

A Kind Of Magic

by star_girl

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Chapter 1

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The tall, dark man walked briskly away from the cottage, a book gripped firmly in one hand. He took long, purposeful strides towards the woodland, his black hair falling in front of his pale face. It was the summer solstice, and this evening was a particularly balmy one, with the golden light winking through the trees and casting dappled shadows. Even so, the man was dressed head to foot in black robes, as if he had no desire to be basking in the clement weather.

Severus Snape knew this place like the back of his hand; he'd spent many long hours practicing magic in the woods at Spinner's End as a child, and the place still held a sense of solace for him. He'd used the woods as a place to escape from hurt, pain and the outside world when he was younger, and even now as an adult, the trees seemed to offer a silent embrace no person had ever given him. He made his way quietly, skilfully through the thicket, heading for the shady copse, hoping to kick off his boots, open his latest tome and rest.

As he veered down the path to the right, he was sure he could hear a voice coming from further ahead. Cautiously, he withdrew his wand from his jacket and crept ever onwards.

The voice, he could now tell, was female, and she was speaking a very strange language indeed, it sounded to his ears part Latin, part something unrecognisable. The tone of her voice sounded like she was performing some kind of spell.

Gripping his wand tighter, he edged forwards, a muscle flexing in his jaw with anger. He felt far more annoyance than fear. Who dared to intrude on his private place? And what the hell were they doing?

The voice was getting louder as he approached, and he knew the clearing was just ahead of him, behind the clump of bushes. Crouching now, he found a perfect spot in which to observe and was so shocked by what he saw he nearly let out a gasp of astonishment.

In front of him was a young woman, completely naked except for a strange tiara in her brown hair, standing in the middle of a circle marked with candles around the edge. She held a wand and was making funny shapes in the air with it as she spoke, and yet, Severus noted, no light emitted from its tip. His first impression was that he'd stumbled across either a Squib caught up in fantasy, or else an unfortunate who needed to be taken straight away to St. Mungo's. As he crept further to the right, however, he saw a flag hanging from a branch, decorated with a golden, interlocking five-pointed star, surrounded by a circle. In front of this was a tree stump with objects and yet more candles on it. A small fire burned to one side.

Wicca, he thought with surprise. Severus had dimly heard of *Wicca*, or "Muggle-magic" as it was known in the wizarding world, and thought it at best a ridiculous and laughable notion. However, sightings of such activity were extremely rare. Only a handful of wizard writings existed on the rituals and performance of *Wicca*, and so his curiosity coupled with the blatant nudity of a nubile young female in front of him was enough to pique his interest and make him stay put.

The woman dropped to her knees, laying her wand on the wood-stump altar next to a silver chalice. She picked up a sharp-looking silver knife, which had a dark jewel glinting on the hilt. Holding it flat for a moment, she then raised it with both hands high above her head, the blade tip pointing downwards as she murmured more words.

She threw her head back, and for an awful moment, Severus thought she was going to stab herself. His wand arm twitched in anticipation, but to his relief she thrust the blade into the chalice, chanting all the while.

Removing the blade and settling it once again on the altar, the woman raised the cup up with both hands in the same manner as the knife and made some kind of blessing before drinking deeply from the cup.

Next, she took a small dish from the side and appeared to anoint herself from it, touching her wrists and neck and, he watched with a jolt of excitement, her breasts and pubis. Severus was fascinated and couldn't tear his eyes away at this point even if he'd wanted to.

She took a deep breath and picked up a bright red candle from the altar. This time, she spoke clearly and deliberately in English:

"Oh my lover, come unto me;

Hide from me no more.

Burn me with your fiery heart;

Come at last to my door."

Severus gasped as on the third line she'd tilted the candle, spilling some of the molten red wax onto her breasts, and yet her voice did not waver.

Placing the candle down, she held up a sprig of what he recognised to be rosemary. He was surprised at this, because rosemary had been used for centuries in wizarding love potions also. With a shiver of arousal, he watched as the woman began to rub the herb all over her body whilst continuing her rhyme:

"Time waits for no-one;

And yet I wait for you.

I'm longing for your touch.

Let our love begin anew."

This time at the third line, the woman ran the rosemary between her legs and Severus flushed.

Now she held the rosemary above the fire, dropping the sprig to the flames beneath on the third line once more:

"Oh my lover, come unto me.

For our love will be like fire;

Eternal, imperishable,

And full of passionate desire."

She raised her wand, swirling the sweet rosemary smoke around her as she turned in a circle. As she spun around, Severus ducked to avoid being seen, his foot hitting a dry twig that cracked loudly in the silence. Startled by the noise, the woman glanced straight into the bushes where Severus was hiding, and all he remembered before Disapparating was her clear green eyes.

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What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Sarah glanced up with a start at the sound of a snapping twig; to her relief, there was no-one there. *Just a fox or a bird or something*, she thought, trying to steady her breathing, and yet she'd had a sudden icy feeling of being watched. Shaking her head as if to clear her mind from such thoughts, she finished her ritual before opening the circle and extinguishing the flames.

She made it back to her cottage before nightfall. Bernard, her old tabby cat, mewed silently at her through the window as she made her way up the garden path. Her modest front garden was fairly ramshackle in appearance. Ivy grew untamed around the door, and a multitude of herbs and flowers fought for growing space in a chaotic yet pretty manner. On entering the hallway, Bernard, as usual, ran straight up to her, mewing and demanding a tickle behind the ears for a greeting. She stroked his head quickly before striding into the lounge and removing her dress in one fluid action and set about unpacking her bag; the night was not yet over, and she still had work to do.

Severus felt furious with himself as he Apparated with a smooth pop into his back yard. How could he be so careless? And what if the Muggle girl had seen him? Striding angrily into the house, he couldn't believe how stupid he'd been. He'd been a spy for so long during the War, for Merlin's sake, and there he was, as if Confunded by the sight of a naked Muggle girl, and had not even performed a basic invisibility spell for protection! *What a damn fool.*

He threw his cloak down with annoyance and, with a flick of his wand, summoned a glass of wine and sat in his favourite armchair. *Poor deluded Muggle*, he thought. She had looked deep in concentration, as if she genuinely believed that what she was doing was actually real! And yet it was difficult not to be interested in her methods and her tools, as watching her proved to be fascinating. Very little was known about Wicca in the wizarding world, after all. A smile crept to his lips as a thought began to take shape in his head. Maybe, just maybe, the Muggle might be worth studying. He could publish a paper, no, a book, on Muggle magic and its rituals. What better way to further distance himself from the incrimination of his Death Eater days than to display to the whole wizarding world some Dumbledore-esque tolerance in this post-War era? He thanked his Slytherin nature once again for the ability to turn the situation to his advantage. *The fact the Muggle is a pretty young thing is merely coincidental*, he thought with a grin. Hurriedly finishing his wine, he made haste straight away to Hogwarts library to research Wicca.

As he'd assumed, there weren't many texts on the subject to be found easily. "In The Company Of Muggles" proved fruitless, as did "Ancient Magic: 4356 BC to the Middle

Ages". The most comprehensive piece he'd found so far was in "A History Of Magic", which had a whole chapter devoted to Muggle-magic and touched on the medieval witch hunts and also briefly mentioned the eight festivals. Midsummer, of course, he thought. The celebration of the solstice.

But what of the specific spells and rituals? What of the meanings of these festivals? With a snort he threw down the umpteenth book on the table, loud enough for Madam Pince's eyes to flick up from her desk momentarily. They returned with haste; she knew better than to directly disturb Professor Snape when he was working.

Well, there was only one way to find out more. He would go to the woods and watch her perform her next ritual. He flicked back to "A History Of Magic" and saw that the next sabbat, called Lughnasadh, was seven weeks away. With a chill, he realised Lughnasadh fell on July 31st, which happened to be the birthday of none other than the Boy Who Lived: Harry Potter.

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What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Sarah stepped out of her rose-scented bath and threw a towel around her as she padded into the bedroom, dripping water all over her old, wooden floor. *Rose for love, she thought, and the flower of St John's Wort under your pillow on the night of the solstice and your true love will come to you in your dream.*

She hurriedly dried herself, humming as she did so. She made sure her skin was lathered in rose scented moisturiser after she was dry. It felt like Yule, she was so excited! *Calm down*, she thought to herself as she fluffed her pillows, ensuring the little yellow flower was placed just so. *hope I'm not too excited to sleep*, she thought as she snuggled down, pulling the duvet around her.

Seven weeks is a long time to wait, thought Severus irritably. There were things he wanted answers to right now. Like, the rosemary in her love spell: what other similarities were there between magical uses of herbs and flora within his world and hers? And what of Harry Potter's birthday falling on Lughnasadh – surely not a coincidence? And what was this festival, what did it mean? His investigations seemed to be coming up with more questions than answers, and when it came to gaining knowledge, Severus Snape was not a patient man.

He exhaled, putting his hands behind his head. He would stay in the damn library all night if he had to; he needed to put his mind at rest.

Sarah slept deeply, and her dreams were filled with vivid images. There were arched corridors of an old building, like a church or university, with a black-cloaked figure walking quickly ahead of her. She called out to him to stop and tried to catch up with him, but he was always one step ahead, disappearing around corners. Then suddenly she held her wand aloft, and a stream of white light came from the tip; the man halted and slowly turned around. He was pale, with chin-length dark hair that framed his face, with the most intense beetle-black eyes she'd ever seen. She was at once both transfixed and afraid. Before she could speak, the man vanished on the spot, and she woke up feeling restless.

Snape had spent every spare evening at the library over the forthcoming weeks. With summer in full swing and the term drawing to a close, there were never many students in there of an evening. His research was drawing blanks, but he was damned if he was going to ask for Madam Pince's assistance, even though she obviously sensed his frustration and hovered haughtily behind him at inopportune moments, trying to see what books he was reading, as if she knew he was up to something extracurricular. Each time he saw her lurking, he would fix her with a warning stare, and she would reluctantly return to her desk, eyes flicking up at him from time to time over her glasses, with a mistrustful expression carved on her putrid old face.

After exhausting each of the avenues available to him in the main library, Severus' mind turned to the Restricted Section. *How to get rid of that interfering old bat*, he wondered. Her suspicions would definitely be aroused if she saw him in the Restricted Section, but she rarely left the library at all, unless Filch had come to show her some forbidden book or other he'd confiscated. *Filch! That's it!* A lazy smile crept to his lips as a plan formulated in his mind. The pair of them had been dancing around each other for years, neither brave enough to voice any interest in each other. He knew just what to do. He'd replicate one of his particularly nasty private tomes, maybe *Draughts of Death* or something similar, and leave it on Filch's desk with a note that he'd found it just outside the Gryffindor common room, and could he please speak to Madam Pince about this? He chuckled to himself; a chance to have a dig at Gryffindor at the same time could not be missed.

Sarah meanwhile spent every day desperately looking out for her dream figure. To her annoyance, he wasn't at work, or at the college, or at her local pub. With desperation, she even visited places nearby that had similar architecture to the place in her dream, but the town hall, church and grammar school all appeared fruitless. Wicca had never let her down before, and yet she felt a crushing sense of disappointment the more time wore on. *Forget about him*, she thought firmly. *Look to Lughnasadh and ask the Goddess again.*

Severus' plan worked beautifully; the very next evening after placing the book in Filch's office just before dinner, he was down like clockwork at 7pm with that blasted cat of his, mumbling about "if Madam would be so kind, I have something important to show you in my office." Severus gave a crooked smile at this as he watched them both from the shadows of a bookcase. *I bet you do, you filthy old pervert*. He had to resist a shudder at the mental image of his two elderly colleagues rutting like beasts on Filch's desk whilst his mangy cat observed them with her orb-like amber eyes. He watched Madam Pince flush with pleasure as colour rose in her wrinkled cheeks before following him breathlessly out of the library, whispering in hushed and scandalised tones.

As soon as they left, Snape turned on his heel and walked swiftly towards the Restricted Section towards the back of the library. He wasn't convinced he would find anything but it was the last avenue available to him, and he was nothing if not thorough. He knew he would not have long to look before Madam Pince came back to lock up.

After skimming the names of spines, he settled on a heavy, old-looking book called *Magick Moste Ancient* and hurriedly settled down on one of the worn-out armchairs to read. To his great surprise, not only did it mention "Muggle-magick" but also "Black Magick", which was to all intents and purposes the Muggle equivalent of the Dark Arts.

Fascinated, he read with interest about the inverted pentagram with the sign of the goat as the demarcation of Black Magic, along with descriptions of blood sacrifice and scourge rituals. *Interesting, but not what I'm looking for; my Muggle-witch is a good little Wiccan*, he thought, turning back to the section on Wicca. As he'd discovered previously, it described the eight sabbats, but this time it also mentioned the Wiccan tools. *Wand, cauldron, broomstick*, he thought. Most curious. Flicking on, he discovered a passage on casting the circle and banishing the circle. As far as he could tell, these were opening and closing rituals, but there was no other description of any spells that actually took place within the circle once it had been cast. The frustration was maddening!

With a sigh, he placed the book carefully back on the shelf and made his way out of the library. *So, Lughnasadh it is. First-hand observation will undoubtedly be more beneficial*, he reasoned as he turned and made his way to his quarters in the dungeons, his cloak billowing in his wake.

Chapter 4

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What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

July 31st finally arrived and Severus was more than ready. Term time was now over, so he'd had chance to relax at Spinner's End for a few days. With no work to occupy his thoughts, all he could concentrate on was the impending ritual this evening. He presumed his Muggle-witch was in daily employment and that she preferred her rituals to take place in the evening as before. So, after taking a light dinner, he cast an invisibility charm on himself before Apparating from his back garden to the clearing in the woods. There was nothing else to do now but wait.

He did not have to wait long before he heard the swishing of leaves and the crunch of twigs underfoot, indicating the presence of someone picking their way through the trees. *There she is*, he thought with a flash of excitement. He felt slightly disappointed that she was clothed as he watched her enter the copse, a bag on her shoulder. It was ridiculous to think she walked around stark naked all the time, he conceded, but nonetheless he'd only ever seen her without clothes and therefore only ever imagined her that way. And he'd been imagining her more and more lately.

He watched as she assembled her altar on the tree-stump in a purposeful manner; she'd obviously done this many times before. She busied herself with hanging the flag in the branches and set to work on lighting the candles and the little fire. When she was sure she had everything just so, she began to peel off her dress, revealing her naked body underneath. Severus could not stop his eyes from roaming up and down as he drank in her female form. He liked the way she seemed so uninhibited about her nakedness, and he had the distinct impression she found it liberating. She seemed to compose herself for a moment before lifting her wand and beginning to cast the circle.

The opening ritual, just like the book said, he thought to himself. He'd positioned himself just slightly to the left of the tree bearing the flag, so he could see her up close, hear her words clearly and observe her movements. She wasn't the most beautiful of women, he decided, but pretty and nubile enough for his body to respond to her. And her eyes... well, he'd always had a thing for green eyes, and hers were exceptionally pretty. He cursed himself inwardly for allowing himself to think of such romantic notions as she began to chant over a bowl of water:

"I consecrate thee, O water, by these names:

Abrach, Aradia, Aranom.

By the Goddess, so mote it be."

She waved her wand in a circle three times before placing it back on the altar. Next, she picked up another bowl, and began to chant once more:

"I consecrate thee, O salt, by these names:

Abrach, Aradia, Aranom.

By the Goddess, so mote it be."

Again, she waved her wand in a circle three times before placing it back on the altar, next to the bowl of water.

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath before continuing. She turned ever so slightly, so that she was directly facing him and, raising her wand, said clearly:

"Let the power of the Goddess be within me tonight. Abracadabra!"

It all happened in a flash. Severus withdrew his wand almost instinctively and Stunned her as soon as he heard the last word, regretting it the second the spell left his wand. It hit her squarely in the chest and she crumpled unconscious onto the leaf-strewn woodland.

What the hell, he thought, panic rising in his chest. She'd just said the Killing Curse! All the years of living in fear of the Dark Lord had honed his reflexes to be constantly vigilant for attacks, and he'd moved with such lightning speed he was almost unaware of what he was doing. And now he'd just Stunned a Muggle who could no more kill him with her wand than protect herself with it. He was invisible, for Merlin's sake! She couldn't even see he was there! *What have I done? This wasn't supposed to happen!*

He stepped towards her, to see how badly he'd hurt her. Crouching beside her, he brought his fingers to her neck and was relieved to find a pulse. He noticed a small silver necklace glimmering at her throat; it said the name "Sarah" surrounded by little stars. He felt a sudden wave of tenderness; she looked so young. *I can't just leave her here*, he thought. *But if I take her to my house she will assume I have kidnapped her, or worse. Hadn't she spoken of the Killing Curse? I must find out what that meant!* Hundreds of thoughts were flying through his mind as he tried to decide what to do, running his hand through his stringy black hair in anguish.

She must come home with me, he thought finally, removing the invisibility charm from himself. He looked down at her and saw how vulnerable she was now in her nudity. Averting his eyes, with a flick of his wand he charmed her dress onto her body and with another extinguished the flames and packed her things away inside her bag. Carefully picking her up in his arms and with her bag over his shoulder, he Apparated into his lounge and laid her gently onto his battered leather sofa.

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What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

When she came to, it took her a few moments to register she wasn't in her own home. Blinking, she turned her head and saw a serious-looking pale man with long, dark hair and beetle-black eyes, gazing at her with concern, and she shrieked.

"Please do not be alarmed," Snape said in as gentle a voice as he could muster. "You have injured yourself, and I found you. My name is Severus Snape and you are in my house at Spinner's End. You have nothing to fear."

Her heart racing, Sarah did not know what to say. She had every reason to be scared; here in front of her was the man in her dream, and she had no idea how she got here or what happened.

"This must be a dream," she murmured, looking around the room furtively and noticing shelves upon shelves of books and a rather threadbare rug on the old wooden floorboards.

"I'm afraid you are totally awake. I repeat: you injured yourself in the woods, I found you and I brought you here. Do not be frightened, Sarah." His eyes flicked from her necklace to her face.

Sarah paused for a second. "What happened? My things " She lurched forwards.

"Are right here, in your bag," he finished for her, calmly. "As to what happened, I cannot say for certain," he lied easily, "but when I found you, you were out cold, I'd assumed you may have tripped or fallen, and in such a... vulnerable state," he inflected these words carefully, "I did not want to leave you."

Sarah thought back, trying to remember what had happened. It was Lughnasadh, she had been in the woods, and the thought suddenly hit her with extreme embarrassment she had been completely naked! And on top of that, this man must realise she was a witch! What had happened to make her unconscious? Was it him? Maybe he'd touched her, or, or... She felt more afraid than ever, and without being able to stop it, hot tears pricked her eyes and spilled down her face.

Severus looked at her, pity flickering in his jet black eyes. "But of course, you are afraid, and in shock too I have no doubt. If you are wondering why I did not take you straight to hospital, the answer is because I do not own an automobile. My first thought was to get you somewhere safe. And you may not believe it, but you are perfectly safe here."

She looked up at him through her tears and sought his eyes. There was genuine concern in them, and he looked softer somehow than he did in her dream. The bit about the automobile struck her as an odd turn of phrase, and yet what he'd said sounded convincing. *Wicca has never let me down*, she thought, steeling herself, and blinked back tears as he offered her a delicate lace handkerchief.

"Thank you," she managed to hiccup.

"It is natural to be shocked," he said softly. "Would I be right in thinking a cup of tea would help about now?" He managed to smile at her and she smiled back warmly. "Yes, please. "

Severus left the room, and she could hear him clattering around in the kitchen. With him gone, she managed to get a good look at her surroundings. The room was large, looked tired and wasn't particularly well decorated, but it had a homely feel to it nonetheless. There was a battered armchair on which he had been sitting, positioned next to a cast-iron fireplace, with a small coffee table in front of it. Behind the sofa and along the next wall was floor to ceiling in bookshelves. She idly browsed the spines of the ones nearest to her. "The Art Of Potions" was nestled alongside "1000 Magical Plants And Their Uses". Raising her eyebrows, her eyes skimmed along the shelf and found "Advanced Book Of Spells, Grade 7" and "Sorcery And Spellwork". *He's a witch!* she thought with a gasp. Just as she was about to take down one of the books for a flick through, she saw him walking back through the door carrying a tinkling tea tray complete with steaming tea pot, two cups and saucers and a little jug of milk.

"You will have to excuse the poorness of my crockery; I rarely get visitors," he drawled as he busied himself pouring the tea.

"Not at all," Sarah replied, merely for something to say.

He handed her the cup and saucer, and she was thankful to find she wasn't shaking as she took it from him. He watched her carefully as she took a sip and was relieved to see that she had relaxed a little. The few drops Calming Draught he'd placed in her tea were starting to work. Severus had never been particularly gifted at being able to do "tea and sympathy", but he knew that keeping the Muggle girl on side was essential. Legillimens and Veritaserum were going to be no good to him now to get the information he needed.

"How are you feeling?" he asked carefully.

"Much better, thank you. But I am a little embarrassed, at the state you found me in earlier "

Severus nodded. "I thought you might be. But you should not worry. That's the way of Wicca, is it not?" He cocked his head to one side and the corner of his mouth turned up.

"I knew it!" she exclaimed, making her teacup rattle on its saucer with her excitement. "You're one too! You're a witch!"

He let out a bark of a laugh at this. "My dear lady, the term is wizard. And yes, if you must know, I am one. I do not, however, practice Wicca."

A cold chill ran over her. "You practice Black Magic?" she asked quietly.

He raised his eyebrows. "Black Magic... Dark Magic... I will admit the Dark Arts fascinated me in my youth. But I regret the association. My magic these days is of a far lighter variety." He took a sip of Earl Grey, and she watched him intently.

"But if not Wicca, what is it you practice?"

Severus put down his cup and sighed. "I live in a different world to you. The magic I practice is very, very different. It is difficult to explain. There is so much you would not understand, or even believe." He paused, looking into her eyes. "It's magic. Does it need another name?" he asked softly and smiled.

"I guess not," Sarah murmured. But she was curious, and she was desperate to know more. Before she could formulate her next question however, Severus had already spoken.

"It is magic I need to speak to you of now. My knowledge of Wicca is actually very limited, and it is imperative I find out more about it. Maybe you'd be able to help me?"

Sarah looked at him appraisingly. "I believe there are books out there on the subject. But I'm not supposed to speak of the secrets of magic to those who do not practice," she said cautiously.

"Neither am I," he replied simply. "Have I not told you that I'm a wizard?"

Sarah hesitated. She'd seen the books, so she knew he was at the very least an occultist. But from where she was sitting, it seemed grossly unfair to ask all about her magic and then say he was a wizard but decline to share more information about his magic. *He could just be saying it to find out my secrets,* she thought.

Severus sensed her hesitation, and he rubbed his forehead. He needed to keep the girl interested and on his side, and he needed her to believe him. But the Statute of Secrecy forbade the use of magic in front of a Muggle. He took a deep breath.

"I am afraid I cannot physically show you my magic. It is forbidden. I would be discovered and punished severely. And also," he added quietly, "I think it would scare you."

Sarah looked up at him, and the flutter of uncertainty swept through her again.

"What I can do, however," he continued, "is show you my vast collection of spellbooks and my wand and implore you to believe me." He looked at her hard for a second before moving swiftly to the bookshelf, picking up various tomes. He handed her "Seven Spells of Success" by Billious Bigglesworth and "What Every Wizard Needs To Know About Transfiguration (But Are Too Afraid To Ask)" by Astrid Pepipsky. Sarah actually smiled at the title of the second book, and Severus watched her carefully as she scanned the blurb and flicked it open at random, scanning the page. Such strange names these authors have too, she noticed.

After a long time, she spoke.

"Why do you need to know more about Wicca?" she asked, still flicking through the book.

"I have noticed there are some... interesting parallels between your magic and mine. So I wish to explore this in more depth and see what resonance there could be for such a thing. Very little is known about Wicca in my circles."

Sarah seemed to find this an acceptable answer.

"May I see your wand?" she asked, closing the book. Silently, he removed it from his robes and paused for a second before handing it over. Sarah looked at it in wonder, noting he carried it on his person. It was made of pure ebony, a deep, luscious black, and must have been about twelve inches long. It had strange symbols carved ornately in the hilt. It did indeed look like a very magical object. She held it up, feeling the weight of it in her hands and stroked her fingers down the smoothly polished shaft. Severus couldn't help but smile at the way she admired and revered it; *rightly so,* he thought.

