand. Lucius picked it up in a blink of an eye.

'Birch? I'd expected oak. Dragon heart string, I've heard. Let's see what it can do.'

Once more, Severus tried unsuccessfully to break free from Crabbe and Goyle, but it was no use. All he could not do was watch as Lucius levitated Morgaine's body and suspend it in midair. Her eyes were closed. Obviously, she had been knocked out.

Which spell Lucius was using, Severus didn't know. He just stared helplessly at Morgaine's twitching body. Then her eyes flew open, and the blood in Severus' veins froze to ice. Never before had he seen such horror in her eyes.

'Cease!'

Lucius was thrown off his feet, and Morgaine's body hit the floor with a thud. Severus broke free from Crabbe and Goyle and hurried towards her, pulling her into his arms. She was shaking, and her face was chalky white. Carefully, he helped her to her feet. From the corner of his eye, he saw the Death Eaters around him fall to their knees, and then a shudder went down his spine.

'Rise, my friends.'

Severus jerked up his head. His eyes fell upon the tall, imposing man who had entered the room. The Dark Lord.

Instinctively, Severus shoved Morgaine behind his back, at the same time knowing that it was useless. He had not been able to protect her from Lucius, and he would definitely not be able to protect her from the Dark Lord, who was now towering over the recoiling shape of Lucius Malfoy.

'You should know better than to treat guests like that, my slippery friend,' he said in a smooth tone.

Severus saw spasms chasing through Lucius' body. He didn't even want to know what curse the Dark Lord had just used on the man.

'My child.' The Dark Lord had turned around and was now addressing Morgaine. 'Forgive him. He thought he was serving the greater good. Come, let me have a look at you.' He extended his hand in a welcoming gesture.

Severus' heart skipped a beat, and his hand closed around Morgaine's wrist. No, not her!

Then he felt Morgaine's fingers on his hand. She was freeing herself from his grip. He turned his head to look at her. Her face was still pale but now free of any emotion, she was carrying herself straight. And Severus couldn't do anything but stare at her back when she approached the Dark Lord with determined steps.

A wave of nausea washed over him when he saw the Dark Lord caress Morgaine's cheek with his long, pale fingers.

'Welcome back, Morgaine of the Lake. You are the spitting image of your mother.'

Severus swallowed, a sense of terror filling his mind. The Dark Lord had recognised Morgaine and not just because he had seen her in Severus' mind. He remembered her mother.

'I knew your mother well, my child,' the Dark Lord continued. 'She was a charming witch. Rumour has it that you have charmed my truest servant in a similar fashion.'

He was now holding out his hand towards Severus, beckoning him to approach. 'A word, my friend, in private.'

Severus felt yet another chill go down his spine as the Dark Lord laid his cold hand on his shoulder and pulled him close. They didn't have to leave the room. The Dark Lord's Silencing Charm shut out all unwanted listeners.

'I want to thank you for bringing the child back to us, Severus.'

The Dark Lord's voice made Severus shiver. What did he mean? Severus knew that Morgaine's mother had fled from the Death Eaters when Morgaine had just been a child. But whatever did the Dark Lord mean with *bringing the child back*?

He got the explanation as the Dark Lord continued: 'The child should have been brought up by our kind, but her dear mother was too much of a Gryffindor to let her daughter to be raised by how did Dumbledore put it the Dark Side.' He chuckled. It was a horrible sound. 'You did well bedding her, my friend,' he went on in a most silky tone. 'Not only did you bind her to us, but it will also make the old fool Dumbledore believe that you are definitely his man through and through. Keep her close.'

'My Lord.' Severus bowed, thus acknowledging the Dark Lord's orders.

'My friends, I apologise for having so little time for you,' the Dark Lord was now addressing his Death Eaters. 'There are more urgent matters needing my attention. I am sure that Lucius will see to your well-being as soon as he regains consciousness.'

He turned to leave. On his way out, he stopped at Morgaine's side, once more caressing her cheek with his hand.

'Do enjoy the party, my child.'

And then, he was gone.

Severus wouldn't stay a minute longer. He had to get Morgaine out of there. He reached her with three swift strides, took her by the hand, picked up her wand from the floor and dragged her out of the library, out of the manor.

Her hands were clammy, her whole body was shaking. She had carried herself tall in the library, not showed any emotions, any weakness. But when they had reached the courtyard she sank to her knees and started retching. And Severus just stood by and watched. Something deep inside him kept him from touching her. After a while, he just dragged her up by her wrist. It felt like holding a puppet. There was no will left in her body.

They Apparated directly to Grimmauld Place. The Order would need to know what had happened.

~ ~ ~

They were all gathered in the living room: Dumbledore, Black, Lupin, Tonks, the Weasleys. They, too, had been celebrating New Year's Eve. The children had, fortunately, already been sent to bed.

Lupin immediately rose from his chair when he caught sight of Morgaine. 'By the Gods, what happened?'

It was the first time since they had left Malfoy Manor that Severus actually looked at Morgaine. Her face was chalky white, her pupils dilated with fear. There were bruises forming on her jaw where Malfoy's fist had hit her, and there was still dried blood at the corner of her mouth.

Lupin freed her from Severus' grip and sat her down on a chair.

'The Dark Lord,' Severus began, 'he has recognised her.'

'Did Voldemort do this?' Lupin pointed at Morgaine's bruises. 'Did he touch her?'

Severus shook his head. 'No, that was Malfoy's doing. The Dark Lord ...'

'Enough.' Dumbledore had risen from his armchair. 'Remus, would you please bring Morgaine to her room? Sirius, Molly, Arthur, I need to talk with Severus in private.'

They all left without protesting. But Severus saw the dirty look Black was shooting at him and the terrified look in Molly's eyes. Surely, they were all blaming him for the state Morgaine was in. How could they not? He was blaming himself as well.

When the door had closed, he turned to Dumbledore again. 'Albus, he has recognised her,' he repeated.

'Of course, he has,' Dumbledore answered, his voice unusually cold. 'You have shown her to him in June.'

'No, not like that, Albus,' Severus heard the panicky tone in his own voice, but he did not even try to hide it. 'He knows who she is. He said she looks like her mother.'

Dumbledore absentmindedly stroked his beard. 'So he remembers Jeanne,' he said, more to himself than to Severus. 'What more did he say?'

'He thanked me for bringing her back and congratulated me for bedding your great-granddaughter,' Severus said in a mocking tone. 'He thinks it is one of my tricks to make you believe I am on your side.'

Dumbledore nodded. 'Of course. Tom would never understand that you might actually love her.'

The minutes ticked by, and Dumbledore did not speak anymore. He was just standing there, stroking his beard. Severus felt his temper rising. What was it Dumbledore knew and didn't disclose?

'What did he mean when he welcomed her back, Albus? I demand to be told the truth now.'

'Morgaine was supposed to be brought up by Death Eaters.'

'Yes, he mentioned that,' Severus said, an awful suspicion suddenly creeping into his mind.

'She was meant to be used against me,' Dumbledore continued in his annoyingly calm voice. 'Voldemort must have thought that a child that combined the Dark and the Light would give him access to me.'

'And you knew this?' Severus' voice actually cracked 'How could you let this happen, Albus? How could you let me take her to Malfoy Manor?'

'There was no point in delaying it any longer, Severus. Sooner or later, Voldemort would have come looking for her. It was better that way.'

'Better that way? Better that way? Albus, what ... I ...' Severus' horror rendered him incoherent for a second. 'Why, Albus? Why?'

But Dumbledore just raised his hand, and Severus knew that there was no point in asking any more questions. The old man would not disclose any more.

'Go and take care of her, Severus. She needs you now, more than ever.' And with these words, Severus was dismissed.

Fortunately, he didn't meet anyone on his way up to Morgaine's room. He didn't feel like talking to anybody right now.

He found Lupin sitting on a chair beside Morgaine's bed, holding her hand. He was grateful to see no trace of blame or hatred on Lupin's face. He had had enough of that this night.

'She just fell asleep,' Lupin said in a hushed voice as he rose from his chair. 'She has been asking for you, Severus. Will you stay with her tonight? She should not be alone when she wakes up.'

Severus nodded silently, sat down on the now empty chair and watched Lupin leaving the room. It was the first time that he didn't feel any resentment for that man.

'Thank you, Remus,' he said in such a low voice that he wasn't sure if Lupin would even hear him.

But Lupin had heard him. He did not, however, turn around. He just raised a hand in acknowledgement and then silently left the room. And Severus never got to see the unshed tears that were glistening in his eyes.

'Do you still hate him, Severus?'

Severus stared at Morgaine in surprise. 'I thought you were asleep,' he said.

'I didn't want Remus to worry too much.' She sat up in the bed and looked at him. 'Do you still hate him?'

That girl was just amazing. She had just been beaten and tortured, she had just met the Dark Lord, and there she was, wondering whether he and his childhood enemy would ever make up. Severus couldn't help but smile at her.

He reached out and tenderly brushed her cheek with his fingers., and Morgaine grabbed his hand to press it against her face, placing a kiss on his palm.

'I don't want to be here tonight, Severus,' she whispered. 'Take me home. Take me to Hogwarts.'

~ ~ ~

'Welcome back into the fold, my child.'

The Dark Lord's cold voice was echoing in the big room which was dimly lit by thirteen torches that were attached to the walls. Severus knew this place. He had been initiated there. And now, he was standing in the circle of his fellow Death Eaters, terrified, staring at the scene before him.

The Dark Lord was towering tall in front of the altar, his white skin reflecting ghostly in the dark. And kneeling before him, wearing a long black robe, was Morgaine.

'Yes, welcome back, my child. Finally, you have returned.'

'My Lord.' Severus barely recognised her voice. It was raspy, cold.

'Are you ready to pledge alliance to me? Are you ready to take my Mark, Morgaine of the Lake?'

'Yes, my Lord. I am ready.'

Like in slow-motion, Severus saw Morgaine extend her left arm towards the Dark Lord. No, this mustn't happen! He broke the circle, ran towards her and grabbed her shoulders. He had to protect her.

But it was too late. All the light had gone from her eyes, and burnt into her flesh was the Dark Mark. And Severus screamed in agony.

'No!'

He jerked awake. His shirt was sticking to his back, and he could feel the cold sweat of terror on his brow. He sighed in relief. It had been a dream, just a terrible dream. They were not in the initiation chamber. They were in his own quarters at Hogwarts, and Morgaine was sleeping soundly beside him. The Dreamless Sleep Potion he had given her was working perfectly.

He reached out for her and pulled her towards his chest. Her face was pale, her body icy cold. She seemed so little, so fragile.

Severus sighed. What had he done? Why had he ever let her get tangled up in this? Why had he taken her to Malfoy Manor? He had known that something was going to happen. Why had he not stood up to Dumbledore?

*It is not your fault, Severus. You never had a choice. Neither of us had.*

Severus smiled faintly. Even when she was asleep, Morgaine's mind was in tune with his. It was a glorious feeling.

He pulled her closer towards him and buried his face at her shoulder.

'I will protect you, my angel,' he whispered. 'With my very life, if necessary.'

~ ~ ~

On the first of January, Severus awoke to the smell of newly-brewed tea and honey. He sat up to find Morgaine sitting on the rug by the fireplace, a steaming cup in her hands. The flames were reflecting in her eyes, but he doubted that she actually saw them. Her thoughts seemed to be far, far away.

He slipped out of bed and sank to his knees behind her, wrapping his arms around her. For a while, she didn't seem to notice him, but then she let her head fall back against his shoulder.

'Did I wake you?' she asked in a slightly husky voice.

Severus shook his head and pulled her closer to his chest. She felt so cold.

'I wonder if it is snowing.'

He looked at her from the side. She was still staring into the fire but not really seeing it.

'I'd like to go out and run in the snow,' she said. 'I remember running in the snow with my mother when I was little.'

Severus just stared at Morgaine, not really sure what to make of her words. Why would she want to go running in the snow?

He heard her take a deep breath and saw her blink. It was as if she were just waking up from deep slumber. She turned her face and looked at him. There was a sort of serenity in her eyes he had not expected after the night's events. And neither had he expected to see her smile.

'Would you like to go to Hogsmeade today?' she asked. 'Remus and Tonks will be there. We could have lunch with them.'

'If that is what you would like,' he answered, eyeing her with slight concern.

'Yes, that's what I'd like.'

Morgaine was cheerful all day. She made jokes, she laughed, and she nagged Remus about taking out Tonks on a date. Yes, she seemed just as carefree and happy as she always did.

Severus kept in the background, observing her. This was not right. She had one of the worst nights of her life behind her, and there she was, bright and breezy. No, this was not right. But then again, he couldn't picture her sobbing in a corner either.

He kept his eyes on her all day, ready to catch her when she fell, ready to pick up the pieces when her armour crumbled, but nothing happened. The smile on her face reflected in her eyes, and it did not falter.

It was first on their way back to Hogwarts, when they were alone, that Severus dared to ask her. 'Are you alright, Morgaine?'

He saw her bite her lip, but just once, and then the smile was back. 'Yes, Severus, I am fine.'

'Are you sure?'

He gazed intensely at her. Her mind was wide open, and she invited him to join her thoughts. Yes, the dark memories of the last night were there, but they weren't overshadowing her other memories. He saw familiar faces: her grandmother, Lupin, himself. He caught glimpses of Hogwarts, his dungeon, Iceland. And there was the birch tree by the riverbank where they had once spent a whole night just listening to each other's thoughts. No, Morgaine was not going to let the last night's events break her.

'You are strong, Morgaine,' Severus said as he caressed her cheek with his fingertips.

She took his hand into hers and looked into his eyes. 'You know, Severus, the Dark Lord being back doesn't mean that the world will stop turning. People will still die of old age, babies will be born, and people will still fall in love. He is not going to take this from us. Not yet anyway.'

Severus pulled her towards him. All he wanted to do was hold her close, keeping her safe for just one single moment. When he let go of her, she stood tall, and Severus knew that she would fight bravely when the battle arrived.

