

Obliviate

by chivalric

How did Snape find the strength for casting the Killing Curse on Albus Dumbledore?
And why does he always look so nastily greasy? This is a missing scene, set a few months before the final events in the tower.

One-shot Story

Chapter 1 of 1

How did Snape find the strength for casting the Killing Curse on Albus Dumbledore? And why does he always look so nastily greasy? This is a missing scene, set a few months before the final events in the tower.

A/N: I always wondered how Snape could actually bring himself to kill Dumbledore, despite the old man's plea and despite the fact that Snape was doing the Headmaster a favour. This is my explanation for it, and it explains why the Potions master always looks as awful as possible.

Many thanks to my wonderful betas, shellsnapelover, Lariope, and CharmedForce. shell has triggered the idea to this fic. Thanks, love!

Warning: This is a dark, bitter, and cruel story. Before you continue reading, please understand that it describes severe violence.

It was a late and moonless evening when Severus Snape, triple-spy for Albus Dumbledore and Lord Voldemort, returned to his school. Clouds covered the sky; it would rain soon, and the wind chased some leaves across the dry, shrivelled grass.

The night was too dark to see one's hand in front of the eyes, which was a good thing in itself the Potions master was very obviously not entirely stable on his feet, and he would have hated if someone had seen him in his sorry state.

Step by step he made it to the huge front gates. Slow steps, small steps; for once, his robes didn't billow behind him. He didn't even wear robes, just a thick, heavy coat over shirt and trousers. No shoes; no socks.

He staggered and swayed, and he was even paler than usual. During daylight, there would have been students around, and although they always tried to stay as far away as possible from the greasy git, even they couldn't have missed the fact that something was utterly wrong with Snape.

But it was dark; the students were in bed, and no one saw how painfully slow Snape worked his way down to his dungeons. No one witnessed his need to stabilise himself against the stone walls. No one was there to help him up when he fell. Not even Peeves was around, and that wasn't a bad thing either: the last thing Snape needed was a poltergeist making fun of him. There had been enough laughter at his expense in the past hours.

Feeling sick and tired, Snape leaned his forehead against the cool stones next to the staircase which lead to his rooms. He wondered how long he could stand the pain without screaming out loud. He was, simply spoken, in agony. Every inch of his body hurt, and he could feel blood seeping into his shirt and into the fabric of his heavy cloak a cloak too heavy to actually be worn but impossible to leave behind. The woollen garment covered him, hid his appearance, and disguised his shirt sticking to his haggard body as well as the fact that his trousers were soaked with blood, too.

His lip cracked under his teeth when he bit them, trying to hinder a groan escape his mouth. He tasted blood. Again. Some drops trickled down his chin, but he didn't care.

It was nothing compared to the wounds on his body.

It took him an eternity to reach his private rooms deep down in the dungeons. Not for the briefest moment did he consider going to the hospital wing and seek out Poppy, who would certainly know how to deal with his injuries. *All* of them.

Which was precisely the problem: one look, and she would know. She would know what had happened, what they had done to him, and she would pity him. And pity was another thing Snape couldn't deal with tonight. He pitied himself enough. Too many people already knew what had happened. Everyone who had been there. Everyone who had hurt him, who had... Everyone who had laughed.

He would deal with his injuries himself.

Barely able to push his door open, Snape finally managed to let himself in, carefully avoiding looking into the mirror that hung next to the door. He truly doubted he would be able to face his own image ever again. He had never been a vain man, but after tonight... no. Looking at his reflection knowing what had happened would quite possibly be too much to bear.

He had not hindered them; he had been too weak to keep them at bay. He had not fought hard and determinedly enough to stop them. "How could that happen?" he whispered to the darkness and, "Why did it happen?" before sinking onto his knees. His long, wet hair hung over his face to touch the floor. Like a beaten dog, Snape made his way on all fours toward the next wall, which he followed until he had found a dark corner in the back of his living room. There he pulled up his legs, wrapped his arms round his waist, and lowered his tired head to his knees.

He was shaking with cold, trembling with pain and bleeding like a stabbed pig. Half blinded by the lanky strands that clung to his face, he dug his fingers into the heavy fabric of his cloak and managed to wrap the sodden garment round his freezing bones. A strained gasp pierced the silence, and he pulled the cloak over his head as well.

Tried to keep control. Tried to clench his teeth so they would stop chattering.

In vain; sobs seeped into the dark room. And although the Potions master was alone, he was still very embarrassed by the tears that were streaming down his face.

Hours earlier, at Malfoy Manor, the Dark Lord walked out a low, grey room and waved a bored hand, indicating the day's entertainment was over. His Death Eaters followed him without a look back.

Lucius Malfoy stayed behind after the others had left and opened the chains round Snape's wrists, helping him move away from the table and silently forcing him to stand on his far too weak legs. It was Lucius, in whose house it had all happened, who pulled him along into a brighter, friendlier room. It was he who closed the door behind Snape; Lucius who managed to manoeuvre his naked, fellow Death Eater into the shower. It was Lucius who washed blood and dirt and everything else off Snape's back and legs, never speaking, as if he knew that words wouldn't bring any comfort anyway.

Maybe Lucius knew this because he had been in the same situation himself. Maybe he only knew it because he had seen it happen to others too often.

Sometimes, the Dark Lord was ruthless in his wrath. Tonight, for no particular reason, it had been Snape who had been blessed with his attention.

Lucius found clothes for Snape and helped him to get dressed, even closing the buttons of the grey shirt and the light trousers; the Potions master was in no condition to do this small task himself. The blond wizard ignored the empty look in the Potions master's eyes, overheard the chattering of Snape's teeth, but was kind enough to steady him on his way out of the house and to the Apparition point. "You know where to find help?" he asked his friend and cast a somewhat fearful glance back to the lightened window of his mansion, the windows behind which he knew Lord Voldemort was waiting.