Can he really do those things in the book, she wondered. *Transformations? Summoning charms? Is it really possible?* The man did seem to exude intensity in waves, which must, she reasoned, be a reflection of his magical power.

"Do you believe me now," he asked, not unkindly, reaching to take his wand back.

"Yes, yes I do," she replied, handing the wand over. "Your wand is very beautiful," she said sincerely.

"Thank you." He gave her a crooked smile. No-one had described it quite like that before!

There was a few moments of silence before Severus asked, "So how long have you been a Wiccan?"

Sarah exhaled. "Well, magic has always fascinated me, even as a child. But I've been practicing Wicca for about five years now." She smiled proudly.

"And does it work?" he continued, his voice slipping into its usual lazy drawl.

She looked at him quizzically.

"Your magic. Does it work?"

Sarah's face fell and she looked affronted. *So now he doesn't believe me!* "Yes, my magic works," she replied, trying to keep her voice even. "It took me a few attempts, and I'm not perfect, but the more I practice, the better it gets."

Severus looked at her thoughtfully.

"Can you tell me which spells of yours have worked particularly well?" he asked softly.

Sarah looked down. "A few months ago I put a binding spell on my brother. He self-harms, and I did it to protect him. Ever since then, he stopped," she said quietly. "Also, a friend of mine was diagnosed with an aggressive tumour, the doctors said she would only have months to live. I performed a healing spell for her and she was cured." She looked up, and Snape quirked an eyebrow. "And sometimes I have dreams... not all the time, but sometimes..."

"Go on," Severus prompted, intrigued.

"Well some of them are prophetic. In the last dream I had like that, I dreamt about you." She looked him straight in the eyes, a green stare of defiance, daring him to contradict her.

Severus looked genuinely shocked. "Me?"

She nodded. "I was following you through an old building, full of arches. It looked like a university or something. But I couldn't catch you. Then I lifted up my wand, and all this white light came from the end, and you turned around to face me. Then you disappeared, just like that, into nothing. That's why I screamed when I woke up earlier, because you were the man in my dream." Sarah conveniently neglected to mention how this dream had come about, and any romantic implications the dream was supposed to portend to.

Severus' eyebrows meanwhile had crept higher and higher up his forehead whilst listening to her. *The Muggle really can do magic! If she can do magic, she's not a Muggle. And if she's not a Muggle, why can't she seem to do other magic, MY kind of magic?* He closed his eyes for a moment. *This makes no sense. You're either a Muggle, a witch, a wizard, or a Squib. That much had been drummed in to every magical person since birth. There had to be answers.*

He snapped his eyes open, a thought suddenly stirring.

"Do you always perform magic in the woods?" he wondered.

"When the weather allows me to. Wicca is about being closer to nature, to the elements."

"I see..." Severus leaned back into his chair. *I've been practicing magic in those woods since I was a child. The place has obviously absorbed some of my magical energy, which in turn has made her charming Wiccan rites successful,* he thought smugly. *Yes, that must be it. She's a delicate flower though... Let's play pretend with her and see*

what else I can find out...

"And when you were out in the woods today, what ritual were you performing?"

Sarah took a deep breath. *The man will surely ask what I had for breakfast or when I last passed a bowel movement next* she thought wryly, but continued as calmly as she could. "Today is Lughnasadh, otherwise known as Lammass, which is one of the eight sabbats of Wicca."

"And what is the significance of this day?"

"It celebrates the god Lugh, who was killed and resurrected. It's a festival of death and resurrection."

Severus froze. After the War, when the full story of Harry Potter's final showdown with the Dark Lord came to light, the wizarding world was amazed at the boy's death and subsequent resurrection. "Oh, Merlin," he muttered. All these links between worlds was far too coincidental. Where was it leading?

"Are you alright?" she asked, seeing him pale further.

Severus steadied himself. "Yes, I'm fine. It's just today has great significance in the wizarding world, for very similar and yet totally different reasons. The growing parallels are very surprising."

He paused for a moment, remembering Avada Kedavra.

"I must ask you, have you ever heard of the words Avada Kedavra?" he asked slowly, looking at the floor and careful to say them with no emotion.

"You mean Abracadabra?" she asked, unsure if she heard right. His head shot up. "That word. What does it mean?" he asked her quite fiercely now, and she could sense the urgency in his voice, and his gaze became more than a little intimidating as his eyes flashed dangerously.

"I-it's a magical word, it doesn't really mean anything," she said quickly. "I looked it up once and apparently it stems from Roman times as a protective chant, like an amulet. Why do you ask?" she asked curiously.

"It sounds very much like the most deadly spell you could ever perform in my world. It sounds just like the Killing Curse."

She looked at him, horrified. He looked back at her solemnly. "I'm glad there is no parallel for that word," he said quietly.

She blinked at him. *Killing Curse? He said he wasn't into Black Magic!*

He changed tact, swiftly changing the subject before she had a chance to feel uncomfortable. "Tell me more about what you were doing in the woods today. What rites and spells were you going to cast?"

"Well, the standard opening rite, then a symbolic rite for Lugh, then I would have performed a spell of my own creation." She glanced down nervously. He wondered if she would have repeated her love spell, but he didn't want to embarrass her so he kept quiet.

"There is one rite that should be performed today, but which I am unable to perform alone," she continued softly.

"Oh?" He found her eyes, an enquiring look etched on his face.

"Yes, it requires two people." She tried to sound breezy, excitement welling up inside her. "It's called the Great Rite." She looked at her hands, not able to believe what she was about to suggest. *Wicca has never let me down*, she thought again.

"And what is so great about this particular rite?"

She paused. "It's supposed to be one of the most powerful rites in Wicca. It's about balance, and unity, and the power of the male and female polarity joining as one."

"And that would involve?" he asked, looking sideways at her.

Sarah took a deep breath. "It involves sex. And I want you to perform the Great Rite with me, tonight."

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

The look of surprise on Severus Snape's face would have been priceless to any of Hogwarts students. He'd looked as if someone had put Doxy eggs in his tea. Sarah's heart hammered in her chest as she awaited his response.

"You want to perform the Great Rite, with me, tonight?" he repeated slowly, as if he'd misheard or that she was in some way simple.

"Yes. You want to know more about Wiccan ritual, so I'm giving you the chance to see my magic first hand. If you cannot show me your magic, it would benefit me if you could assist me in mine. Plus, you are clearly a very magical man; I can sense it." *And if there is any foolproof way to see if you are my true love, this has to be it* she thought.

The corner of Snape's mouth twitched. *The girl wasn't backwards in coming forwards, was she? Slytherin fortune again, handing him sex on a plate, all in the name of research!* He cleared his throat before speaking.

"And how does one go about this Great Rite? Are there any documented procedures on how it is to be enacted?" He fought hard to keep the tone of amusement out of his voice.

"Actually, there is," she answered breathlessly, reaching for her bag. She rummaged around and pulled out a book. It was bound in black leather and had "Book Of

Shadows" along with a five pointed pentacle embossed on the front cover in gold. She handed it to Severus, whose face remained impassive, although inside his stomach gave a triumphant whoosh. *Now this is what I call research*, he thought.

"Chapter eleven," she said quietly, looking at her hands. There was silence while Severus flicked to the appropriate page and began to read. She watched his face for any sign of shock or disgust, yet he carried on reading without a flicker of emotion on his face.

Sarah was glad for the opportunity to study him. He wasn't what you would call classically handsome, yet his dark features held an intense, almost magnetic kind of attraction to her. He was wearing a crisp white high-collared shirt with ruffles at the sleeves with smartly tailored black trousers. *Very Goth, very Karl Lagerfeld, very nice!* Her eyes flicked to his lips which, she now noticed, looked soft and sensual within his hard face. *Is this man really my true love?* she asked herself.

Severus looked up. "You have never done this before?"

Sarah smiled. "Not in the ritualistic way of the Grand Rite, no," she replied. Severus breathed deeply through his nose.

"Are you quite sure you want to do this?" he asked her quietly.

Her eyes found his. "I absolutely want to do this." He gazed back at her for a few heartbeats. "Do you want to do this?" she batted the question back at him.

"I see nothing unpleasant in this ritual, and I think it would enhance my knowledge," he answered steadily *And I haven't felt a woman's flesh in years, and you're offering yourself to me wholeheartedly, you pretty young thing, and I need the sweet release*, he thought, slightly ashamed.

Sarah looked at him. "You do realise that the rite must be continued to the very end? That we would be unable to stop once we'd started?"

Severus nearly laughed, but raised an eyebrow instead. *Is she getting performance anxiety on my behalf?*

"It's written that, as this is a powerful rite, you should see it through to the end as the power it produces can backfire if the rite is performed but left incomplete."

Severus nodded. *Yes, we'll do all your mumbo-jumbo by the book, my dear, and you will get a thoroughly good shagging at the end of it!* assure you, Sarah, I have no intention of leaving you... incomplete," he drawled. The suggestion of his voice sent a shiver of pleasure down her spine.

"And you do realise you will have to be fully naked, like me, for this ritual?" she asked carefully. Snape paused for a second, thinking of the Dark Mark *Damn thing can be passed off as a tattoo*, he decided. It still irritated him that with the Dark Lord now deceased, the bloody mark was still there, clear as ever. He'd got used to the idea of having it for the rest of his life, as a reminder of the era of cruelty of which he'd been a part of.

"I'd find it difficult to conceive of enacting the ritual thoroughly if this were not the case," he replied smoothly. Once again, she shivered with anticipation.

"Then we must prepare. It's already dark and the ritual must be completed by midnight."

Merciful Goddess, she thought. *What am I doing?*

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

The furniture in Snape's lounge had been pushed back to create a large, open space on the floor. The threadbare rug had been removed and candles were burning around the edge of a chalk-marked circle. The coffee table was used as an impromptu altar, the flag with the five-pointed star draped across it and her tools spread on top as usual. The "Book Of Shadows" was propped open on a bookstand just in front of the altar. Severus had read and re-read the rite over and over whilst Sarah prepared the room.

Looks like I'll be the one doing all the talking in this, he thought to himself. *Do it by the book, keep her happy and I'm sure my pleasure will return to me threefold* he smirked.

As she'd been lighting the candles and setting up the altar, she had started to fear that something may go wrong *What if I cannot arouse him? What if he finds me unattractive?* Nagging self-doubt had crept in, and she had to shoo those thoughts away with the plain fact that he'd agreed to go through the ceremony with her in the first place. *Surely he wouldn't have agreed if he couldn't, ah, rise to the occasion*, she thought to herself with a small smile.

He padded back into the lounge again, now in bare feet, his naked body covered in what looked to be a black satin smoking jacket. He felt like a flasher. "Are you sure you want to do this?" he asked again, trying to look casual, like he entertained Muggle-witches all the time for bouts of spontaneous ritualistic sex.

She simply smiled and in response slipped her dress over her head and threw it at once onto the sofa. His eyes flicked down to her naked body briefly, then up to her face. Taking a deep breath, he opened his robe and threw it on top of her dress on the sofa and walked slowly towards her into the circle. She noticed with pleasure his broad shoulders, the rangy athleticism of his body, the dark smattering of hair that led from his naval to his pubis and the black skull tattoo on his left forearm.

"Nice tattoo. Into Death Metal, are you?" she asked jovially. Severus raised an eyebrow.

"Something like that."

They were about a foot apart now, and they gazed into each other's eyes for a moment. She could feel the heat coming from him. She had worried it would feel awkward or strange, but as soon as he stepped into the circle she felt as if this was totally right.

"Are you ready?" she asked him softly. He nodded at her, never taking his eyes off hers. She paused for a moment before turning to the altar, taking her wand and casting the circle. She chanted the words of the opening rite, and then laid her wand back onto the altar, before turning and stepping towards Severus.

Severus knelt before her, in preparation for the Five-Fold Kiss. He spoke in his deep, drawling voice, accentuating every syllable:

"Blessed be thy feet, that hast brought thee to me."

He then kissed her feet, slowly; right foot, then left foot. Sarah felt the heat of his lips on the tops of her feet and held her breath. He continued:

"Blessed be thy knees, that kneel at the sacred altar."

He then kissed her knees, again right then left.

"Blessed be thy womb, without which we would not be."

He kissed her tenderly, just above her pubis, and it felt like fire in her belly. She let out a little breath as he slowly stood, making his way upwards.

"Blessed be thy breasts, formed in beauty."

He paused, admiring her breasts. She could almost feel the heat of his gaze as he placed his hands on them, before dipping his head and taking the right nipple in his mouth, swirling it with his tongue, softly sucking and landing a gentle kiss on the awakened nub, before doing exactly the same to the left. She closed her eyes now and could not suppress a moan. Just as she had succumbed to the sensations, he lifted his head. She found his glittering, obsidian eyes as he murmured the next line:

"Blessed be thy lips, that shalt utter the sacred names."

The world stopped turning for a second as his lips reached for hers. Slowly, so slowly their mouths met. She was not surprised by the instant arousal it stirred in her, the jets of pure desire shooting down her spine as he wrapped an arm around her. She placed her hands on his chest, and he pulled her ever closer, their kiss growing deeper, tongues fluttering over each others lips. Now his hands raked over her hips and she slid her hands through his dark, oily hair and he pushed himself against her. Sarah could feel the magic radiating off him and longed to be closer, much closer to this mysterious man. His hands were all over her, her breasts, her arse, and tangling in her thick, brown hair.

Finally, they stopped kissing, and they gazed into each other's eyes once more, each a little short of breath and full of desire. She smiled at him, and he offered a smile in return as he helped her to lie down in the centre of the circle. He covered her with a thin, silver square of material, and kneeled between her feet, her legs slightly apart. His voice continued, in the same baritone drawl as before:

"All once worshipped the ancient altar;

The great altar of all things.

For woman was the altar,

And the sacred place inside the circle was her.

She is the origin of all things, and so we adore her.

O circle of stars, O infinite space,

Let it ever be thus.

For the point of life, without which we would not be;

For the power and glory of all men."

Carefully, Severus removed the veil from Sarah's body, and he admired her form once more. His fingers began to trace lightly up her legs, grazing her calf, her thigh, taking his time to swirl circles across her belly and abdomen, making her shudder with delight. He then continued the spell, planting row after row of kisses slowly and carefully up her legs as he began to creep up her body:

"Altar of mysteries manifold,

The Circle's secret point;

Thus do I sign of old,

With kisses of my lips anoint."

He stopped just by her pubis, and Sarah was trembling as his mouth hovered just inches away. He could smell her arousal and feel her warmth, and those signals, linked to his animal brain, made his cock swell impatiently. He swooped down, kissing and lapping at her sensitive ridges; her hips bucked in response as she groaned delicately. Then he moved up her body once more, the snake of his tongue tasting his way up her belly and breasts as the spell continued:

"Open for me the secret way,

Beyond the gates of night and day.

Here where lance and grail unite,

This sacred and most powerful night.

From the Goddess cup I long to sip,

Now joined at feet, and knees, and breast, and hip."

On the last line, Severus entered Sarah with a gasp, and her moan of appreciation only served to flood his senses with even more pleasure as their eyes locked and he slid deep inside her to the hilt. He was surrounded by her wet heat, and he filled her so completely, hand in glove. Her whole body felt like it was singing, each nerve end making her a pure receptacle for gratification as she grabbed onto his shoulders and they began to rock together.

As their passion increased, the candles around the circle grew brighter, the flames getting higher and higher, echoing their desire as he slammed into her faster, harder. It was as if a ball of pure white light was filling each of their hearts with joy and love. The closer to climax they got, the more the energy of pure rapture swept over them.

She was clinging to him now as if she were drowning, and still their eyes locked as he thrust into her, urging her on. Her moans were unbridled *Yes, yes, by the Goddess, you're the one!* was the last thought she had before she was overtaken by the intense waves of her orgasm, crying out his name whilst her spasms brought forth his torrent of pleasure as he spilled his seed inside her with feral groans of his own. The light grew brighter still from the candles, and panting, still inside her, they looked up to see each of the flames had risen up in a swift arc, meeting each other at the apex above them, forming a cage of pure fire.

Suddenly, the cage exploded silently with a bright white flash and they were left in each other's arms with only the altar candle burning for light, still breathing heavily. Severus looked deeply into her green, searching eyes and recognised a swell of love within him, a love which was now being reflected in her gaze. *What madness is this?* he thought with mounting panic, and after a moment withdrew quickly, standing up and walking towards the door.

"No! Stop! You can't leave the circle, the ritual isn't over!" Sarah cried urgently.

Severus stood just on the threshold of stepping over the chalk-drawn circle. He stopped, turned back and helped her to her feet. "I must finish the rite," she said, running a hand down his face, and involuntarily he found himself kissing her fingers.

Steadying herself, she picked up her wand, banished the watch towers and closed the circle. When she was done, she spun around and flung herself into his arms. He could feel she was shaking, and he closed his arms around her, a strange distant look in his eyes.

"Well, that's never happened before," she quipped, gazing up at him. He didn't smile and wouldn't meet her eyes, so she ran her hands across his shoulders and down his arms, not wanting to break contact with the man she just had the best sex of her life with. As she stroked his arm, she noticed with surprise that his tattoo had vanished.

"Severus, your arm "

His eyes flicked down automatically to his left arm, and they widened to see that the Dark Mark had indeed disappeared, leaving just smooth pale skin to mirror his other forearm.

Oh, Merlin.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

The sight of his now-clear forearm tore Severus away from his reverie. "I do believe," he said slowly, "that you and I have just performed some very, very powerful magic indeed."

He turned away from her coldly and walked to the sofa, grabbing his robe and wrapping it around him with haste. "I should not have done this. The Ministry's notification will be here any minute. I will be punished." He ran a hand through his hair with desperation.

"I don't understand," she replied, anguish in her voice. "This was my ritual, not yours."

He spun at her, fury flashing in his eyes. "Did you not see the flames? Only my magic could have produced such an effect," he scoffed. "So I have successfully performed magic in front of you, and therefore I have broken the Statute of Secrecy." He put his hands to his face and rubbed his temples, breathing deeply.

"How will they know," she asked quietly, snakes of dread knotted in her stomach, not really knowing who "they" were, or even what the Statute of Secrecy might be.

"They know. They always know." Severus strode to the window and opened it, looking out for his impending owl.

"Will someone come?" she asked, and he detected the fear in her voice.

Snape struggled to keep calm, but his voice was icy. "They'll send an owl. The punishment is mine and mine alone. You are, apparently, the innocent party in all this. *All that'll happen to you is that you'll be Obliviated, and then you can run along back to your normal life,* he thought bitterly.

Sarah paused for a second. She was sure she'd heard him say an owl was coming, but that couldn't be right. Unless it was an acronym for the wizard police, like Officers of Wizarding Law. *Yes, that's probably it,* she thought. She stepped gingerly towards him. "I should not have asked this of you," she said gently, wanting to touch him again but afraid of his dismissal.

His obsidian eyes fixed upon her. "No, you should not have," he said in a low, menacing growl. "The ritual we just performed was not about death and rebirth, or the balance of nature, was it?"

Sarah flushed, looking down.

"The most powerful rite in Wicca, you said. I bet that effect had never been documented before. There was no mention of a cage of fire in your "Book of Shadows", was there?" His black eyes shone malevolently, and she shook her head imperceptibly, guilt washing over her with a tide of nausea.

"Because the rite we have just performed has somehow bound me to you, and you knew that would happen before you asked me, didn't you?" He could barely contain the rage in his voice.

"No, it wasn't like that – " she began, but Severus cut her off.

"Well, why don't you tell me what it was like, exactly. Performing love spells in the woods? Trying to ensnare the affections of the first man to cross your path?" he sneered venomously.

Sarah flushed again, her eyes widening in anger and surprise. "You've been spying on me! You - you evil, perverted – "

"And yet, magically binding someone without their consent is neither perverted nor evil, I presume?" he asked silkily, not denying her accusation. The steely look of cold fury in his eyes made her look away. She had no answer for this; he was totally right.

By the Goddess, it wasn't supposed to turn out like this, she thought, feeling sick to her stomach. *Why had Wicca shown him to me, if he is not my love? As a warning, perhaps? He'd been spying on me, he'd all but admitted it. How could I be so foolish? During the ritual, I thought I saw love in his eyes, but now all I see is hate.* She gave a little sob.

Severus turned away from her again, breathing deeply. *How was I supposed to know my magic would somehow activate her rite? It was supposed to be her ritual, her pathetic Muggle-magic, not mine,* he thought ruefully. *Wanton little harlot tricked me, bound me to her no less, coerced me into showing my magic and will in all probability now leave me ruined or exiled! And all that from a Muggle girl. A Death Eater would have been proud of causing that kind of carnage in a night's work. How the hell am I going to reverse a ritual like that?*

Severus began pacing up and down, his hand raking distractedly yet again through his damp, dark hair. "Where is it? Bloody owl should be here by now," he snapped. "And don't you want to put some clothes on, girl?" he roared.

He hadn't meant for it to sound as harsh as it did, and he could see that she was hurt as she physically recoiled from his words with embarrassment as if stung, trying to cover up her body from him. He once again saw how young and vulnerable she was and, with great effort, quelled his anger.

"It wasn't – I did not mean –" Severus began, frustrated, trying to focus his thoughts on the immediate situation. He drew breath. "You must understand that this one act of magic could ruin my life. I'm now waiting for an owl to deliver my fate. I will at the very least be jailed. I may even be exiled. All because of your whimsical desire for love! In my world, we tend to take the notion of love and consent a little more seriously," he said coldly.

To his great surprise, Sarah rounded on him. "In your world? What is this world? The world in where your magic is infinitely better than mine! I have been trying to give you answers to whatever ridiculous questions you have plagued me with all day, and all you come back with is anger and superiority! I gave you a chance to see my magic first hand, to give you more knowledge of Wicca, and I also gave you a chance to say no. I'm SORRY that the power of the Great Rite was such a surprise to you, and I'm SORRY you feel like taking all the credit for the magic it produced! I am a WITCH, sir, even if you think I am not!"

As she shouted the last line, several things happened at once. The window slammed, the altar candle pulsed bright red and the silver veil swept up off the floor, covering her naked body. In the echoing silence they gaped at each other for a moment with their mouths open.

"Your magic..." she started.

"No, your magic. I did not do this," he said quietly.

"What? How?" Sarah looked at her hands as if she was seeing them for the first time.

Severus closed his eyes. *This is why the Ministry owl has not come*, he thought. *What have I done?*

"Sarah," he started slowly, eyes opening wide with the realisation suddenly dawning, "I believe that the ritual was so powerful, that I have somehow transferred some of my power into you. And, from the look of my... tattoo disappearing, some of your power appears to have been transferred into me."

Sarah looked scared. "Will the owls come for me too?" she asked, her voice trembling.

Severus let out a bark of a laugh. "No, the owl will not come for you. And I think it will not come for me either," he added thoughtfully.

"I don't understand," she said and gazed at him imploringly.

He sighed. "There is much you do not understand. There is much I do not understand. Come; get dressed and we will start from the beginning. There is much to discuss; this will be a long night."

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Sarah watched his back as he strode out of the lounge and up the stairs. *What was going on? One minute he's ranting and raving about owls and blaming me for involving him in the Great Rite, the next minute he's saying we need to talk! And that episode with the window slamming was that actually me? How is that possible?* she thought to herself as she pulled on her dress and began to pack her things away.

A minute later, Severus padded back into the lounge barefoot, dressed in black trousers and a white shirt that was half open. Sarah's first thought was he looked incredibly raffish and sexy, but then she remembered he was angry with her, so she dismissed such thoughts immediately. He removed the chalk circle from the wooden floor with his wand, and then giving it a little flick, rearranged the furniture to exactly how it was before. Sarah looked at him wide-eyed.

"I will explain all about my magic," he said wearily, anticipating her questions, "but first we need to be totally honest with each other. Please sit." He gestured to the sofa as he took his usual position in the armchair near the fire.

At least he's calmed down a bit, she thought with relief, sinking down into the squashy leather.

"Drink?" he asked, as with another flick of his wand he summoned two glasses and a bottle of wine from the sideboard and sent it floating across the room, landing neatly on the coffee table. Another twirl and the bottle began to pour deep red liquid into one of the glasses. Sarah's eyes were nearly on stalks.

"How " she began.