~ ~ ~

*I had two choices. One was to break down and cry, to tremble in fear and hope that the Dark Lord would never reach out his hand towards me anymore. The other was to stand up and fight.*

*It wasn't really a choice, though. I had seen the Dark Side. I had seen the horrors and even experienced them on my own body. I had seen people suffer and die.*

*But I would not suffer.*

*And if I should die, I would die fighting.*

## XXVIII: To Those Who Fought Bravely

Chapter 28 of 35

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Thanks to JKR for some amazing characters.

Thanks to Apple Blossom for beta reading.

And thanks to you for reading and reviewing.

In this chapter, you will recognise passages from 'Out of the Fire' and 'The Department of Mysteries' (OotP).

### Chapter XXVIII: To Those Who Fought Bravely

'That stupid little brat,' Severus hissed as he stormed into his private study. 'How is he supposed to save the Wizarding world from plummeting into darkness? He cannot even manage to stay out of trouble here at Hogwarts.'

'What has Harry done now?' Morgaine was sitting in the armchair by the fire with a book. There was a slightly annoyed tone in her voice, and Severus wasn't sure if it was because of Potter or his own outburst.

But he had every right to be furious. There he was, trying to protect the boy, and Potter did nothing other than get himself into trouble. Oh, he was so much like his father.

Severus tried to keep his voice calm as he explained what had happened. 'Potter tried to contact Black from Umbridge's office and got himself caught. How dense can one get?'

'Why would Harry want to contact Sirius?' Morgaine asked. The annoyance in her voice had now given way to curiosity.

'He thought the Dark Lord was holding Black in the Department of Mysteries.'

'But Sirius is at Grimmauld Place.'

'I know that, I checked myself,' Severus hissed. 'But Potter doesn't know. And by now, he is surely on his way to London. And so is Black. We need to alert Dumbledore. You will have to send the Wyvern.'

Morgaine never asked why he did not contact Dumbledore himself. She just did as he told her. She always did, she always trusted his judgement.

For a moment, she looked after her Patronus, and then she turned to face Severus. Her eyes locked onto his, and as so many times before, he felt her looking right into his soul. There was a question burning in those blue eyes, Severus could see that clearly. But whatever Morgaine had meant to ask him, she never got a chance, since Dumbledore's response arrived that very moment: 'It is a trap. There are Death Eaters at the Ministry. Alert the Order.'

Morgaine just managed to send away her Patronus a second time, when a searing pain in his forearm made Severus fall to his knees. The Dark Lord was calling.

~ ~ ~

*Everything happened so fast. One minute our biggest problem had been getting Potter out of Umbridge's claws, and the next minute it was time to choose sides. The battle had begun.*

At first, Severus straight-out forbade me to join up with the Order at the Ministry. Then he argued. And in the end, he begged. I saw the fear in his eyes. He did not want me to go. Just as little as I wanted him to answer the Dark Lord's call.

But I had no choice. The choice whether I would fight the Dark Lord had been made years ago. And Severus knew that all too well. Just as well as I knew why he had to stay behind. He could not choose sides in this. He could not risk his position. If he had chosen sides that day, all he had worked for would have been lost. And that was the one thing he could not let happen.

So I left for the Ministry alone, leaving Severus behind. He would have to fight his own battle later, and it pained me to know that he would have to fight it all alone.

~ ~ ~

When the Dark Lord called for the first time, Severus chose not to obey. He knew that the Death Eaters were at the Ministry. He also knew that the Order was there as well. And he knew that he couldn't choose sides, that he mustn't.

So he waited until the Dark Lord called a second time. Then he knew that the battle was over. But he had no idea which side had won.

The first thing Severus felt when entering the library at Malfoy Manor was excruciating pain. Someone had hit him with the Cruciatus Curse. It felt as if his body were being ripped to pieces with red-hot pitchforks. He knew that there was no point fighting. Whoever was casting the spell knew what they were doing. They knew how much he could endure. Every time when he thought that his body could take no more, the curse was lifted slightly, just enough for him to catch his breath, just to hit him with full force again seconds later. Eventually, he passed out anyway.

'You filthy bastard! You son of a blood-traitor!'

Bellatrix's shrill voice was the first thing Severus heard when he came around. So the Death Eaters hadn't been the winners of the battle.

It took him all his self-control to get up from the floor. Every muscle in his body was twitching uncontrollably, but he stood tall, glaring at Bellatrix.

'I gather from your reactions that you have been unsuccessful,' he pointed out in a sneering tone.

He saw Bellatrix's face contort in fury. Her second curse hit him within the blink of an eye, and this time, she made sure that he stayed conscious. He would have to suffer until she was satisfied.

After some agonising minutes, the cold, commanding voice of the Dark Lord made Bellatrix lower her wand. 'Enough!'

Severus was lying on his stomach, panting. When he was able to open his eyes, he realised that the Dark Lord was standing right in front of him. Fighting the excruciating pain in his body, he reached out and kissed the hem of the Dark Lord's robe.

'Leave us alone,' the Dark Lord said. Severus couldn't see the other Death Eaters, but he knew that none of them would defy the Dark Lord. When he heard the door close, he knew that they were alone.

'Get up, Severus.'

With big effort, Severus got to his knees. But his whole body was shaking, and his muscles didn't obey him.

'I command you to get up *now*, Severus Snape.' The Dark Lord's voice was cold and merciless.

Severus grabbed hold of a chair and pulled himself up. When he had found his balance, he lifted his head to look at the Dark Lord. There was no trace of emotion on the snakelike face, but the tremble in his voice gave the Dark Lord away. He was beyond furious.

'You were not at the Ministry, Severus.'

'No, my Lord.'

'I called you. Why did you disobey me?'

'My Lord,' Severus replied. 'I could not risk my position. If I had joined the Death Eaters against the Order ...'

'Enough!' The Dark Lord cut him short. 'I do not need to hear your well-rehearsed story, my slippery friend. For today, I choose to believe you.'

Severus frowned. If the Dark Lord had really had any doubts about his loyalty, he would not have survived this conversation, he knew that. But still, he had a feeling that the Dark Lord knew more than he let on.

'Tell me, Severus, where was Morgaine tonight? Where was Albus Dumbledore's great-granddaughter?'

Severus swallowed dryly. 'She fought with the Order, my Lord.'

He saw the Dark Lord's red eyes flash dangerously, and when the spell hit him, it felt as if he were flayed alive.

~ ~ ~

Severus didn't know how long he had been unconscious, but when he came around, the sun had already set and Malfoy Manor had been abandoned. He dragged himself out of the library, crawled out of the Manor and collapsed on the white gravel outside. His muscles were twitching uncontrollably, and the mere task of producing his wand from his pocket took him several minutes.

He knew the risks. He knew that he could end up splinching himself if he attempted Apparition in his state, but he had to take his chances. If it was the last thing he did in his life, he had to get to Grimmauld Place. Because he knew that the only person he cared for would be waiting for him there.

He did not know how he had managed it, but somehow he had ended up on the doorstep of number twelve. He dragged himself along the hallway, supporting himself against the wall. His muscles had stopped twitching, but the pain in his body was almost unbearable. Several times he considered just giving up, sinking to the floor and dying. But he had to go on. He had to see her.

When Severus reached the kitchen door, he hesitated. He knew that some of the members of the Order had been injured. Bellatrix had even been boasting about having killed somebody. A chill went down his spine. What if he opened this door and Morgaine wasn't there? He had tried to stop her from going. He had not wanted her to fight. But of course, she had not listened. He hadn't expected her to either. He had long known that she would stand up against the Dark Lord and fight. That decision had been made for her years ago. But what if she had not returned from the battle?

He took a deep breath, braced himself for the worst and pushed open the kitchen door.

'Severus!'

Morgaine's voice seemed to light up the room. Within a heartbeat, she came to stand by his side to support him, and Severus let himself fall against her, wondering how he had managed to keep on his feet for so long. She led him to a chair by the table, and he sank down on it gratefully, not sure just how much longer his legs would have supported him.

Morgaine sat down on the chair to his right, placing her left hand comfortingly on his back. With her other hand, she pushed a glass of Firewhisky towards him. Severus felt his stomach lurch at the mere thought of consuming anything.

'Drink, sonny, it will do you good.' Moody's growling voice made Severus raise his head and look at the people around the table. It was just now that he realised how few they were. Moody didn't look any worse than usual, and he didn't seem to have been injured. Neither did Lupin, but his face was ashen, his eyes widened.

'Where are the others?' Severus asked, his voice raspy.

'The Weasleys are with their children. One of them has been injured.' Moody's voice was rough as always. 'Tonks is at St. Mungo's. She'll be fine.'

'And Black?' Severus asked, silently wondering why he even cared.

'Bellatrix got him,' Moody answered. 'He won't be coming back. Gone, dead.'

Lupin burst into tears, and Severus just stared at him, his mind strangely empty. He had wished Black to hell so many times, and now he was dead and Severus felt ... nothing, nothing at all.

He felt Morgaine let go of him, and he followed her with his eyes as she hurried soundlessly towards the other side of the table. She came to a halt behind Lupin and wrapped her arms around the sobbing man. Her chin came to rest on Lupin's shoulder, and for a moment, she closed her eyes. When she opened them again, those blue eyes locked immediately onto Severus' dark ones. He could hear her unasked question.

*How many more are going to die? Which of us will be next?*

He took a deep breath and drained his glass. He didn't have any answers, and right now, he didn't want to know either.

'A toast, my friends.' Moody refilled their glasses and lifted his own. 'To those who fought bravely.'

They toasted and drank. Severus felt the Firewhisky burn in his throat. The alcohol warmed his aching body, but his soul stayed cold, so cold.

For a long time, the four of them were just sitting there, silently, each one absorbed in their own thoughts. Then Moody bade them goodnight and left. Lupin got up as well.

'I'm going to bed.' His voice was so fragile that Severus barely recognised it. 'Will you be staying?' It wasn't a question. Lupin was begging them not to leave him alone that night.

Morgaine nodded. 'We will be at the other end of the corridor. You know where to knock.'

A shudder went through Lupin's body, and he broke out in tears once again. He was sobbing too hard to say goodnight when he left the kitchen.

For several minutes, Morgaine kept staring at the door he had closed behind him. Severus could sense how concerned she was.

'Go, Morgaine,' he said. 'Go, stay with L... with Remus.'

He was surprised at his own words. He had never liked Lupin, but he did know how it felt to lose one's best friend. No one should have to be alone after such a loss.

He felt Morgaine wrap her arms around him. Instinctively, he tensed every muscle in his aching body, but her touch was gentle. He relaxed and pulled her close, and his head came to rest at her chest. He could hear her heartbeat, it was slow and steady, and her body felt warm against his. He wished he could stay in her arms forever, but he knew that he was not the only one in need of her comforting embrace that night.

'I will be fine,' he whispered. 'Go, Morgaine. Remus needs a friend tonight.'

He felt Morgaine's lips brush his forehead and watched her walking towards the door.

'You *will* stay here tonight, won't you?' she asked before she left the room.

Severus just nodded. Yes, he would stay. He had nowhere else to go.

~ ~ ~

He had no idea how long he had been sitting in the kitchen, staring at his empty glass. But when he got up from his chair, the candle on the table had almost burned down.

Every step he took was pure agony, every single muscle in his body hurt as he dragged himself up the stairs. As he stopped on the landing to catch his breath, his gaze was drawn to the half-open door at the end of the corridor. He could see Lupin and Morgaine sitting on the bed. Lupin was sobbing at Morgaine's shoulder, and his whole body was shaking. For a moment, Severus felt jealous, but not because Morgaine had her arms wrapped around Lupin. No, he was jealous of the tears Lupin could shed.

When he entered Morgaine's room, he found that she had already put out a towel and a nightshirt. There was also a bottle of Essence of Dittany with a note attached to it: 'There is a warm bath waiting for you at the end of the corridor.' Severus smiled. She always thought of everything.

Gratefully he sank into the warm water, closed his eyes and deeply inhaled the fumes that rose from the bathwater. He didn't even hear her come in. Suddenly, he just felt her hands on his shoulders. Her touch was warm and comforting, and without opening his eyes, he let his head fall back, enjoying her touch, wordlessly begging for more, knowing that she knew how to ease the pain in his body as well as the pain in his soul.

She dried him off with a soft towel, carefully avoiding the parts where his skin had broken. He couldn't take his eyes off her. Looking at her did to his soul what the Healing Paste did to his wounded body.

Back in her room, he let her tuck him in like a mother tucks in her sick child. He was unspeakably grateful for her tenderness, for her care.

It was first when Morgaine sat down beside him on the edge of the bed that Severus realised how tired she looked. There were dark shadows under her eyes, and her hands were shaking. She had been so strong, so brave. She had given all her strength to those around her, to those who had no strength left of their own.

Severus reached out for her and pulled her down onto the bed. She snuck up against him, and he placed a tender kiss on her forehead. All he wanted was to hold her in his arms.

He buried his face in her hair and inhaled the comforting scent of sandalwood and honey. And suddenly, everything felt so clear, so easy.

'I love you, Morgaine.'

For an instant, he was surprised at how easily the words had come. He had always feared them, never had the courage to say them aloud. And now, they were out, hanging in the room like a silver mist, like the light of a Patronus.

Morgaine didn't stir in his arms. Her breathing had become deep and slow, and Severus figured that she was fast asleep.

He felt tears burn in his eyes. It wasn't fair. He had finally had the courage to tell her how he felt for her, and she hadn't heard him.

But then there was a whisper, almost silent like the wind in the trees.

'I love you too, Severus. I always have.'

He felt her arms encircle his torso and pulled her closer. The lump in his throat prevented him from speaking, and he wordlessly buried his face in her hair. And for the first time in many years, Severus felt tears streaming down his face.

## XXIX: The Most Loyal

*Chapter 29 of 35*

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Thanks to JKR for some wonderful characters.

Thanks to Apple Blossom for beta reading.

And special thanks to Trickle Woo and Memory. You guys know why.

In this chapters you will recognise passages from Rowling's 'The Prince's Tale' (DH). I am only borrowing.

### Chapter XXIX: The Most Loyal

Severus didn't let go of Morgaine all night. The warmth of her body was as comforting as a woollen blanket. And every time she turned in her sleep, every time she moved just an inch, he felt the chill of the night lick his skin and pulled her closer towards him. She was the only one who could warm him now.