Snape managed a nod, but not more. Yes, he knew where to go. Hogwarts. Dumbledore. There always had been help; it always had been home. He would reach it even if he had to crawl.

"Go then, before he decides it still hasn't been enough. You know, if you had shown a bit of fear, if you hadn't held your damn head so high, maybe he would have been satisfied to just have you whipped..."

Snape looked up for the first time since Malfoy had opened the chains. "Didn't know he'd order something like that," he croaked. "Would have begged him to have mercy, believe me."

"But..." Malfoy said, and then Snape Disappeared with the last bit of strength he possessed.

Crying didn't ease the pain, and unfortunately, it didn't soothe the uproar of emotions inside Snape, either. So, after a while, exhausted, he leaned his aching head against the wall behind him, dried his tears, and waved an unsteady hand to summon the nearly full bottle of firewhiskey that must be hidden somewhere in his quarters. He kept it at hand, as he knew only too well he'd need it every now and then. The alcohol would ease the aftershock-symptoms of Voldemort's cursed whip, if nothing else. He always had a bottle on the shelf although he detested the stuff. He hated the taste from the bottom of his heart and became sick by so much as thinking about its disgusting smell.

"Damn stuff; damn whip," Snape murmured and nearly strangled the slim bottle in his hand. The prospect of the coming hours scared the life out of the Potions master. One of the more interesting effects of Voldemort's weapon the cursed whip that had been dancing on Snape's back for most of the evening was that the pain didn't end after the initial torture. The whipping was repeated about an hour later, more cruelly, more brutally than anyone who hadn't actually experienced it could ever imagine. For lack of a better word, Snape called this second set of strokes aftershocks. Alcohol, firewhiskey mainly, could ease the symptoms if the victim was able to drink enough in time ideally enough to fall unconscious. Snape knew that, of course. But still he detested the whiskey.

Medicine, Snape thought, hate welling up inside him. *This is medicine, so stop whining and drink it.*

Staring at the bottle, he took the cork with his teeth and spat it onto the floor. Taking a deep swig, he nearly choked as the hot, burning liquid ran down his throat and exploded in his stomach like little fireworks. Not waiting until the burning had eased, he drank some more, taking deep gulps until the bottle was a quarter empty.

He shuddered, and his stomach clenched, but that could be endured. The only important thing was the fact that the alcohol would go straight to his head. As he had thrown up everything that had been in his stomach after his... punishment, he expected nothing else but to get drunk quickly. And he welcomed the feeling of dizziness that already claimed his mind. Dizziness meant he might be able to flee his memories.

Another sip. Another explosion. Shifting his shoulders, Snape winced with pain and was only slightly shocked to realise that more tears continued running down his face.

"Fucking, lousy bastard," he murmured and cradled the bottle to his chest. "Worthless piece of shit."

Then he laughed, deep and harsh and entirely without humour. It was a horrible sound and it was laced with hysteria. "Ah, no. I'm beyond hysterics," Snape rasped and drained the bottle until it was only half full. "I'm right in the middle of a breakdown. Wonderful. This utterly horrible arsehole broke me. After twenty years of spying, after several beatings and countless rounds of the Cruciatus, after all he has done to me and I have done for him, he has finally managed to break me into *fucking* pieces!"

Snape wiped off his face and accidentally poured some of the firewhiskey over his cloak. Not good. He was supposed to drink this stuff, or he would scream his lungs out

in a little while.

Well, given the way he felt and considering the kind of torture the Dark Lord had thought appropriate for his second-in-command, he might do that anyway. Screaming his lungs out, that was.

Yes, the night promised to become as interesting as the evening had begun. If he switched to screaming, maybe he would be able to stop crying like a child sometime soon. But then... no. Highly unlikely.

He should get up and tend to his wounds, but trying to get up proved to be tricky, as he was bleeding more profusely than he had expected. The shirt, the hem of his trousers, and the trouser legs were soaked, the floor slippery with his blood. "What a mess," Snape murmured and abandoned his attempts to get up. Where would he have gone, anyway? This dark corner was perfect. In this dark corner, it might be even possible to forget for a little while what had happened.

For that, though, some more alcohol was needed. Just a little more.

Maybe with the help of the firewhiskey, he could forget that he had been summoned tonight... yesterday?... Whenever. A while ago. An eternity ago. He had been summoned by the damnable Dark Mark on his forearm, had followed the summoning obediently, and had found himself in the centre of the Dark Lord's bad mood. And had then found himself in the centre of the Dark Lord's full attention.

Always a bad thing when the Dark Lord focused on you.

Voldemort had been craving some distraction. Maybe he had been bored. Maybe the arrogance of his most devoted follower and the fact that Snape had never even flinched when his master looked upon him with his snake-like eyes had pissed the Dark Lord off. Maybe it had been the weather.

Whatever the reason, Snape had been stripped of his shirt, hung in front of the Dark Lord, and someone wearing the mask had tested their master's whip on his back. A terrifying experience in itself, especially when combined with the Cruciatus Curse. But Snape had the pleasure of serving as entertainment for Voldemort before, and he knew it wouldn't take too long before his master would release him. After all, he was of value, wasn't he?

Faintly, Snape thought he could hear the cracking of the whip, although it was completely silent in his rooms. Before his inner eye, he could even see the damn thing, made of leather and hellfire. The handle, hard and round, was just long enough to perfectly fit into a man's hand. The straps, more than a dozen, were long and entwined with magic. It always seemed to glow in a pleasant red. But then, this might be the blood it was crusted with.

Snape hated that whip. Good gods, how much he hated it. And he certainly remembered every single lash that had landed on his flesh.

Determined, Snape took another sip. Really, he had believed the whipping would end as quickly as it had started. As usual. A few strokes; unpleasant, but endurable.

He had been so very wrong.