"Later," said Severus, with finality. "Right now I'm going to tell you what really happened today, and after that you're going to tell me what other rituals you have been performing. Maybe it will illuminate how we got into this mess and whether we are able to do anything about it." He sent a glass of wine soaring through the air to where she was sitting. Sarah plucked it from mid-air, so surprised she forgot to utter a word of thanks.

"I came across you at the summer solstice in the woods. I was heading towards the clearing to read in peace, but then I heard a voice and I'd assumed it was someone from my world performing a spell. When I saw it was you and it was a Wicca ritual, I was shocked and curious, so I hid in the bushes and watched you." Severus took a sip of the wine whilst letting her digest this information. She opened her mouth to say something, but he held up his hand to silence her and continued.

"A noise nearly alerted you to my presence, so I had to Disapparate out of sight. And then "

"I'm sorry," she interrupted suddenly. "You had to what?"

"Disapparate. Apparate. It's a way of travelling from one point to another quickly."

"Show me."

Severus sighed; of course she was going to be fascinated with the wealth of new magic that she didn't know and would want to know more. But he was not a patient man, and if she continued to punctuate this conversation with requests for demonstrations, there was a considerable risk that he may well show her the Tongue-Tying Curse first hand! *Is this what it's going to be like for the rest of the evening?* he grumbled in his thoughts. *I'm going to be a damned performing monkey!*

"Very well, for the purposes of the story..." he replied testily. He stood, twisted on the spot and disappeared with a pop. Sarah looked on in disbelief as he stalked back into the lounge from the hallway.

"And that's Apparition," he drawled, collapsing back into his armchair.

"That's... that's... incredible!" she gasped.

If her jaw had dropped any lower, her chin would have surely hit the floor, Severus thought with a smirk.

"I can assure you, the skill is not uncommon amongst wizards. Anyway, as I was saying," he said firmly, making it clear that the subject of Apparition was now off-limits. "After seeing you at the solstice, I decided to do some research. Very little is known about Wiccan ritual, but what I had seen had prompted me to believe there may be parallels between the two worlds. Then I discovered Lughnasadh fell on the same day as the birthday of... a very important figure in my world." He inflected the words as though they left a nasty taste in his mouth. "So important in fact that a whole war had been fought over him, and so naturally that was enough motivation for me to investigate further."

Sarah sipped her wine and stayed silent, allowing him to continue.

"I decided that I would watch you on Lughnasadh, this time under the protection of invisibility. You then uttered a word that sounded like Avada Kedavra, and acting purely out of self-defence, I cast a spell which Stunned you."

Sarah's eyes widened. *So that's how I became unconscious!*

"You must understand how serious the Killing Curse is, and how often my own life has been threatened by it. It was an instinct to defend myself. Naturally I was horrified when I realised what I'd done. I couldn't leave you like that, so I made the decision to bring you here by Apparition."

Severus paused, looking at the light through the rich ruby-red liquid in his glass. He looked like he had more to say and that it was taking great effort to wrestle these words from his lips. Finally, he spoke.

"I apologise for spying on you. And I apologise for being careless and Stunning you. It's lucky you weren't seriously injured," he said softly.

Sarah regarded him for a moment, her face deep in concentration. "You Stunned me with a spell?" she asked carefully. "And then we disappeared from the woods and ended up here?"

"Disapparated," he corrected, nodding.

"If that's the case," she persisted, "why didn't the owls come earlier then, if you'd already performed magic in front of me?"

Severus' already white pallor paled even further with this question. He'd not, up to that point, even considered that at all. Technically, thinking it through, he'd revealed magic in her presence four times: the first Apparition at the solstice; the Stunning spell; the second Apparition with her this evening; and lastly the Calming Draught he'd sneaked into her tea. And yet, no owl had come. Severus took a long swig of wine as he came to the uneasy conclusion of why that might be: either Sarah had dormant wizarding abilities, which had only manifested themselves this evening (unlikely giving her reaction after their little argument earlier), or the Ministry considered Wicca to be real magic.

He exhaled. "In all honesty, I do not know." He shifted in his seat before changing the subject. "You've heard the truth from me. Your turn. The truth, please, Sarah." He sat back and watched her closely, dark eyes glittering.

Sarah placed her glass down on to the coffee table and lightly cleared her throat.

"Well, the ritual you saw at the solstice was a Wiccan love ritual," she started, trying hard not to blush. "I usually perform spells for the benefit of other people, but I'd decided to see if I could do something positive for myself. I chose the solstice because, along with Beltaine, it's the most significant date in the Wiccan calendar associated with love.

After I finished the ritual, I went back to my cottage to perform another charm. This was a very ancient spell. It's said that if you bathe in the scent of the rose and place the flower of St. John's Wort under your pillow on the night of the solstice, your true love will be revealed to you in your dream." She paused, fidgeting with her hands.

"And did it work?" Severus asked through his onyx gaze.

"I saw a man," she admitted. She took a deep breath. "The dream I told you about earlier? That was the dream I dreamt of on the night of the solstice." Her bright green eyes found his.

"I see..." He rubbed his left arm absently, considering this, eyes now fixed on hers. "Is that why you asked me to perform the Great Rite with you?" he asked quietly.

Sarah held his gaze. "Yes. I asked you because of the dream, and because Wicca had never let me down before. I thought it would be the way to tell if you really were... who the dream said you were," she said tactfully. "I didn't know it would be binding and I didn't mean to trick you. I'd just hoped that... that we'd end up falling for each other," she finished lamely, heat rising in her cheeks.

"Strong emotions were invoked during the rite," he answered carefully. "I am sure you felt them too. I believe this is a demonstration of how powerful the ritual was. And there is no doubt the ritual was binding. We are bound by the magic it produced."

"How do you know for sure?" she asked timidly, not wanting to provoke his anger.

"Ropes of flame are common in many kinds of wizarding pacts, especially those that require a moral contract; for example, the Unbreakable Vow or certain types of wedding ceremonies. The cage of fire clearly showed to me that we are bound to one another." Severus raised a finger to his lip and absently ran it back and forth in thought as he stared into the middle distance. "There is, however, a tendency with bindings of this kind that they are permanent and irreversible in nature." His eyes met hers, and he saw her mouth open with shock.

Yes, my dear, it looks like you're stuck with me, he thought grimly.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Sarah watched Severus look away, his eyes fixed on the stub of a candle burning on the sideboard. Her expression quickly changed from shock to thoughtfulness as she considered his words: permanent and irreversible in nature. *Surely that defines what true love is supposed to be, she reflected. True love should be unwavering; intense and bright and eternal. What I'd give, and what I would want in return: one hundred percent devotion. Anything less makes a mockery of love.*

"Would that necessarily be a bad thing," she asked, looking at her glass and swirling the crimson contents within.

Now it was Snape's turn to look shocked. "Being bound, by all intents and purposes, to a complete stranger? How could that possibly be a good thing? I know nothing about you, and you know nothing about me." *You know nothing of what I am, what I have done, and who I used to be* thought gloomily.

"At the moment, that is true. But it wouldn't be that way forever." She looked directly at him, challenging him.

Is she mad? he thought with surprise. *She should be tearing her hair out and trying to get as far away from me as humanly possible. Any other woman in their right mind would beg to be Obliviated rather than suffer being magically bound to me both romantically and indeterminately.*

"Are you seriously saying to me that you would engage in a relationship with a complete stranger through one act of sex and because you are magically bound to do so?" he asked incredulously.

"I know of relationships that have been built on a lot less," she said dryly and smiled briefly before becoming more serious. "Don't you believe in love?" she asked quietly.

Severus blinked. *Love is something that I feel and that is never reciprocated, he thought to himself. Love was something I never had and never deserved. From Mother. From Father. From Lily.*

Voldemort's death had let him, finally, put the ghost of Lily and his love for her to rest. His love for Lily had been the only thing that had spurred him on to do good, to atone, to relentlessly day after day put his life on the line to defeat Voldemort, and once the war was over and after recovering in St. Mungo's, he'd spent the rest of the summer grieving; for Dumbledore, for Lily, for everyone who'd lost their life so needlessly, and for all the mistakes he'd made. He knew he was over Lily once and for all when he'd cast his Patronus one day after his recovery and it was no longer a doe but a Thestral. *It was quite fitting, really,* he'd thought wryly. And yet, as much as his love for Lily had been painfully one-sided, it was almost like a cold comfort to him, allowing him to cry in the dead of night, or project fantasies of what may have been in some alternate universe had he not ruined their friendship. It was like a blanket of pain and misery that he'd clung to for so long that, once it had gone, he started to miss it, for even unrequited love was preferable to the numbness and void of no love at all.

And yet, she was right: the ritual had undoubtedly conjured feelings of intense love within him, love that he'd thought his soul too destroyed to ever feel again. Surely if the love had been created by magic alone, it couldn't possibly be any more than a cruel illusion, to taunt him of all that he'd never had, and never would have.

But then there was the issue of his Dark Mark disappearing. The Dark Mark had been formed with such evil, such malice, that only something so light and good could have possibly have removed it; something like love. He never considered casting a spell to remove it because he'd thought Voldemort's magic so strong that to try would be futile, let alone dangerous. As far as he knew, the mark would be with him until he died; a permanent reminder of all he'd lost, of all his faults, of all the evil he'd ever performed. It was his penance, the symbol of a life wasted on pain and regret.

"Do I believe love exists? Yes," he answered eventually, one hand playing absently with a strand of black hair, his black eyes caught in a thousand yard stare.

She didn't push it any further than that. Some instinct told her not to *I believe in love, too,* she thought. *And I believe in magic.*

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

The grandfather clock at the back of the lounge stood tall and silent, the pendulum soundlessly swinging back and forth. Severus had cast a silencing charm on it many years ago when Voldemort had returned and he'd started his role as spy. The ticking to him sounded like each second was being swiped away from his life, like a countdown to his impending death, and it was unbearable. Preferring the peace that accompanied his solitude, he'd never bothered to remove the charm.

Sarah and Severus sat in the silence, both mulling over the events of the evening. *The sex with him was so good,* she thought to herself. *Such tender ferocity from such an austere man. Just his kiss drove me insane. As for his, ah, "magic wand"... And that swell of emotion, I know he felt it too. I saw it in his eyes.*

Sarah had never really experienced proper romantic love before. There was once a man she'd been seeing off and on sporadically for a year or so, and yet others she'd had one night dalliances with. That wasn't love. Neither was the unrequited feelings she'd had for the handful of men who had matched her personality seemingly perfectly, only to openly reject her unwanted advances. Yet she yearned desperately for love, and no matter how hard she looked, she never found it. She had friendships, a job, a house, a cat, even her mismatch of a family, but never the one thing she so desperately wanted.

Part of her had doubts about using a Wiccan love spell. She knew that, once cast, it would have a certain amount of inevitability about it, and those things could not be entered into lightly. She also knew that she wasn't beautiful. In all probability, this fact heeded her pursuit of love more than anything else. And so, after becoming proficient with Wicca and trusting both it and her abilities, she'd finally plucked up the courage to ask the Goddess to help her poor heart. The Goddess had responded swiftly. But whereas Sarah was happy to embrace this man as her love, Severus himself seemed aloof, hard and impenetrable. She wasn't sure what he wanted of her, if anything. It was apparent even to herself that she was being superbly naïve about the whole situation, but as usual her head could not control her heart. She shifted position on the sofa. The creak of the leather punctuated the quiet.

When was the last time I had sex before tonight? Severus asked himself. *It was surely years. It must have been that time with Madam Rosmerta, when she'd all but dragged me to her chamber after plying me with her newly imported Goblin-made mead. Severus' mouth twitched with a smile. It was good mead. And as for Rosmerta... the woman was all over me like Nifflers on gold!*

He'd not been back to The Three Broomsticks since that fateful night, which was the last time Slytherin had won the Quidditch Cup, if he remembered rightly. Rosmerta was eager and skilful, it was true, but she was a predator and a man-eater. Once she'd got what she wanted, she had made sure he was out of the door faster than Bowtruckles on Doxy eggs. If he ever saw her again, he didn't know who would be more mortified. The Three Broomsticks was firmly off limits from that point on, and he'd felt furtive and ashamed by their encounter.

But with Sarah, it was different, he ruminated. *Yes, the magic had brought forwards the emotional side, but she did not seem to regret it afterwards. The ritualistic aspect ensured a slower pace; indeed it was more like "making love" than plain old rutting. And she seemed to respond to every kiss, every thrust, as if I was the only man who could elicit such responses.* The thought made a bloom of heat swell in his navel and travel down towards his groin. She'd been talking of their bind like it was the most natural thing in the world, like they could get used to living with such an arrangement. *A relationship, even!* He chanced a swift look at her. He did not need to use Legilimency to understand the look she was giving him; a green gaze of affection tinged with pure, unadulterated lust.

He looked away, momentarily stunned by this. He couldn't bring himself to tell her just yet of the most probable outcome of their unexpected magical binding, not when she was looking at him like that. She'd already had enough shocks for one night; surely the truth about the bind would tip her over the edge.

When he looked back, Sarah's face had changed into an expression of keen interest.

"Was it definitely me that performed the magic after the ritual? You know, with the window slamming and the veil?" she asked after a long time. Severus leaned forwards and flicked his wand at the bottle of wine, to refill their now empty glasses.

He'd almost forgotten about that, with the drama of the non-existent owls and his thoughts filled with the inescapable bind. "Yes, it was definitely you. Have you ever done anything like that before?" he asked, taking a sip from his refilled glass. The elf-made wine was really rather good.

"No, never. I wouldn't have dreamt anything like that to be possible. There are no comparisons in Wicca." She managed to grab the refreshed glass that had soared over to her before it slopped its burgundy contents all over her dress.

"Then it's just as I thought. The ritual must have imbued you with some of my powers, just as some of yours permeated me and removed my... tattoo." He neglected to tell her his theory about love vanishing; it sounded too twee to even vocalise.

He placed his glass neatly down on the coffee table. "There is a way to test if this is a permanent affectation and not just a fall-out from the ritual. I want you to see if you can copy my spell." He held his wand aloft and muttered, "Lumos." The tip of his wand ignited like a torch. A smile erupted on Sarah's face before Severus extinguished the wand with a quiet "Nox."

He handed the wand to her, handle first, and she cautiously took it from him in her right hand, examining it once more.

"Raise the wand, and say the word: Lumos."

She did as told, mumbling the word and looking afraid, as though the wand would burst into flames. Unsurprisingly, nothing happened. She looked disappointed.

Severus chided her like the teacher he was. "Feel the wand. It should be an extension of your arm. Do not be afraid of it. Own it. The spell should be an extension of your thought and of your will. You need to believe the word. Command the wand to light. Again," he instructed.

Sarah looked determined as her face screwed up into a scowl of concentration and her arm flexed whilst holding the wand. *Lumos!* she cried, and to her complete surprise and delight, the end of the wand glowed brightly, and she was suddenly reminded of her dream. She gazed in wonder at Severus, who had a curious look on his face.

She started to giggle now, from the sheer joy of it, and began waving the wand around, making shapes in the air. Snape was reminded of a child with a Muggle firework known as a sparkler. His mouth curled in a reluctant smile.

"To stop the spell, do the same thing, but say the word: Nox," he drawled.

Sarah stopped and focused with the same look of determination. *Nox!* she said firmly, and the light disappeared.

Severus held his hand out for his wand back, his eyebrow raised sinisterly as she grinned and passed it back to him.

"Well, this gives us an entirely new dilemma, does it not?" he wondered aloud wearily, placing the wand on his knee.

"Will you teach me more?" she asked eagerly.

Severus rubbed his forehead, looking concerned. "That is yet to be seen."

Sarah looked at him intently. *He's talking in riddles again, this can't be good.*

"You will most certainly need to be taught. But whether it is allowed, is another matter."

She blinked. *Not those bloody owls again, surely.*

His eyes found hers with a piercing stare. He'd returned once again to looking stern and severe. "Tomorrow you will come to my work, and we will see if arrangements can be made for your magical education."

It occurred to her suddenly that she knew nothing of this man other than his (rather magnificent) body and his (equally magnificent) magical ability. "Where do you work?"

Severus continued his hard stare, waiting once again for her look of complete shock. "I work as a professor at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

Sarah choked so hard she nearly sent wine gushing from her nostrils.

"There's a school that teaches this?" she spluttered disbelievingly.

Severus continued his serious stare. "Yes. Students are admitted from the age of eleven if they have shown wizarding ability, the likes of which you have just demonstrated."

Sarah coughed again, now recovered from her choking. "And you think I should be taught there? Aren't I a little old for that?"

Severus thought for a moment. If she'd demonstrated wizarding abilities, she would need to be educated in them. It would be dangerous to have the ability to perform magic and not be able to control it. That's the way it had been for a thousand years. The fact that she was older than the rest of students was irrelevant.

"There are ways around that," he said slowly. "I will need to seek advice before we go any further. An ex-colleague of mine will know what to do."

Sarah cleared her throat, looking stunned.

"I realise this is a lot to take in. It's been a somewhat... eventful night for both of us." He glanced at the grandfather clock. "It's late. I should walk you home." He stood swiftly.

He saw her face fall, and she looked like she was going to ask him something *Please, no, don't ask me that*, thought Severus with alarm. *I don't know if I'll be able to say no. I'm going to be your teacher. Please don't ask to stay.*

She chewed on her bottom lip and then opened her mouth, but before she could say anything, Severus interjected, "Come; it's been a long night. I'll walk you home."

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

They strolled along the road that led away from Spinner's End together in silence, the faint orange glow of the streetlamps reflecting off the tarmac. The waxing crescent moon hung low in the inky blue-black sky. The only sounds were the click of Snape's boots on the pavement and the occasional jangle emanating from Sarah's bag as they walked.

"How long have you been teaching?" Sarah asked after a moment, wanting to break the silence.

"Too long," replied Severus archly. It had began to dawn on him he knew very little about his Muggle-witch, aside from her new-found powers, her soft, rounded body and her rather intense way of making love. "Where do you work?" he asked enquiringly.

"I'm a librarian at the library in town." She neither sounded proud nor ashamed; it was just a statement of fact.

"And would you be happy to give that job up for the possibility of magical education?" They turned a corner and headed left as Sarah thought about this for a second.

"Well... I do have a house to pay for, and bills..."

"A bursary could be arranged. Grants are often allocated to students who are in need of financial assistance."

She took a deep breath. "The school might not accept me anyway. I'm too old!"

Severus looked down at her. "As impertinent as it may be to ask a lady her age, may I enquire as to how old you are?"

Sarah smiled with the thought that neither of them knew this quite important piece of information about each other. "I'm 25. How about you?"

Severus frowned. "I'm forty. And you can spare me the "life begins" speech," he growled.

Sarah giggled. "You look good for it," she said with a twinkle. "My house is just on the end there. Oh and look, Bernard's waiting for me!"

Bernard? Who's Bernard? Severus wondered with a flash of annoyance. *Don't tell me she has a damned child, or some obsessive ex-lover.*

Just then, he heard the sound of a cat's meow, and the cat trotted up the wall to meet her. "Hello, Bernard, did you miss me?" she cooed, stroking him from his head all the way to the tip of his tail. Bernard looked up at Severus and then trotted forward with another mew. Severus held out his long, pale fingers, and the cat happily rubbed himself against them, purring as loudly as an engine. Severus' mouth twisted into a crooked smile.

He looked up and saw Sarah beaming at him approvingly. "I'm so pleased he likes you. He doesn't take to everyone. Cats are so intuitive. There's something wrong with people who hate cats, don't you think?" she babbled nervously, fiddling with her bag for her key.

Severus merely raised an eyebrow in response as Bernard jumped from the wall and skittered down the garden path, waiting patiently outside Sarah's front door. What followed was an awkward few moments of silence as each of them hesitated, trying to figure out the best way to say goodbye.

"Thank you for walking me home," she began, feeling suddenly shy, like she was on a date.

"It was no trouble," he muttered. "I will call for you at eleven o'clock tomorrow morning, and we will make our way to the school. Is this acceptable?"

She nodded and then took a hesitant step forwards. "I'm sorry... for everything." She looked up at him.

Severus sighed. "I'm as much to blame." He paused, as if to say more. "Goodnight, Sarah," he said finally.

Just as he was about to turn on his heel, she reached up, grabbed the front of his cloak and kissed him, full on the lips. He froze with the initial shock, but once again the warmth began to unfurl in his chest like the fronds of an exotic plant and he was filled with a loving glow. Kissing her felt as natural as breathing; her lips were soft and felt like they belonged on his, like they were designed to kiss him just like that. Her arms snaked around his shoulders and he marvelled at the perfect synchronicity of their kiss as his arms entwined around her, drawing her to him. She moaned softly as he kissed her deeper still, which almost made him dizzy with happiness.

Then his rational brain kicked in. It took all his effort to drag himself away from her. With a grunt, he grabbed her gently but firmly by the shoulders and pulled her back, his eyes locked sternly on to hers.

"We cannot do this! If you attend lessons at the school, I will be your teacher!"

Sarah's green eyes looked sadly back up at him. "Do you have to be?" she asked quietly.

"I don't have a choice. Even if you don't take my subject, you may well be in my house. And regardless of that, I am deputy headmaster."

"Well, do I have to go to school?" she asked petulantly.

Severus inhaled sharply. "Nearly every person of wizarding ability for a thousand years has been educated at Hogwarts to hone their skills. It would be dangerous for you not to learn how to control it. Especially, I might add, around Muggles, which is what we call non-magical people. There is a Statute of Secrecy forbidding us to show magic in front of Muggles. Our world operates in secrecy, totally separate from yours. That's why I couldn't show you my magic earlier. Now do you see how important this is?"

Sarah closed her eyes, trying to compose herself. *This is so unfair!* "I understand," she said eventually.

"Good. Then I will see you tomorrow," he said firmly before walking away briskly without a second glance, his heart thumping wildly in his chest *just the effect of the ritual*, he told himself. *Just a magical illusion.* But his hands were shaking as he stalked down the road.

Sarah watched his receding form, his cloak billowing, all in black, like a man from another era *Or another world*, she thought.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Severus stalked with purpose back to his cottage. No sooner had he strode back into his cottage at Spinner's End, he then Apparated straight away into the outskirts of the Forbidden Forest and made his way swiftly up to the Headmistress's office. Minerva McGonagall was headmistress of Hogwarts, and he thought she was more than deserving of the position. Once he'd fully recovered from his war injuries, the staff had tried to cajole him into resuming the role of headmaster as gratitude for all he'd done, but he had no intentions of reprising his stint; it had been a necessary position at the crux of his job as spy, but he had no ambitions for it himself, and he knew Minerva would be much better suited for the long term, being both older and more experienced in the day to day running of the school. He'd also declined the Order of Merlin, First Class, that the Ministry wanted to award him. "You can give it to me when I'm dead," he'd spat at a bemused-looking Kingsley Shacklebolt, the new Prime Minister, when told of the honour.

He'd only agreed to return to Hogwarts on two conditions: firstly, that he could be deputy head, and secondly, that he could continue to fill the position of the (no longer cursed) Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher. Minerva had noted sagely that if anyone was qualified to take the role, it was him, as the bravest and longest-suffering survivor of the war, and had made him blush when she all but knocked him over with a hug so fierce he thought she would snap him in two.

He made his way up the spiral staircase and entered the room without knocking. It would be empty; Minerva undoubtedly would be off on a well-deserved summer break, and it was very late. The only people who tended to inhabit Hogwarts in the summer months were Filch, Hagrid and the ghosts. The glow of the waxing moon shone through the windows and reflected off the large mahogany desk in the darkness. He waved his wand and lit the lamps on the wall. He noticed that all of the portraits were fast asleep, some snoring and wheezing gently, one of which looked particularly restful and content the portrait he'd come to see, the portrait of Albus Dumbledore. He cast a Muffliato charm so he could speak without the other portraits overhearing as he stood in front of the painting.

"Albus," he muttered.

The man in the portrait continued to snooze, his rasping breath making his great white beard undulate. His half-moon spectacles had slipped right to the very edge of his Roman nose, balancing precariously.

"Albus!" he hissed, and the man in the painting awoke with a snort, blinking in confusion and pushing his glasses back up his nose with one hand, looking for the source of the interruption of his sleep. As soon as his eyes fell on Severus, his face crinkled into a smile of recognition.

"Severus, my dear friend! What brings you here so late? Shouldn't you be topping up your tan somewhere?" he asked ironically and smiled sleepily at the dark man. "If it's Minerva you're after, I'm afraid she's in Norway fishing for Giant Freshwater Pimplies."