His head was filled with hundreds of questions that night: How many more would die in this war? Who would be next? Would he himself survive? Would Morgaine? Would there ever be a peaceful future for them? He didn't have answers to any of those questions, and it was not as much the questions themselves as the lack of answers that



kept him awake. When he finally fell asleep, he was beyond exhausted and slept soundly and dreamlessly.

He awoke shortly after dawn to find the bed sheets beside him empty. But his mind was at ease: for the very first time he didn't panic after having found Morgaine gone. He knew he didn't need to. He knew that she had not gone far. Carefully, he pulled her pillow closer to his face and inhaled the comforting scent of sandalwood and honey. Yes, he knew now that she would always be close to him and that she would never leave him, ever again.

He found her downstairs in the kitchen. She was sitting close to Lupin with her arms wrapped around him. Lupin's body was still shaking with sobs. He looked dreadful, and Severus wondered if the man had slept at all, if he had ever stopped crying.

When he had seen Lupin in Morgaine's arms, Severus had almost expected the familiar sensation of jealousy to wash over him, but to his surprise it never did. Morgaine would always be there for her oldest friend, Severus knew that. And all of a sudden he wondered why it had taken him so many years to accept it. Hadn't he long since known that her heart belonged to him, him alone?

When Lupin noticed Severus, he straightened and wiped his tears away. He even attempted a faint smile which Severus acknowledged with a quick nod. Lupin seemed genuinely surprised to see him at Grimmauld Place so early in the morning, but he didn't say anything. He didn't need to.

They shared breakfast in silence. They had said what had to be said the night before, and they all knew it. There was no point in going over the events at the Ministry once more.

The footsteps in the corridor were the first sound that made any of them take their eyes off their coffee cups. They weren't surprised to see Moody enter the kitchen. The clunking noise of his leg had given him away.

'You all look like crap,' he growled as he helped himself to a cup of coffee. 'Has either of you been to bed at all, or have you spent the night in the kitchen?'

No one answered, and Moody didn't pursue the question but turned to more important matters instead.

'Dumbledore is taking care of Potter, and everybody else is doing alright. The Weasley kids are patched up, and Tonks will be out of St. Mungo's in a couple of days. I am off to see her right now. Anyone care to join me?'

'I would,' Lupin said and rose from his chair.

Moody growled a goodbye and limped out of the kitchen. Lupin hurried to follow him, but when he had reached the door, he stopped and looked back. There was a sad smile on his face.

'I am happy for you two, you know. I really am. We all need some light in these dark times.'

And then he closed the door and left Severus and Morgaine alone in the kitchen.

~ ~ ~

*Remus didn't need to ask. He had known about Severus and me before anybody else had. Ever since that summer on Iceland, he had seemed to know that Severus and I belonged together. Already back then, he had asked me if I was in love. I remember that I had just stared at him back then, not knowing what he was talking about. But he had understood.*

*What if I had understood as well? What if Severus had? What if either of us had had the courage to talk about our feelings back then? Would things have been different?*

*We had wasted so much time, Severus and I. Pride and fear had kept us apart for all those years. Years we could have spent together, years we could have given to each other. Years we would never get back.*

*When the Dark Lord called, Severus left Grimmauld Place and took a piece of my heart with him. And once more, I did not know if he would return.*

~ ~ ~

They never talked about their tasks. Why should they? Morgaine had to carry out her tasks for the Order, just as Severus had to carry out his. They were both in danger, and they both knew it. And there was no point talking about it.

Whenever Morgaine closed the heavy oak door of Severus' private chambers behind her, the world outside disappeared. There was no war, no Dumbledore and no Dark Lord. There was no Order and no Death Eaters. For some stolen hours at night, there were only the two of them, and all that mattered was the love they had to give to each other. Several times, Severus wished that the night would last forever, that he would not have to let go of Morgaine, that she could stay by his side and hold his hand. But dawn always came, quickly and mercilessly.

Before anybody stirred in the castle, Morgaine had to sneak out of the dungeon, leaving her lover behind. No one must know about them. They had decided that it was too dangerous. If Morgaine should ever be caught by Death Eaters, or if Severus should ever fall out of favour with the Dark Lord, it would be best if no one knew about their love, so that it could never be used as a weapon against them.

It was hard to see her go, and every time Severus kissed Morgaine goodbye, he felt the urge to tell her to be safe, to take care of herself. But what good would it do, he wondered. Nobody was safe anymore.

There were days when Severus wished that he could share all his burdens with Morgaine. He knew that she would understand, that she would support him. But she mustn't know. And although it pained Severus immeasurably not being able to be honest with her, he knew that he had to keep her in the dark if he wanted to protect her. The less she knew, the safer she was.

But sometimes, he was afraid that she knew too much already to be ever safe again.

She had been with him the night Dumbledore had returned with Marvolo Gaunt's ring. She had seen her great-grandfather's hand, blackened and burned. And as time had been of the essence, Severus had let her help him prepare the potion which had kept Dumbledore from dying that very night. He was well aware that she knew enough about Dark Magic to know that the ring had carried a powerful curse, and that she knew that Dumbledore's days were numbered.

She did not know, however, that Dumbledore had asked Severus to kill him. She did not know that Dumbledore had asked him to damage his soul beyond repair. She did not know that he soon would be one of the most hunted wizards in Britain.

And she must never know. As much as Severus was thirsting for the strength Morgaine could have given him, he could not tell her. He must not tell her. But it didn't feel right. He did not want to keep secrets from her. He trusted her with his very life, and he knew that she felt the same way about him. But he had no choice: to keep her safe, he had to keep her in the dark.

So he didn't tell her about Dumbledore's plans. And he did not tell her about Narcissa Malfoy's visit to Spinner's End.

~ ~ ~

*Something was not right. I sensed it, but I could not put my finger on it.*

When we returned to Hogwarts in the autumn, Severus was edgier than ever. He seemed troubled, preoccupied, haunted. And it had nothing to do with the Dark Lord calling him several times a week. There was something else, I could sense it.

But since Severus did not say anything, I did not ask. I was not supposed to know about his secret tasks. We had agreed upon that months ago. The less I knew, the less danger I would be in, Severus had said. I was grateful for his consideration, and I understood the reasons behind his decision, but still I wished he would confide in me. I had promised to stand by his side, but this was a hard thing to do, since I never knew in which direction he was going.

Yes, I knew that something was wrong, but I had no idea just how gruesome a task Severus had been given by one of his masters.

~ ~ ~

He had asked for it. Severus had demanded that Dumbledore finally let him in on the secret of Harry Potter. He had demanded to know just how the boy was supposed to bring the Dark Lord down. And finally, Dumbledore had told him and revealed that the boy had to die in order for Voldemort to die. It was either both or none of them.

This was not what Severus had wanted to hear. Had he spied, lied, and put his life in mortal danger over and over again just to see Harry Potter, Lily's son, being brought to the slaughter? Had all been for nothing?

It was almost midnight when Severus returned to his private chambers. He felt betrayed. Dumbledore had promised him that all of this would have a point. He had promised him that by protecting Harry, he would be able to repent, to repay his debt to Lily. And so he had protected her son all these years. He had protected the boy so she would not have died in vain. And now, Dumbledore had told him that all of it had been for nothing, nothing at all. The boy was going to die just as his mother had by the hand of the Dark Lord. And Severus would not be able to protect him anymore. Just as little as he had been able to protect Lily.

He sank onto the armchair by the fireplace and stared blankly into the empty grate. He didn't know what to feel. He was overwhelmed with emotions, but at the same time, there was a strange emptiness inside his chest. Right then and there, he felt like giving up.

He raised his wand and, for the second time that evening, he murmured the incantation: *Expecto Patronum*.

The silver doe enlightened the dungeon like a newly-lit candle. It just stood there, as if grazing, and Severus stared at it, not really knowing why he had called for it.

'I have failed you,' he whispered.

The doe lifted its head and looked at him. For some moments, Patronus and wizard just gazed at each other, silently, and Severus desperately hoped for some comfort. And then, after what felt like hours, he felt a second pair of eyes upon him.

He had not heard her come in. Suddenly Morgaine was standing beside him. There was a sad smile on her face when she held out her hand towards the doe, which approached her cautiously and took in her scent. Morgaine patted it tenderly, and the doe rubbed its nose against her hand. Then it turned its head to look at Severus once more, and disappeared.

'How long have you known, Morgaine?' Severus barely recognised his own voice. It seemed to come from far, far away.

'Does it really matter, Severus?' Her hand with which she had just patted the doe came to rest on his shoulder, and its warmth seeped through his skin and right into his very soul.

Severus lifted his head and looked at the woman he loved. He could have sworn that there were tears glistening in her blue eyes.

'How long have you known, Morgaine?' he repeated his question.

'I have only guessed. Since you have always avoided using your Patronus, I figured its shape was something you did not want anyone to see.'

She knelt down in front of him and took both his hands into hers. And her blue eyes locked onto his dark ones as so many times before.

'Since the day you opened your mind to me for the first time, I have known that there was something hidden deep inside you, Severus. Something that you would never overcome. Something that would be there forever, as part of your soul.'

Severus saw her blink back the tears that had been hanging on her lashes. She would not cry, he knew that. At least not as long as he could see it. She never did.

'Are you disappointed?' he asked. Still his voice wasn't much more than a whisper.

'Disappointed at what, Severus? At you being the man you are? At you being the most loyal person I have ever known?'

A shudder went through Severus' body, and he felt Morgaine's hands tighten their grip around his. He found it hard to breathe. His throat was tight, and his chest seemed to sit in a giant vice. He had to let it all out.

'I let her down. I carried the prophecy to the Dark Lord, and he killed her. And I could not protect her.'

'No, Severus, you did not let her down. The Dark Lord chose to apply the prophecy to the Potters. You could not have known.'

Morgaine's voice was calm, but Severus knew that there were just as many emotions raging in her heart as there were in his. But she would not show it. Not tonight, not ever, Severus knew that.

'Lily did not die because of you, Severus,' Morgaine continued. 'You did all you could with the little means you had been given. It was not your fault. Lily died because she was a pawn in this great game of wizard's chess. Just a pawn, like you and I.'

Severus felt cold. Just as cold as he had felt the night Lily had died. He turned his head and stared into the darkness. 'Will the pain ever go away?' he whispered.

Morgaine brought her hand to his chin and made him look at her again. He stared into her blue eyes and wished they were an enchanted lake in which he could drown and forget his sorrow.

'No, Severus,' she replied. 'It will never go away. It is part of who you are. This is a burden you will have to carry for the rest of your life. And you will have to carry it alone. But remember that I will always be there to carry *you*.'

He sank to his knees beside her and buried his face at her shoulder. There were tears burning in his eyes, but he blinked them back, just as she had. Morgaine had been strong for him, and he would have to be strong for her.

He knew that she must be hurting. How could she not? She had stood by his side for years. She had suffered with him, for him and even because of him. And now she had seen that he still carried Lily in his heart.

Yes, Lily was still there, and she would probably always be. He had loved her dearly, and he still did, but her ghost would never be able to give him what he needed to go on: a glimpse of hope for the future, a hand in the dark. But Morgaine could give him that. And Severus knew that she would not let him down.

~ ~ ~

*Yes, I had known. From the first time Severus had opened his mind to me, I had known that Lily was still in his heart. Just as she had been since the day he had met her. After all these years, she was still there, haunting him.*

*Severus had loved Lily dearly, and although she had rejected him, abandoned him when he had needed her the most, he still felt like he owed her his loyalty. He still felt responsible for her death, and he would never forgive himself. The suffering would forever be part of his soul.*

*Yes, I had known. But until the very moment I saw the doe, I had hoped, prayed, that Severus' Patronus would have another shape. But it had not, and I had to accept it. I would lie if I said that I wasn't jealous. I would lie if I said that it did not hurt. And I would lie if I said that I did not think it unfair.*

*I had been there for Severus since the first time he had reached out his hand for me in the dark. He never had to go looking for me. When he needed me, I was there, whatever it took. And still, he held her in his heart.*

*Yes, I was angry that night. Angry with Severus for not being able to let go. Angry with Lily for turning away from him when he had needed her the most. And angry with myself for not telling him how much it hurt.*

*But how could I have told him? How could I have asked him to let go? Whatever he had felt for Lily had made Severus into the man I had fallen in love with, the man to whom I had promised that I would never leave his side. How could I ask him to cast away part of himself?*

*Yes, I was jealous, and I was hurt, and I did not think that it was fair. But I was not disappointed, because I had long since known that Severus still kept Lily in his heart. And I had never expected any less of him. Because Severus Snape had always been the most loyal of us all.*

## XXX: Comfort and Strength

*Chapter 30 of 35*

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Thanks to JKR for creating the HP universe.

Thanks to Apple Blossom for beta reading.

And thanks to you for reading and reviewing.

In this chapter, you will recognise passages from 'The Lightning-Struck Tower', 'Flight of the Prince' (HBP) and 'The Prince's Tale' (DH). I am only borrowing.

### Chapter XXX: Comfort and Strength

How long they had been kneeling on the cold stone floor, Severus did not know. Time had not mattered that night. All that had mattered was that Morgaine was still there, holding him tight in her arms.

He had not expected her to. For some terrifying moments, he had been convinced that seeing his Patronus had been too much for her, that he had finally managed to hurt her enough to make her turn from him. And if she had walked away that night, he would not have had the words to hold her back. How could he have asked her to stay after she had seen that he still held Lily in his heart?

But he had not needed to ask anything of Morgaine. She had held him in her arms the whole night. And he had once more wondered how he had deserved her devotion. Unconditionally, she had stood by his side, never questioning, never judging. She had picked him up when he lay shattered on the floor. She had kept him warm during those nights when his very soul seemed to be frozen to ice. She had given him strength. She had given him hope.

Every time he had looked at her that night, every time she had smiled at him, his soul had filled up with a sort of warmth he had never felt before. But just moments later, he had felt his heart freeze to ice. Soon, far too soon, he would have to do things which would seem to her as if he were betraying her trust. Far too soon he would once more have to hurt her.