The bottle of firewhiskey was nearly empty, and Snape, sitting in his corner feeling broken and sick and ill and humiliated to the bones, shook his head to get it clear. Despite the fact that he wasn't used to alcohol and despite the fact that he was supposed to be completely drunk by now, he still found he could think. And remember.

Too bad, that, as the memory that haunted him was really and completely horrific.

When had he realised that *this* beating was entirely different from the others he had received on the Dark Lord's orders? That this beating was worse than any punishment he had ever received in the presence of this madman; that it would be even worse than the abuse he had suffered from as a child by a father with a loose hand and a cruel belt?

When it had become absolutely clear, even to him, that the whipping wouldn't stop anytime soon, panic had gripped him, and he had begun to fight.

Stupid move. His retaliation brought only stronger lashes and more cruelty. Maybe he should have begged, but then, he never begged. He had screamed, of course. It was impossible not to scream out the pain he suffered from. But he hadn't begged for mercy. What for? It would have been useless, as the Dark Lord didn't grant mercy. And it would be over soon, anyway. Wouldn't it?

But it hadn't been over, not by far. The whipping had gone on for ages, and sometime, after an eternity, Snape had considered pleading a worthy option.

Pleading, begging, wailing for mercy. "End it, master!" he had howled, repeatedly. How fucking embarrassing.

No. He wouldn't think of it anymore. He would drink a bit more whiskey, and eventually he would fall asleep from exhaustion, blood-loss, and pain. Yes. Good plan.

And until then maybe he should think of something else, something different. Maybe he should think of something innocent, something normal; something that had a daily familiarity. Anything but the whipping and what had come afterwards.

Furniture.

Yes, furniture was good. Thinking about furniture would be a really grand idea.

Snape lifted his head and gasped when pain shot from his slashed shoulders down to his buttocks. Taking the last sip of the now empty bottle, he threw it away and watched it roll under the table.

Furniture. Table.

A worthy target for his thoughts. His worktable. Where he either brewed his more private potions or had his lonely meals during the vacations. Where he sat and wrote, where he marked the essays of his students, where he, very rarely, just daydreamed. It was of wood, his table, and it had a bench.

The bench hadn't been there, at Malfoy Manor. Nor had there been chairs. And the table he now thought about, that ~~other~~ table, the black table in the black room, had been of stone. It had been higher than his worktable as well, as if having been designed for something entirely different than having meals upon. It had been of the deepest, dark slate, Malfoy's table, with a rough surface and sharp edges. There had been blood on it.

Snape still could feel that surface scratching his chest and lower abdomen, ripping sharp, burning wounds along his ribcage. As if there hadn't been enough wounds already on his body when they had thrown him onto the damn thing.

His own table, his worktable, had a smooth surface, polished by many years of constant usage. He was fond of it; he had bought it with his first salary as Potions teacher, and he had spent a lot more for it than he had initially intended. He saw it on a daily basis and had touched it a countless number of times.

So how could it be that looking at his table from his position on the floor, the sight of it could pour sheer terror into his chest? It was wood, not stone, for Merlin's sake! It was too low, and it wasn't even smeared with blood. His blood. He had never screamed whilst being pinned on his table he never had been pinned onto it in the first place and he had never shed a tear onto it. Or thrown up next to it. No need for terror.

But his heart was beating like a scared, caged bird in his aching chest, and he turned his head away to avoid the sight of wood shining in the soft candle light.

Didn't work. Memories haunted him.

Well, maybe something else would work. With a short and brutal jerk, Snape smacked his head against the wall behind him. It hurt, but at least it momentarily distracted him from thinking about tables. And another little wound, this time at the back of his head, really didn't matter anymore.

Staring into the distance, the Potions master considered opening another bottle of firewhiskey and winced at the simple thought. So far he had never needed more than half a bottle to deal with the aftershocks, and now he was already thinking about a second one. His stomach protested at the idea; but another bottle might do the trick of sending him into alcoholic unconsciousness. How very welcome unconsciousness would be; obviously blood-loss and pain couldn't, or didn't want to, combine forces to send him into blissful oblivion even for a short while.

Firewhiskey in abundance might help him forget what had happened after the Dark Lord had released the spell that had bound his hands atop his head. After he had fallen to the floor, after he had curled up in a fetal position, by then far beyond feeling embarrassed about this visible sign of his helplessness.

Had he, back then, really dared to hope that now it was over, that the Dark Lord was done with his punishment?

"Since when are you stupid?" Snape asked himself in the candle-lit darkness of his rooms. "How could you be naive enough to believe that a beating was all he had in mind?"

But how on earth was he supposed to have expected something like *that*?

That, yes. That had been... harrowing. Because someone had yanked him up and had dragged him along into another room. The room with the table of convenient height. Where his so-called colleagues had waited in their Death Eater robes and their masks.

Carelessly, someone had thrown his beaten, bleeding body onto the table. Instinctively, he had reached out to hinder himself from slipping to the floor like a bone-less rag doll.

The next moment, he had heard buttons hopping merrily over the floor, the buttons from his own trousers, when they had ripped them off his hips. They, whoever they had been.

His head hit the wall again he couldn't think about this room. Or the buttons. Never, ever. He had been terrified; he had been speechless. He definitely had been unable to believe that this was really happening.

He hadn't begged for mercy. By then, when he had been naked and face-down on the table, he had been in no condition for begging anymore. He had been barely able to breathe.

And why the hell didn't the firewhiskey prevent him from thinking? Usually, a sniff was enough to send him to dreamland, and now he had drunk half a litre and still he seemed nearly sober.

"Adrenalin, presumably," Snape muttered and shifted his shoulders again. The red hot bolt of pain stabbed him through and through, and he fell forward. In the last moment, he caught himself on his palms, his nose only an inch away from the floor. The movement finally forced a scream out of him, and when he saw blood dripping onto the ground, he realised that he needed some healing potions if he was to survive the night. He was bleeding badly. He was bleeding to death.