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Albus. I need to ask your advice." He looked pensive and anxious, which automatically shook any traces of slumber away from Albus' demeanour.

"Ask away," he replied, eying him with concern as he sat in the headmistress's chair and took a deep breath.

"What do you know of Wicca?" he asked after a moment.

Albus raised his white, bushy eyebrows in surprise. Of all of the things he was expecting to hear from the mouth of Severus Snape, questions of Muggle-magic were as far down the list as the topic of the most notable Hufflepuffs in Quidditch history.

"Muggle-magic? Well, historically, it was intertwined with wizarding magic up until the middle ages."

Severus looked at him, mouth open. This was, apparently, news to him.

"In ancient times, Muggles and wizards would perform magic together, right up until the time of the medieval witch hunts," Albus continued. "As you know, that's what drove our kind into hiding and initiated the Statute of Secrecy. Alas, the Muggle practitioners used a different kind of magic so were unable to hide and suffered great losses as a consequence. From that point on, Muggle-magic and wizarding ability became totally separate branches of magic. I believe there is a residue left over in Wiccan practice from the association with wizardry still, such as the use of wands, brooms and cauldrons in their rituals." He smiled benignly at the dark man, whose face had now knotted into an expression of deep confusion.

"How do you know all this?" he asked, genuinely shocked. "I have found nothing about Wicca in the library, despite extensive research."

"I wouldn't expect you to have found any information there," Albus chuckled. "I only became aware of Wicca and its history through my time at the Wizengamot. Wicca is recognised as a branch of magic within wizarding law; however, it is the property of Muggles and as such completely separate. We can neither enforce nor control it, in accordance with the Statute of Secrecy."

Severus' eyes widened. *Of course, that explains why the owls didn't come!*

"I am rather curious, Severus. Why the sudden interest in Muggle-magic?"

Severus sighed. There was no point beating around the bush. "I was foolish enough to involve myself in a ridiculous Wiccan rite this evening."

If Albus' eyebrows reached any higher, they would have blended in with the thick mass of white hair at his forehead.

"Merlin's beard, Severus! You? Practicing Muggle-magic?"

Severus closed his eyes. *He was going to have a field-day with this, wasn't he?*

"As unlikely as it would seem that I would somehow get involved with this form of inferior magic, regrettably, that is what happened, and that's why I need your advice," he answered coldly.

Albus looked carefully at the man over his wire-framed glasses, blue eyes glittering. "Wiccan magic is not inferior, Severus. Just different."

Severus scowled.

"And what rite was it that you got involved with?" he continued, his fingers pressed together at the tips, a curious expression on his face.

Severus scowled even more.

"It's known as the Great Rite," he answered reluctantly. Albus stared at him blankly for a few moments and, to his chagrin, burst into peals of deep, bellowing laughter.

"I hardly see what's so funny," he snapped with annoyance.

Albus wiped his watering eyes with a finger, his chuckles subsiding. "Oh, that was a good one, Severus. I haven't had a laugh like that in years. Not since the Weasley twins created U-No-Poo." Severus stared up at him with a face like thunder. Albus faltered, his face falling.

"You're totally serious, aren't you?" he asked timidly. Severus nodded, glaring.

"Then it appears I need to offer you my sincere apologies," he answered politely, regaining his composure. "And who was the lucky Wiccan lady?"

"I will come to that in a moment," he said with irritation. "I trust you are aware of the Great Rite involves?"

Albus' eyes twinkled with merriment. "I believe it involves the balance of the male and female union," he inflected euphemistically.

Twinkly-eyed fucker is really enjoying this, isn't he? thought Severus savagely.

"That is correct," he replied through gritted teeth. "However, there appears to have been some... unexpected reactions from the rite, which you may be able to enlighten me on."

"Do go on," Albus encouraged, fingertips pressed together once more.

"At the... zenith of the rite, a cage of fire was invoked, which appears to have bound myself and the Wiccan." Albus could tell that they'd come to the heart of the matter, and this was what was really troubling Severus.

"Bound? In what way?" asked Albus, brow furrowing.

"Strong emotions of affection were conjured. The flames indicated to me that we are bound together irrevocably by these emotions, just like the flames when performing the Unbreakable Vow."

Albus began to laugh again, but this time in a gentle, sympathetic way.

"Dear boy, are you telling me you think the flames, and your 'strong emotions of affection', as you so delicately put it, were conjured by the rite itself?"

Severus nodded imperceptibly.

"You are judging the rite from a wizarding point of view. This is a Wiccan rite. The feelings of 'affection' you have described are what activated the flames of the ritual; as opposed to the ritual activating the feelings of 'affection'."

Severus looked thunderstruck. "What?" he bellowed in disbelief.

Albus smiled kindly. "That is to say, you and your Wiccan lady must have had feelings for each other before you enacted the rite, in order for the cage of fire to be produced. I can only offer my congratulations, Severus. It's about time you found some happiness."

"This cannot be... She could not... She does not even know me," Severus started, slumping forwards onto the desk and resting his forehead on his hands.

Albus looked sternly at his friend. "Severus, is it really so hard to imagine a woman could have genuine feelings for you?"

"She knows nothing of me, Albus. I have done unspeakable things. I was a Death Eater," he said quietly.

"It matters not what you were, but what you are now. Yes, you can be cantankerous, obstinate, rude and downright unpleasant. But you are a good person, Severus, if not a particularly nice one at times. You have proved that a thousand times over during the war. And good people deserve love in spades. If you have any sense at all, you will seize this opportunity for happiness and stop trying to ambush it with your unfounded and ridiculous bouts of self-loathing!"

Severus scowled up at the man. *He really does know me so well*, he thought.

"It's not that simple," he muttered dully.

"What could be simpler than two people in love?" Albus countered.

Severus sighed. "There was another reaction from the rite."

Albus stared at him keenly, waiting for him to continue.

"The rite... transferred some of my wizarding magic into her whilst simultaneously removing the Dark Mark."

Now it was Dumbledore's turn to look shocked as Severus rolled up his sleeve and walked towards the painting, holding out his forearm for the portrait to see.

"Exceptional," Dumbledore breathed. "Quite extraordinary. Only the most Light sort of magic could surely have made that happen. Only a ritual involving very deep and powerful love."

Severus knew Albus would say something along those lines; it was just as he'd assumed himself. But the notion of love didn't sit easily with Severus Snape. The only love he'd known was obsessive, tortuous and unreciprocated. He was relieved Sarah was not bound to him by magic, as the issue of consent troubled him no end, but finding out their feelings for each other were totally genuine was hard to digest, as Snape viewed himself as habitually unlovable.

Severus made a non-committal noise of agreement, before pressing on. "The bigger issue here is that she now has wizarding abilities."

"Are you quite sure about that?" Albus asked carefully.

"Absolutely. She produced a Summoning charm by accident, and then I taught her to perform the Lumos spell with my wand. She is now a witch in our sense of the word."

Albus thought for a moment. "Well, transference of power, although rare, is not unheard of. Harry Potter and Tom Riddle, for example. You are a powerful wizard, Severus, so it does not seem to far-fetched that this could have happened."

Severus took a deep breath and strolled towards the window. The moon was beautiful, reflected perfectly in the still black waters of the Great Lake. "That's not the problem. The problem is in the matter of her education, and my position within this school. She will need to be educated, it is law. It is inappropriate to have feelings for someone who will be educated here."

Albus snorted. "How old is the lady in question?"

"She's twenty-five."

"And have you discussed anything about her magical education with her?"

"Well, it has been mentioned. She has a full-time job in a Muggle library, and I believe she is reluctant to give that up."

"Naturally," Dumbledore mused. "And having a twenty-five year old woman running around in a school uniform could be somewhat distracting for the other pupils, not to mention the teachers," he said with a quirk of a smile.

"Quite," replied Snape archly. There was about a minute of silence whilst Dumbledore closed his eyes in thought, head bowed slightly.

"The details of this should, of course, be worked out between yourself and Minerva. However, it would appear to me that, all circumstances taken into consideration, Miss..."

"Sarah," Snape answered. "Her name is Sarah."

"...Sarah would benefit from studying here part-time. I would suggest she concentrates on five subjects only, as five subjects are required in order to continue to NEWT level, should she progress that far. She can have lessons on Saturdays and have the evenings during the week to complete her homework. Therefore, the other students would never have to be aware of her, and she does not have to compromise her life in the Muggle world, or her feelings for you." He smiled at Severus.

Severus glanced up at the old man. "Is it not inappropriate, with me being deputy headmaster..."

"As long as she does not take your subject whilst here, and any grievances are handled by Minerva, I cannot see that being a problem. She may well be Sorted in to your house, but we will deal with that if it ever arises."

Severus looked relieved, like a massive weight had been lifted from his shoulders.

"How much does Sarah know of the wizarding world?" Albus asked.

"Very little. I did not have much time to go into depth, and I wanted to consult with you before revealing too much."

"I am glad you sought my advice, Severus." He smiled again. "Without wishing to sound impertinent, I think it may be a good idea if you coach Sarah for the rest of the summer on the basics of magical subjects before she enrolls properly for the start of next term. This will give her a head start and help her decide what subjects she wants to take. It will also allow us to assess her progress before she starts, so her lessons can be tailored to suit. I presume you would be so kind as to take her to Diagon Alley to help her purchase the necessary books and equipment?"

Snape nodded quickly.

"Oh, and don't forget to give her a copy of *Hogwarts: A Revised History* straight away. She needs to know what a brave man she's fallen in love with." Dumbledore's blue eyes twinkled genially at the dark man, and Severus managed a grateful smile in return.

"Thank you, Albus," Severus said quietly.

"No trouble at all, Severus. When will I get to meet this delightful lady of yours?"

"I will bring her in tomorrow," Snape replied, making his way to leave.

Albus beamed at the receding figure, happiness radiating off him in waves.

"I'm looking forward to it very much," said the old man, tears welling up in his crinkly blue eyes.

Author's note: I loved writing this chapter! I hope you enjoyed it too.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Sarah deliberately woke up early the next morning. Sunday was usually her day for a well-deserved lie-in, and being a sensualist, she would normally indulge herself to spending time happily curled up and comfy under the duvet, even if she was wide awake. Today, however, she was up and in the bath at seven am, feeling decidedly jittery.

What the hell do I wear for a meeting at a school of magic? she asked herself frantically. After three costume changes and much flailing of items from her tangled

wardrobe, she finally decided on a black Chinese-style knee length dress, with a fine black lace shawl. Black would make her look serious, she considered, and she decided to wear her hair pinned up to add to the impression of gravitas. She'd applied a little silver make-up and mascara to accentuate her green eyes and added a slick of gloss to her lips. On her right hand she wore a silver signet ring which had the pentacle motif of a five-pointed star encased in a circle. She wore flat silver pumps on her feet and rounded off the outfit with a small silver clutch bag covered in stars. *Witchy, but not too witchy*, she thought.

Bernard mewed at her demandingly as she paced up and down the lounge, waiting for Severus' arrival. "No, you can't have a cuddle, darling, you'll get me covered in hair." Bernard mewed again reproachfully. He hated being denied affection. Just like his owner.

At five to eleven, there was a curt rap at the door. "Wish me luck," she breathed, giving Bernard a quick head-rub on the way out. She threw open the door to find Severus in a smart-looking black frock coat and trousers, the collars and cuffs of his crisp white shirt just visible underneath. She thought he looked completely edible. Severus himself had spent far longer than usual getting ready. His normal appearance was smart, but today he'd worn his best frock coat, washed his hair and dug out his favourite cologne, which had been gathering dust on his dresser in the bedroom.

"Morning!" she smiled. His black eyes scanned her briefly up and down. His face remained impassive; internally, he gave a wolf-whistle.

"Good morning," he replied in a silky drawl. "You look... nice." He hadn't had much practice in complimenting women. He wanted to sweep her up, tell her she was beautiful and tell her all about what he'd discovered from Dumbledore the previous night regarding their bond (or lack thereof). But that could wait; he had professional duties to attend to first, and they needed to be taken care of before anything else.

Sarah smiled shyly.

"I trust you are well rested?"

"Yes, thank you," Sarah lied. In reality she'd spent a long time playing and re-playing the events of the evening over in her head, trying to make sense of all that happened. She'd eventually fallen asleep with the smell of him still on her skin, clutching her pillow.

"Look at us, both in black. We look like we're going to a funeral," she giggled.

"I happen to like black," he said with a ghost of a smile on his lips, and Sarah knew she'd made the right choice of outfit and grinned inwardly. "We'll Apparate from the woods, as it will be safer and we'll be less likely to be seen," he said authoritatively.

"OK," she nodded, closing the door behind her and following him up the garden path.

They turned right and headed up towards a turnstile at the bottom of the road.

"I'm quite nervous, Severus. Who will I be meeting today?"

"Do not be nervous, there is no need. I will simply show you around the school and grounds, tell you more about the subjects that are taught at Hogwarts, and then we'll have a chat with the ex-headmaster. The current headmistress is on leave as term-time does not resume until September." He glanced at her. "You do realise once we reach the school, you will need to refer to me as Professor Snape?"

"Yes, sir," she grinned with a twinkle of naughtiness. Severus struggled to keep his face straight.

"It has just occurred to me that I don't even know your surname," he mused as they passed through the turnstile and into a gravelly lane leading to the woods.

"It's Shaw," she replied. Severus noted idly that they shared the same initials.

"What kind of a name is Severus, anyway?" she asked as they crunched along the gravel, apropos of nothing.

"It's one of those obscure and ostentatious Latinate names that wizarding families tend to inflict on their unfortunate offspring," he muttered wryly. "My mother thought I looked very stern after I'd been born; it was her idea of a little joke. It turned out to be the most apt name she could have possibly chosen."

Sarah chuckled, suprised at his good humour. *Someone's woken up on the right side of the bed this morning*, she mused.

It only took a minute to reach the woods. Severus thought how strange it was to be there with her, partly because it had been such a private place for him for so long and partly because the other times he'd seen her there she'd been stark naked and he'd been spying on her. An image suddenly jumped into his head of him ravishing her against a tree; he shook his head briskly to rid himself of the thought.

Sarah picked her way delicately towards the copse, following his lead. *If I'd have known we were going rambling, I'd have dressed more appropriately*, she thought with a brief flash of annoyance. No sooner as that thought flitted into her head, the clearing came into view. Severus waited for her as she tip-toed towards him.

"I must warn you, Apparition is not a pleasant sensation, and many people find it disagreeable. You will need to hold on to me tightly." He lifted his arms up from his side so she could wrap her arms around him. Sarah grinned up at him, slipping forward into a gentle hug. She didn't need to be told twice. "Tighter," he growled, crossing his arms firmly around her shoulders. Sarah grinned even more whilst squeezing him tightly, burying her face in his chest and breathing in the smell of starch along with the heady scent of some unrecognisable cologne. *I want to Apparate all the time if this is how you do it*, she thought happily.

Severus tried to ignore the little swell of his heart as she snuggled into him.

Then suddenly, she felt both of them twist on the spot, and her face pressed forwards into his chest. It felt as if she was being squeezed out of the end of a tube of toothpaste. It was like being in a vacuum; she could neither breathe in nor breathe out, and the pressure was such she thought she was drowning without water. Then just as quickly as it started, the world returned to normal and she stumbled as her feet hit solid ground, gasping. Severus held her up as she swayed a little.

"Are you alright?" he asked as she blinked and took in her surroundings. She could see a huge, imposing castle up ahead, the entrance gates flanked with two ugly, winged boars. There was a shimmering dark lake to one side, the bright sun winking off its black surface. Beyond that there looked to be acres of forest. It looked truly breathtaking.

"This is where you teach?" she asked, one hand to her face, shielding her eyes from the sun. "It's beautiful."

"Welcome to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, teaching dunderheads how to cast spells since 993," he quipped dryly, as they began to walk up the path towards the castle.

Sarah and Severus made their way past the heavy, wrought iron gates, through the huge oak door and into the main entrance hall. Severus explained about the Hogwarts coat of arms, which hung imperiously over the door, reflecting the four houses into which every pupil was Sorted, and the school's motto. Her eyes were drawn to the four huge glass egg-timers, each filled with coloured precious gems according to the colour of the house.

"Hufflepuff!" she giggled. "What a cute name!"

Severus looked less than impressed. "Believe me, you'd rather return to being a Muggle than to end up in that house," he scoffed.

"So what house are you in?" she asked teasingly.

"I'm not telling you. It may influence your Sorting," he replied primly.

"How does one get Sorted into a house, exactly?"

"Via the Sorting Hat. The hat assesses your personality and judges you according to the attributes that are most suited to that house."

"And what attributes do each of the houses have?" she enquired, looking up at the high ceiling and noticing gargoyles hiding in the corners.

"Hufflepuff, represented by the badger, is for the perennially dull-witted. Gryffindors, represented by the lion, display a quixotic sense of recklessness bordering on lunacy. Ravenclaw, represented by the eagle, admit only those with keen intellect. And Slytherin, represented by the snake, favours those who are cunning, skilful and ambitious."

"I see," pondered Sarah thoughtfully. "Which means you're either a Ravenclaw or a Slytherin."

Severus scowled. Sarah then remembered his now-extinct tattoo.

"You're a Slytherin!" she cried, grinning with her own cleverness.

He sighed with defeat. "Yes, that is correct. I am also head of Slytherin house."

She smiled again as he led her towards the Great Hall.

"This is where we dine." They stepped inside. All the tables were clear now, in their usual rows with the teacher's table at the front. Sarah looked up at the enchanted ceiling and gasped as the clouds billowed dramatically across the blue sky.

"It's a charm," he told her. "But it's something I never tire of, even after all the years I've been here." Sarah could see why; the effect was mesmerising.

"This is where I work," he told her as they made their way into the cool, dark chambers of the dungeons. "The Slytherin common room is to the left, and my old classroom is just here." He paused outside, not really sure why he wanted to show her his rooms.

"Your old classroom? What do you teach now?"

"I used to teach Potions, for what felt like an eternity. I now teach Defence Against the Dark Arts."

So that's why he knows all about Killing Curses, she thought to herself.

"My new classroom is just down here on the right." She followed him obediently as he swung open a heavy-looking door and then peered into the gloom. There were drawings of Werewolves and Vampires, and nasty creatures Sarah didn't recognise all around the room. It looked like a sinister place and was giving her the creeps.

"Unfortunately, given the nature of our... acquaintance, you will be unable to formally take my subject. However, there is no restriction on extracurricular teaching, and so I would be happy to teach you some defensive and protective magic should you require it outside of the school."

"Thank you." She smiled warmly at him, and it made his stomach somersault.

As they retraced their steps back from the dungeons, Sarah noticed out of the corner of her eye that the figures in the paintings were moving. This startled her at first, but then she realised they must be enchanted, just as the ceiling of the Great Hall had been. They had walked a little further when suddenly a misty figure hovered silently up ahead in the corridor. Severus, used to such apparitions, barely noticed and kept on walking, but Sarah froze and yelped in shock. He turned around, brows knotted in concern. "Whatever's the matter?" he snapped.

"G-g-ghost!" she stammered, pointing a shaking finger.

"Him? That's Nearly Headless Nick. Don't let that Gryffindor buffoon scare you. We have plenty of ghosts here at Hogwarts. They can't harm you, but they can be a complete pain in the rectal area."

Nick glided smoothly towards them. "Professor Snape," he acknowledged politely. "My lady," he nodded to Sarah and with horror she saw his head flap on its ruff and let out another squeak of fear.

"Charming," Nick spat huffily as he floated past.

Severus explained a little about each of the subjects as they made their way up to the Astronomy Tower, and of the plan to teach her part-time in only five of her elected subjects, and his role of coach for the rest of the summer.

"Does this sound agreeable to you? You will have the summer to decide what subjects you wish to pursue. This will all have to be run past the headmistress, of course."

Sarah leaned from one of the windows and looked out at the glorious view from the top of the tower, watching birds circle above the forest and took a deep breath of clean Scottish air. It all felt like the most wonderful dream, being here in this incredible castle with this incredible man. "It sounds fantastic. I absolutely can't wait to start. I love this place."

Severus smiled. "There is so much more yet to see. Come; I want to introduce you to an old friend of mine."

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Sarah followed Severus up the spiral staircase that led up to the headmistress's office. He paused outside and turned to her for a moment.

"Albus is a good friend of mine, and it would have been foolhardy for me to have kept the true nature of... the development of your powers from him," he said tactfully. "I hope you do not feel I've betrayed your confidence by doing this. It was only so we could devise a way of providing your education without having to compromise your

position at the school and your life in the Muggle world." *And your feelings for me*, he thought hopefully.

Sarah felt a rush of affection for Severus for being so honest and noble.

"It's fine," she replied. "I'm sure people don't usually develop wizarding magic overnight without causing suspicion."

He swung the door open and allowed Sarah to enter ahead of him. She walked in slowly, looking around as she did so. She noticed delicate silver instruments placed over every available surface and many books in a cabinet on one side. The desk and chair that dominated the room were quite imposing, as were the array of moving portraits that covered the walls.

"It appears we may be early," said Sarah politely, not unreasonably expecting a person to be waiting for them.

"The person I want you to meet is already here." He strode forwards towards the painting of Dumbledore, who leaned forward keenly in his frame.

"Albus, this is Sarah Shaw, the Wiccan whom we are to educate next term. Sarah, this is Albus Dumbledore, ex-headmaster of Hogwarts and a very old friend of mine."

"Pleased to meet you," said Sarah graciously, feeling silly for a moment for addressing a painting.

Albus peered at her over his half-moon spectacles, blue eyes glittering with pleasure. "And it's absolutely rapturous to meet you, Miss Shaw. Severus failed to mention what a beautiful creature you are."

Sarah blushed and looked down. Severus glared hard at Albus and shook his head, making a cut-throat gesture with one hand. Albus seemed to take on board the meaning of this and cleared his throat before continuing.

"Well, Miss Shaw, Severus has enlightened me as to the development of your magical ability. You'll be pleased to know that transference of magical power, although rare, is not unheard of." He smiled, noticing she looked down coyly.

"So what do you make of our humble school?" he asked genially, changing the subject swiftly to avoid any further embarrassment.

"It's incredible! The Great Hall is breathtaking, and the view from the Astronomy Tower is just gorgeous." She smiled back up at Albus, who looked very pleased. Severus slipped into the headmistress's chair, watching her closely.

"I've never tired of that particular view myself. Well, maybe once," he frowned, and looked over at Severus with mock-reproach. Severus scowled back at his attempt at humour over his death.

"I trust Severus has mentioned to you about the range of subjects we teach here, and our proposal that you join us on a part-time basis in order not to jeopardise your existing vocation?"

"Yes, sir, and I think that's an excellent idea. I'm not sure I would be able to cope with more than five subjects, and I think it may be odd for me to study full-time surrounded by students much younger than myself. Lessons on Saturday would be perfect, that's if it's acceptable to the other teachers."

"Wonderful. It will mean one extra lesson a week for the teachers in question, hardly a massive effort. Severus will cover the basics of each subject with you over the summer, so you'll be able to make a more informed decision as to what subjects you wish to pursue when term starts. Severus will also help you buy any equipment or books that you need." She smiled at him gratefully and he gave her a small smile in return.

"Well, if you're happy with that arrangement, all that remains is to notify the headmistress. Severus, would you mind writing to Minerva and let her know of our discussions?"

Severus nodded, pulling a fresh piece of parchment towards him on the desk and began scratching away with a quill.

"Will the headmistress need to know the exact details of my new-found magical ability?" Sarah asked quietly. Severus looked up.

Albus chuckled. "No, I think we can stretch the truth a little for Minerva's sake. We will say that you were involved in a magical rite that somehow transferred magical ability to you. We'll just not mention what the rite was, or who that rite was with." He winked. Severus shifted uncomfortably and continued scratching away at the parchment.

Sarah looked relieved. "When will I get to meet the headmistress?" she asked curiously.

"Minerva will want to assess your progress at some point before term starts. However, with a recommendation from Severus, I'm sure she will see nothing untoward in what we've proposed for your education."

There was a pause as Severus signed the parchment with a flourish and then began to roll it up before sealing it with the wax seal of the Hogwarts crest.

"Severus, perhaps you would like to go to the owlery and post Minerva's letter whilst Sarah and I have a little chat?" Albus said pointedly.