And that day would come far sooner than he had expected.

~ ~ ~

There wasn't a cloud in the sky when Severus left the Great Hall for the dungeons after dinner, but he could sense a storm coming. He heard the distant rumbles of thunder and saw the surface of the lake ripple dangerously. He knew that there was a fateful night ahead.

Dumbledore had left the castle at sunset, taking Harry Potter with him. And shortly before leaving, he had called Severus to his office. And Severus had known that it was time. Time to fulfil the promise he had given Dumbledore almost a year ago. Time to throw away any hope of peace he had ever had.

'Stay awake tonight, Severus,' Dumbledore had said. 'I'm afraid I am going to need you.'

And Severus had just nodded, silently.

Now, just hours later, he was standing in his office, staring at the empty grate of the fireplace, contemplating the situation at hand.

Yes, it was time. The moment he had dreaded all those months had finally come. And he wished that he had never agreed to this. He had done many despicable things in his life. He had lied, tortured, killed. He had sinned beyond repent, but the sin Dumbledore had asked him to commit was the only one he did not want to have on his conscience. Because committing it meant betraying the trust of the only one he had ever truly loved.

Once more, he looked around his office. Yes, he had thought of everything. Everything was prepared, all loose ends were tied up. He had even graded every last Defence Against the Dark Arts essay. What a waste of time, actually. What student would want to receive a grade from one of the most wanted wizards in Britain? But Severus

Snape had always taken any of his tasks very seriously, and he would not give up that habit now.

Yes, everything was prepared. The protective spells around his quarters would activate themselves the moment he left the castle. Not that there was anything within these walls that would be of interest to anybody. He just did not like the thought of Aurors tearing apart his private possessions.

What made him sit down at his empty desk again, Severus did not know, and for a moment, he just stared blankly at the parchment in front of him, not knowing what to write, not knowing where to begin. He could not tell Morgaine the truth, he mustn't. Her knowing the truth would put her in tremendous danger. But still, he felt the need to leave her with *something*.

No, he did not know where to begin, but once he had written her name, the words suddenly came, and the quill moved over the parchment as if of its own accord.

*Morgaine,*

*When you read these lines, beloved, you will be alone. And I will either be dead or on the run. When you read these lines, I will have hurt you, once again. And I am unspeakably sorry.*

*I wish I could explain the reasons to you. I know you would understand. You always do. But I must not. Me telling you would put you in danger, beloved, and that is the one thing I am not willing to risk.*

*It is almost midnight. You will soon come and see me. I know you will. You always do. You always come when I need you. Sometimes, you know before I do.*

*What is it that makes you come back? I have never understood how I have come to earn your trust, your support. I fear that I never will. But I thank you for it.*

*Yes, you will soon come and see me, beloved, and I am hoping that you will hold my hand, comfort me and give me your strength, as you have done so many times before. And a part of me is hoping that you will wait for me, that you will be there for me should I ever come back. But how can I ask this of you? How can I put this burden upon you, beloved? What I am about to do tonight will make you hate me, and I cannot demand of you to love me after this.*

*How many times have I hurt you, beloved? How many times have I pushed you away? And how many times have you forgiven me? They are far too many to count. And I cannot comprehend that you are still here. But I am indescribably grateful for it.*

*I know that the words I have written will not comfort you at all. But I hope that in time, you will find it in your heart to forgive me, just once more.*

*I never meant to hurt you, my love.*

*Forever yours, devotedly,*

*Severus*

Then there was a knock on the door, and for a moment, Severus stared at the parchment in front of him, hesitating. How could he ask this of her? How could he ask Morgaine to forgive him? How could he ask her to continue to stand by his side? It was not fair of him to ask anything of her. Maybe, it would be more humane to let her believe that he actually was a cold-blooded murderer, that he had deceived her. That way, she would be able to hate him, and consequently, to let go. She had suffered enough.

It did not take more than a flick of his wand to ignite the parchment. And by the time Morgaine entered his office, all there was left were smouldering ashes.

~ ~ ~

'You've tidied up, I see,' Morgaine said, looking around his office.

All the books were in their place, all the phials on the shelf sealed and labelled. For a moment, Severus saw her eyes linger on the pile of ashes that was lying on his otherwise empty desk, and he detected a frown on her brow. Then she looked up at him, and their eyes locked, as so many times before.

'You'll be leaving tonight.' This was not a question. She was stating a fact. She knew.

Severus nodded. Would Morgaine ever look at him like that again, he wondered. Or would her eyes, her beautiful blue eyes, be filled with hatred and disgust the next time they looked upon him?

'I will be waiting for you, Severus,' she said, her voice firm and warm. 'When you return, I will be here, right by your side.'

He sighed almost inaudibly. He had heard these words before. She had kept her promise then, and he desperately hoped that she really *would* be there when if he returned this time. But deep inside his heart, he feared that what he had to do that night would be too much to forgive, even for her.

He wanted to tell her to stay in the dungeons until everything was over; he wanted her to stay out of harm's way, but he knew that it was no use. For a moment, he even considered Stupefying her or locking her up in his office, but he decided against it. When the Death Eaters entered the castle, Morgaine would want to fight. She would want to defend her students, her colleagues, her home. And he had no right to prevent her.

'Morgaine, stay down here tonight,' he started. 'Whatever happens ...'

He never got to finish telling her why he wanted her to stay in the dungeons. Suddenly the office door flew open and Professor Flitwick came sprinting in.

'Death Eaters. Death Eaters in the castle,' he yelled. 'You must come. We need you.'

So it was time.

Severus turned slowly towards his flustered colleague. 'Filius,' he said in the imperative tone he normally reserved for his students when warning them about poisonous potion ingredients. 'I need you to stay here.'

'Stay here? Stay here?' Flitwick squeaked. 'Severus, did you not understand me? There are Death Eaters in the castle. We have to fight them.'

He was already on his way out of the office again when Severus' spell hit him in the back, and he collapsed face first on the cold stone floor.

Severus reached him with three swift strides and turned him onto his back. 'I am sorry, Filius. But this seems to be the only way to keep you down here, out of danger.'

Then he straightened and looked at Morgaine. He saw the confusion in her eyes. But at the same time, he knew that she understood why he had just attacked his colleague.

'I suppose there is no use in telling you to stay down here,' he stated.

She shook her head. 'No, Severus, there isn't. And you are not going to Stupefy me either.'

No, he wasn't. Morgaine was needed up there. *He* needed her.

One last time, Severus let his fingers caress her cheek while his thumb slipped down over her nose to her lips. With his hand under her chin, he pulled her face towards his and placed a last, tender kiss on her lips.

'Forgive me,' he whispered and without looking back he swept out of the dungeons, up to the Astronomy Tower, not sure if Morgaine had heard his apology.

~ ~ ~

*The air was filled with electricity, and I imagined hearing the thunder rolling in from over the hills. The power that hung in the air that night made my skin tingle. Great things were about to happen. Horrendous things, but great nonetheless.*

*I watched Severus sweep out of the dungeons, his robes billowing behind him. What task he had to carry out that night, for which master, I did not know. But I knew that he did not want to go.*

*I let Hermione and Luna take care of Filius and charmed the door shut behind me as I left the dungeons. It would even take Hermione a while to get out of there. Three people out of harm's way. Severus would have liked that.*

*As I followed in his wake, I once more heard Dumbledore's words ringing in my ears. He had called me to his office the very same morning:*

*'Whatever Severus does, whatever the world sees him as, promise me that you will be there for him. Promise me that one thing, Morgaine.'*

*What Dumbledore had meant, I did not know then, and it was a promise he had no right to ask of me.*

*Yes, I would be there, but not because Dumbledore had asked me to. I would be there to ease the pain that my family had inflicted on Severus Snape.*

~ ~ ~

Severus quickly assessed the situation as he arrived on the ramparts. There were three Death Eaters and Fenrir Greyback, the werewolf. There was Draco Malfoy, pale as a ghost, shaking and clutching his wand. And there was Albus Dumbledore, slumped against the wall, dying.

Severus did not need to ask where Harry Potter was. The hatred that radiated from the boy made the hair on his neck stand up. Yes, he knew Potter was there, under his Invisibility Cloak, and obviously Dumbledore had immobilised him just in time. Good, Severus thought. That way, the boy would be out of harm's way, at least for a while.

His eyes darted back to Draco. He would not be able to do it, Severus knew that. The boy was no murderer. And even if he were, Severus would not allow him to kill. He had promised to protect the boy's soul.

'Severus.'

Dumbledore's voice was barely audible, but it was loud enough to send chills down Severus' spine.

*Is this how you imagined it, Albus?*

If he had spoken the question aloud, his voice would have been filled with endless hatred, Severus was well aware of that. But he could not feel sorry for the old man who was lying in front of him, not anymore.

'Severus, please.'

*Do you know how much I hate you for this, old man?*

When his dark eyes locked onto Dumbledore's blue ones, Severus felt a stab in his heart.

*She has your eyes, you know.*

And then Severus fired the spell that sent Dumbledore to his death and himself straight to hell.

~ ~ ~

Draco felt like a puppet in his hands as Severus forced him down the stairs. The boy could not have understood what just had happened. Severus himself was not sure if he did.

He had known that this moment would come eventually. He had known that he would have to be the one to kill Albus Dumbledore. But now that the deed was done, it felt utterly absurd. He had never been asked if he wanted to carry this burden. Dumbledore had just said that he had to, that he was the only one who could do it. And he had not even tried to talk himself out of it. He had just accepted the task, hoping that it was the right thing to do.

When they arrived at the bottom of the spiral staircase, the battle was raging before them. Hexes were thrown, spells were blocked. People were shouting, and there was the smell of blood in the air. Severus could make out McGonagall, Lupin, one of the Weasleys.

And then he saw Morgaine, on the far end of the corridor, where she had just brought a Death Eater down. And as if she had sensed him, she turned her head in Severus' direction, and her blue eyes met his. Blue eyes. Dumbledore's eyes.

She had only looked at him for a split second, but it had been enough for her opponent to find the wand he had dropped and point it at her. She ducked in the very last moment, and the spell hit the ceiling which collapsed with a deafening crush.

She had not even time to scream. And as much Severus wanted to run to her, he knew that he could not.

## XXXI: Farewell, My Friend

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Thanks to JKR for creating the HP universe.

Thanks to Apple Blossom for beta reading.

And thanks to you for reading and reviewing.

In this chapter, you will recognise passages from Rowling's 'The Phoenix Lament' and 'The White Tomb' (HBP). I'm only borrowing.

### **Chapter XXXI: Farewell, My Friend**

*I learnt about Dumbledore's death in the hospital wing, where I had woken up with a pounding headache and my right leg in a cast. And that had seemed odd, because normally Poppy mended broken bones in a heartbeat. Hence, a cast could only mean two things: that the injury was very serious or that something more urgent had distracted her. It was the latter.*

*I heard voices coming from the other side of the curtains that were hanging around my bed. Remus was there. He was talking about Bill. I didn't really understand what he was saying. Had Bill been injured?*

*Then I heard Ginny. 'Dumbledore's dead,' she said. But everything was fuzzy, and my brain did not seem to process the information properly. Dumbledore dead? But how? Why?*

*And then it was as if somebody had lifted the mist I had been drifting in, and Harry Potter's words reached my ears loud and clear: 'Snape killed him.'*

*It felt as if all the strength was leaving my body. If I hadn't been lying down already, I would have collapsed. This couldn't be true. Severus could not have done that. Severus could not have killed Albus Dumbledore. Dumbledore had trusted him. I had trusted him. Severus was on our side. This was wrong. Terribly wrong.*

*'Snape was a highly accomplished Occlumens,' Remus said.*

*Yes, he was. The best. He had even managed to fool the Dark Lord. Had he fooled us all? Had he fooled me?*

*I felt betrayed. Had I, all these years, supported a liar? Had I been misled? Had I given my heart to a cold-blooded killer?*

*I barely heard what the people on the other side of the curtains were discussing. The mists had entrapped me again, and I seemed to be drifting away. Far, far away, to a place where all of this was not true.*

*When I heard Remus approach my bed, I closed my eyes and pretended to be asleep. I did not want him to see my tears.*

~ ~ ~

Severus entered the little cottage and put down the basket on the table. The Scottish moors had provided him with all the herbs and plants he needed for his potion. But he wouldn't have to start it for another two hours. This potion was best brewed after midnight.

Once more, he stepped outside and sat down on the stone bench beside the door. The moon was barely visible for the fog, and there was not a single sound to be heard. Dumbledore had certainly picked a beautiful place for him to hide, Severus thought. Nobody would find him there. The cottage was Unplottable, and not even the Dark Lord knew of its whereabouts.

He had been hiding there for a couple of days now. He had come there directly after he had returned Draco to his mother. What would happen to the boy, he did not know. And for the time being, he did not care either.

He had not slept more than an hour or two since he had arrived at his hiding place. He had not even bothered to lie down on the bed. He knew that every time he closed his eyes, those blue eyes would haunt him. And he was not even sure if they were Dumbledore's or Morgaine's.

Dumbledore was dead, he knew that. But what about Morgaine? The last time he had seen her, she had just dodged a Killing Curse that had been directed at her. And then the roof had collapsed. And he had not had time to look back.

Severus buried his face in his hands. She must still be alive. If not, he would surely have felt it in his heart. *But she was dead, if she was gone when he returned to Hogwarts, if she was not there to stand by his side, how would he ever be able to go on? Who would give him strength? Who would hold his hand in the dark? Who would give him hope?*

But there was no point pondering questions to which there were no answers. Slowly, Severus got up and went inside to sort the ingredients for his potion. He knew very well what risks he was taking. If anyone detected him, if he got caught, he would be brought directly to Azkaban and receive the Dementor's Kiss within the hour. But he had no choice. He had to get to Hogwarts.

When the clock struck midnight, he added the first ingredient to the cauldron. The potion would be finished the day of Dumbledore's funeral.

~ ~ ~

The day of Dumbledore's funeral dawned peacefully, even in the Scottish moors. Calmly, Severus chopped the last ingredients and added them to the dark green potion in front of him. Three clockwise stirs, three taps on the rim of the cauldron, and it was done.