Not too bad an idea, actually: bleeding to death. Dying, in general, would certainly stop the memories.

But then, he wasn't a coward, and he would be damned if he allowed his worthless, mad master to win by dying on his own living room floor.

Snape tried to get his legs underneath him only to slip in his own blood. Again.

Fuck. Damn fuck. "Pathetic," Snape murmured, barely audible and massively annoyed at his inability to command his own body. He had to get up. If he stayed on the floor, he would...

"Come on, Severus; I will help you," a familiar voice said, and hands grabbed him round the waist. Snape gasped with pain and shock at the sudden sensation of being touched, but nevertheless felt himself being heaved onto his jelly-like feet.

Albus. Thank gods, it was just Albus, who now shoved his shoulder under his arm and half carried him to the bench in front of his table, the table which terrified the life out of him by simply looking like... well, a table.

Snape struggled, fought against the gentle grip, tried to move away from the worktable and crawl back into his corner, but Albus didn't let go of him. "These are your rooms, Severus, and no one is here apart from me. Nothing and no one can harm you anymore. I want you to sit down; yes, just like that, nice and slowly. Sit down and let me have a look at you."

Soothing words, friendly words. How could the old man know what he feared others in general and his own furniture in particular? Albus, somehow, seemed to know and eased his fear with his gentle words. "No one can harm you; no one will harm you. You are safe." They dripped like raindrops into Snape's burning mind, and as he was too weak to put up a fight, he allowed the Headmaster to support him until he sat safely on the bench.

Sitting hurt. Breathing hurt. Thinking hurt. Absolutely everything just hurt.

Uncomprehending, Snape stared at the man who had taken a seat opposite him. "Did I... I didn't let you in?" he asked, quite unsure about his actions in the past... minutes? Hours?

"You didn't ward your door. One of the house-elves informed me that you were back. I had them look out for you. I... hurried to get down here," Albus said, his voice as soft as if he were dealing with a frightened child. "You must allow me to take care of your wounds, Severus. Please. You are injured badly, and I need to have a look at your back. Would you take your shirt off?"

Snape blinked in confusion and became aware of his hands lying in front of him on the table like two dead little animals. He could barely feel them; only coldness seeped up from his palms into his arms and elbows, and the skin seemed strangely white and frozen under the blood that caked them. Tentatively, he tried to waggle his fingers. When he managed this task, he brought his hands to his shirt and tried to unbutton it.

Impossible. His fingers were numb, stiff. They didn't belong to him, didn't obey orders. And they were dirty. Bloody. And his head was so light, light and empty. Not a bad feeling, that was. Not at all. *No more memories*, that light-headedness promised. *No more fear*.

It was slightly disturbing that, all of a sudden, he couldn't remember his own name anymore.

Snape, who had lost a lot of blood and was close to losing consciousness, lifted his head and flinched at the sadness in Albus's face. "Why... why are my hands bloody?" he asked shakily. "Why do I hurt so much?"

Albus closed his eyes for the briefest second. "Your hands are bloody because your shoulders are bleeding. The blood has soaked the sleeves of your shirt and is now running over your wrists and fingers."

"Ah," Snape said, but he didn't understand at all. "Why... are my shoulders bleeding?"

"Your shoulders, your back you've been tortured, Severus. And I want you to drink this potion. It will take care of the blood loss."

"Tortured," Snape murmured and downed the liquid. "Now that... explains... a lot."

The potion worked fast, and the dreamlike manner of the Potions master subsided gradually. Finally, after many long, silent moments, Snape looked at his hands once more and then tried to open his buttons again. "Can't do it," he complained faintly. "Think you need to help me."

"Of course, my dear boy," Albus replied quietly and reached out only to freeze in mid-motion at Snape's sharp intake of breath and the look of fresh panic in his face. "Please, Severus," he insisted. "Those wounds need to be healed, and I can't just vanish your shirt without causing you further harm. Let me help you."

"Don't... touch me!" Snape breathed, staring at the Headmaster's hand the one that was unharmed like the mouse might have stared at the snake which was just about to kill it.

If Dumbledore was surprised at this statement, he at least didn't show it. "I won't. I will just help you with the buttons. I promise."

After a very long moment of consideration, Snape nodded. "Don't touch me," he repeated with a tremble in his voice. "And don't send the buttons flying. I'm... somewhat... allergic to... the sound." His laughter at this ridiculous statement sounded hysterical in his own ears before it turned into a pained cough. *Gods, I'm behaving like a frightened little girl and can't do anything about it*, the Potions master thought distractedly, feeling disgusted with himself.

Laughing and coughing hurt; he had to steady his shaking body by pressing both his bloody hands onto the bench he was sitting on.

Dumbledore moved the fingers of his right hand and vanished not the shirt but the buttons before he got up and gingerly plucked at the collar. Slowly, he peeled the blood-soaked fabric off Snape's bony frame, revealing very little bits of marble-white skin and a countless amount of deep, horrible looking slashes. From shoulders down to hips, each inch of Snape's back was covered with whip-wounds.

It was Albus who now seemed to have a hard time breathing. "Good gods," he murmured. "Dear, good gods. Tom never has been that ruthless. Never!" Casting a Healing Spell took him only a moment, and he summoned several phials of essences of Dittany and Murtlap as well. Working quickly, ignoring the gasps and moans, Dumbledore forced his Potions master's head down onto the table and applied the salves on the wounds. He used his wand, not his hands, keeping his promise not to touch his Potions master.

It took Dumbledore over half an hour to close the wounds so the bleeding would finally stop. Snape didn't say a single word all the time, just kept his hands folded behind his head and his head thus pinned to the table. Silent tears dropped to the wood, accompanied by sweat and blood seeping into the already wet sleeves of his shirt. Surely, he must be a horrible sight. Definitely, he didn't give a damn.