Severus looked at him suspiciously for a moment before rising. "I will see you shortly," he murmured, glancing at Sarah swiftly before sweeping out of the room clutching the parchment and closing the door on his departure.

Albus noticed the little smile Sarah had given him on his way out.

"I can see you are very fond of Severus," he began, the tips of his fingers pressed together characteristically.

"Oh, um, well, I'm not taking his lessons, and he made it quite clear yesterday that he was a professor here..." she answered with embarrassment, fiddling with her clutch bag.

Albus chuckled. "That wasn't an accusation, Sarah," he said gently. "I'm glad you feel that way about him. Not many people do, sadly." He looked down at her and smiled kindly.

"Severus is a very complex man. He's had an uncommonly difficult life, with very little love or light to help him through. But he is a good man."

She nodded, waiting for him to continue.

"I am sure he hasn't mentioned any details to you about the war yet, has he?"

Sarah's brow furrowed. "He mentioned a war being fought over someone who was born on the same day as Lughnasadh. But that was all."

"That's as I thought. Severus is also a private man. I will not divulge his secrets here, but suffice to say, he played a crucial part in recent events on the side of good during the war. The war nearly killed him and pushed him to the limits of his nerve, daring and valour. It is certain to say we could not have won the war without him."

Sarah's face looked awestruck.

"I only tell you these things so you can see why this would affect his behaviour. If he is a little rude, or prickly, or unpleasant, or obnoxious, which I know Severus can be, I ask of you to offer him patience. Because, underneath that frosty exterior, there is an incredibly brave man: a man who deserves happiness and love, and a man who has,

regrettably, experienced far too little of either during his life." He smiled at her again over his glasses, and she smiled back nervously.

"You'd do well to let him come to you in his own time, about matters regarding the war, or his background, or anything remotely personal. Your patience will be rewarded. I've waited so long to see Severus find happiness and I truly hope he finds it with you."

Sarah looked away. She felt deeply confused. *Surely Albus is getting the wrong end of the stick here? Severus made it clear last night where I stand. What can he have said to make Albus think otherwise?*

"You've had rather a lot to take in over the past couple of days, haven't you?" he asked sympathetically, noticing her look of confusion.

"It's been... intense," she replied truthfully. "But I don't regret what happened between Severus and I in the slightest. I feel so lucky to have this magical ability; I almost can't believe it's real." Her eyes began to fill with tears with the feeling of being overwhelmed.

"Of course, my dear, it is overwhelming. It's a natural reaction; many Muggle-borns feel that way. For you, it's all the more stranger, given the exceptional circumstances surrounding your powers."

She wiped her eyes delicately with one finger, careful not to smudge her make-up.

"A good place to start to learn more about our world would be to read *Hogwarts: A Revised History*. It will tell you all about the school, and it's now been updated to include details about the war. You'll find out more of the era Severus lived through. In fact, I think I can see a copy on that shelf over there. Can you see it?"

Sarah walked towards the shelf.

"Bound in red leather, forth shelf up."

"Got it!" She grabbed the thick, heavy book.

"Take that one with you for now, but make sure you get your own copy when you go to Flourish & Blott's. It will prove invaluable in helping to make sense of this place." He smiled once more.

"Thank you, Mr. Dumbledore," she smiled back gratefully.

"Please, call me Albus," he twinkled in response.

Just then, the door open and Severus returned.

"Ah, Severus, I was just telling Sarah to take Minerva's copy of *Hogwarts: A Revised History* to study."

Severus raised an eyebrow and then held out his hand to Sarah to give him the book. As she passed it to him, she saw him remove his wand from his frock coat.

Placing it on the desk, he aimed his wand and muttered, "Reducio." The book shrank until it could fit into his palm and he handed it back to her with a smile. She grinned at him in admiration and popped the book inside her silver clutch.

"I'll let you know when Minerva has replied to my owl," he said to the portrait. "Sarah and I will continue our little tour of Hogwarts and Hogsmeade now, unless you have anything further you would like to discuss?"

"Not at all, everything seems to be in order," he replied, blue eyes glittering with mischief. "Be sure to take Sarah to Madam Puddifoot's when you go to Hogsmeade, won't you, Severus? I'm sure she would enjoy it."

Severus scowled as he held open the door for Sarah to walk through as they said their goodbyes.

"Goodbye, Albus," he hissed finally, and Albus chuckled heartily as he slammed the door behind him.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

"What's Madam Paddy-foots?" Sarah asked as she followed him back down the spiral staircase.

"Madam *Puddifoot's* is a nauseatingly twee tea-room up in Hogsmeade village, where lovesick teenagers go to moon at each other over cloying cakes and weak tea," he sneered. "It was Dumbledore's idea of a little joke. There is no way I'm taking you to that godforsaken place. Jasmine's Restaurant is far better for lunch." He paused and looked at her swiftly. "That is to say, if you would like to have lunch with me this afternoon?" he added quietly.

"I'd love to, Sev—I mean, Professor Snape," she replied hastily as they walked back towards the Great Hall.

Severus smirked. "As we have established, I will not be teaching you this year, and I will have as little as possible to do with your education. Any grievances should go through to your head of house, and in the unlikely circumstance that it's me, then you would go to the headmistress instead. In which case, you are now permitted to call me by my ridiculous Latinate forename." He looked sideways at her and gave her a wolfish smile. Sarah beamed back.

"In that case, I'd love to, Severus."

He looked down at his feet, feeling just a little like a mooning teenager himself as they turned a corner and found themselves back in the entrance hall.

"Do you wish to see the lake and the Quidditch pitch before we go to Hogsmeade?" he asked.

"The lake and the *what* now?"

Severus groaned. "I keep forgetting how little you know. Quidditch is a wizarding sport, played on brooms. It's fast, brutal and skilful, and I guarantee that after you watch your first match, you'll be hooked."

He led her back out into the sunshine, and they turned right towards the Quidditch pitch. "You see those tall posts up in the air? They're the goalposts."

"Do wizards really fly on brooms?" she asked curiously.

"They most certainly do."

"Do you?"

Severus rolled his eyes. "Yes, even crusty old professors like me are known to get their ancient legs over a broom from time to time."

Sarah giggled. "That's not what I meant!"

Severus raised a sinister eyebrow. "Most pupils don't believe I need a broom at all, actually. They tend to think I am distinctly bat-like and merely flap my robes about in order to fly." He gestured the action lightly with his arms.

Sarah burst into more peals of laughter. "Stop it!" Her face feigned seriousness for an instant. "You don't, do you?"

He gave her a look that could turn Medusa to stone and she once again giggled wildly. Severus smiled despite himself as they passed the Quidditch pitch and made their way down to the Great Lake. He wasn't used to causing such hilarity intentionally, but he rather liked the warm feeling it gave him in his stomach. Whereas sniggering schoolgirls sent his blood pressure soaring, Sarah's laughter was like music, and he hoped to make her laugh as often as possible.

"Brooms have a slightly different usage in Wicca," Sarah told him after her giggles had subsided.

"Oh?" he replied curiously.

"They are commonly used in handfasting ceremonies, or Wiccan wedding rites. That's where the expression 'jump the broomstick' comes from. We also use them to sweep away negative energies if performing a ritual indoors. I always carry a mini-besom with me as part of my tools." She turned and saw Severus was listening to her with genuine fascination as they picked their way down the slope of grass.

"In the past, though, witches would literally 'ride' their brooms during fertility rituals." Her mouth curled into a smile.

"Witches used to fly?" he asked with disbelief.

"Ah, no... how shall I put it? The broom is seen as a masculine object in Wicca, and therefore quite phallic..."

Severus coughed as the realisation dawned on him, and Sarah's smile widened further.

"Rest assured, the practice is very much extinct these days. We much prefer the Great Rite." She grinned up at him as they approached the lake.

"So I understand," he said roguishly, giving her a thin smile.

He sat on a tree stump at the edge of the lake and watched Sarah as she took in the sight of the purple mountain tops that surrounded them, then the onyx depths of the water. *So black, so fathomless, just like his eyes,* she thought.

"You know, there are Merpeople who live at the bottom of the lake," he said after a while.

She turned to him and this time it was her face that bore a withering look. "Come on, Severus. Flying on brooms is one thing. Merpeople! Pull the other one."

His eyebrows rose in surprise. "If I could speak Mermish, I'd stick my head under the water and call one of them up for you!"

"Mermish!" she snorted, turning back to the lake. "Next you'll be telling me there's a giant squid in there as well."

Just as she said this, a huge, suckered tentacle rose from beneath the murky surface and gave a little wave with the tip. She shrieked and ran towards Severus as he burst into laughter.

"That was not funny!" she fumed and slapped him disdainfully on the arm. She'd not really heard him laugh before, other than a short bark-like sound. This was a low, rumbling chuckle, which seemed to be exacerbated by her slaps of annoyance to his arm. She continued to slap him, mock-angry, punctuating each hit with, "Really-not-funny-at-all!"

"Ow! Stop it, you infernal woman, or you'll damage my wand arm!" He reached forward and grabbed her by the waist, pulling her to him so she was standing between his legs. Her hands instinctively rested on his chest and their eyes drew level. His breath caught as they gazed at each other for a moment, their faces becoming serious. Her eyes searched his, before flicking to his mouth. Little tendrils of her hair had come loose from where it was pinned up, framing her face. *Merlin, she's lovely,* he thought.

She reached a hand up to his face and caressed his cheek gently, her deep green eyes glittering with emotion. He could see desire in them, but he could also see something else; something he was afraid to acknowledge.

Slowly, she ran her thumb down his cheek until it reached his lips, and dragged it across them. They parted instinctively as her thumb brushed his mouth, and her eyes flicked back down to his mouth again with a small smile.

Now she was moving her face towards him, ever so gradually, her mouth slightly open. Severus' heart began to race. This was potentially the most romantic moment he'd ever experienced, but he had to tell her.

"Sarah," he muttered thickly.

"Hmmm?" she replied, not taking her eyes off his lips, edging forwards even more.

"Albus explained about the bind," he breathed, their mouths barely inches apart.

She pulled back, the spell broken, and her eyes met his with concern.

"What did he say?"

"He said that it wasn't the rite that caused the emotions we felt. He said the flames were caused by our emotions."

Sarah looked puzzled. "What do you mean?"

Severus sighed; he hated talking about this kind of thing. Showing how he really felt made him vulnerable and weak, but Sarah deserved the truth. He took a deep breath.

"He said that we must have had... feelings for each before we completed the rite. The emotions had activated the rite, not the other way round. So therefore, the flames

were not a bind, and you're not bound to me," he finished and looked down.

The breeze rustled through the treetops, making a soft shushing sound. Somewhere, a crow squawked in the distance.

"Oh, but I am," she said quietly, after a moment.

Severus' eyes shot up.

"I'm bound by the heart. I love you, Severus Snape."

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Severus stared at her for several long moments, his face again an inscrutable mask. Sarah willed him to speak, her heart pounding furiously. The trees whispered in the breeze as the seconds ticked agonizingly by. Finally, he spoke, his voice full of forced geniality.

"I think you will like Jasmine's. It specialises in cuisine from all around the world, and the wine there is second to none. I was fortunate to get a reservation at short notice. You should try the salmon. It really is –"

"Severus, did you hear what I just said? I love you." She stared at him, waiting for him to respond. Words, however, felt coarse in his throat; he couldn't say them. As the awkward silence stretched onwards, Sarah's eyes filled with a look of indescribable pain. "Forget it," she choked, turning away from him.

Severus was in that instance reminded of a time, many years ago, when another girl with devastatingly pretty green eyes had hold of his heart. He recognised the same expression of disappointment, of grief, that he'd inflicted on her. He'd let that particular girl slip away from him through not being able to show his true feelings. He was not going to let that happen again.

"NO!" he yelled, grabbing her gently but firmly by the wrist. "... have the same feelings as you. And it absolutely terrifies me."

She glanced at him and noticed his obsidian eyes were shining with desperation. He was shaking. She stepped closer to him now, concern etched on her face, and laid a hand gently on his shoulder.

"What are you afraid of?" she asked softly.

I'm afraid of you getting to know me and disliking me the more of me you see. I'm afraid you'll find out what I was and what I've done and turn away from me. I'm afraid I'll lose you, like I lost Lily. I'm afraid this is all some wonderful dream, and I'll be woken up to the reality of an existence filled with loneliness. I'm afraid because I have no idea how a relationship is supposed to work, as I've never had one. I'm afraid to have such strong feelings for someone I've known less than a day. I'm afraid I'm not worthy of love. I'm afraid my soul is so damaged, I am unable to love.

"Everything," he croaked.

Sarah simply reached forwards and embraced him, squeezing him tenderly, resting her head on his shoulder. She felt him tremble as he returned her embrace, and he clutched her tightly, almost fiercely, as if someone would snatch her away from him.

Oh, Severus, she thought. How unkind of me to force the issue with you. I'm so sorry.

"You don't have to be afraid, Severus. My love won't hurt you," she said quietly, holding him close and stroking his hair with one hand.

He closed his eyes with the rhythmic stroking of his hair. He wasn't used to being held like this by a lover. Her embrace soothed him and seemed to draw all the hurt and fear out of him and into her. After a while, their breathing became synchronised. She made no movement to pull away; neither did he. They didn't even need words. Just the proximity of their bodies entwined together spoke volumes to Severus.

I'm here, I'm not going anywhere, believe me, I love you, Sarah thought over and over.

He didn't know how long they had been standing there. It could have been minutes; it could have been hours. Still she held him, not letting him go.

The relative silence was broken suddenly by the sound of Sarah's stomach making an untimely growl. He felt her shake with silent laughter.

"I think that may be our cue to go for lunch," he said wryly.

"I'm so sorry, Severus. I was so nervous this morning, I never had breakfast." She looked up at him sheepishly.

"Our reservation is at two." He quickly checked his watch, then quirked his eyebrow. "It appears your magical abilities also extend to your stomach; it's five to now. We should Apparate." He paused, looking down at her with a smile that was reflected right back up at him. *Thank you, for being you,* he thought and kissed her forehead.

Chapter 18

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

The pair Apparated into the bottom of Hogsmeade High Street with a smart crack. Severus offered Sarah his arm, which she gladly accepted, and went on to explain to Sarah about Hogsmeade being one of the few wholly wizarding places in the UK as they strolled casually past the little row of shops. Severus felt proud to have a lady on his arm and, noticing their reflection in a shop window, thought they made quite a dashing couple.

Sarah, meanwhile, was fascinated by the colourful magical displays in Zonko's front window and lured by the delightful sugary smells coming from Honeyduke's.

"Will I have time to have a look around the shops after lunch?" she asked hopefully.

"Of course. I need to get some supplies from Alcaeus Apothecary myself."

Jasmine's restaurant was opposite a shop called Dervish & Banges. Sarah's attention was caught by strange looking instruments in the window, and she made a mental note to pop by after lunch.

The sign above the restaurant was emblazoned with shimmering mirrored letters. The windows were a discreet smoky-grey colour. It looked like a very fine establishment. Severus held the door open for her to walk through before following her in. They were instantly greeted by the Maitre'd, an olive-skinned wizard with a neatly-trimmed goatee and a shock of oiled, slicked back hair.

"Professor Snape! It's been too long," the man acknowledged graciously.

"It has indeed, Alfonso. I trust you are well?"

"Business is good. And if business is good, then I am good also." He smiled genially at Severus for a second before his eyes flicked to his companion. "Forgive me; I do not believe I've had the pleasure, Miss..."

"Shaw," Sarah offered. "Sarah Shaw."

"Wonderful to meet you, Miss Shaw." He gave a polite smile before turning again to Snape. "Your favourite table is ready, Professor. Please be seated whilst I fetch your menus." With a curt nod, he disappeared behind a rich velvet curtain as Severus led Sarah through the restaurant to their table, pulling out a chair for her before taking a seat of his own. Sarah really appreciated his manners and his sense of unquestioning old-fashioned chivalry, and it made her feel quite ladylike and special.

She took the opportunity to look around and noted the highly eclectic décor. Behind Severus was a massive wooden plaque, carved into the shape of an ornate, Oriental dragon. A full-sized Grecian statue stood in the far corner. There were also Italian-looking Frescos painted on the ceiling, whilst brightly-coloured paintings of Hindu gods and gilded Buddhas sat juxtaposed on the walls against delicate Japanese ink drawings, Egyptian papyrus and Aztec masks. The cultural clash could have easily been gaudy and gauche, but instead the overall effect oozed class and elegance.

On the table in front of them were silver goblets and heavy-looking silver cutlery with a tiny twist detail on the handle, and large silver plates. Thick white napkins were folded into the shape of a lotus and had been charmed to gently open and close on the plates.

Alfonso returned swiftly with the menus. They were bound in black leather and had 'Jasmine's' embossed in fluid script on the front. After presenting the menus, he left them to decide their order in peace.

Sarah opened her menu and was shocked to find it contained only one piece of parchment, which also happened to be completely blank. She frowned and then looked over at Severus, whose menu was exactly the same. She opened her mouth to vocalise her confusion, but Severus spoke in his rich baritone.

"Italian," he drawled, and Sarah watched as flowing purple ink appeared on the menu in front of him, filling the page with curly script. Sarah smiled as it dawned on her what she needed to do.

"Choose whatever you like," he encouraged with a smile.

Sarah thought for a moment, and then said, "Thai." This time, her menu began to blossom with fancy purple writing as dish after dish materialised on the page.

After a discreet amount of time, Alfonso came over once more. "Would you like to see the wine menu, Professor?" he asked Snape, but Snape shook his head.

"We'll have the '82 Diavolo Rioja, thank you."

"An excellent choice," replied Alfonso before disappearing again.

"I've never heard of that wine before? Is it Spanish?" Sarah asked.

"It is. But you would not have heard of it as it is wizard made. It's called Diavolo as the grapes are blended with a tiny amount of belladonna. It's literally the 'Devil's Rioja'." He smiled at her.

Sarah meanwhile looked affronted. "Isn't belladonna poisonous?"

"You're correct; in certain amounts belladonna is toxic and can be fatal. However, it is used in many wizarding potions and is quite safe if used properly and can even aid digestion. In this particular vintage, they would add one berry for every three litres in the cask. The effect is subtle, but I promise you, it's wonderful."

Well, he did say he used to teach Potions, so he must know all about it she thought.

"What are the effects?" she asked curiously.

"It makes the lips tingle, and the pupils dilate. Belladonna means "beautiful lady" in Italian. Drops prepared from the belladonna plant were used to dilate women's pupils, an effect considered to be attractive. Highly dangerous, of course." He smiled again, and Sarah found herself wanting to know more.

Just before she was able to voice her next question, her eyes were drawn to her goblet, which was now silently filling up with deep red liquid. Severus grabbed his and took a sip, closing his eyes briefly with pleasure. Sarah did the same and was surprised at how delicious it was. It was deep and almost like black cherry in fruitiness, with a rich chocolatey aftertaste that did indeed make her lips tingle lightly. Her first impression was that it was like sex in drink form, and that appealed to her sensualist nature no end.

"This is incredible," she managed after her first sip.

Severus smirked indulgently. "I'm pleased you like it."

Severus plucked at the lotus-flower napkin, giving it a brisk shake to return it to its natural shape before placing it on his lap. Sarah followed suit, remembering her next question.

"What made you give up Potions? Do you hate the subject that much?"

Severus let out another customary bark-like laugh. "Hate Potions? On the contrary, I adore Potions. It requires a high level of skill, patience and concentration, and also subtlety and intuition. It is the teaching of Potions that is maddening and that I detest. You tend to find that few students prove competent, and the rest are eternally dismal and there's no hope for them. The grading process for marking Potions is more tedious too, as you have to analyze each component to understand what made it particularly bad or good. It is completely soul-destroying to watch students continually blunder through a subject I have so much passion for." He paused, taking another sip of the Rioja before continuing.

"I had wanted to teach Defence Against the Dark Arts for some years, but was denied the position for several... complex reasons," he explained. "Besides being a subject I have had very real experience of, it is one of the most paramount skills pupils need for their own personal protection. I take great satisfaction from making sure every pupil at the very least will be able to walk away from my class being able to summon a Patronus charm or conjure an effective Shield charm. And of course, the marking is much simpler."

"It is a shame I will not be able to take your subject," Sarah lamented.

"It is unfortunate. But as I have said, I am more than happy to cover the basics with you outside of the school so you will also have defensive tools at your disposal."

"Thank you, Severus. You are very kind." She smiled at him sincerely, and he saw the pupils in her fern-coloured eyes had begun to dilate already. *Beautiful lady indeed*, he thought.

"Have you decided what you would like?" he asked after a moment, tearing his eyes away from hers.

"Oh, no, just a second." Sarah had been so engrossed in his conversation, she'd barely looked. "I've decided," she said quickly.

"Tagliatelle con funghi et salsiccia," Severus muttered carefully at his plate, looking at Sarah to do the same.

"Thai red curry," she said clearly. Within seconds, each meal miraculously appeared on to the wide silver plates, steaming hot and deliciously prepared. Sarah's curry had a delicately-carved vegetable to one side which looked to be a beetroot; deep crimson, and shaped like an incredibly delicate flower. She grinned across at Severus with pleasure as he raised a fork and muttered, "Bon appetite."

There was relative silence whilst they ate, punctuated by the occasional moans of delight and "Quite delicious" from Sarah. Severus watched her eat, amused.

"It's good to see a Muggle woman actually eating. I'd presumed they were all stick-thin due to starvation, if the trend in their vulgar magazines which I confiscate from pupils on an almost daily basis is anything to go by," he said dryly.

Sarah felt a flash of embarrassment. She was certainly no size zero. "I could probably do with losing a few pounds myself, but I enjoy my food," she said quietly.

Severus realised that she was somehow insulted by his last comment. "I am very glad you have a healthy appetite. I would not find you so positively charming if you lost any of your curves. There is clearly something wrong with Muggle men if they find skeletal forms attractive."

She smiled up shyly at him now, realising he was trying to pay her a genuine compliment.

"If you are agreeable, once we have finished in Hogsmeade we will need to buy you a wand," Severus said after finishing the last mouthful of his tasty pasta dish.

Sarah looked puzzled. "But I already have a wand."

Severus raised his eyebrow. "I could no more perform spells with that than you could. Wizarding wands have special cores, usually a piece from a magical creature. Whereas most people with any kind of magical ability should be able to yield some results with any of these magically-imbued wands, wand ownership is very complicated and wizards tend to perform best with their own custom wand. The wand chooses the wizard, so they say. Mine chose me at the age of eleven, and I've had it ever since. Nearly lost or had it broken innumerable times. It would be like losing a limb if I ever had it taken from me." Sarah saw him reach into his jacket instinctively, to see if it was still there.

"Is there a wand shop in Hogsmeade?" she asked.

"No, unfortunately not. Ollivander's is the main UK supplier of wands, and his shop is based in London and is usually shut on Sundays. However, I have made a special request that we can go and see him later on this afternoon to buy you a wand, as I will be unable to begin coaching you without one. I've already explained to him that you have never owned a wand before. Naturally he was suspicious, as most people will purchase a wand at the age of eleven before pursuing a magical education, and the only time they would have to go back is if their wand was lost or damaged. I told him you had a spell rebound on you that had inflicted magical powers upon you; he does not need more information than that."

Sarah finished her last scoop of red curry and rice with a satisfied smile. "Thank you for bringing me here. It was wonderful."

"It was absolutely my pleasure," he drawled before draining the last of his wine. "Would you like dessert? Coffee?" he offered.

"I'm absolutely stuffed, thank you," she replied.

"In that case, I'll request the bill."

As if Alfonso had read his mind, he was there in an instant, with a polite, "Anything else I can get for you, Professor?"

"Just the bill, please, Alfonso. Once again, you've outdone yourself, it was truly delicious."

"Very kind, Professor, very kind," he answered with a smile before producing a plain piece of parchment and his wand from his apron. He tapped it once, causing italics to spread across the surface. With a little bow, he handed the parchment to Severus and left their table. Severus glanced at the parchment, before noticing with amusement that Sarah was rifling through her bag looking for her wallet.

"I don't think so," he said in a silky drawl as she looked up at him. "Wizards have their own currency. And besides, I wouldn't dream of inviting a lady out to lunch and expecting her to pay." With that he removed a tiny black velvet pouch from his coat and tapped it with his wand. The pouch grew to about ten times its size, and Severus carefully opened it and removed ten fat, shiny golden coins. With another tap, the bill turned into an envelope, which he slipped the coins inside. He then tapped the pouch again, returning it to its minuscule state before pocketing both pouch and wand.