For some moments, he just stared at the potion. It was a great risk, and Dumbledore would not approve, Severus knew that. He was risking everything. If he got caught, Harry Potter would stand alone, and all they had worked for would have been for nothing. But to hell with it, all of it.

He filled a goblet with the potion and toasted towards the skies. 'To you, Dumbledore. To you and your schemes.'

The potion tasted of liquorice and peppermint, and it worked immediately. After only a few seconds, Severus looked down over a black beak instead of his hooked nose, and as he held out his arms, he did not lift his flapping coat but two black wings. The transformation had been successful.

He hopped towards the open window, spread his wings and took flight towards Hogwarts. And anyone who spotted him would see nothing but a black raven.

~ ~ ~

It was the most wonderful of views. The Hogwarts grounds were bathing in golden sunlight, and the colour of the lake was the most magnificent green Severus had ever seen. Yes, Hogwarts had always seemed beautiful to him, but that day, it seemed more magical than ever.

He settled on a branch and carefully folded his wings. The tree he had chosen was at the very edge of the Forbidden Forest. If necessary, he would be able to retreat into the darkness of the forest in a blink of an eye, and still he was close enough to the lake to be able to oversee the funeral.

He let his gaze wander over the people who had already taken their seats. It was the strangest mix of people one could imagine, but they were all there for the same reason: to take farewell of one of the greatest wizards of all times.

There were the students of Hogwarts. Severus was pleased to see that even the Slytherins looked moved, some even shaken. After all, Albus Dumbledore had loved Slytherin House just as much as Gryffindor, Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff.

There were the teachers of Hogwarts and the ghosts. There were friends and acquaintances of Dumbledore. And there were the members of the Order of the Phoenix: Arthur Weasley with his arm around his beloved Molly, Bill Weasley supported by his bride-to-be, and Remus Lupin and Tonks, holding hands. Severus could not help but smile sadly as his eyes lingered upon them. What had Morgaine said?

*People will still die of old age, babies will be born, and people will still fall in love. The Dark Lord is not going to take this from us.*

It was true. He could see the proof down there below him. And again, Severus smiled. Dumbledore would have loved to see this. He had always said that love was a precious gift, not to be cast aside but to be treasured.

He let his eyes wander towards the front row. Of course Morgaine would be standing there, right beside the enwrapped body. She was next of kin to Albus Dumbledore, heiress to his name. She was deadly pale which made the dark shadows under her eyes even more evident. There was a deep cut under her right eye, and Severus wondered why she had not bothered to heal it with magic. But despite her paleness, despite the ugly cut, Morgaine looked beautiful to him. Her robe was of the darkest green velvet, and her hair was shimmering in the same golden-red tone he had adored so many times in front of his fireplace in the dungeons. And around her neck, she wore the Witch's Star and the Wyvern.

Severus swallowed. The Wyvern. Why was she still wearing it? Was it out of sheer habit? Or was it actually possible that Morgaine stood by his side while the rest of the Wizarding world considered him to be a traitor, a cold-blooded murderer? Dared he believe? Dared he hope?

When the white flames erupted around Dumbledore's body and everybody stared at the spirals of smoke, Severus saw Morgaine avert her eyes, and for the tiniest of moments, he thought that she looked at him. And for the duration of a single heartbeat, he felt the familiar feeling of her thoughts brushing his. But it could not be. She could not have seen him, and if she had, he would have to turn away. If he stayed, he would not only put his own safety at risk but hers as well.

He stretched out his wings and took flight. High up in the sky, he circled thrice over the white tomb of Albus Dumbledore, saying goodbye to his old friend. And then, without looking back, he flew off towards the little cottage somewhere in the Scottish moors.

~ ~ ~

He was ripped out of his uneasy slumber by a humming sound. Wand drawn, Severus jumped out of the chair he had been sitting in and scanned the room, momentarily at a loss about where the humming came from. Then his eyes came to rest on the emerald glass cube on the mantelpiece, and suddenly he was wide awake: somebody had entered his private chambers at Hogwarts.

He had put protective spells on his door years ago. Not many wizards or witches were able to get around them at all. And in case somebody did, he had bewitched the mirror opposite the door. If someone entered his office, the emerald cube on the mantelpiece in his hiding place would show him whoever it was and what they were doing.

With three swift strides, he reached the mantelpiece and picked up the cube. Indeed, the door to his office stood open. But whoever had entered it had already passed the mirror, and hence he couldn't see them. But he could hear them. He heard soft footsteps on the stone floor, the rustle of robes, and then she came into focus. He should have known that it was Morgaine. She had long known which spells he had used to protect his chambers, and she could enter without blasting the door apart.

What was she doing there? She wasn't opening any drawers, so she couldn't be looking for something. Instead, she was just pacing the room, looking slightly lost.

Then Lupin appeared in the doorway.

'I thought I might find you here, kitten,' he said in a soft voice. 'You shouldn't be down here alone.'

When he reached out for her to place his hand on her shoulder, Morgaine shrank away and disappeared from Severus' sight once more, leaving Lupin standing alone in front of the mirror. Again, Severus could hear her pacing the room.

'What are you looking for, Morgaine?' Lupin asked.

'Shattered dreams and dusty memories.'

The sound of Morgaine's voice made Severus' heart ache. It was filled with tears, and Severus knew that they were tears of disappointment. She must feel as if he had let her down.

'What do you think happened on the top of the Astronomy Tower?' Lupin asked.

'I don't know, Remus. And I do not want to know.'

'What do you mean, you don't want to know?'

Her voice was trembling when she spoke. 'What is the point of me knowing, Remus? If what Harry says is true, then Severus Snape is loyal to the Dark Lord, and I will never forgive him for betraying my trust. And if he is innocent, then I have no means to prove it.'

There was a pause, and Severus could hear Morgaine's sharp intake of breath. When she spoke again, her voice was so thick with tears that he could barely understand what she was saying.

'Either way Severus is gone, and I don't know if I will ever see him again. And it breaks my heart not being able to do anything. So tell me, Remus, what is the point of me knowing what really happened?'

Severus saw Lupin shrug and heard a deep sigh from Morgaine.

'Exactly, Remus. There is no point of me knowing what really happened, if Severus is guilty or innocent. Because there is absolutely nothing I can do about it.'

Then her voice broke, and she started weeping. And as Lupin rushed towards her, he too disappeared from Severus' sight. For some agonising minutes, all he could see was the empty doorway. And all he could hear were Morgaine's sobs.

The sound of her crying hurt Severus more than any Dark spell had ever hurt him. Morgaine had never cried. During all the years that she had stood by his side, she had taken so much, she had carried the burden of those around her, and she had never cried, not once. And the fact that she was crying now just proved to Severus how hurt she was, how forlorn.

How he wished that he could take her into his arms. He wanted to beg her for forgiveness. And he wished that she had never gotten involved in the first place.

Then he heard Lupin's voice. 'You still love him, don't you, Morgaine? You still love Severus Snape.'

For a moment, everything stopped. Severus didn't breathe, his heart didn't beat. Even the wind had stopped whispering.

*Please answer.* He sent a plea through time and space, hoping it would reach her. *Please answer, Morgaine.*

But she didn't.

Severus clasped the emerald cube so hard that he could hear it crack.

*In the name of the Goddess, I implore you, Morgaine. Answer him. Answer me.*

But all he heard were footsteps, and all he saw was Morgaine and Lupin leaving the room and closing the door behind them. And then there was nothing but silence.

The world around him seemed to crumble, and Severus sank to his knees. Her silence was too much to bear. For him, it meant that Morgaine had given up, that she had turned away. And as much as he wanted to believe, he did not even dare hope that she might have nodded.

## XXXII: Severus Snape, Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

*Chapter 32 of 35*

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Thanks to JKR for letting me play around with her characters.

Thanks to Apple Blossom for beta reading.

And thanks to you for reading and reviewing.

In this chapter, you will recognise passages from 'The Dark Lord Ascending' (DH).

### Chapter XXXII: Severus Snape, Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

'Do you recognise our guest, Severus?' The Dark Lord's voice was cold but at the same time almost triumphant as he addressed his servant.

Severus felt the muscles in his neck tense and tentatively raised his eyes towards the slowly revolving figure that was suspended over the table. He did not want to look. He did not want to know. Then his dark eyes met her blue ones, and he woke up, screaming.

His heart was pounding so hard in his chest that he thought it might crack a rib. His nightshirt was drenched with sweat. He found it hard to breathe. He looked around the room, for a moment at a loss about where he was. But then he recognised the stone walls of the little cottage that had become so familiar to him over the last months. He still returned there several nights a week, despite having been offered more luxurious quarters by some of his fellow Death Eaters and even by the Dark Lord himself. He *wanted* to return there. The little cottage had become a sanctuary to him, a place where he could disappear, a place where he could rest.

He brought his shaking hands to his face and rubbed his burning eyes. It had been a dream, just a terrible nightmare. The same that had haunted him since the night he had seen Charity Burbage die. Every night when he closed his eyes, he relived the gruesome scene. But in his dream, it was never Charity Burbage who suffered the Dark Lord's wrath. It was always Morgaine.

Severus buried his face in his hands. How was he going to protect her? If the Dark Lord decided that he wanted to hurt her, kill her – for the sake of revenge or just for enjoyment – there would be nothing he could do to save her from harm. Nothing at all.

He would see her later that day, at Hogwarts, where he was to be presented as the new headmaster. How would she react when she saw him, he wondered. He did not, of course, expect her to wrap her arms around him and rejoice. Not after what he had done. But he desperately hoped that she would at least look at him.

~ ~ ~

He knew that they were all there, the people he had worked with for seventeen years, his colleagues, his fellow fighters. They were all up in Dumbledore's old office, awaiting their new headmaster. But none of them knew that he was on his way there, too.

Severus gave an almost inaudible sigh. He wasn't looking forward to meeting them. He knew what they were thinking of him: in their eyes he was a liar, a traitor, and a cold-blooded murderer. None of them knew the truth. And he couldn't tell them either. If there was any chance for him to carry out his mission, they couldn't know, none of them.

He noticed the Ministry clerk in front of him fidgeting with his robes and sweating like a pig as they climbed the stairs to the headmaster's office and could not help but smirk at the little man and pity him. It could not be a gratifying task to present Lord Voldemort's most loyal servant as the new headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. But the poor clerk had no choice. Just as little as Severus himself could choose whether he wanted to take the position or not.

'What in the blazing hell are *you* doing here?'

Sprout's words hit Severus like a clenched fist when he entered the office through the polished oak door. He had not expected any other reaction, but still, it stung.

'The Ministry has appointed Severus Snape new headmaster of Hogwarts,' the clerk announced in a shaky voice.

Sprout's mouth fell open. McGonagall sank onto the nearest chair. Slughorn looked dumbstruck. And Flitwick gasped for air. But nobody said a word. They just stared at their new headmaster, looks of surprise and terror on their faces.



Severus' eyes darted towards Morgaine. She was standing by the window, at the same spot that he himself had occupied so many times. She held his gaze steadily, and her face was a stern mask which did not reveal any of her thoughts or emotions. Deep inside, Severus felt proud. He had taught her well.

After what felt like an eternity, he managed to turn away from her to address the rest of his staff.

'Welcome to another school year.' His voice was cold, and he looked at his staff with a scowl that made clear that he would not tolerate any interruption. 'There will be some changes in staff. Alecto Carrow will take over Muggle Studies. Her brother Amycus will teach Defence Against the Dark Arts. The rest of you will continue teaching your usual classes. Professor Slughorn, you will take over as Head of Slytherin House.'

Still nobody moved. Still nobody uttered a sound. They didn't even react to the appointment of two Death Eaters.

Good, Severus thought. At least they knew when it was best to hold their peace.

'I expect complete loyalty towards the school,' he continued. 'If you feel unable to give me that, then there is the door.'

Still nobody moved. Still they were all just staring at him.

'I will discuss the new guidelines with each and every one of you in private. For now, you are dismissed.'

They all left without any comment. Nobody even looked at him. It was spine-chilling. And Severus was not sure if he really preferred their silence to any emotional outburst.

Morgaine was just about to close the door behind her and McGonagall when he mustered the courage to call her back.

'Professor duLac, a word.'

She turned wordlessly to face him. And for a while, they just gazed at each other. The cut under her right eye had healed nicely, only a thin white line suggested that she had been injured. But she looked still pale and tired, and the shadows under her eyes had never been darker. But what shocked Severus the most was the look in her eyes. She had always looked at him with love and understanding, but now this look was gone, replaced by coldness and distance.

'How are you, Morgaine?' Her name tasted sweet on his lips. He had longed to say it all summer.

Her voice was calm when she answered his question, and still there was no trace of any emotion on her face. 'Considering the circumstances, I'd say I am fine, Headmaster.'

Headmaster? No, this was not what he wanted her to call him. He wanted her to call him by his name, with the warm and caressing voice she had used the last night they had spent together, the night when she had given him all the strength he had needed to carry out his gruesome task. Because today, he needed her strength just as much as he had then.

They looked at each other in silence for several minutes. Severus' heart was aching. He wanted to fall to his knees, beg for forgiveness. But he did not even dare taking a step in Morgaine's direction. What if she shrank away? Or even worse, what if she turned her head away from him?

'Is there anything else, Headmaster?' The coldness in her voice cut through Severus like a sword. And he just shook his head.

'Am I dismissed then?'

Severus nodded and watched her leave. When she had closed the door behind her, he sank onto the nearest chair and closed his eyes. She had promised to be there for him when he returned. She had promised to stand by his side. But right there and then, Severus had no strength left to remind Morgaine of her oath.

~ ~ ~

*After the night Dumbledore died, every day was a fight. I was torn between my heart and my brain and clung to every scrap of evidence that spoke for Severus' innocence, although there weren't that many. None, in fact. Everybody believed the account of Harry Potter, the only witness. And why should they not? Harry had seen Severus arrive with the Death Eaters, he had seen him cast the Killing Curse. And the Wizarding world had always doubted Severus' loyalty. So in their eyes, he was a cold-blooded murderer. And there were days when I believed that, too.*

Over the summer, I had come to terms with the fact that the next time I saw Severus, he would either be dead or in Azkaban, and that there was not a damn thing I could do about it.