Finally, Albus sat down again, and Snape pulled his head up from the table. His hair, nearly dry but worlds away from being clean, covered his face. He didn't speak, just stared into nothingness.

"The aftershocks will begin tormenting you soon, my dear boy," Dumbledore reminded him. "How much whiskey did you manage to drink?"

Snape's Adam's apple moved with his effort to speak. "Nearly... a bottle," he rasped. "Seems not enough to stop me... from remembering."

"How many?" The Headmaster's voice was barely audible when he asked this question.

Snape turned his head and seemed somewhat surprised. "How many strokes? Don't know. Lost count around... thirty, I'd say."

Handing his friend another phial with Blood-Replenishing Potion and making sure he drank it as well, Dumbledore shook his head once. "There are a lot more than just thirty wounds on your back. And I didn't mean that, anyway. What I want to know is... how many have raped you?"

The empty phial slipped out of Snape's trembling hand and shattered on the ground, casting dozens of little splinters into every corner. The sound reminded Snape of buttons hopping across another floor in another house. A burning, flaming fist appeared in his stomach, twisted cruelly, and Snape very nearly threw up each drop he had drunk so far. Wide-eyed, he stared at Dumbledore. He opened and closed his mouth several times, gulping in air, before he finally managed, ""Why... how... is it... that obvious?" only to summon himself another bottle of firewhiskey. As this one was unopened and therefore no cork to be gripped with fingers or teeth, Snape smashed its head to the rim of the table, breaking it off.

More glittering splinters on the floor. More pain in his stomach. More tears on his cheeks. Pouring a glass full up to the top, Snape downed the alcohol only a second later, squeezing his eyes shut to avoid seeing the world tumbling down at him.

Albus took the bottle and moved it out of Snape's reach. "You've had enough whiskey to take care of the aftershocks," he observed mildly. "And yes, it is that obvious. I knew it the moment when I saw you sitting in the corner, as I have seen you in this state before. There is blood on your trouser legs; too much to have originated from the wounds on your back. And there are the tears in your eyes. You don't cry when coming back here after a... normal punishment. You swear, you scream, you curse. But you don't cry. Only when they have raped you. So, tell me... how many? I need to know, I... if you tell me it will be easier for me to heal those wounds appropriately."

Suddenly, Snape felt as if Albus had reached inside his body and had ripped his heart out. The rest of the dwindling strength he still possessed left him, and he started shaking all over, from head to toes. His colour changed from merely pale to ashen, and his hands, his still blood-crusted hands, dug holes in his upper arms where they had taken a rest, where he was embracing himself to reassure him he wasn't yet dead.

Fear. Pain. Horrific memories. For one endless moment, Snape truly believed he would try to strangle the man with the half-moon glasses and the glossy, white beard, the man who had asked this absolutely hilarious, cruel, unbelievable, forbidden question. Yes. He would kill him instead of the Dark Lord, simply because Albus was here, and Voldemort was not. He would kill him so he might be able to forget about what had happened. Dumbledore would be a substitute, but what the hell. Maybe killing someone, anyone, would ease the pain. He would tear Albus to pieces, this old, friendly, gentle wizard, just as he had been torn to pieces a couple of hours ago.

The problem was, Albus was the only friend he had. Killing him was not an option.

But there was this question... How many had raped him?

Snape dug his fingers into his upper arms. Trying hard to get the words out, the Potions master croaked, "Five. Maybe six. I guess. *Plus the Dark Lord and the handle of his hellish whip*, he thought with a half-mad grin, making sure Albus couldn't see it and swearing a silent oath that he wouldn't share that juicy little bit of information with anyone as long as he had the bad luck to live. The pain that very special, searing pain had simply ripped him apart... had been unbelievable. And of course, the fact that he had been raped with that device was the main reason for the amount of blood on his trouser legs.

Snape wiped a hand across his face, smearing blood, tears, and sweat across it. "Guess I should be grateful I was only half conscious after the beating, when they dragged me into that... that damn room."

He felt more tears welling up in his eyes. *Really*, he thought bitterly, *I should stop crying. It's useless. Stop it!*

If only he could.

"Tom must have lost his mind, torturing you like this." Albus's voice sounded strangely strangled.

"Tell me about it," Snape whispered. "He seemed utterly infuriated with me. Even Lucius was a little taken aback at the way our master... treated me." He wanted to say something else was close to sharing secrets he didn't really want to share when he stopped and stared at his legs instead.

They trembled. They hurt. Why?

Unwelcome memories appeared inside his head, demanding to get acknowledged.

In a somewhat dreamlike manner, Snape forced his hands off his forearms and placed them on his thighs instead, carefully rubbing along the bones down to the knees.

Something was wrong. Horrified, the Potions master could feel the blood-soaked fabric of his trousers; he felt the searing pain between his legs and deep inside him as well, but most of all, at that moment, he felt pain in both his femur bones. "Nothing wrong with you," he scolded his legs. "Stop hurting!" Utterly bewildered, he stared at Dumbledore, hoping he could offer an explanation.

Dumbledore knew something Snape didn't. "What you feel there the pain in your bones is but a memory. Last time, he broke your legs, Severus," Albus murmured and sounded as if he could barely bring himself to say the words. "He had you whipped and raped by three of his followers and then he broke your legs. You came back home crawling on your stomach after Lucius Malfoy had taken you out of his house and left you outside the wards. You remember it; I see you can remember it now that I have told you."

Snape stared at his legs, his hands, then at the Headmaster and slowly shook his head. The broken legs weren't the problem he indeed remembered that now. But what Albus had said about... had just said... "No. Wrong. No. This... today... was the first time I got... I... I would remember. I... can't remember that!" Raped? Before tonight? Naked panic rang in Snape's voice, and he pushed himself away from Dumbledore, back towards the wall, ignoring the howling increase of pain the movement caused. Wrong. Lies! He had NEVER been raped so far he would know!