"Thank you, Severus." She smiled at him graciously. He felt a warm glow; it felt rather luxurious taking a lady out for a civilized spot of lunch in a fine restaurant. Pleasures such as these were, for someone like Lucius Malfoy, with all his pomp and circumstance and devoted wife, taken for granted as an everyday experience. However, the novelty was certainly still there for Severus, who could count his romantic meals out on one hand.

Rising from their seats, they bade their thanks and farewells to Alfonso before stepping back into the High Street for a spot of unhurried shopping.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Snape took Sarah first to the apothecary to collect his potion ingredients before making their way back up the High Street. She was fascinated by Dervish & Banges and absolutely captured by Honeyduke's. He'd bought her a massive box of assorted fudge and chocolate, to which she offered him a blushing peck on the cheek, and he once again revelled in feeling chivalrous.

Severus explained that their meeting with Ollivander was at four in Diagon Alley in London, and that it wouldn't do to keep the old man waiting. They Apparated from just outside the Post Office in Hogsmeade High Street, in to Diagon Alley, just in front of Gringotts Bank, at quarter-to four.

"Gringotts is the primary wizarding bank," he explained as Sarah gazed at the impressive marble building ahead. "It's controlled by Goblins and is naturally closed on Sundays. It offers a Muggle-Wizarding currency exchange facility. However, you need to have proof of your wizarding ability in order to enter Gringotts. This is another reason why we need to ensure you have a wand, so we will be able to set you up with a Gringotts Bank account. You'll need it as proof of your wizarding identity."

They walked onwards, Sarah craning her neck to peer at the shops as they went.

"Do not worry, we will have plenty of time to explore Diagon Alley when we return to set up your bank account and collect your schooling equipment," he told her, sensing her inextinguishable inquisitiveness. "There is only one place we need to go to today."

They made their way left, and on the corner they saw a shop with narrow and shabby-looking exterior with a sign that read: Ollivander's: Makers of Fine Wands since 382 BC.

Snape tried the door, and it opened with a tinkle. This time, he passed through before holding the door open for Sarah to follow him. Her eyes adjusted to the dim light. There was a small counter at the back of the shop, and the rest of the place was sparse, apart from stacks and stacks of dusty boxes, with a delicate-looking spindly chair in the middle of the room. Sarah thought the shop was empty at first, before an old, soft, reedy voice called through from the back.

"Professor Snape? Is that you?"

"Yes, Mr. Ollivander. It appears we are a little early."

"One moment please," he called back.

They waited for a minute or so, until finally Mr. Ollivander crept up a hidden staircase behind the counter, his elderly form emerging slowly. He carefully closed the trapdoor before making his way over.

"Professor Snape," the old man croaked, shaking his hand. Severus noted the texture of his skin was like papyrus. "And this must be the mysterious Miss Shaw." Sarah also took his hand and watched Ollivander's silvery-grey eyes glitter with a hint of suspicion as well as curiosity.

"Pleased to meet you," she said politely, suddenly feeling very nervous.

"Likewise," he said officiously, suddenly brandishing what looked to be a measuring tape. "If Miss would be so kind, please step forwards with your arms out. I need to take some rudimentary measurements. Are you left- or right- handed?"

"Right-handed," replied Sarah as she raised her arms out to the sides whilst Ollivander measured her height, her right hand span, her right arm span, her fingertip to fingertip span, and the circumference of her head, whilst a little note book and quill hovered in front of him, noting down the figures as he muttered the measurements. He squinted at her for a moment and then promptly measured the distance between each of her eyes. Seemingly satisfied, he began to rifle through the stack of boxes until he found one he was happy with. Sarah looked at Severus, who tried to give her a reassuring smile.

"Holly, nine inches, firm, phoenix feather," he said, passing it to her. She took it from him, holding it uncertainly.

"Go on, then. Give it a wave!" he encouraged. She glanced quickly from the old man to Snape, who solemnly nodded his encouragement.

She waved it around. Nothing happened. She blinked helplessly at Ollivander.

"No matter, just as I thought," he said efficiently, taking the wand from her and then burying himself back into the massive pile of boxes.

After some minutes, he returned brandishing another wand. "Birch, eight inches, slightly springy, unicorn hair," he puffed, handing the wand over to her.

Again, she waved the wand, and again, nothing happened. Ollivander gave her a curious expression. "I'd had you down as unicorn," he muttered. "Let's see, then..."

Once more Ollivander plundered the stack of boxes and made her try wands of varying woods, lengths and cores. A birch wand with dragon heartstring had glowed faintly when she waved it, which came to a relief to Sarah, but Ollivander was not satisfied, taking it from her hastily and muttering to himself.

"I wonder..." he wheezed, making his way to the back of the shop.

Sarah gazed anxiously at Severus. "What if he can't find one for me?" she whispered urgently.

"An impossibility. Ollivander has made wands for every British wizard and witch alive," he hissed back.

After some time, the old man returned, carrying a box almost reverently. "This wand was an experiment of mine some years ago. With the help of Hagrid I managed to track down the unusual core material. No-one, however, has yet been drawn to this particular wand." He held the wand out to her to take.

It was made from a very pale wood, with what looked to be crescent moons carved back to back at the top and bottom of the handle. Sarah thought it immensely beautiful.

"Hazel, ten inches, firm, centaur hair," he breathed as she took it from him.

As soon as she grabbed the handle, she felt surge of power shoot down her arm. The wand felt like it absolutely belonged in her hand; it was the right weight, and length, and did indeed feel like an extension of her arm. She drew the wand diagonally in front of her swiftly until she was holding it aloft, and tens of tiny white stars erupted from the tip, filling the gloom with white light.

Ollivander clapped his hands with delight and roared with approval as her mouth opened in awe; she was reminded once more of her dream.

"Most extraordinary! I never thought I'd live to see the day," he continued, taking the wand from her and replacing it in the box, making his way over to the counter. "You'll be wanting to take this now, Miss Shaw?"

She glanced at Severus. *I have no wizarding money*, she thought sadly.

Severus strode over to Ollivander and placed a handful of fat Galleons on the counter. His silvery eyes widened. "But this is too much," he protested, pushing the pile back towards Severus.

"For your trouble," he replied in a tone which stated there was to be no argument.

"You're welcome, Professor Snape, Miss Shaw," he croaked, handing Snape a bag containing the perfectly wrapped wand box and pocketing the Galleons.

As they left the shop, Sarah turned to Severus. "I cannot let you pay for my wand. As soon as I get my own account I will reimburse you."

"You will do no such thing," Severus replied coolly. "I was the one that instigated your powers, therefore it is fitting that I am the one that provides you with the tool you need to harness it."

"You've already been so generous to me today, Severus, paying for lunch and buying me chocolates. You really do not have to do this too." He looked into her eyes and saw how grateful she was. It was clear that she wasn't used to such generosity from a man, and she seemed somehow uncomfortable with it.

He took a deep breath, placing a hand on her face. "Sarah, wizards have a peculiar view of life-debts. If someone saves someone's life, they are in debt to that person. Similarly, I feel I am in debt to you as I was the one who disrupted your Muggle life by transferring wizarding powers to you. It would be an honour if you let me do this for you."

Her eyes shone up at him. "Bestowing me with these powers was the greatest gift of all," she whispered, before reaching up and kissing him gently on the lips. "Thank you."

He smiled down at her. "It was as much a gift for me as it was for you," he replied, stroking her hair.

She snuggled into him then, and they remained in an embrace outside Ollivander's. Severus thought idly that if any student or acquaintance spotted them there was sure to be scandal. His second thought was that he didn't actually care, and squeezed her back.

"Would you like to come back to mine for a glass of wine?" she asked brightly. "It's not quite Diavolo Rioja, but I have an acceptable Cabernet Sauvignon if you would care to join me?"

Severus smirked. "I'd love to." And with that, they Apparated back to the woods at Spinner's End.

Author's note: I chose hazel for Sarah's wand as wands made of this wood symbolize white magic and healing. Forked sticks made from hazel are used to find water or buried treasure. Magically, hazel wood is used to gain knowledge, wisdom and poetic inspiration, and this wood is frequently used in Wiccan wand making.

I chose centaur hair for the core as centaurs are blessed with the power of divination, which is a skill Sarah also has, as reflected by her dreams

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Severus was still carrying her things as they crossed the threshold into her cottage. He stepped into the pale lounge and saw it to be homely in a sparse kind of way. He'd half expected hundreds of trinkets to be scattered everywhere, but instead there were choice pieces on display here and there, with a few graceful paintings along the walls. There were some low book cases and another tall case to one side filled with hundreds upon hundreds of what he assumed were also books, but with very thin spines and of uniform height. Star-shaped fairy lights adorned the fireplace, which she had now switched on, and various pieces of electrical equipment he did not recognise were arranged in one corner.

Sarah turned to him to relieve him of the bags. "Thank you for carrying my things, darling," she said as she took them from him and placed them on the side. "Please take your shoes and coat off, and sit down and relax whilst I get myself out of this dress and into something more comfortable. As much as I love this dress, it's terribly constrictive, and I'm dying to put my PJs on," she said with a smile before turning out of the lounge.

Severus heard her footsteps leading up the stairs. *She called me darling*, he thought, mouth twisting. He did as she requested, taking off his frock coat and slipping his boots off, placing them all neatly in the hallway. He then strode over to the unknown electrical equipment for closer inspection. He peered at a flat box containing a large, black piece of glass in it. He could see his reflection in it. *Maybe it's a Muggle's version of a Sneakoscope*, he thought. There was also a silver box with buttons all over it, flanked by two other boxes covered in what looked to be gauze. One of the buttons said "ON", so he pressed it gingerly. Blue lights flashed a welcome message at him, and he raised an eyebrow in surprise. He also saw a button marked "PLAY", so he pressed this one too. The box began to whirr, and suddenly electronic music began to flood out from the boxes either side. Severus cocked his head. *A music box! How quaint.*

The music was like nothing he'd ever heard before. There was a swell of some instrument he didn't recognise, with some strings lightly piercing the background. Then there were handclaps, followed by fast, rhythmic drums and a deep, booming bass as the melody continued over the top. The effect was quite ethereal and yet made his foot tap. Not quite sure how to turn the damn thing off again, he walked back across the lounge and sat on Sarah's squashy red sofa, looking around the room once more. Just as he was getting comfy, a clattering noise startled him from the kitchen. Instinctively, he reached for his wand, but then instantly relaxed when he heard a familiar meowing. *Bernard.*

Bernard came trotting into the lounge, looked at Snape as if to say "You?" and mewed again accusingly. "She's upstairs," Snape told the cat. The cat seemed placated by that and then jumped gracefully on to the sofa and proceeded to stalk across to where Snape was sitting, tail held high, on the hunt for affection. "Come here, then," he drawled, amused, as the cat rubbed its head under his fingers and padded on to Severus' lap.

When Sarah returned downstairs, she was met with the rather odd sight of Bernard happily curled up in Severus' lap, his left hand scratching the cat idly behind one ear,

the right tapping merrily away to the music.

"Do you want me to turn this off?" she asked, walking through the lounge towards the kitchen at the back.

"No, this music is... acceptable," he replied, watching her form. She'd changed into what looked to be very thin pyjama bottoms and a black vest top, and she'd taken her hair down.

He heard her clinking around with glasses, and in a few moments she'd returned with two large glasses of red wine.

"I would have never in the life of me thought that wizards would like drum and bass," she grinned, handing him a glass.

"Drum and bass?" he repeated with a frown.

"It's what this type of music is called. It's not hugely well known in my world, but it's a type of music that people dance to at parties and festivals." She shook her head with a smile. Trying to describe music was tricky at the best of times. Trying to explain an alternative form of dance music to a wizard seemed nigh-on impossible. "I'd just thought of you as more of a classical music sort of person."

Severus wasn't sure whether to be insulted by this or not.

"And what, exactly, would a 'classical music sort of person' be like?" he asked slowly. "Let me guess: boring, uptight, and old-fashioned?" He quirked an eyebrow for effect.

Sarah giggled. "Not at all! I was thinking, intelligent, educated and refined, actually," she said with a smile, before taking a gulp of wine.

Severus rolled his eyes in mock-annoyance before taking a deep swig himself.

"I'm so happy with my wand, Severus. It's so beautiful," she sighed, changing the subject.

"You do realise that your wand is exceptionally rare, don't you?" he asked after a moment.

"Mr Ollivander did give me the impression it was... unusual," Sarah replied.

"Unusual? It may well be the only wand of its kind in existence!"

Sarah's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "What makes you think that?"

"Ollivander makes wands with only three magical cores: unicorn hair, dragon heartstring and phoenix feather. For whatever reason, these are the magical cores that are most conducive to producing magic and are the cores of every British witch and wizard's wand. My own wand contains dragon heartstring, which is why I'm guessing you were able to produce some effect from the ones you tried with that core, as you were able to perform a basic spell with my wand yesterday." He continued scratching Bernard with his long fingers, as the cat stretched its neck and grinned, eyes shut.

"Your wand, however, contains centaur hair, which Ollivander admitted was an experiment and that no-one had been able to master that wand. It's my theory that, as it was an experiment, it is more than likely to be a one-off and, given the circumstances of your magical ability, that you would be the only person the wand would choose."

Sarah blinked, then put her wine glass down and reached for the box containing her wand. She opened it slowly and carefully, taking the lid off and gently removing the wand from its tissue-paper bed. She gazed at it, stroking it lovingly, while little sparks came out of the tip. Severus watched her with a flash of affection. He was exactly the same when he first bought his wand. He remembered how powerful it had made him feel, how different and how, fleetingly, special.

"*Lumos*," she muttered, flicking the wand ahead of her. A bright white beam issued from the end.

"Impressive," remarked Snape. "Do you see the difference between the strength of the spell between your wand and mine? Your own wand is much more powerful when performing magic."

She nodded before extinguishing the wand. "Would you like to have a go?" she asked.

Severus hesitated for a second. It wasn't really "wand etiquette" to let people "have a go" on your wand, unless really necessary. But he was curious about the wand with the strange core and wondered if he could produce an effect. He held out his hand as Sarah passed it over.

It was a very beautiful wand; there was no doubting that, he noted as he admired the carvings. He then held the wand up: "*Wingardium Leviosa!*" he commanded, swishing his wand at a candlestick on the fireplace. It hovered a foot above the shelf before setting down again.

"Pathetic," he muttered, handing Sarah her wand back and then reaching into his waistcoat for his own. This time when he performed the spell, the candlestick soared many feet up, and as Severus dragged his wand around the room, the candlestick followed.

"Teach me!" she begged, following the candlestick with round eyes.

"Tomorrow," said Severus. "We'll start your coaching tomorrow evening. If you are free, that is," he added softly.

Sarah nodded with a smile and reluctantly packed her wand away, again taking great care to place it just so on the tissue like a newborn baby before replacing the lid. Severus couldn't help but smile.

"Bernard's really fond of you, isn't he?" she asked after putting her wand away.

"What's the matter? Jealous?" teased Severus in a low voice.

"I am, actually," replied Sarah playfully. "I was rather hoping I'd get to sit on your lap this evening." Her eyes twinkled mischievously.

"Oh really?" he drawled, quirked his eyebrow once again. "Well, we'll have to see what we can do about that, won't we?"

He shifted his legs so that Bernard was forced to stand. "On to the chair, please," he told the cat. To Sarah's surprise, Bernard stepped up on to the arm of the sofa, leapt skilfully across to the armchair, and sat, paws tucked in underneath him.

Severus looked over at Sarah. "All yours, my dear."

Sarah's mouth twisted into a seductive smile as she crawled along the sofa towards him before straddling his lap and placing her arms around his neck.

"That's much better, isn't it?" she asked in a husky voice. Severus could see by the swell of her breast that she was not wearing a bra, and the knowledge made him giddy.

"Hmmm, but do you purr if I stroke you?" he replied, running his fingers up and down her sides lightly.

"There's only one way to find out," she whispered, before bringing her mouth close to his. They shared a few heady moments of the anticipation of their kiss, breathing each other's breath, before their lips met in a symphony of nerve endings. Sarah's hands reached to hold his face as Severus' raked lightly down her back and crept up her vest top. Sarah's hips began to push forward, and the feel of her heat through her light cotton pyjama bottoms as she brushed against his groin sent his passion flaring.

He moaned as he kissed her deeper now, and she took his large, pale hands in hers and placed them firmly on her breasts. He withdrew for a moment and looked into her eyes, and saw her pupils were still dilated from the wine earlier. She looked like lust personified; her mouth slightly opened as he kneaded her breasts gently. She threw her head back and let out a little yelp as Severus began to tease each awakened nipple between finger and thumb.

Now she arched forward to start nipping and nuzzling his throat as his hands tangled in her thick brown hair. She could feel his bulge forming underneath her and wanted to see it with her own eyes and feel it with her hands. The ritual had required that she was passive throughout, and although she knew he was big by the way she had felt incredibly full, she wanted to know just how big.

She began to move down his body, dragging her hands down his fully clad form, until at last she was kneeling between his legs. She began to stroke his thighs, moving upwards until her fingers brushed the straining swelling beneath the wool of his trousers, and gasped. He was huge! She leaned forwards and opened her mouth, tracing her lips all the way along the clothed outline of his rapidly stiffening manhood. Severus jolted as if electrocuted.

"Sarah," he muttered thickly.

Sarah froze. Please, no self-doubt, or unfounded teacher-pupil angst, or anything else, she prayed silently.

"Can we move? Bernard's staring at me."

Sarah turned her head and saw Bernard scowling at them both, and she laughed. "He really hates it when he's not getting any affection. Just like me." She stood and offered Severus her hand. "Let's go to my room," she whispered, leading him up the stairs.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Sarah opened the door to her room and pulled Severus immediately in for another passionate kiss. He was dimly aware of being led to a huge double bed and felt navy blue satin underneath his fingers as he sat. As to what else the room contained, he neither knew nor cared; his attention was so completely taken up by the ravenous woman hungrily kissing him.

As they kissed her fingers began to unbutton his waistcoat and she tore it from him urgently before placing a fresh assault on his mouth. Now she was reaching for his shirt buttons to undo, which Severus himself took over as she ran her fingers through his hair, never once breaking the kiss.

Sarah immediately slipped her hands inside his now-open shirt, feeling the warmth of his smooth, pale torso, running her hands up his shoulders to delight in their firm, broad masculinity before trickling back down to his nipples, circling them with delicate thumbs. Her mouth moved to his throat, kissing and nibbling and licking, hands snaking around to his back to drag her fingernails lightly down it, feeling him shiver slightly. She planted a little row of kisses down his neck, to his collarbone, and she could not resist sinking her teeth into his deliciously manly shoulder, making him grunt.

She pushed the shirt from his body, and Severus reached behind him to pluck the sleeves from his arms before discarding it on the floor. As she kissed him again, her tongue danced over his lips and she placed her hands on the centre of his chest and pushed gently. He understood; she wanted him to lie back, so he did. She removed each of his socks quickly, effortlessly tossing them to one side. She then pulled her vest top over her head, freeing her large breasts, and removed her pyjama bottoms with haste. Severus watched her, his arousal growing by the second.

Sarah now began to etch little circles around his naval with a finger, tracing the little trail of dark hair that led from his belly to his groin, until she reached the top of his trousers. Again she brushed her hand against his bulge, and she could feel it was straining to be freed. She unzipped his fly and hooked her fingers inside the waistband of his trousers, noticing as she did that he wasn't wearing any underwear. This drove her half-mad with desire, and a flash of urgency overtook her. She needed to see him, she needed to feel him right now, and with that she tore his trousers down to his knees, making Severus recoil a little in surprise as she feasted her eyes at last upon his manhood. It stood out proudly from a mass of black curls, dusky pink against the paleness of the rest of his body. The head was large and sculpted; the shaft was thick and long. She never tore her eyes away from his beautiful cock for a moment as she removed his trousers and flung them over the side of the bed.

"My God, you're magnificent," she murmured, moving forwards between his legs and bringing her face close to it. Wrapping one hand around the base, she began to rub her cheek against the head, revelling in the feel of the warm velvet skin stretched over the hard flesh.

Severus shuddered and closed his eyes; it felt incredible, yet he felt so open and exposed, he was fighting with the feeling of shielding himself from her. All that changed however when she stuck out her pink tongue and began lapping at him. He groaned and his head shot up and his eyes snapped open. There she was: licking up and down like he was the most delicious ice cream in the whole world, her eyes locked onto his. Severus thought he'd never seen anything so incredibly erotic in his life. Her eyes were still dilated from the Diavolo Rioja, her tongue swirling around him, and his cock twitched with pleasure.

Sarah cupped his swollen testicles in one hand whilst the other beginning to move up and down over the shaft as she stretched her lips over the head and began to suck him. He groaned again, watching her close her eyes as if this act pleased her as much as it pleased him. Her head bobbed up and down as her mouth and hand began to work a steady rhythm. Severus' breath drew shallow as his hips began to thrust gently in time. She was exceptionally good at this and he knew he wouldn't last long. The movements of his thrusts told her how fast to go, and soon he was thrusting faster, trying to get deeper inside her mouth, his breathing more and more ragged.

"Sarah, I'm going to "

He finished that sentence with a growl as his hips bucked and Sarah took his length all the way inside her mouth, his hot salty-sweet climax hitting the back of her throat, his fingers gripping the satin sheets as orgasm roared over him like a tempest. She held him in her throat until his climax subsided, until the last seed had been spilled from him, and then she slowly sucked her way back up his length, swallowing every drop of him down.

Severus looked at her, panting, half-embarrassed and half-aroused, not entirely sure about the etiquette of oral sex and wondering if he should apologise. In response, Sarah licked her lips lasciviously.

"You taste so sweet," she said huskily, eyes still gazing straight into his as she crawled up his body and rested next to him, draping her arm round him.

"I can barely see," was all he managed to mutter in response. Sarah giggled into his chest and squeezed him, holding him until he recovered from the intensity of his orgasm.

They were silent for a moment. Sarah listened to his heart racing like a train as she held him, waiting for his breath and pulse to normalise.

"Did you like that?" she purred after a few minutes, rolling over and resting on her elbows.

Severus shifted from his back to his side with a groan. "You are a diabolically wanton little minx. You rendered me incompetent of either thought or sight after that performance. Surely such exquisite pleasure is illegal," he drawled, his fingers tracing down her spine and caressing the curve of her buttocks. She giggled again and he felt her shiver.

"I'll take that as a yes, then," she replied, a naughty grin etched on her face.

"Mmm," he agreed, caressing her further.

"That's nice," she whispered as his hand slipped lower over the seam of her behind, a finger lightly tracing the soft folds of skin at its apex. He began to drag it up and down with a featherlike touch, which made her shift and squirm and open her legs to give him more access.

Severus smirked and got to his knees, never taking his hand away. Sarah raised her bum instinctively as he continued to stroke her, pulling her knees up so she opened for him like a flower. His finger felt the slickness of her flesh, and she was beginning to whimper, but still he kept on gently toying with her. She was grinding her hips in a circle, and he knew what she wanted, but his touch remained light and consistent, driving her further into a frenzy.

Now he was beginning to stiffen again, and he shifted so he was behind her, one hand continually fondling her, the other stroking his cock to its impressive full state of arousal.

"Tease me with your cock," she pleaded, and he twitched in response. Drawing close, he dragged the head across her silky pink folds and she moaned as he nudged her clit with it. He rubbed her with his cock as his fingers had, but this time she began writhing more urgently; she wanted, no, she needed him inside her.

"Fuck me, please," she begged breathlessly, glancing at him over her shoulder, and he could contain himself no more. With a swift thrust, he buried himself deep within her. She yelped straight away, back arching, as he began to drive into her. He squeezed her buttocks as he thrust, stretching her wide. He found a rhythm, using her hips for leverage, Sarah moaning loudly each time he entered her.

"Harder, oh please, harder," she whispered, backing on to him and Severus willingly obliged. He was forcing himself faster and deeper into her, her screams telling him that she was absolutely loving it.

"Do you like being fucked like a whore?" he growled hoarsely, driving into her, the sound of their skin slapping together punctuating her soprano moans.

"Oh yes, just like that, don't stop," she cried, her body tensing around him, and he could tell she was close. Within moments she had closed tightly around him, her inner muscles gripping him spasmodically with the intense flood of her climax as she howled, the force of her orgasm driving Severus on to his own. He held himself inside her, stroking the small of her back, until her muscles twitched no more.