How many times I cried myself to sleep that summer, I don't know. But however hard I cried at night, the pain did not go away. It waited there at the side of my bed, ready to sink its fangs into my soul at the first rays of sunlight.

When Severus entered the headmaster's office, I didn't know what to think, what to feel. Every fibre in my body was screaming for his embrace. I just wanted to lie in his arms, forget the war, forget the dark times. I wanted to wake up from the nightmare that had haunted me all summer. But my brain told me that he was a liar, a traitor. That he had deceived me in the most despicable way.

When he called me back, my first impulse was to run away. I felt that I was not ready to look into his eyes, not ready to hear the truth. I wanted him to be innocent. I wanted to be able to stand by his side as I had promised to do. But I felt weak, so weak. For every ounce of trust I had given him over the years, I had received two ounces of sorrow and misery. And before I could help him carry his burden, I would have to gather the strength to carry my own. So I walked away, leaving Severus behind. And with every step that I took away from him, the daggers of pain cut deeper into my heart.

I don't know why I went down to the dungeons. But by the time I had reached the oak door that led to the study that was no longer his, I understood that neither of us would be able to carry on without the other.

~ ~ ~

Severus called every member of staff to his office separately to discuss the current situation with them. He needed to be sure that they would be loyal to the school. He had promised that no harm would come to the students of Hogwarts. And with two Death Eaters lurking around in the corridors, he would need all the help he could get from his staff. And he hoped that they – for the sake of the innocent children – would cooperate even with him, the murderer of Albus Dumbledore.

They all had the same look in their eyes: they all despised him and saw him as a traitor, a murderer. They all wished that he would burn in hell. And he understood them all too well.

He wished that he could tell them what really had happened, that he could let them in on his secrets. But he knew that he must not. He mustn't tell them about the plan that lay behind the death of their beloved headmaster. He had to carry the burden alone. But he would do all in his power to make sure that his colleagues kept their mouths shut and with that out of harm's way. As long as they all played by the rules, the Dark Lord wouldn't have any reason to dispose of any of them.

It had been a long day. Enduring the icy, reproachful stares of his former colleagues had drained Severus completely. Thankfully, he had talked to every member of his staff now, all but one.

He sank back into his chair and looked at the clock. It was five minutes to ten. Morgaine would arrive any moment. He sighed. What was he going to say to her? He

couldn't use the same speech he had used on his other colleagues. He couldn't just tell her that she could choose between being loyal to the school and leaving. He knew that she would stay. He had no doubts about her loyalty towards Hogwarts. But from *her* he needed more.

A polite cough ripped him out of his thoughts, and he turned to face the portrait of Albus Dumbledore. The old man was looking at him with his ever so sparkling blue eyes. Even now, Severus had the feeling that the old man could see right into his very soul.

'Morgaine will arrive soon, I assume,' Dumbledore said.

Severus nodded.

'You cannot tell her, Severus,' Dumbledore continued. '*You mustn't* tell her. It is too dangerous for her.'

'This has been too dangerous for her from the very start,' Severus retorted. 'I should never have let you drag her into this.'

'Now, my dear boy, do not blame me for this,' Dumbledore replied in an almost patronising tone.

'Not blame you?' Severus heard his voice shake, but he did not care. He was losing his patience with the old man and finally needed to get all of this off his chest. 'You made sure that Morgaine and I were linked together from the very beginning. *You* made me her tutor. *You* made me teach her Occlumency. *You* made me go to Iceland. *You* made me take her to Malfoy Manor. *You* ...'

His rant was cut short by Dumbledore's raised hand. 'I didn't need to meddle, Severus. You and Morgaine are two of a kind. Smart enough to be in Ravenclaw House, brave enough to be in Gryffindor, loyal enough to be in Hufflepuff, but you were both sorted into Slytherin. You both combine the Dark and the Light. You are a powerful union. You would have found to each other even without me.'

'You never cared about either of us,' Severus hissed, not really taking in what Dumbledore had just said. 'All you wanted was to create the perfect distraction for the Dark Lord.'

'The defeat of Lord Voldemort has always been my greatest goal, Severus. You have known that for many years.'

'Do you even care how many lives you destroy to achieve this goal, Albus?' Severus' voice was now dripping with hatred.

'Are you implying that I have destroyed your life, my son?' Dumbledore asked. 'I, who gave you the opportunity to repent?'

'*My* life?' Severus almost laughed. 'My life was destroyed the day the Dark Lord branded me with his Mark. But what about everybody else? All the people who trusted you? What about Lily, what about Morgaine? They both trusted you, and you failed them.'

For the first time that evening, there was a shadow on Dumbledore's face. He didn't say anything for a while, and then he just nodded, his eyes fixed on Severus. 'Morgaine stopped trusting me years ago.'

Severus frowned. Was it possible that he had just heard a note of regret in Albus Dumbledore's voice? Could it be?

'But she still trusts you, Severus. Just as she has done since the day that I put her into your care. She still trusts you, and she always will. Don't let her down now, Severus. Fulfill the promise you have given her years ago. Protect her from the Darkness.'

## XXXIII: Always By Your Side

### Chapter 33 of 35

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Thanks go to JKR for letting me play with her characters.

Thanks to Apple Blossom for beta reading.

And thanks to you for reading and reviewing.

### Chapter XXXIII: Always By Your Side

*Nothing had changed in Severus' old study. The door had resealed itself after my last visit, so nobody could enter.*

*Not that anybody had wanted to. Nobody had cared to go in there to look for evidence to prove Severus' innocence or his guilt. Nobody had bothered since people had made up their minds the moment they had heard Harry Potter's testimony. In their eyes, Severus Snape was a murderer, loyal to the Dark Lord.*

*And so the study had remained untouched. All the books stood still in their place, ordered by subject and then by title, just as he liked it. And the shelves were still filled with phials, all carefully sealed and labelled.*

*The day Severus had returned to Hogwarts, I spent the whole afternoon in his study, shifting from the armchair by the fireplace to his old desk and back again, secretly hoping that Severus would come sweeping in any moment, his black robes billowing behind him. But I knew that he would not come. Not that day anyway. But still I waited.*

*Shattered dreams and dusty memories, that's what I had told Remus that I was looking for the day of Dumbledore's funeral. What I was looking for the day of Severus' return, I did not know.*

*The memories were still there. The first time Severus had held me in his arms had been here in this study, as had the first time I had held his hand in the dark. And the first kiss we had ever shared had been right over there by the door. I could still feel his eyes upon me. And I could hear his laughter.*

*Yes, the memories lingered. But had I ever had any dreams? Or had I always known that my love for Severus was destined to end in loneliness and despair?*

*I thought of Severus up in the headmaster's office. How much strength must it have taken him to face his former colleagues, to stand tall, bearing their accusing glances? And why was I not up there by his side?*

*'Be there for him ... whatever the world sees him as ...' Those had been Albus Dumbledore's last words to me. And the day of Severus' return I finally understood them. The old man had known. He had known what task Severus had been set. Probably, he had been the one to give the orders in the first place.*

*It had always been him. He had made Severus my mentor, the protector of my soul. He had brought him to Iceland. He had made sure that we would spend enough time together to hopelessly fall for each other. He had meddled from the very beginning. He, Albus Dumbledore, chess master par excellence, meddlesome old fool. Did he ever care for either of us?*

*Did I hate him? Did I hate the old man who had brought me the love of my life? Do I hate him now? No, of course not. Because despite his schemes, despite the way he had used us, Albus Dumbledore had also looked out for us. And with his last words, he had reminded me of the oath I had sworn many years ago.*

*And that afternoon down in the dungeons, I prayed that Severus would forgive me for ever doubting him.*

~ ~ ~

The resolute knocks on the heavy oak door mixed with the tolling of the bell. Ten o'clock sharp. Severus could not help but smile: Morgaine had never let him wait. She had always been punctual.

Dumbledore had left his portrait, but Severus could still hear the old man's voice ringing in his ears: 'Keep your promise, Severus. Protect her.'

Yes, he would keep his promise. Even if it meant risking everything else.

He never let Morgaine enter the office. At her second knock, he flung open the door, grabbed her by the wrist and literally dragged her down the stairs, through the Entrance Hall and out into the grounds. He had no idea where he was heading. He did not even know why he was running, but the castle the only place he had ever called home suddenly seemed to suffocate him.

At the edge of the lake, Severus fell dead in his tracks. Dumbledore's white tomb was bathing in the pale moonlight, shining bright in the darkness. The wind was whispering in the treetops, and the water of the lake was softly lapping against the shore. Why had he come here of all places?

He let go of Morgaine's wrist and turned away, his hand feeling strangely empty. He stood still close enough to her to hear her breathing. But he was too scared to turn and look at her, too scared that he might find that she had turned her face away from him. He almost expected her to run away now that he had loosened his grip on her, or at least to take a step away from him, but she didn't move. He could feel her eyes on his back, but still he did not dare turn around. What if her eyes were still as empty as they had been that morning?

Then suddenly there was a silent whisper, the gentle brushing of two minds:

*Look at me.*

Cautiously Severus turned around, and his dark eyes met her blue ones. He recognised the look. He had seen it many years before, in front of the fireplace, the night Morgaine had come to offer him her friendship. She had understood then. And she understood now.

For a while, they just stood gazing at each other, and the only sound that could be heard was the rushing of the waves against the shore. Then Severus felt Morgaine take his hand, and before he knew what was happening, he felt his body being dragged into the familiar spiral of Apparation.

~ ~ ~

'Where are we?' Severus asked as he had found his balance again.

'Don't you recognise this place?' Morgaine was still holding on tight to his hand.

Severus let his gaze wander over the moss-clad hills. The midnight sun was casting eerie shadows, and he could have sworn that he saw something flitting around in the semi-darkness. He heard the mumbling of the river. And when he knew what to look for, he found the birch tree.

Yes, he knew this place. It had been a dear memory to him for many years. But it seemed lifetimes ago that they had sat there under the very birch tree that Morgaine was leading him towards now.

'Why have you brought me here, Morgaine?'

'I thought we needed some place to talk.'

They settled under the tree, side by side, shoulder to shoulder, just as they had all those years ago. Severus stared at the horizon, and for a long time, neither of them said anything.

When her voice broke the silence, it was soft and warm. 'You were there, weren't you? At Dumbledore's funeral.'

Severus felt her eyes upon him and nodded.

'I sensed you.'

Again, Severus nodded. 'I thought you did.'

'It was foolish of you to come. You could have been caught.'

'I had to take farewell.'

For the second time that evening, Severus turned to look at Morgaine. There were tears shining in her eyes, but he knew that she would not shed them in front of him. Just as he would not shed those tears that were burning in his own eyes.

*Forgive me.*

He didn't know who had pleaded for forgiveness first, but he knew that their promises had been renewed. Neither of them would ever have to walk alone again.

He reached out for Morgaine and pulled her towards him. Her head came to rest against his chest, and as he held her in his arms, inhaling the comforting scent of sandalwood and honey, he felt as if he had travelled back in time, back to the night of the Harvest Feast, the night when he had lost his heart.

'I should make you stay here,' he whispered as the moon rose over the horizon. 'You would be safe here, at least for a while.'

He felt her shift slightly in his arms, and when Morgaine looked into his eyes, Severus could see that all the warmth and trust had returned.

'I will not let you return alone, Severus. I have promised to stand by your side. And I intend to keep that promise.'

'Those were different times, Morgaine,' he replied as he let his fingers caress her cheek. 'I cannot ask you to keep that promise'

'This is not yours to decide, Severus. I have chosen my fate. I belong by your side.'

He felt her lips brush his slightly before she freed herself from his embrace. As she spoke the incantation, there was not the slightest trace of doubt in her voice. *Expecto Patronum.*

And as Severus looked after the Wyvern as it danced under the midnight sun, he realised what a fool he had been to ever doubt her loyalties.

~ ~ ~

Having Morgaine by his side was more than Severus had ever hoped for. He drank her strength and absorbed her warmth. She gave without taking. She was there whenever he reached out for her. And he was endlessly grateful.

When he entered the Great Hall at the Start of Term feast, Severus' eyes darted immediately towards the high table. Morgaine was already there, sitting in the chair next to the headmaster's, waiting for him. She held his gaze steadily as he strode through the hall, and he clung to her eyes like a drowning man to a lifebuoy.

The silence in the Great Hall was eerie. Of course, the students knew already that he had been appointed headmaster. The Prophet had given the event a big enough headline. And therefore, there were no gasps of surprise or shock. But the air seemed to crackle, and the hatred that emitted from the students was almost tangible. Severus felt chills go down his spine. He was perfectly aware of the fact that they had never liked him. Many of them had even feared him. But now, they loathed him, thoroughly, passionately.

When he sat down on the headmaster's chair, the Slytherin table erupted in dutiful applause. The offspring of Death Eaters especially cast him meaningful glances. Naturally, they knew who had made him headmaster. And they knew that defying him meant defying the Dark Lord himself. Hence they deemed it best to start off on the headmaster's good side. They were after all Slytherins, self-preservation was part of their nature. But even among his ever so loyal Slytherins, Severus could spot worried faces.

The few worried Slytherin faces were however nothing compared to what the Hufflepuffs had to offer. They were huddled together at their table as if a thundercloud were hovering above them. They could have been reduced to tears by a single word of his, but Severus had no reason to scare them. Not today.

His gaze wandered towards the Ravenclaw table. They all looked at him with eyes schooled for science. Yes, they hated him, too. But they would at least give him a chance as headmaster. They wouldn't judge him too soon but gather facts first. Anything else would be against their nature.

Before he turned to face the Gryffindors, Severus took a deep breath. This was not going to be easy. They had never liked him, but the cold hatred that emanated from them now was overwhelming. Yes, they despised him, loathed him. Every single one of them wished him to die a very slow and painful death. And he couldn't blame them for their feelings. After all, he had killed Albus Dumbledore.

He noticed several empty seats at all the tables. Muggleborns and half-bloods in particular were missing. Good, he thought. At least they were out of harm's way for a while. As for the others, he had sworn to protect them, and he would look out for each and every one of them as well as he could. If he could help it, not a single one of them would fall victim to the Dark side.