Dumbledore took off his glasses and placed them next to Severus's empty glass. Wearily pinching his nose and clearly dreading the turn this evening was about to take, he took the bottle and filled up the glass against his better judgement. He pushed it with one finger towards his Potions master who was close to jumping up and throwing himself out of the next window. If there had been windows down in the dungeons, he would have done it without hesitation.

As his rooms were deep down in Hogwarts' cellars, Snape instead snatched at the glass and used it as a lifeline, holding on to the tiny bit of sparkling normality like a drowning man. His eyes were huge in his face. "Lies," he stated, surprisingly calm. "You... are lying!"

Sadly, Albus Dumbledore shook his head. "Including tonight, there have been eight nights like tonight, when you came back to Hogwarts, to me, beaten and broken. Raped. I'm sorry, but it's true. Now that I have told you, you know it is true."

"I CANNOT REMEMBER!"

But he could. Albus's words had opened something inside Snape: a barrier, and memories. Memories that hadn't been there minutes ago and had become faint ghosts some heartbeats back tumbled down on him; horrible memories, too cruel to be looked at. Only those memories didn't wait until he was ready to look at them; they weren't polite enough to linger and hide until he called upon them. They pushed into his already traumatised mind, flooded him, and pinned him more effectively onto the bench than all spells and all chains the Wizarding world had ever invented.

He saw himself, screaming and fighting, barely more than a boy. He saw his bleeding, beaten body lying on the floor of his home at Spinner's End. Out of the corner of his eye he saw trousers getting thrown into a corner and naked feet silently crossing the wooden planks.

He heard laughter ringing in his ears. He felt, fresh and new, the burning pain of the whip. He heard his pleas; he heard the cool, flat voice of his master, ordering him to be taken to the table room.

He smelled his own blood, and he became aware of the excitement his colleagues radiated at the prospect of a helpless victim under their ministrations.

He had to deal with the searing pain of being raped, penetrated against his will. One man behind him; two. Several.

The Dark Lord's snake-like eyes, roaming over his naked body; the hissed command to chain him to the table made of slate.

Voldemort's hot and sweaty hand on the small of his back, the whip's handle caressing the wounds from his shoulders down to his arse.

He remembered the pain. Pain above all else, pain and blood and tears.

Lucius, taking care of him afterwards. Providing him with clothes. Supporting him.

Why the fuck had he forgotten it? How could someone forget memories like that?

Eight times. Eight! The last time, it seemed if he could trust those memories had been around a year ago. Crawling back into Albus's care, the bones in his useless legs feeling like broken glass, had taken him over an hour.

Well, at least Malfoy's words made sense now. "If you had shown some fear," he had said, of course assuming that Snape knew what Voldemort was up to when he was in such a black mood. Lucius had expected his colleague to beg for mercy.

"Had I known, I would have begged," Snape whispered hoarsely. "He might have been satisfied with the whipping. Why didn't I know?"

Again, Dumbledore knew the answer. "You were raped the first time briefly after you had asked Tom to spare Lily," he said quietly, holding Snape's horrified gaze. "Tom was very upset and decided to teach you a lesson. He... did it himself in your parents' house and sent you back here long past midnight, knowing I would never cast anyone out. Not even someone I considered a traitor."

Snape just shook his head in denial. No one could be that cruel.

But the Dark Lord was cruel. He had known that for years.

What he hadn't known was that Dumbledore possessed even more cruelty.

"I had to Oblivate you," Albus told him matter-of-factly, and Snape's heart skipped a beat or two. "Otherwise you wouldn't have been able to go back to him. You were twenty-one years old, you were willing to spy for me, and I couldn't let pass that opportunity only because he had..." His voice faltered.

"Only because he had broken my mind and my body and my spirit and my bloody traitorous, worthless soul," Snape finished for him and managed to heave himself onto his feet. Shock at this confession, made by a man he had considered a friend, washed over him. He needed to get some more distance between him and this man he obviously didn't know at all.

Still holding the glass in his hands, Snape crushed it with one violent movement. Glass chips were drilled into his palms. He didn't care. He didn't care about anything anymore, not with the memories crushing him as flat as a piece of parchment and leaving him worthy of nothing else but to be burned. "Eight times, Albus. Eight! And you wonder why he as good as slaughtered me tonight?"

Albus became angry. "My Obliviating you has nothing to do with..."

"I'll tell you why!" Snape hissed, smashing his bleeding hand onto his table. "He gets more and more cruel every time because he waits for a reaction from my side. He wants me to beg; he expects me to plead for his mercy. He wants to see me on my knees. And I... well, I deprive him of his satisfaction, just because I don't know what he wants! He uses more and more force each time to break me... He gets into the mood to see a gang rape... Every now and then he tries again, considers it time to hear me scream again because you Oblivate me!" Staggering back another step, Snape bumped against the wall. He felt like a trapped animal. "Had I known... had I remembered..."

Dumbledore got up as well, and the difference in the appearance between the two men was heart-wrenching. One white and shiny, mild and gentle, old and wise. The other one black and cruel, broken and bleeding, scared and hateful. All logic and reason, the Headmaster continued, "You would not have been able to go back! Not in time, not a few days afterwards, when Tom had summoned you. And if you hadn't gone back, you would have been useless for me!"

The words felt like a slap in his face. Useless. Now that really hurt. After all those years, after sacrificing his life to this old man, he was considered useless.

"I might have been able to come to terms," Snape rasped. "I might have learned to deal with it! I... if you had allowed me to keep those memories I..."

"You would be a different man, Severus," Albus said tiredly. "Do you think I don't know this? Do you think I didn't observe, during the years, how much you have changed? How you turned into the man you are keeping distance from everyone, keeping your solitude. Being rude and unfriendly, doing everything to avoid friendships. Your fear of being touched you can't even stand a handshake without sneering is based on your experience, although you can't remember any of it. The way you dress this most forbidding black, showing you don't want to mingle. That you rarely shower, keep your hair unwashed and greasy, ignore the basic rules of hygiene... each of your actions are results of what Tom did to you. You don't want anyone near you. You can't have anyone near you. You hate the world, you hate people, you hate yourself. I know that. But I can't change it because of the cause."