"Now I can't see," she muttered into her pillow, and Severus chuckled as he withdrew, crawling up the bed behind her and covering her body with his.

"Looks like we're even," he drawled in her ear, wrapping his arms tightly around her.

"You're magnificent," she said again, kissing one of his hands. They lay silently together, embraced in the post-coital glow, each wanting time to stand still as they dozed contentedly in each others arms.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Severus' chin was resting on top of Sarah's head as they lay together like spoons, drowsing. There was no doubt they had both just experienced spectacular orgasms, but he had to admit he wasn't expecting their first "proper" coupling to be quite so animalistic and ferocious in nature. The ritual had required her to be passive, but this time she was anything but, devouring him as easily as a common tart and begging for him to take her on all fours. *Minx*, he thought, squeezing her tighter.

"Has your eyesight returned?" he muttered lazily. He felt her shake with a giggle.

"Just about." She laced her fingers into his and sighed happily.

"Good. I think I can just about form coherent sentences myself." His baritone, although usually sexy, now had a post-coital huskiness to it, which brought to Sarah's mind the thought of a purring blank panther beside her. She could listen to him all day.

They'd just started to doze again when a scratching noise began to emanate from the window.

"What on earth's that?" asked Sarah, lifting her head off the pillow.

"Owl," Severus grunted, reluctantly removing his entwined limbs from hers and wrapping the satin sheet around his waist as he swung his legs off the bed. He stalked to the window and opened it. A small grey owl with orange eyes bobbed its head up and down, as if trying to see who else was in the room. Severus tried to take the little parcel attached to the owl's leg, but it kept shifting position, hooting disdainfully. Severus understood.

"Sarah, the owl is for you."

"For me?" she asked with complete surprise. She picked up the first garment she found on the floor, which happened to be Severus' white shirt, and threw it on, doing up just a few buttons before making her way over to the window. Severus looked at her curiously. It was strange to see a woman wearing his clothes, although "wearing" was a loose term as it positively swamped her and the sleeves were far too long.

"What does it want?" she asked, peeking at it curiously.

"It appears to have some mail for you, according to that parcel strapped to its leg."

The little owl hooted as if in agreement, sticking its leg out. Sarah peered forwards and read the address scrawled on the front:

Sarah Shaw

Lilac Cottage

Spinner's End

She fumbled with the tie, finally removing the package. Turning it over, she saw it had a wax seal on it.

"Ollivander's seal," Severus noted aloud.

The owl hooted impatiently for some kind of reward. Severus scowled at it. "Your master has had quite enough galleons out of me for one day, thank you," he snapped. The owl glared right back at Severus with its flaming eyes and made a little hissing sound before taking off.

She sat on the bed and opened the package, removing the brown parcel paper. Inside, there was a piece of parchment, and a tub of something called "Wheelan's Wand Wipes." She began to read:

Miss Shaw,

Let me first thank you for shopping with me today.

I must however reiterate how surprised I was that you had mastered the centaur hair wand. I made it almost twenty-six years ago, and it is a one-off; completely unique, a pure experiment on my behalf.

Whilst I am pleased the wand has found a worthy owner, I am also a little concerned as no-one else has a wand with a core such as your own. I am therefore unable to predict the outcome of using such a wand, as I have never observed it in use.

Although my initial impression of your bonding is very positive, I cannot be one hundred per cent sure of the wand core's reliability and stability. Should you encounter any such problems with the wand, please drop me an owl and stop using it immediately.

I do not wish to alarm you, but I feel it prudent that you should be aware of the unusual nature of your wand.

I hope you have many long and happy years with your wand. Please find enclosed a complimentary tub of "Wheelan's Wand Wipes," to help keep that just-bought sheen.

Sincerely,

M. Ollivander

Sarah looked up at Severus after she had finished reading. He'd now settled back into bed, the satin sheet draped over him opulently. She passed him the parchment so he could read for himself.

"Just as I said," Severus muttered after scanning it.

Sarah looked at him nervously. "He makes it sound like it could be dangerous."

He shook his head. "I doubt very much the wand will be in any way dangerous. Ollivander is being over-cautious. He takes his reputation very seriously, and he probably feels a little jaded that his knowledge about wands is no longer all-encompassing. He's also managed to cover his behind in a legal sense too, because if your wand stopped working, he'd be able to say, 'I told you so.'"

"It was nice of him to send the letter and the wipes though," she acquiesced, placing them on her dresser.

He should have given you a year's worth, the amount of galleons I gave him earlier, Snape thought with a snort.

Sarah gave a little stretch and a yawn.

"Keeping you up, am I?" he murmured silkily.

She turned around and smiled. "Well, it's just that someone has completely tired me out between a wonderful day in the wizarding world and a wonderful time between the sheets."

"How unfortunate," he drawled. "Looks like you need to go back to bed." He patted the space beside him with an amused smirk. Grinning, Sarah scrambled onto the bed, still wearing his shirt, and tumbled into his warm embrace.

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Sarah spent the rest of August in a flurry of activity. During the week, she continued working in the library, reading snippets of *Hogwarts: A Revised History* in her lunch breaks and during her commute to and from work. Severus had taught her both "Reducio" and "Engorgio" to prevent her struggling with the weighty tome and had also charmed the cover so it now bore the inoffensive title of *The Complete Works Of Shakespeare*. Her evenings were spent with Severus for her coaching, throughout which he retained an air of professional distance. The following weekends, however, were for her and Severus alone, and she wanted to hold on to every blessed second of them.

Whether they were strolling through the woods at Spinner's End, curled up watching television on the sofa (Severus had developed a keen interest in the Muggle news), or, more frequently, exploring each other in bed, Sarah's weekends were as precious to her as gold. She still knew very little about her dark lover. Sometimes he would ask

her questions about her family or her experience growing up, and she would reply openly. If she then responded in kind, he would usually brush her off with an "It's not important," or "There's not much to say." She remembered Albus' words about not pushing him, and so she left it, reasoning he would tell her in his own time.

Sarah had some holiday time booked from work towards the latter part of the month and had made plans to stay with friends in London for a few days. This worked out well, as term-time did not start until the first week in September and Minerva would not be returning from her own vacation until a few days before. Severus had discovered by way of her returned owl. Minerva seemed to have no overt objections to Sarah's tutelage, but suggested they meet after she had arrived back to assess her progress, to formally select her subjects, and to conduct her Sorting.

Sarah was already showing an aptitude for Charms and a keen interest in Herbology and Transfiguration. In light of her Charms work, Severus decided to teach her some defensive spells the night before she left to go on holiday.

"The two main forms of defence against spells and hexes are disarming and blocking," he told her in his smoothest teacher's voice, tapping his wand lightly on one hand. The furniture in his large lounge had once again been pushed back to give them both room, and he'd conjured a blackboard to hover in front of one of his vast bookshelves.

"The disarm is the simplest spell to master. Raise your wand in the secondary offensive position, like so." Snape held one arm straight out in front of him, his right hand hooked over his head, wand pointing straight at her. She copied the stance.

"Now, observe. *Expelliarmus!*"

A jet of red light whooshed from his wand and sent Sarah's arcing up from her hand, landing neatly on the sofa behind her. She looked from her hand, to her wand, and back to Severus, impressed.

"Your turn," he drawled as she turned to collect her wand. She stroked it absently, hoping it hadn't been damaged. "They're harder than they look," he said in consolation, noticing her furrowed brow.

Sarah stepped back into the offensive stance.

"After three," Severus instructed. "One... two... three!"

"*Expelliarmus!*" she muttered. A red puff issued from the end of her wand, but trailed out after a few feet.

"Concentrate!" he chided her. "Remember: both the wand and the word are an extension of your will. You can do this. Again."

Sarah took a breath, shifting her feet and rearranging her fingers over her wand. Her face shifted into a scowl of concentration. "*Expelliarmus!*" she cried. A jet of red swooped from her wand and whizzed past Severus' ear, making several books come flying from the shelves.

"Much better," Severus replied, quietly impressed. "Now we need to hone your target skills. Be aware of the direction of where you're aiming the spell. You should be able to see the tip of the wand in your periphery vision. Use your front arm as you would the sight of a pistol. Again, on three." He waved his wand, and the books floated back up to the shelf.

They both took the stance. Sarah once again shifted, her face the picture of concentration.

"One... two... three!"

"*Expelliarmus!*" she cried, and this time the jet zoomed precisely at Severus' wand, sending it ricocheting off the wall and on to the floor.

Severus raised his eyebrows. "Impressive. A full disarm on your third attempt. It is indeed a shame you will not be taking my subject this year."

She smiled at him happily as he retrieved his wand.

Severus then went on to teach her how to shield, which she successfully managed after two attempts. She so impressed him with the speed of her learning that he decided to push her a little and moved on to the topic of the Patronus Charm.

"The Patronus Charm is one of the lightest sorts of magic. It is used as a weapon against Dementors, who are foul, evil beasts which can suck your soul right through your mouth." He looked hard at Sarah and found her looking back at him with horrified disbelief. "Yes, you heard me correctly. Dementors guard the wizarding jail of Azkaban. Only a Patronus Charm is effective against them. A full Patronus, or Corporeal Patronus, takes the form of an animal. It is summoned by positive feelings, especially those of hope, which counteract the Dementors' own excretions of despair."

Although Severus could cast a Patronus non-verbally, for Sarah's benefit, he flicked his wand and spoke clearly, "*Expecto Patronum.*"

A burst of white light spilled forth from his wand, followed by twisting, silvery-grey, smoky fronds which began to form into a shape Sarah did not recognise. It looked to be a skeletal, winged horse, almost frightening in appearance, like something from the Apocalypse. She watched as it delicately unfurled its wings, tossing its skull-like head before turning and trotting gracefully towards Severus. On closer inspection, the animal looked sad, and it ducked its head down to receive an ethereal caress as Severus offered his hand to it.

"What creature is that?" Sarah whispered.

"It's a Thestral. They can only be seen by those who have witnessed death. Despite their fearful exterior, they are in fact gentle creatures. A herd actually dwells in the Forest at Hogwarts."

Sarah watched it paw at the floor with a hoof, wings drawing close to its sides once more.

"Will my Patronus look like that?" she asked.

Severus smiled. "No. Producing a Patronus is a very personal thing, and each person's Patronus is unique to them, in much the same way their wand is. This is in part due to the happy thought required to conjure the spell, as much as the person themselves." With a swift flick, the Thestral disappeared.

"This is quite advanced magic, but I'd like to see you try it. You need to concentrate on one of your happiest memories. Find a strong one, one that makes you smile in recollection. Hold on to it tightly in your mind; do not let go. Then say the words: *Expecto Patronum.*"

Sarah thought for a moment. Which memory to choose? She'd had many happy ones over the last few days, that's for sure. One popped into her head quite unexpectedly; the thought of Severus walking her home, and Bernard rushing up to greet him, and the inexplicable swell of happiness that she felt when she saw the man she loved being accepted by her choosy cat. Her mouth quirked; yes, that would do.

"Concentrate, now," Snape encouraged as she flexed her wand arm.

"*Expecto Patronum!*" she gasped, and to both of their astonishment, her wand-tip glowed white and the smoky tendrils curled forth, materialising into the shape of a proud, sleek tabby cat that trotted forwards.

"Well, the form of your Patronus is no surprise, even if your ability to produce one most certainly is," Snape drawled. "A cat, of course. My own Patronus was a cat, once."

"Your Patronus changed?" she asked, watching the cat swishing its tail gently from side to side, blinking at her benevolently.

"Yes, the shape of the Patronus can change, according to whatever memory is used to produce it. My own has changed three times in my life, as I've used three different memories to conjure it."

He looked at her sideways for a long moment.

"I've never heard of anyone to be able to produce a Corporeal Patronus on their first attempt. It is quite a feat for someone so new to magic. Filius and Albus will be thrilled."

She glanced back at him and smiled as the cat vanished. "I'm so excited about magic. I just want to learn everything. I just can't seem to learn quickly enough."

Severus raised his eyebrows. "You are learning plenty fast enough. Once your schooling begins in earnest in a few weeks, you'll have much more on your plate. As for tonight, I think that will be all for now. I was hoping you'd join me for a nightcap so I can say goodbye to you properly." His mouth twisted into a crooked smile at the prospect.

"Saying goodbye properly" actually resulted in a long, luxurious evening of unhurried lovemaking, Severus making her body sing with each caress as he explored every inch of her, deliberately slowing the pace so he could enjoy her for longer and watch her whip herself into a lustful frenzy as he kept her on the edge. He was by turns both tender and passionate and also very keen to drive her to more and more climaxes. When it came for the time to say goodbye, they held each other for a long time. Severus knew she would only be gone for five days, but to him it would feel like an eternity.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

The day after Sarah's departure, Snape found himself once more in the headmistress's office, addressing the portrait of his old friend.

"Centaur hair core, you say, Severus?" Albus peered over his half-moon specs with curiosity as Snape told him all about Sarah's wand. "In all possibility, Sarah will excel at Divination."

Severus snorted, leaning back in the headmistress's chair. Divination was a subject for frauds and attention-seekers, he'd always thought.

"Ollivander stated that it was a one-off experiment and that no-one had been able to master the wand before. He was also a little concerned, as he could not vouch for its effects," Snape expanded, crossing his right foot over his left knee, triangulating his lap.

"Yes, well, we know Ollivander has a reputation to protect," Dumbledore replied. "Still, a most interesting development. Something we should keep an eye on, I feel. And how is Sarah taking to her coaching?"

"She has shown great aptitude and interest in Potions, Herbology, and Charms," Snape conceded. "In fact, she produced a corporeal Patronus on the first attempt."

Dumbledore's white eyebrows shot up. "Merlin's wand!"

"It surprised me as much as it surprised you," Snape said smoothly. "It also seems she has a particularly strong competency in defensive magic."

Albus ruminated on this for a while. "Given the nature of the transference of power, it would seem logical that she would be strong in the subjects that you also happen to be gifted at," he said delicately. "The Divination aspect must have already been a part of her. Has she passed any of this ability on to you at all?"

Severus gave him a withering look. "I can assure you, the need to gaze into people's teacups and demand they cross my palm with silver is very much lacking with me," he answered snippily.

Albus chuckled. "A good thing, too. Otherwise poor Sybill may think you'll be after her job next." He twinkled down at Severus, who flexed his jaw with barely-concealed irritation. "It is good you are teaching her Defence outside of the school, Severus. It would be prudent to continue."

Severus nodded curtly, looking at his fingernails. There were a few moments of silence, before Dumbledore spoke again.

"How are things progressing outside of Sarah's education?" he asked lightly.

Severus felt rankled at the question, knowing it was leading somewhere he did not want to go.

"Sarah is still working at the library, so I presume she's very happy there," Snape replied, being deliberately obtuse.

"That's not what I meant, Severus."

Reluctantly, Snape threw his black eyes back up at the painting and saw the old man looking down in concern.

"I know she is very fond of you," Albus said quietly.

"And I am fond of her," Snape murmured. "But it does not change the fact that she does not know a thing about the war, or Lily, or the Dark Lord, or the Death Eaters. She doesn't even know I am a killer. She knows nothing, Albus, nothing!" Severus raised a hand to his face, pinching the bridge of his nose in frustration.

"Severus," Dumbledore began softly. "Forgive my intrusion and my presumption. I know you have resolved your feelings for Lily, and I have seen you grieve for all that happened during the war. And I am truly grateful that you are beginning to heal. But it seems to me there are still many, many wounds buried deep within you that are still festering." Severus scowled up at him and Albus knew he was skating on thin ice. "I know that the only way you could have coped over the last twenty years is by blocking out the horror you saw whilst you were associated with the Death Eaters. It is a testament to your will and character that you had the strength to do this, and an indication of the brilliance of your Occlumency, no doubt. But you need to resolve your feelings about these incidents, and you need to put them to rest in order to finally accept yourself. I fear it will destroy you, and your blossoming relationship, if you do not."

Snape sat in silence, trying to push down the bubble of anger that welled up inside him whenever someone tried to penetrate the walls of his emotional defences, and instead concentrate rationally on Albus' words. He was right, of course. There were many things in his past he did not wish to revisit, many acts of cruelty and neglect, that, if he was being truthful, he was afraid of. He sighed.

"We all have skeletons in our closet. I am sure you are well aware of mine, thanks to the delightful writings of Rita Skeeter." The old man looked at him kindly now. "You deserve a future, Severus - a happy future. And I don't want you to taint that future by not being able to accept the past."

Severus' eyes gazed into space. He had intended to revisit the memories one day, when he felt able to. The war happened only two years ago and Albus was right, he'd done much healing since then. But these memories... there was some dark material in there, and he knew it would be horrifically painful for him to relive them. He thought of Sarah, and how, for once, there seemed to be glimmer of opportunity for light in his life since their paths had crossed. If Severus continued to be weighed down by his past, he would undoubtedly push her away with his self-loathing and bitterness, like he'd done with any other person who tried to get close to him. This realisation hit him like a Stunner. He couldn't lose her, not now.

"May I borrow your Pensieve, Albus?" he asked after a while.

"Be my guest, Severus," Albus said reverently, masking his relief. "Take as long as you need."

Chapter 25

Chapter 25 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Sarah was sitting in a busy bar in the middle of London, surrounded by her two oldest and closest friends in the whole world, with pints of lager and the whole afternoon to catch up laying leisurely before them. Jobs and responsibilities, the two inevitable restraints of growing older, meant they barely saw each other more than a handful of times a year now they were all living in different parts of the country and following their own career paths. She'd known Teri and Susannah since she was eleven, and they'd been an inseparable trio both at school and thereafter. Sarah was simultaneously amazed and grateful that, despite distance and the sporadic nature of meetings, they never seemed to skip a beat and picked off exactly where they had left off. *The mark of true friendship*, she thought with a warm glow as she took a sip of ice-cold beer.

"So, come on, then," said Susannah, her blue eyes sparkling, "You're obviously dying to tell us something. You've been twitching like you've got a splinter up your bum. Spit it out."

"I don't know what you mean," Sarah replied, unable to keep the smirk from her face.

"Oho! Did you see that?" Susannah asked Teri, hitting a hand down lightly on the wooden table. "I can smell some first-class gossip here."

"You've pulled, haven't you?" asked Teri bluntly as Sarah took another deep swig from her pint.

"Might have," she answered with another smirk, loving prolonging the agony for them as they made exaggerated gasping noises and collective cries of, "Oh my God!"

"Details," commanded Susannah. "Name. Age. Hair. Eyes..." She paused for dramatic effect. "Girth..."

"Susannah!" Sarah chided with mock-derision, whilst Teri made noisy agreement.

"Tell us everything!"

Sarah sighed. "His name is Severus, and he's a teacher."

"Severus?" asked Susannah incredulously. "He's not Polish, is he?"

Sarah burst into peals of giggles. "No, he is not Polish, or any way Eastern European!"

"Strange name though. Do you call him Sev for short? Sevvers? Sevvy?"

Sarah looked appalled at the thought. "I don't think he'd like that, some how," she answered, swilling her beer around the glass.

"What does he teach?" demanded Susannah.

Sarah paused. *Defence Against Dark Arts? Potions? Er...* "Chemistry," she said after a moment, thanking her quick thinking.

"Ooh, clever sod then," Susannah replied.

"So where did you meet?" Teri chipped in.

Oh God. She hated lying to her friends, and she wanted more than anything to share her secret about magic with them. She was practically bursting with excitement with all the things that had happened to her in the last few weeks, but she knew the Statute Of Secrecy now affected her and she didn't want to lose the precious gift she'd only just been given.

"We met at the library," she said quietly, thinking it wasn't unreasonable for a teacher to frequent her place of work and hoping they wouldn't probe into their meeting any further to cause her to lie even more.

"Have you shagged him yet?" asked Susannah, cutting in with all the tact of a stampeding water buffalo.

Sarah nearly choked on her pint. "I'm not saying," she said demurely.

"Which means you have!" Teri yelled triumphantly as Susannah roared with approval.

Sarah looked down coyly whilst her friends continued to tease her.

"So how about the old chemistry set, then? The old Bunsen burner. The old test tube." Susannah waggled her eyebrows mischievously.

"Yeah," Teri joined in, "Is he more of a beaker than a bung?"

The pair giggled like harridans as Sarah rolled her eyes.

"He's perfectly well-endowed, thank you," she said quietly, tracing a patch of spilled beer on the table with a finger.

Teri looked at her friend for a long moment. Sarah usually revelled in such banter, out-filthing the pair of them on occasion. Her face became serious.

"You really like him, don't you?" she asked quietly.

Sarah nodded.

"Awww!" the pair cried in unison.

"That's so sweet, Sarah. I really hope it works out for you. God knows you've waited long enough," Teri said encouragingly, with Susannah nodding over her pint.

"Tell me about it! I thought I'd healed over at one point!" Sarah quipped, sending them all bursting into giggles again.

"Seriously, though," said Susannah, "You deserve some luck. You're gorgeous, and I hope he realises it."

Sarah smiled gratefully up at her friends.

"Promise you'll introduce him to us next time?" Teri begged.

"Hold your horses! It's early days yet, we've only been seeing each other for a few weeks."

Teri and Susannah gave each other knowing looks and started to cluck like mother hens.

"Stop it! I don't want to jinx it."

The pair acquiesced, seeing how much affection their friend had for this man, whoever he was.

"When are you seeing him next?" asked Teri.

"Well, I told him I wouldn't be back until Monday, but my train is on Sunday afternoon so I'm going to surprise him Sunday evening." She grinned.

"Awww. You've got it bad, girlfriend," said Susannah, smiling with genuine happiness for her friend.

"Good luck to the pair of you, I say," added Teri, raising her glass. "To Bunsen burners!"

"Bunsen burners!" Sarah and Susannah cried, chinking their glasses and laughing.

Sarah felt the warm glow of contentment settle down in her stomach once more as she looked fondly at her friends. She hadn't been this happy in a very long time.

Chapter 26

Chapter 26 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Snape had been trying, unsuccessfully, not to think about Sarah for days now, and had decided to use the time she was away to catch up on his reading. This task, in all honesty, was nothing more than procrastination, of putting off the real task: the task of facing the Pensieve. It sat on his desk, large and looming, and he could see it out of the corner of his eye as he turned the pages of his book. He huffed restlessly.

It was late afternoon on Sunday. Usually, he'd be enjoying a glass of wine about now with Sarah, maybe entwined on the sofa, or possibly in the bath, as an aperitif. Snape had no appetite tonight, however. Sarah would be back tomorrow and he had to fill his time constructively until he could next see her. He could still hear Dumbledore's words, about "tainting the future by not being able to accept the past." It made him shiver. It was some moments before he realised he'd been reading the same paragraph for about the twelfth time. He huffed again, glaring at the Pensieve, before shutting the book with a snap and tossing it on to the sofa.

"Let's get this one over with, then," he muttered to himself, stalking over to his desk and slipping into the high-backed chair. He was surprised to notice he was shaking as he grabbed his wand. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath before placing the wand to his temple. He drew away a smoky ribbon with the wand, plucking the thought from his head, and patted the delicate frond gently inside the stone basin, where it swirled and churned within.

Out of all the memories, it was this one that was buried deepest and this one that he feared the most. He was terrified of observing the results of his actions. He was terrified of the feelings it would bring back. And, most of all, he was terrified that he would show no remorse.

He steadied himself for a moment before gripping the side of the bowl and submerging his face in the silvery-grey mist. He was aware of the sensation of tumbling, of flipping head over heels, before his feet landed at once on solid ground.

The mist cleared. He was in a cellar of some kind, and a group of men stood jeering loudly in a circle. He felt his stomach turn to ice as he edged forward. There was Avery, his eyes glowing with delight as a sickly smile stretched over his lightly-sweating face. Next to him was Nott, moustache twitching as he bellowed and brayed. And there he was, Severus Snape, twenty years old and virginal, staring ahead impassively at the wretched woman invisibly bound on the floor. Snape noticed how young he looked, and how little emotion was displayed on his stern features. He remembered how fast his heart was beating at that moment, and how he had refused to look directly at the woman's face.