It took him a while to realise that Potter wasn't there, nor were his two sidekicks. Severus hadn't expected any of them to show up either, since they had disappeared after the Death Eater attack at the Weasley wedding. But with Potter away from Hogwarts, he would not be able to protect him anymore. And so Severus could only hope that the boy just for once would keep a low profile and that he wouldn't get himself killed, because the Boy Who Lived would be of no use if he was dead.

The Sorting Hat's song resembled the one they had heard the previous year. It warned from the dangers that were lurking outside Hogwarts and advised the students to stand together, be strong from within. Not a chance, Severus thought. They were too scared to trust anyone, especially their new headmaster.

There was no point in making a big start of term speech, he knew that very well. All he could do was repeat the Sorting Hat's message and advise everyone to unite, teachers and students alike. If they didn't stand united, if they didn't trust each other, then there was no way that he was going to be able to protect any of them.

He was relieved when the food appeared and most of the students shifted their attention away from him. Meeting them had been tough and cost far more strength than he had anticipated. And he was unspeakably thankful that Morgaine was right there by his side, looking out for him. He knew that it was not easy for her.

The day after his instalment, he had seen McGonagall take Morgaine aside. And as the both of them could not be found anywhere in the castle for hours, he had understood that the Order had called for a meeting. At first, he had almost felt disappointed that she had attended, but the feeling had passed quickly. Of course Morgaine would still stand on the Order's side. After all, the Order did not fight him personally, but the Dark Lord. And bringing the Dark Lord down was his goal as well.

How long before dinner Morgaine had returned, Severus did not know, but it had been at the dinner table he first caught sight of her. She had looked strangely uneasy. And he could have sworn that her eyes had been red from crying. But when he had tried to approach her, she had shaken her head and turned away.

~ ~ ~

*I had never thought that attending an Order meeting could be that demanding. Nobody said anything. Nobody asked me why I still trusted Severus. But I felt their eyes upon me, and I knew that they questioned my loyalties.*

*I was still part of their plans and was informed about any move against the Dark Lord, just as any other member. But I could not help but wonder if they would convey anything to me if they ever plotted Severus' downfall.*

~ ~ ~

The autumn term passed blissfully uneventful. The students as well as the staff kept an amazingly low profile, especially around the Carrows. And Severus was glad for it. The less trouble they made, the easier was his task to protect them. As long as they were invisible, the Dark Lord would have no reason to dispose of any of them.

Severus knew that Morgaine had dutifully attended every Order meeting since the start of term. And he knew that she had become what he once had been, a spy on the headmaster.

Not that there was anything to spy on. She knew as much about his orders from the Dark Lord as any other teacher at Hogwarts did. And even if there were more to know, he would not convey anything to her. She must not know. He refused to let Morgaine be used as a weapon, not against him and not by him. And so he let her attend the meetings of the Order, hoping that they would at least treat her with respect, and making sure that the Carrows never found out that she was leaving the castle.

'How are they treating you?' he asked one evening as he watched her clasp her travelling cloak over her black robes. He had never asked her about the meetings, and to be honest, he was dreading the answer to his question.

Morgaine did not look at him when she spoke, but kept her eyes resolutely on her gloves in her hand. 'Nobody says anything. But the looks on their faces ...' She broke off and started fidgeting with the gloves, feverishly chewing her lip.

Yes, Severus knew just how much strength this took. He knew how it felt to enter a room full of people who were suspicious of you. It was not easy to give your report and then walk out of there with you back straight and your head held high, knowing that the people in the room did not know whether to trust you or not.

He took the gloves from her hands and cupped her chin so she would look at him. 'I am sorry for this, Morgaine.'

'Damn your chivalry, Severus.' She was looking straight at him now, and in her eyes he could see the perseverance of the Slytherin snake as well as the strength of the Gryffindor lion. 'This is not your fault,' she went on, her voice determined. 'Neither of us has ever had a choice in this.'

## XXXIV: Saying Goodbye

*Chapter 34 of 35*

A canon compliant version of the last fourteen years in the life of Severus Snape. Canon compliant but with one important difference: in this story, Severus Snape has a friend. A friend who offers him her hand in the dark and will stay by his side until the bitter end.

Thanks to JKR for creating the HP universe.

Thanks to Apple Blossom for beta reading.

And thanks to you for reading.

In this chapter you will recognise passages from 'The Silver Doe', 'The Sacking of Severus Snape', 'The Elder Wand' and 'The Prince's Tale' (DH).

### Chapter XXXIV: Saying Goodbye

For the first time in the history of the school, Hogwarts castle was completely deserted over the Christmas holidays. All the students had been hurried home by their parents, and the staff had left shortly after the last student. There wasn't a sound to be heard, and the corridors were dark and empty. And the only lighted windows were the ones in the headmaster's office in the top of the eastern tower.

Travelling cloak in one hand and the sword of Gryffindor in the other, Severus glared at the portrait of Albus Dumbledore. The new headmaster was pale, and the line between his eyes seemed deeper than ever. He was beyond frustrated. Once more, Dumbledore had asked him to risk life and limb. And once more, the old man wouldn't tell him what for. Why ever would Potter need the sword of Gryffindor?

But Severus had no choice. He had promised to do anything in his power to help the boy. And that evening, he had finally been given the chance to do so: only a couple of minutes ago, Phineas Nigellus had come running into his portrait, informing him of Potter whereabouts.

Severus knew very well that he would have to be careful. Under no circumstances was Potter supposed to see him. The boy hated him enough to kill him on sight without listening to any explanation. And if the Dark Lord should ever enter the boy's mind and find Severus acting for him, everything they had worked for all those years would be lost. No, under no circumstances could he afford to be seen. But Severus had a plan.

He swung the travelling cloak around his shoulders and left the office. His footsteps echoed loudly in the eerie silence of the dark corridors, and there was no other sound, no other movement. Even the inhabitants of the portraits at the walls seemed to have deserted their frames.

All of a sudden, Severus felt strangely alone. Morgaine had been invited to spend Christmas with Tonks and Lupin, and he had told her to go. She had refused at first, but he had insisted. She had been through enough the last couple of months. It was hard on her to be caught between her loyalties towards Severus and her obligations towards the Order of the Phoenix. And although she put up a brave face, Severus knew that she was in dire need of a friend. The fact that Lupin had invited her for Christmas had proved that he had not forgotten their friendship. And Severus wasn't sure who had been happier about that, he or Morgaine.

As Severus left the castle, he wrapped his cloak tighter around himself. A biting wind was blowing from the north, and the snow was falling heavily. So heavily that the footprints that had been visible on the ground only minutes ago were now hidden from Severus' eyes under a coat of white snow.

Finding the clearing in the forest where the children were camping was easy enough. So was placing the sword in the frozen forest pool. Now there was the matter of making Potter find it. Severus had been over his plan an uncountable number of times, and it had always seemed foolproof. But now – as the success of Dumbledore's plan of bringing the Dark Lord down depended on the outcome of his mission – Severus started to doubt the brilliancy of his calculations. What if Potter did not see the doe? What if he thought it was a trap and refused to follow it? What if ...? Suddenly, the odds for failure seemed much greater than the odds for success, and for a moment Severus hesitated. But what other choice did he have than to try?

He did not need to say the incantation aloud, and before he knew it, his Patronus was standing in front of him, looking at him with its long-lashed eyes. Severus gazed at the silver doe for a moment and then reached out his hand as if to touch it.

'I have failed you,' he murmured. 'All those years ago, I tried to protect you, but I failed. And I will never forgive myself for it. But tonight I have the chance to give your son one of the tools he needs to bring down the creature that killed you. Help me make him understand. Help me one last time.'

As if it wanted him to know that it had understood, the doe brushed its head lightly against his outstretched hand and then turned and stepped away from him. And as Severus looked after it, he felt the tears on his cheeks freeze to ice.

~ ~ ~

Those had been some of the most fearful moments in his life. It had taken Potter too long to resurface, far too long. And Severus had already been on the verge of casting all precautions to the wind and running to the boy's rescue. Potter must not see him, Severus knew that. But risking his position as a spy was nothing compared to the horrors that awaited the Wizarding world should Harry Potter die. Thankfully, the Weasley boy had followed the doe as willingly as Potter had, and had arrived in time to save his friend from drowning. And Severus had remained hidden behind the twin oaks and watched the two boys until he had been sure that they were both well and the sword in safe hands.

Now he was making his way back through the snow-covered grounds of Hogwarts, and for the second time that evening he felt strangely alone. The doe had never returned to him. Where it had gone, Severus did not know, but deep inside his heart he knew that he would never see it again.

He was surprised to find himself in the dungeon corridor. He had not once been to his old study since his return. It wasn't his anymore. He was the headmaster now, and his study was at the top of the eastern tower. But that night, he wanted to return home.

He never questioned why the door was ajar, but just stepped inside. There was a fire burning in the fireplace, and the comforting scent of sandalwood and honey made him aware of Morgaine's presence long before his eyes fell upon her.

She was sitting in the old armchair by the fire. Severus could see the flames reflect in her blue eyes, and for a split second he thought that he had seen another reflection, the reflection of a silver doe. But as he looked over his shoulder, all he could see was darkness.

He sank to his knees at Morgaine's feet and buried his face in her lap. He felt her soft touch on his damp hair and shivered, wrapping his arms tight around her waist. That night, he needed her warmth more than ever before.

'Will you always be there, Morgaine?' he asked, his voice muffled by the velvet of her robe. 'Will you always be by my side when I need you?'

He thought that he heard her stifle a sob, but as he raised his head to look into her eyes, he could not detect any tears.

'Yes, Severus,' he heard her whisper. 'I will always be there. Just as I always have.'

When their lips met, the world around them seemed to disappear. There was no Dark Lord, no war. There were just Severus and Morgaine and the love they shared.

The black satin sheets of his old bed felt smooth and smelled of musk and midsummer roses. And as Severus laid Morgaine down, he remembered the first night they had spent together in that bed. And he could see in her eyes that she, too, remembered that night.

'I should have told you then,' he whispered into her ear. 'I should have told you then how much I loved you.'

He saw a smile in her eyes and felt her brush a streak of hair out of his face. 'We both should have, Severus. We both should have.'

How many hours they spent making love, Severus did not know. And it did not matter. Nothing mattered that night. And if it had been up to him, they could both have died then and there. And it would not have mattered either.

Morgaine fell asleep in his arms, and he held her close, held her safe, whispering words of love into her ear, hoping that she would hear him in her dreams, hoping that she would never forget him.

~ ~ ~

*Severus never knew that his Patronus had come to me that night.*

I had been waiting for his return in his old study when the doe had appeared out of thin air. At first, I had been alarmed, fearing that Severus was in danger and that he had sent the doe to get help. But nothing happened. No message was delivered. The doe just stood there, looking at me. And I stared back into its eyes, searching for an answer to why it had come. Then it faded away slowly, and Severus stepped into its place, pale and shaking, his hair and cloak damp from the snow.

And when the doe disappeared, I understood that it could not protect Severus any longer, and that it was time to say goodbye.

~ ~ ~

Severus was ripped out of his slumber by the searing pain in his left forearm. The Mark! The Dark Lord was approaching, calling upon his followers. And that meant that Potter had made his way back to Hogwarts. The final battle was about to begin.

Silently, Severus slid out of bed, picked up his clothes and dressed. He didn't want to wake Morgaine. She would be better off in the safety of the dungeon.

They had spent almost every night down there since that snowy December night. His old chambers had become their haven, a place where they could forget about the dangers that were lurking in the dark outside. And against all the odds, Severus sincerely hoped that the walls of the dungeon would keep Morgaine safe.

As he put on his black cloak and turned to leave, he heard her call his name. 'He is calling you, isn't he, Severus? The Dark Lord is calling.'

He turned to look at her, and as his eyes locked onto hers, he nodded. She must have sensed it, too.

He took her outstretched hand into his and settled on the edge of the bed, softly caressing her cheek with his fingers. 'Promise me to be careful, my love,' he whispered. 'Promise me to keep out of harm's way, Morgaine.'

The smile she gave him was the saddest Severus had ever seen. He could see her lower lip tremble, and her voice was thick with tears when she spoke. But he knew that she would not cry. Not in front of him.

'You know I cannot promise you that, Severus. As little as you can promise me to do the same.'

Yes, he knew it was true. Neither of them would be safe that night.

He wrapped his arms around her and placed one last tender kiss on her lips. And then he left without looking back, blinking back the tears that were burning in his eyes.

~ ~ ~

*It was time. The Dark Lord was approaching, and Severus had to leave. And I knew that I could not hold him back.*

We never said goodbye that night. I did not dare. It felt as if saying goodbye would seal his destiny, as if saying goodbye meant that he would not come back.

I would gladly have sold my soul for his safe return. And had I known then that I would never see him again, that I would never again hear his voice, I would not have let him go.

And to this very day, I still regret not having said goodbye.

I caught up with Flitwick, Sprout and Slughorn in the corridor outside the Ravenclaw common room. We had come just in time to see Minerva's daggers sink into a suit of armour behind which Severus had taken cover. And then we saw him run. No, we saw him fly – out of the window and towards the sky.

I heard the yells. I heard Minerva calling him a coward. But I knew it wasn't true. Severus Snape had been a lot of things: a spy, a traitor, maybe even a murderer. But he had never been a coward.

~ ~ ~

Before Severus jumped out of the window, he caught a last fleeting glimpse of Morgaine. He knew she would fight, he knew she would defend her school, her colleagues, and her students. He wished he could once more tell her to be safe. He wished he could say goodbye. But there was no time. The Dark Lord awaited him.

His instincts were telling him not to enter the Shrieking Shack. He hated that place. Black had once wanted him to die there, to be ripped apart by the claws of a werewolf. Severus grinned grimly at the memory, and somehow he wished Black's prank had been a success, that he *had* died that night. It would have saved him so much pain.

The Dark Lord was waiting for him now. And there could only be one reason why he had called him back from the battle. He had found out about the Elder wand. Severus felt a shiver go down his spine. Did this mean that Dumbledore's master plan had failed? Was everything lost now?