Too much. Too much to bear, too much to know, too much to stand. Snape swayed on his legs and would have fallen if he hadn't leaned against the wall for support. Determined to avoid further humiliation, he made his way into the bathroom, stalking like a puppet on strings, where he threw up the firewhiskey he had consumed in the past hour and a half. Both hands dug into the porcelain of the washbasin, he denied himself the comfort of sinking to his knees.

Albus stood behind him. Snape could feel the old man's eyes on his tormented back, and it made him cringe with fear. "You'll do it again, won't you?" he asked and vanished the mess in the basin with a swish of his hand. "You'll Oblivate me again. You will let me believe I was merely tortured. Mildly tortured, I assume. I will wake up and believe nothing... nothing else has happened." Turning, he looked at the old man standing in the doorway. "It will happen again, Albus. I won't see a reason to beg for his mercy, and he will do it again."

Dumbledore didn't even have the dignity to look ashamed. "Yes. I will Oblivate you as soon as the aftershocks are over. I have done so each time, and each time before I did it you remembered and begged me not to do it. But I have to. You know I have to. Harry has to win, and he needs your help to do so. I will be dead soon you will kill me, if I may remind you. I won't be around to see Harry through. You will have to do this. But if I let you keep the memories, your memories of tonight and the nights before, you will try to kill Tom. You will fail. And Harry will be alone. And then he will lose as well. I cannot let that happen, whatever the cost."

Surprising that even an empty stomach could clench. That one could vomit. Nothing but saliva landed in the basin, but still Snape felt sick as never before in his life. Not even after the rape had he felt that utterly lousy.

And, hell, what a miracle: teardrops were landing next to his spit. Lovely. He had thought the Dark Lord had broken him? Nonsense. He had believed Voldemort was the man he hated most? Rubbish. He would have sworn that the cruelty of being whipped and cursed and raped couldn't be topped? Well, he certainly had been most wrong there as well.

"My dear boy..." Albus began, and Snape jumped, grabbed his former friend's collar and threw him against the wall.

"Don't you... *dare* to ever Ever! call me that again!" he hissed, pulling Dumbledore closer and smashing him against the wall once more. He didn't even feel the wounds on his back ripping open again. The fact that his legs were about to give way eluded him. He enjoyed the hate boiling up inside him like water cooking on an open fire. Had he ever doubted that he would find the strength to kill the old man? How ridiculous a fear. Had he truly been horrified at the request? Stupid reaction. He would be able to kill Albus without as much as second thought. Even Oblivated, Snape was sure he would remember that there was no reason whatsoever to spare that friendly, mild, sentimental, extremely cruel bastard from hell.

Then the aftershocks kicked in, violent enough to force another scream out of Snape. He had to let go of Dumbledore, and he slammed hard onto the cold floor of his bathroom whilst the ghost of Voldemort's cursed whip began to dance over his ripped and torn flesh once more. Fire licked over the wounds, fire washed through him, and he thought he could hear the sound, this awful, nasty little wet smack the leather straps made when connecting with his shoulders, his sides and his buttocks.

Albus was there and literally dragged him out of the bathroom, ignoring the screams and ignoring Snape's harsh command not to be touched. Stronger than his condition indicated, given his age and the fact that his hand was next to useless, the Headmaster proved to be more than able to best an only half conscious man, badly wounded and out of his head with fear and pain and rage.

Dumbledore pulled Snape along into the Potions master's bedroom and forced him onto the mattress, having removed the covers first. He spellbound him, using magic to keep the man's fighting body still, then conjured the pots with salve once more. "You shouldn't have thrown up the firewhiskey, Severus," Dumbledore said. His voice was soothing as he scooped up the salve and applied it to the wounds once more. "It will become a long night now."

Gentle hands worked on his back, and he cringed at being touched. Blood seeped into the sheets. The tickling sensation of it running down his sides, the fact that he couldn't move, couldn't run, couldn't hinder something he didn't want to happen nearly drove Snape crazy.

The pain, flaming agony in each open wound, became unbearable, and Snape screamed out loud. He wanted to tell the old man to leave him alone, to get out of his rooms and never come back, but all he managed was to breathe between screams. Finally, he dug his teeth into the pillow to force himself into silence. He didn't want to scream, and he certainly didn't want Dumbledore to hear it. What he really wanted was to be dead, especially when he felt Albus's cool fingers on his back, applying the salve, tracing the slash wounds and closing them in their wake. He hated to be touched, had always hated it.

At least, he now knew why.

But his body betrayed him as he whimpered with relief at Albus's touch, as it brought salvation from the pain. The simple fact that the old man was here, in his dungeons, looking after him, soothed the Potions master beyond explanation. On one side, he wanted to kill Albus; on the other side, he wanted to cry out his gratefulness at the fact that he didn't have to go through this alone.

He couldn't move and therefore couldn't kill; so he cried. And whilst he did, he would have given a lot really, nearly everything if he could have hindered the Headmaster from vanishing his blood-soaked trousers, leaving him naked and shivering on his bed and casting healing spells for the wounds between his legs as well.

In the small hours of the morning, when even the ghosts were sleeping, the world outside the castle was fresh and cool and dark, waiting for a new morning to dawn. A thin mist covered the dewy grass; a small, pale moon shone on Hogwarts' grounds. Soon, the first birds would begin to sing.

Inside, deep down behind thick stone walls, Severus Snape was still lying in his bed. No binding spells held him down anymore, but sheer fatigue and exhaustion after hours of renewed pain.

The Potions master was just able to breathe. He was facing the wall, well aware of Albus still sitting next to his bed. The Headmaster had covered him with a duvet up to

his waist and had lit the fire in the bedroom. A friendly warmth blossomed in the darkish chamber; the mood was nearly peaceful.

"I will kill you happily, old man," Snape whispered, his throat rough from hours of screaming.

"I know. I have asked you to do so," Dumbledore answered quietly. "And I can assure you I consider it more than appropriate that it will be you who casts the Killing Curse."

Snape seemed to think about this for a long time. Just when enough minutes had passed that it might have possible the Potions master had fallen asleep, he continued. Begged. "Don't do it. Don't Oblivate me. Please."

"I have to," Dumbledore answered sadly.

"After you are dead, who will... if the Dark Lord feels like torturing me again like... like this... Next time will be even worse. Who will make sure I will survive, that I am able to go back if... if you are the only one who knows?" With immense effort, Snape dragged his body round, facing Dumbledore. His cheekbones stuck out like razorblades in his whitewashed face, casting shadows down to his thin, faintly blue lips. "You know I would never go to Poppy. I will hide down here, as I did tonight. And no house-elf will tell anyone to come and check on me. Not after I have killed you."

He wasn't in pain anymore; his wounds were healed, the blood-loss was taken care of, and the alcohol had left his system. In a day or two, he would be as good as new.

Well, nearly.

Snape stared at Dumbledore, and realisation dawned in the Potions master. "You haven't thought of that possibility?" he asked, somewhat amused that his Headmaster had actually managed to forget such an important flaw in his plan. "You believe Voldemort will stay put, will be satisfied to just Crucio me? You *hope* he will not beat me unconscious, will not have me raped, will not try to force some respect into me?"

It was Dumbledore's turn to open his mouth; he was unable to say a single word.

Snape barked out a dry laugh. "Well, I truly *hope* you will be right, old man, because if you aren't, and my master thinks he should punish me even more severely than tonight, I quite possibly will not survive. And everything, your whole plan of killing Voldemort and saving Potter, will shatter to nothingness."

Between two heartbeats, the Potions master's eyelids became heavy, too heavy to be kept open. Thinking, even remembering, became impossible. He slipped lower, under the duvet, and pulled it up to his shoulders, turning round and away from Dumbledore's thunderstruck face. His breathing became deep and regular; he could feel his own, steady heartbeat, and for a brief, endless, wonderful moment, he felt safe.

Then he heard a whispered spell and felt his memories being stolen, felt for one last, horrible time tears well up behind his lids again.

Then he was asleep.

When Snape woke up, he felt surprisingly well. Experimentally, he moved his shoulders against his pillow. Yes. Good. No pain. No open wounds. No blood on the sheets. Just aching muscles and an aching throat. Nearly perfect, really.

He took a deep breath and pushed himself up a bit. The soft, grey, flannel pyjama he wore was thoughtfully chosen not only to protect the new skin on its owner's back but to keep him warm as well. Snape always had been sensitive to the cold, but after a session with the Dark Lord, he usually felt chilled to the marrow.

Albus had lit a fire. Excellent. Although the fireplace was several feet away, the heat brushed Snape's skin and made him smile. A bed, a fire, clean sheets there was not much more he needed after a night such as the last. Maybe something to drink. And some food.

"Good evening, Severus," Albus said, entering the bedroom and carrying a tray with a pot of tea and a cup. "It's about time you woke up. You've slept for nearly seventy-two hours; your students are awaiting you eagerly!"

"Thank you so much for mentioning those dunderheads right after I have opened my eyes," Snape grumbled and gratefully accepted a cup of milked and sweetened tea from Albus's hand. He downed it in only two gulps, being hoarse from the sparse talking he'd done so far.

Dumbledore chuckled and twinkled at the Potions master over his half-moon glasses, preparing a second cup. "Tell me, Severus how do you feel?" he asked, looking at Snape intently.

Again, Snape stretched himself, craned his neck, and gently moved his lower spine. Running his fingers over his face and through his hair, he finally nodded. "Not too bad, I suppose. The Dark Lord was obviously in a merciful mood, letting me off the hook so soon."

"Obviously," Dumbledore agreed somewhat sternly. "Still, I decided to keep you in a healing stance for a day longer than usual. The whipping was bad; you had lost a lot of blood, and the aftershocks were awful this time. How much can you remember?"

Sighing comfortably, Snape answered, "Not too much, thank Merlin. I remember coming back here. I vaguely remember getting whipped. I remember... did I... I shattered a glass? Or a bottle?"

Albus took his spectacles off and wiped them clean on the hem of his midnight blue robes, thus avoiding Snape's eyes. "A glass. It slipped out of your fingers, and you managed to bury your hands in the splinters when you fell to the ground."

Examining his palms, Snape could see the tiny wounds that proved Dumbledore's words to be true. "I think I should be grateful for the rare side-effect the Cruciatus Curse has on me, leaving me with holes in my memory the size of Hogwarts' front gates," he mused, yawning widely. "Remembering every beat... No. Nothing one would like to think about."

Dumbledore turned his back to the man in the bed, and Snape wondered for a brief moment why there had been a thin film of sweat on his Headmaster's face. But he forgot about it when Albus asked, "Ready to get up? You must be starving, my d..." The smallest pause. "...ear house-elf Dobby has prepared dinner for you."

Now... that pause was odd. Snape, for the first time since he knew Albus Dumbledore, felt uneasy in the company of the Headmaster. He had the strangest feeling that something had changed between them, but couldn't put his finger on what it was.

Frowning, Snape swung his legs out of the bed and placed his feet on the floor. Dinner was all he was interested in right now. He was hungry, he needed sustenance, and he could think of whatever bothered him... well. Whenever.

Used Prompt: 56. Everyone says his hair is greasy. Why not come up with the way it got that way? Is it because of all the potions he brews? Is it because of an obsession with Crisco/something similar?