There was no point in delaying the inevitable, Severus knew that. He would have to go inside sooner or later. If he did not go inside voluntarily, he would certainly be dragged in. And he had no desire to be called a coward a second time that night. So he took a deep breath and entered the Shrieking Shack, trying to ignore the premonition that he would never leave it again.

He was almost disappointed when Voldemort set Nagini on him. So the Dark Lord, the wizard everybody feared, did not even deem it necessary to finish him off himself? Or did he maybe not dare? Could it be that he was afraid that his truest servant, Severus Snape, might be the one to bring him down?

For some moments, Severus struggled and tried to get the enchanted cage off him and with it the blasted snake. But he failed. His knees gave way, and he fell to the floor, already feeling his own blood drenching the collar of his robes. Then the cage was removed, and Severus saw the Dark Lord leave. What did he say? That he regretted it? Had he had any strength left, Severus would have laughed. But his strength had left him.

Lying on the floor, he felt the blood gushing from the wounds in his neck. Instinctively, he pressed his hand onto it, trying to make the bleeding stop, but he knew that there was no use. He would slowly bleed to death right there on the dusty floor in the Shrieking Shack.

Suddenly, Potter was kneeling beside him. Where he had come from, Severus did not know. But as he looked at the boy, he realised that he had been given a last chance, that he – with his dying breath – could bring the Dark Lord down. He grabbed the front of Potter's robes and pulled him down. The boy needed to know. Good thing that the Granger girl was there as well, Potter wouldn't have known how to collect the silvery blue memories he was offering him. Now Severus could only pray that the boy would at least know how to make use of them.

Once more, for the very last time, Severus looked into Harry Potter's green eyes. Lily's eyes. The eyes of the woman he had never been able to let go, although she had turned from him many years ago.

Then the green faded into blue. And he heard her voice as clearly as if she were standing right beside him. Morgaine's voice. The voice that had guided him through some of the darkest hours of his life. The voice of the woman who held his hand in the dark whenever he had needed her.

*Let go, Severus. Let go, my love.*

He imagined her warm hand freeing his own from Potter's robe, and his nostrils filled with the comforting smell of sandalwood and honey. It felt to him as if she were there by his side, just as she always had been.

And then Severus let go. He let go of his memories, his pain and his love. Lily's eyes and Morgaine's voice. He let go of it all.

He felt the coldness of death creep through his body, but he didn't fight it anymore. He welcomed death now. And he died, knowing that he had not lived in vain, knowing that he had been loved.

~ ~ ~

*I knew that Severus was dead long before Harry came to find me. An icy chill had crept through my veins shortly before midnight and had left me with a feeling of emptiness and despair. And I understood that he had left me forever.*

When Harry entered the Great Hall, we were all busy caring for the wounded, shrouding the dead and consoling those who were left behind. Andromeda Tonks had just arrived with little Teddy in her arms. She was crying for her daughter and her son-in-law. And I mourned Remus with her. It wasn't fair that he had to die just when he had finally found some happiness in his life.

There I was, standing besides the body of my oldest friend when I felt a hand on my shoulder. The boy was still shaky from the battle. Of course he was. He had just defeated one of the most powerful wizards of all time. He, too, had lost friends. No boy his age should have to go through what he had. But he had saved us all from Voldemort's reign of terror.

I knew what he was going to tell me. What else would Harry Potter have to say to me than that Severus had fallen?

'He's dead, isn't he?' I asked, and Harry nodded.

'Did he die alone?' I needed to know.

'I was there. I saw him die,' Harry answered. 'He gave me his memories.'

So he knew. Finally Harry Potter knew the truth about Severus Snape.

'Where is his body?'

I could have asked Harry how he felt, what he had made of the memories he had been given, but right there and then, I didn't care. I just wanted to see him.

'The Shrieking Shack,' Harry answered. 'Do you want me to come with you?'

'You're needed here, Harry Potter.' I said, gesturing at the mourning people around us. 'They need your strength more than I do.'

The sun was rising when I left the castle. Birds were singing, and the air smelled of spring. If it hadn't been for the crumbling walls and the bloodstains on the flagstones, no one could have guessed that one of the greatest battles in wizard history had been fought there just a couple of hours ago.

I don't remember how I got to the Shrieking Shack. Suddenly, I was just standing there, Severus' body lying at my feet. I didn't feel anything then. There was just an endless emptiness expanding in my heart.

I knelt down beside Severus and looked into his eyes. They were fixed and empty. Gone was the coldness people had feared. Gone was the love they had held for me.

When I closed his eyes, I realised that he would never look at me again. And that was when I broke down. I cried for Severus Snape and myself, the friendship we had shared and the love we had given to each other. And the sadness I felt seemed to tear apart my very soul.

I don't know how long I had been sobbing by his side. It might have been hours, I don't know. But when I rose, I had no tears left to shed. And I had said my goodbyes.

I didn't bother taking his shrouded body back to the castle. I knew that there wouldn't be anyone there to mourn him just yet. In time, people would understand the greatness of Severus Snape and grieve for him. But for the time being, they would not care. They had to cry for their own first.

The edge of the Forbidden Forest seemed the right place for him to rest. Behind him stretched the forest which had given him countless ingredients for his beloved potions. And in front of him lay the castle, the only place he had ever truly called home.

Severus Snape may not have been the kindest of men. And he would have laughed at being called a hero. But he was a brave man who did what he could with the little means he had been given.

He fought with the courage of the Gryffindor lion. And his Slytherin cunning helped save many lives.

He was the most loyal of us all.

And he will never be forgotten.

## XXXV: The Final Farewell

*Chapter 35 of 35*

It has been two months since the Final Battle, two months since the death of Severus Snap. Morgaine awakes crying in the dungeon, and by midnight she has chosen her path.

### Chapter XXXV: The Final Farewell

'Hush, Morgaine. Hush, beloved.'

Morgaine shot off the pillow with an outcry and at once covered her mouth with her hands. Her breath was coming in small gasps. Her heart was racing. And cold sweat was making her robes stick to her back. Her robes? Why had she been sleeping in her robes?

Startled, she looked around the dark room. Those weren't her chambers. Even in the depths of night, her chambers were never that dark. There was a big window in her bedroom, through which she could see the sun during the day and the moon and the stars at night. One of the celestial bodies always gave light. No, she could not be in her chambers. In fact, there was only one place in the castle that was so well hidden that neither rays of the sun or the moonlight ever reached it.

The dungeons!

Once more, Morgaine clasped her hands over her mouth. Why was she in the dungeons?

'Lumos.'

The croaky sound of her voice surprised her. So did the raw feeling in her throat. It felt as if she had been screaming for a long time.

She looked around the room that was now illuminated by the faint light her wand provided. She was in the dungeons indeed. This was Severus' bedchamber. It was his bed she had been lying in.

Absent-mindedly, Morgaine let her fingers trail over the black satin sheets. What was she doing down there? Why had she slept in Severus' bed? Why was she wearing her robes?

The last thing she remembered was sitting in front of the fireplace in her study. Despite it being the middle of summer, she had lit a fire in the grate. She had felt cold. And the crackling of the fire had provided her with a consoling calmness she had needed to carry out her task. But still, she had not succeeded in writing down a single word about the man for whom she was supposed to give a commemorative speech the next day. She had so much to say about Severus Snape, her best friend, her lover, her soul mate. But she had been unable to put her thoughts and feelings into words. She had not wanted to. Saying goodbye would mean accepting that he was gone.

She did not remember going to bed. She had probably fallen asleep in front of the fire. But how had she come down to the dungeons? Had she been sleepwalking? It would certainly explain why she was still wearing her robes.

Yes, sleepwalking could have been a possibility. And it wouldn't be a surprise. The last two months had been stressful. There had been so much to do after the Final Battle, wounded comrades to visit at St. Mungo's, funerals to attend, and the reconstruction of Hogwarts needed to be supervised. Minerva was doing a fabulous job with the latter, but Morgaine helped gladly. She would do anything to keep busy, anything to keep herself from thinking.

Sleep was a luxury Morgaine did not allow herself at the moment. There was too much to do to sleep, she had defended herself only a few days ago when Poppy had resolutely demanded that she slow down and take a break. But the true reason for Morgaine staying awake was that she feared sleep. For with sleep came the dreams ... and his voice.

'Hush, beloved.'

Once more, Morgaine's breathing quickened. It had been his voice that had awoken her. Severus' voice! She had heard it so many times in her dreams that she had started to believe that he was actually there, right by her side.

But he couldn't be. Severus was dead. She had seen his mangled body on the dusty floor of the Shrieking Shack. She had wrapped him up in a black shroud. And she had buried him at the edge of the Forbidden Forest.

He was dead. Gone. Forever. It was *not* his voice she was hearing at night.

'Nox.'

The darkness reclaimed the chamber as Morgaine stood and made her way towards the door. She had no business down there in the dungeons. When she returned to the castle in the evening, she would instruct the elves to pack up Severus' belongings and bring them to Spinner's End. What would happen with them then, she would decide upon later.

She slammed the door shut with a force that made the mirror fall of the wall and shatter into hundreds of pieces. It did not matter. It would anyway have been too dark for Morgaine to see her reflection and the tears that were hanging at her lashes.

~ ~ ~

'I'm glad you came, Morgaine.'



Molly's embrace was warm and welcoming, and Morgaine allowed herself to sink into it for a moment. Molly had always been kind to her, especially during the last year when the other Order Members had given her suspicious looks and whispered behind her back. Molly might like everyone else have believed that Severus Snape had murdered Albus Dumbledore in cold blood, but she had never blamed Morgaine for believing otherwise.

Arthur's handshake felt comforting as well. 'Will you be giving a speech?' he asked.

Morgaine shook her head. 'There have been enough speeches and newspaper articles. Severus would not have liked that.'

'No, he would not,' Arthur admitted. 'The article in the Prophet the other day would have made him sneer and cast *incendio* on the paper.'

Morgaine smiled sadly. She had seen the headline as well: *Severus Snape Misunderstood Hero*. It had made her sneer as well. And she had ripped the paper into thousands of pieces with her bare hands without even reading the article.

The mood in the Weasleys' garden was subdued, but it differed immensely from the mood at the funerals Morgaine had attended over the last two months. People had put the first shock behind them. They were still grieving, would continue doing so for a long time to come, but they were ready to take farewell and go on.

Speeches were held for all the fallen heroes. For heroes was what they all were. Moody and Dobby, Remus and Tonks, Fred and all the others who had given their lives to defeat the Dark Lord. When evening fell over the garden, Morgaine felt her heart grow heavy. None of them should have died. And she desperately hoped that they all knew that they had not died in vain, that they all knew that the Light had won.

She was just about to silently leave the garden when Harry Potter's voice made her stop at the gate.

'I think we have forgotten someone.'

Morgaine turned around to face the boy who had risen from his chair, a glass in his hand. Surely, he was going to talk about Albus Dumbledore, his mentor and the mastermind behind the plan that had brought Voldemort down.

'I would like to talk about a man without whose help I would not be standing here today, a man who has fought relentlessly for the cause and who did not deserve to die the way he did. I would like to talk about Severus Snape.'

Morgaine felt the breath hitch in her throat. She had not expected that. She had not been prepared.

'We have hated each other passionately, Severus Snape and I,' Harry went on. 'He seemed to have it in for me from the very moment he laid eyes on me. And for many years, I did not understand why. And I returned his hatred with fervour. Today, I would like to apologise for that.'

He raised his glass and toasted towards the skies.

'I had no idea that all along, you were just trying to make amends, Severus Snape. That you were just trying to help. I had no idea how much you had sacrificed, how much you had risked, how much you had suffered. But you have succeeded. With your dying breath you gave me the tools I needed to carry out my task. Without you, I would not have made it. And none of us would be here today. To Severus Snape.'

The toast echoed around the table as everyone raised their glass to honour the dark wizard none of them had ever truly known. Everyone except Morgaine. She had sunken to her knees by the garden gate and was silently crying the tears she had been holding back for two long months.

~ ~ ~

The air smelled of hay when Morgaine hurried through the Hogwarts grounds. It was close to midnight, but the warmth of the day lingered. But still, Morgaine felt goose bumps erupt on her arms as she came closer to the castle.

Home. Hogwarts had been her home for fourteen years. Over there, on the Quidditch field, she had learned how to fly a broom. Behind Hagrid's hut, she had for the first time seen a unicorn with her own eyes. On top of the Astronomy Tower, she had learned to name the stars. In greenhouse two, she had learned to tend to the Monkhood seedlings with which Severus later brewed the potion that kept Remus from transforming. And down in the dungeons, she had learned how to love.

Once more, Morgaine felt tears well up in her eyes, but she blinked them back. She did not have the strength to cry any more. If she started crying now, she would never be able to stop again. She would cry until her body would break just like her heart had broken.

She couldn't stay. She couldn't take the risk. Every stone in the walls of Hogwarts reminded her of Severus. Every single stone was a reminder of what she had lost, of the time she had wasted and the mistakes she had made. And she could not bear it anymore.

Her belongings were packed in less than an hour. She would have them brought to Iceland the next day. Then she would also contact Minerva. The next day, not now.

Despite the warm night, Morgaine wrapped her heavy travelling cloak around her shoulders and fled the castle. She did not even consider going down to the dungeons to take farewell. She didn't have the strength to face her ghosts.

Before she Disapparated from the edge of the forbidden forest, she read for a very last time the inscription on the slab of dark granite that marked Severus Snape's grave: *Never Forgotten*.

A dry sob escaped Morgaine's throat, and her heart ached as if it were breaking once more. She would never forget him. But if she wanted to survive, she would have to try.

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A/N: This story has really brought out the best in me. Writing it has been a wonderful experience, and I learnt a lot about myself in the process.

I would like to say thank you to a few people here: Daedalus Plumb, Apple Blossom, Memory, Trickie Woo, Iloveneille, Kyriaofdelphi and Star Girl. Your support and encouragement has meant a lot to me.

If you would like to follow Morgaine to Iceland and see how she copes with the death of her beloved Severus, read part two of this story, named *Always By Your Side*. There is still hope, I promise.