The older Snape risked a glance at the woman now. She was young, no older than mid-twenties he supposed, with dark, dishevelled hair and bright brown eyes. Her face was soaked in tears and she was sobbing gently, her sobs drowned out by the cacophony of the leering men. Flashes of pale flesh could be seen underneath the many rips in her clothing. She was trying to struggle under her invisible bonds, but of course, it was no use. Snape felt a stab in his heart of shame, and of pity.

"Go on, Severus, you can have the first ride," the ruddy-faced, heavy-set blond man known as Mulciber encouraged. "Bet you can't wait for this, eh, boy?"

Snape watched his younger self approach the woman swiftly, unbuckling his belt and unzipping his fly, all the while his face inscrutable, before falling to his knees and covering the woman while the men whooped and cheered. His long, dark hair draped over his face as he brought his mouth close to her ear. Snape remembered with great vividness all of the things he'd said to the woman. He'd known they would be of no comfort to her, but he'd shown her as much mercy as he could under the circumstances. He'd wished he could have explained to her that the experience was just as much as a rape for him as it was for her, forced to lose his virginity in such a way. Instead, he made it brief, faking his orgasm so not to contaminate her with his seed, and trying to spare her as much pain as possible.

Mulciber congratulated the boy and taunted the terrified woman before mounting her himself. Snape felt nauseous as he saw him take her roughly, his chubby hand at her throat as he forced himself on her with violence. Mulciber was taking real pleasure from this. Snape's eyes flicked once more to the woman's face, and he saw by her eyes that she was broken; that something inside her had died, some light had gone out. His stomach cramped and he knew he was going to be sick. With great effort, he pulled himself away from the memory and dashed upstairs to the bathroom, retching and heaving with disgust and loathing.

Chapter 27

Chapter 27 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Sarah's weekend with her old friends turned out to be an utter blast. They ended up hitting a cheesy club on Saturday night until the wee hours, drinking cocktails and having a competition to see who could do the craziest dancing. Several times, they each had to rebuff the advances of various drunken and eager men ready to pounce and paw them. They all went for a hearty fry-up at a local greasy spoon café to lock down the hangover on Sunday morning before heading their separate ways at the tube with much hugging, kissing and vows of "Let's not leave it so long next time!"

Sarah had read the remaining chapters of "Hogwarts: A Revised History" avidly on her long train journey back from London. She was by turns shocked, horrified, and then tremendously awed by what she had read. Severus was, by all accounts, somewhat of a hero, turning his back on the Dark Lord and his followers to help save both Hogwarts and the wizarding world from darkness by playing the perfect double agent for years. The book didn't go into great detail about the Death Eaters or their activities apart from the battle of Hogwarts, and it left Sarah with many questions about the organisation, let alone why Severus chose to join them in the first place.

He killed his oldest friend and mentor, she thought, as the train rumbled through the increasingly bleak landscape. *He killed Albus Dumbledore! Because Albus asked him to, as part of the plan!* She was suddenly reminded of the intensity and fierceness of Severus' interrogation about Abracadabra, and now knew why it had troubled him so.

She looked out the window and saw shrubs and hedges flying past as the train roared ever onwards. Still the questions rolled though her mind like a storm on a sea. He'd stared death in the face. He'd lived under its shadow for so long. How did he find the strength to keep going, to do what needed to be done? How did he manage to play his part on both sides so well? What had made him turn from the Dark Lord in the first place? Why did he decide to return to Hogwarts after the war, when he was free to do whatever he wanted? Why did he refuse the offer of Headmaster? Why did he turn down the Order of Merlin from the government? Who were the Death Eaters? Who was Lord Voldemort?

She sighed, and suddenly wished she could find as many books as she could to fill in the gaps in her knowledge. She was desperate to ask Severus all the questions now racing through her mind, but understood even more keenly Albus' advice that it would be unwise to do so, seeing for herself in print some of what he had gone through.

My brave man, she thought proudly, and could not wait to be in his arms again. She rested her head on the window and closed her eyes, thinking of the huge hug she was going to give him when she saw him later. He would not know why, of course, and she would not broach the subject with him until the time felt right. But oh, what a cuddle he was going to get in the meantime!

The hypnotic clattering of the train gradually lulled Sarah to sleep. She was soon dreaming of being inside a dense black fog. It was disorientating; whichever way she turned, there was no way out from the thick, smoke-like murk. She could hear laughing and the occasional scream, and not knowing where the sounds came from made them even more eerie and frightening. She felt cold and trapped and alone; so very alone. She woke up with a start as the train pulled into the tiny station at Spinner's End, glad for the daylight.

* * *

Sarah rushed home from the station and freshened up as quickly as she could. She decided she would wear some frilly underwear with which to surprise Severus, and she eventually chose a pretty black two-piece with delicate pink lace detail. Feeling brave, she covered herself in just a long coat and heels, and made her way to his house.

Severus had invented a cunning little charm so that they could access each other's houses, as long as the occupant was in at the time. She held her wand at the lock and whispered, "*Aperiamorus*," hoping he was at home. With relief, the door swung silently open, and she crept on tiptoes into the hallway, closing the door as quietly as she could. Now she pushed the lounge door and it swung forwards without a creak as she made her way gingerly into the lounge, still not making a sound.

To her surprise, Severus wasn't in the lounge, although he looked like he'd been there recently, judging by the book cast down on the sofa and the chair shoved carelessly away from the desk. Sarah noticed a large, ornamental bowl sitting on the desktop and grinned. He hasn't been giving himself a facial treatment has he? She asked herself with disbelief, creeping over for a look and fully expecting to see it filled with steaming, scented bubbles. Instead, she saw a swirling mist of silver-grey, and it reminded her of the candy floss she used to eat at the fairground when she was little.

The mist looked inviting, so she skimmed a hand through it, hoping to feel the haze roll off her hand. Instead, her hand completely disappeared underneath. Puzzled, she reached her arm in a little more, up to the elbow, but instead of reaching the bottom of bowl, her arm had once more vanished. Not to be outdone, she pushed her arm in all the way to the shoulder, and as she did so, noticed a tiny patch of movement in the centre of the bowl. It was as big as a ten pence piece and was rather like looking through the opposite end of a telescope. Was that people? She wondered, moving her face forwards to peer closer at the source of the movement. Just then, her nose touched the swirling mist, and before she knew what was happening, she was tumbling, tumbling forwards into the basin. Her rational mind knew this was impossible, yet she was flipping over and over, and just as she was about to scream with shock, she felt her feet slam on to solid ground.

She looked around, and could tell she was in a cellar. In front of her was a group of men crowded around something, jeering and laughing. Sarah thought she'd entered some kind of portal, and looked up desperately for an exit, yet there was no escape. Cautiously, she stepped forwards towards the men, and tried a quiet, "Hello?"

There was no response, so she tried again, this time louder. Again, there was no response. Puzzled, but feeling braver, she walked forwards until she was behind a tall man with long blond hair. "Excuse me," she said loudly. No response. "Excuse me," she said again, this time bringing her hand up to tap him on the shoulder, and was shocked when her hand went through him as it would through smoke. Ghosts? She wondered quizzically, recoiling with a shiver. But why can't they see me?

The men continued to leer as she tried to make sense of this, and her ears pricked up at one of the men saying the name "Severus". Her head whipped round, and she saw a very young but nonetheless unmistakable figure of Severus, striding forwards into the circle towards... Oh God! A terrified, sobbing, half-naked woman. Sarah understood now that this was a memory and the knowledge brought her even more discomfort.

She saw the young Severus unzipping his flies and then watched as he dropped to his knees, covering the woman. Sarah's eyes opened wide with revulsion as she watched him bring his mouth close to the woman's ear. All the time the woman was shaking with fright, her cheeks damp with tears. The men were cheering like animals as Severus mounted her, drowning out the sobs of the woman. Sarah thought she was going to pass out as her stomach knotted with disgust and terror. No, not my Severus... No, please... But there was no denying what she was witnessing.

Just then, she felt rough hands on her shoulders, and she was being pulled up, up, until she had surfaced from the basin and was back in the lounge at Spinner's End, looking straight into the angry black eyes of the older Severus Snape.

"What did you see?" he snapped, his onyx eyes glinting menacingly.

Sarah could not answer. She was dumbfounded. This man... this man, whom she loved, who she believed was good, who she was told was good, a hero no less, was in fact a cold-blooded rapist. She couldn't process what she had just seen.

"WHAT DID YOU SEE?" he roared, grabbing the tops of her arms roughly. His eyes had a demented look she had never seen before, and suddenly Sarah was very, very afraid.

"Get off me!" she cried, and Severus knew it was too late, that the damage had been done. She was afraid of him, her voice and her eyes told him as much. She'd seen the worst of him, and now she would turn away from him.

He dropped his grip on her quickly as if burned, holding his hands up like a gesture of surrender.

"Get. Out." He muttered in a low voice. She gazed at him for a few moments, her eyes swimming with tears.

"I SAID, GET OUT!" he yelled, and Sarah whimpered as she fled through the house, hot tears stinging her eyes as she clattered out the front door and into the rising twilight.

Author's note: "Aperiamorus" is from the Latin "aperire" meaning "to open" and "amor" meaning "love".

Chapter 28

Chapter 28 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Severus heard the door bang shut and breathed deeply through his nose, heart pounding, like a fist trying to escape his chest, in raw anger. It took all of his will not to curse the Pensieve into pieces. Gritting his teeth, he withdrew his wand and blasted his coffee table with such force that it shattered against the wall, raining splinters.

What was she doing back? She wasn't due back until tomorrow He glared at the Pensieve once more, pacing the lounge and running a hand through his thick black hair in anguish. The sight of the bowl reminded him of its owner and his benign, stupidly twinkling eyes. *Dumbledore. Dumbledore and his good advice. That's what facing the past got me, you old bastard: shunned and ostracized all over again.*

He snorted, drawing his hostility further around him like a cloak, his defences shutting down like a portcullis. *The Mark on my arm may have gone, but you can't scrub away the stains from my soul,* he thought bitterly. *Stupid of me to think the last few weeks were anything more than a glorified holiday romance. It was inevitable that when the truth came out, she would turn away from me. And why wouldn't she? Who could truly love me, Severus Snape: rapist, murderer, and with a harsher temperament than a Scottish winter?*

He would always pay for his mistakes, just like he'd been paying every day for twenty years. Fate had dealt him a particularly low blow this time, to get him so tantalisingly close to the love he craved and to whip it away in the most brutal way imaginable. Did he really deserve anything less? His crimes spoke for themselves, and whereas his actions in the war atoned for Lily, his distant past had been waiting all along for him, to trip him up and smother the last remaining hope out of him.

He had been foolish to let her get close to his poisonous heart because it was unavoidable that he would hurt her and fill her with nothing but revulsion, he decided. That was one of the reasons he'd kept people away from him for so long; he was tainted, and if people came close, they would be tainted, too. He thought of his heart as being like a decaying, mouldy apple with a fat, white maggot wriggling at its core.

It's probably for the best she knows the truth and to end it now, he thought, slumping onto the sofa with his head in his hands. *It would be harder for her, the longer time went on. And for me also.* Severus thought of her, then, thought of her careless laughter, and ceaseless curiosity, and the way she would look up at him, green eyes filled with tenderness and desire. Then he thought of the look of fear on her face when he had found her, the look that told him she saw him as the monster he truly was. He let out a sob and began to wail, a harsh, pitying howl, like a wounded animal, mourning the loss of the only good thing in his life.

Sarah ran as fast as she could in her heels, the tears in her eyes blurring the streetlamps into misty smears, her throat burning with sobs, the sound of the slammed door still echoing in her ears. She'd never seen that look in his eyes before. It was a look akin to madness. Why had she looked at the bowl? Why had she come back at all? In the space of an hour, Severus had gone from hero to demon, and yet she still couldn't process what she had seen.

Shaking and weeping, she managed to somehow let herself into her cottage and shut the door with her back, sliding down it until she could cling to her knees. She began to rock back and forth, not understanding, not knowing who to turn to for help. Did Albus know about the rape? He was the one who knew Severus best. Did he know, and yet forgive? Why was Severus watching the memory? Did he enjoy it? Did he get a kick out of it? Sarah shuddered with another sob. *No. Not my Severus.* She thought of their love-making and how it was always her that initiated it. She thought of how, before the ritual, he'd asked her about five times if she really wanted to go through with it. She thought about how he would follow her lead when having sex, only getting harder and faster and rougher if she asked him to. She thought of his glittering black eyes,

often so fathomless, but sometimes with a glitter of emotion in them just for her. She wept harder and harder then until her throat was raw, until there were no tears left to shed, until the whites of her eyes turned a damaged, bloodshot red.

Neither of them got to sleep that night. Between tears and the feeling of heart scraped away from bone, they were both broken and desolate, waiting for the small consolation of sunlight to banish the oppression of the night.

Sarah awoke with her head at an awkward angle on her sofa, as Bernard marched across her chest with heavy paws, mewing impatiently. She opened her eyes. They felt dry and sore. She couldn't work out why it felt like she'd been beaten up until she remembered Severus and her heart sank once more. She could hear a scratching noise at the window, and Bernard mewed again, walking over her chest like a Roman foot soldier.

An owl? she thought fuzzily, shoving her cat gracelessly onto the floor and swinging her legs off the sofa. Bernard made a grumbling noise of discontent as she staggered towards the window.

Sure enough, a little white owl with yellow eyes and ruffled feathers peered up at her with a silent hoot as she withdrew the curtain. Leaning out enough to ensure Bernard was safely entrenched inside the cottage, she unpicked the little package from its leg and noticed the Hogwarts crest on the wax seal. Tearing the package open, she found the parchment and began to read:

Dear Miss Shaw,

You are requested to attend a meeting at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry at 10am on Friday, 2nd September with the Head and Deputy Head to discuss chosen subjects for the forthcoming year. You will need to bring your wand and the vial of the Sanicurus potion you have made during your coaching sessions for assessment. Term-time does not start in full until Monday 5th, and your first lesson will be Saturday 10th September respectively.

Please find enclosed a packet of Floo powder and a safety guide to using the Floo Network. Your fire is now linked via the Floo Network to the school's kitchen. The kitchen is the one place in Hogwarts that has a fire burning constantly day or night. You will be able to use this method to transport to and from school for your lessons or to come to study in the library. Simply use the powder as directed on the leaflet and say "Hogwarts Kitchen" as your destination. To return home, you would say "My lounge, Spinner's End." You will be met at 9.45am on Friday 2nd by a house-elf called Winky, who will take you to the headmistress's office.

Please confirm by way of the blank piece of parchment whether you are able to attend or not. The owl has been instructed not to return without your reply.

Regards,

Professor S. Snape

Deputy Head, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

She almost dropped the parchment. It was from Severus! She read and re-read it, trying to glean some tiny gesture of affection from it. It was no use, of course. The letter was practical, perfunctory and professional. The little packet of Floo powder that accompanied the letter was a particularly violent shade of acid green with flames drawn up the side. The little owl hooted expectantly at Sarah, and she realised she needed to draft a reply.

She scabbled around for a pen, hastily scrawling a response:

Dear Professor Snape,

I can confirm I will be attending the meeting at Hogwarts School Of Witchcraft And Wizardry at 10am on Friday, 2nd September.

Regards,

Sarah Shaw

It feels so strange, writing to him so formally, she thought as she tucked the parchment back into the owl's pouch and watched as it took flight. *It was as if last night had never happened.* But of course, it had, and with that knowledge, Sarah turned with heavy heart away from the window and began to cry once more.

Author's note: The name of the potion "Sanicurus" comes from Latin prefixes: "Sani-" (health) and "Cur-" (take care of).

Chapter 29

Chapter 29 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

The days dragged slowly past after receipt of the Hogwarts owl with no further contact from Severus. Sarah felt like a zombie, going through the motions at work, drained and exhausted, only to come home at night and mope listlessly before facing another night of troubled sleep. She found herself rejecting the calls from her two best friends, too ashamed to admit her romance of the century had turned into a horror of epic proportions. Her friends thought she was spending all her time in bed with her new man these days and so did not think anything was amiss from her lack of response and, if anything, felt quite jealous.

Severus meanwhile could not summon the energy to finish his latest paper on the additional uses of Boomslang Skin in cosmetic applications, for *The Potioneer* magazine. He'd been working on the experiments and paper throughout the summer holiday and was about to redraft it, but found he didn't actually care about it any more. He also didn't care that the cupboards were empty or that his own Potion supplies were dwindling and needed replenishing. He didn't care that he hadn't washed his hair for three days, or about the way his stomach growled with hunger. In fact, he found it hard to summon up any emotion for anything, apart from Sarah. Sarah, who had vanished his Mark and stolen his heart, and who had broken it in two with the look of fear she gave him after he'd pulled her from the Pensieve.

Friday morning eventually arrived, and Sarah steeled herself in the shower. *Oh God, he'll be at the meeting today!* She scrubbed her hair with agitated fervour. *It's Professor McGonagall who I've come to see. Just don't look at him,* she thought firmly, swilling off the shampoo.

Once again, she was in the dilemma of what to wear for an interview at the school of magic. She tossed her Chinese-style dress to one side and picked up a long, black, flowing skirt with details of tiny black sequins on the front and hem. She matched this with a black bodice-style top and once again drew her black lace shawl around her. This time she wore her knee-length stiletto boots and finished the outfit with her usual jewellery, a little make-up and a delicately-embroidered silk bag big enough to contain her wand. She decided to wear her hair down, in curls. She glanced in the mirror and smiled. *Not bad for a Muggle,* she thought.

It was now nine o'clock, and although she had got ready in plenty of time, Sarah was worrying about using Floo Powder for the first time, despite the explicit instructions on the leaflet Severus had sent her. She opened the acid green box carefully, looking at the equally-vibrant powder within. It was fine, like flour, but shimmered with a slight iridescence, like the wings of a dragonfly. She set it down carefully and re-read the instructions, just to be sure.

"Right, so, a heaped handful into the fire, the fire turns emerald green, step into the flames and state your destination clearly," she muttered. She looked from the box to the roaring fire. It was against every instinct to step into a fire, into the depths of hot, roaring flames. She toyed with the handful of powder, pacing back and forth nervously.

"Just do it!" she told herself fifteen minutes later, still pacing up and down the hearth. She gritted her teeth and threw the handful of powder into the fire. Sure enough, the flames shot up, bright green. Gingerly, she poked a hand at the green flames. To her surprise, it felt cool. Summoning all her courage, she walked forwards at once into the cool green flames and shouted, "Hogwarts kitchen!"

Within a second she was spinning round and round. She tried to keep her eyes open but the feeling of spinning made her dizzy, so she kept them shut. She was being jostled from side to side which, along with the spinning, made her feel totally disorientated. Just when she thought she would be trapped in this weird vortex forever, the spinning slowed and she found herself lurching forwards out of yet more green flames into a large, old kitchen, with silver pots and pans suspended on the walls and curious little creatures with bulbous eyes and big floppy ears scurrying back and forth, looking busy and occupied.

One of these creatures was standing by the hearth, apparently waiting for her, gazing up at Sarah with massive orb-like eyes.

"Is you being Miss Shaw, Miss?" squeaked the elf.

"Er, yes, I am," she replied, noticing the elf was wearing what looked to be a tea towel tied as a toga, with the Hogwarts crest emblazoned on the front.

"I is being Winky, Miss, and I is showing you to the headmistress' office," Winky said with a curtsy.

"Thank you, Winky," she replied as the elf continued to bob and curtsy.

"If Miss would follow, Winky will lead you now," said the little elf, turning and scurrying towards the door. The elf was surprisingly fast and nimble, and Sarah's stiletto heels clicked across the stone floor as she hurried to keep up.

Sarah followed the elf along narrow corridors until they reached the familiar winding spiral staircase that lead to the headmistress' office.

"We is here, Miss. If there is anything else you be needing, you just say my name." And with that, the elf disappeared with a crisp crack. Sarah looked at the door, her heart racing. *Severus is behind this door,* she thought, and the knowledge made her heart leap. She wanted to see him, yet wanted to be as far away from him as possible, all at the same time. She took a deep breath before knocking smartly three times.

"Come in," replied a female voice in a thick, Scottish brogue. Sarah opened the door and smiled cautiously at the severe-looking elderly lady sat behind the desk in front of her, wire-rimmed spectacles perched on the end of her nose imperiously. The woman looked her up and down for a moment before standing and smiling, offering her hand.

"Miss Shaw, it's good to meet you at last." Sarah shook her hand firmly, grateful for a warm welcome whilst concentrating solely on the woman.

"It's great to meet you too, Professor. And call me Sarah, please," she replied.

"Do take a seat, Sarah. You already know Severus, of course."

At the sound of his name, Sarah's stomach swooped and she glanced at the window where Severus was sitting in a small armchair, his face impassive.

"Professor Snape," she said politely, avoiding his eyes, whilst Snape gave the smallest of nods in her direction.

As soon as she'd walked in, she'd taken his breath away. In black, his favourite, with those tumble-down curls he'd never seen her wear before. The bodice-style top accentuated her figure nicely and the scrap of the shawl drew attention to her pale arms. She looked gorgeous, and totally un-Muggle like, and straight away he'd had to apply his Occlumency lest his eyes revealed his desire and cross his legs lest his body betray him, too.

"Well, Sarah, Severus has been telling me all about your coaching lessons with him throughout the summer, and he says you're a very quick learner, which is high praise indeed, coming from him." She smiled at the younger woman, and Sarah smiled back.

"Sev- I mean, Professor Snape is a very good teacher," she said quietly, wanting to show her gratitude.

"Aye, he is, he's one of our best, so you couldn't have hoped for a better head start." The old woman peered over her glasses again. "So, you've decided on which subjects you are going to pursue this year?"

"Yes, Professor. I've decided to take Divination, Potions, Charms, Transfiguration, and Herbology."

McGonagall beamed, whilst in the background Sarah heard the portrait of Dumbledore mutter, "Excellent!"

"Good choices, if I may say so, Sarah," the headmistress answered crisply. "Potions, Charms and Transfiguration are widely considered to be the staple of magical education, much like English, Maths and Science is in the Muggle curriculum. Potions and Herbology naturally compliment each other, and as for Divination... Albus tells me you have somewhat of a predilection for the art?"

Sarah looked down modestly. "Well, I've had one or two experiences, and the subject fascinates me," she replied.

Minerva let out a little laugh. "I'm sure Severus did his damndest to put you off it, lassie, so well done for sticking with it." The old lady smiled again.

"Well, before I notify the other professors, all that remains is for you to be Sorted." Minerva rose from her chair and reached up to the top shelf, pulling down a tatty, threadbare hat with a rip along the brim.

"I'm not sure how much Severus has told you about Hogwarts, but every pupil that has ever been educated at the school has been Sorted into a house, and I do not see why we should make an exception with you."

Sarah was reminded that she still had the headmistress' copy of *Hogwarts: A Revised History* and reached into her bag to retrieve it.

"Albus told me to borrow this, Professor," she said, placing the book on to Minerva's desk. "I've read it cover to cover; it's absolutely fascinating."

Minerva's mouth quirked. "Ah, very good. Then you will know all about the process of Sorting. I realise there is very little ceremony involved, but I see no harm in Sorting you now, whilst we are all present."

The headmistress walked forwards, placing the Hat in Sarah's hands. "When you are ready," she encouraged.

Sarah could feel Severus' eyes boring in to her as she nervously placed the hat on her head. After a few moments, the Hat began to speak.

"Now, let's see then... Well, this is a difficult choice. You are certainly diligent and loyal, but much too headstrong to be in Hufflepuff. What's that? Slytherin, you say? The Hat chuckled. "You do possess cunning and ambition, I will give you that, but they are not your primary talents. Hmm... yes, there is bravery, intellect and a keen thirst for knowledge, though; you would do well in Gryffindor. Not Gryffindor? Are you sure? Well then, better be... RAVENCLAW!"

The Hat roared the last word before falling silent, and Minerva moved forwards to take the Hat from Sarah.

"Filius will be very pleased. I'm most disappointed not to have you in Gryffindor, personally. I'm sure Severus would have liked you in his own house, too."

A thought flashed through Sarah's mind of being in Severus' house, curled up on his sofa and kissing passionately, and she glanced a look at Severus then, and saw his black eyes still boring into her. He looked as dark and intense and thrillingly handsome as she'd ever seen him, and no less impenetrable. She dropped her gaze quickly as he made to stand.

"Headmistress, it may be prudent if I head to Diagon Alley now to collect Miss Shaw's apparatus whilst you undertake your assessment?" he said curtly.

"As you wish, Severus," Minerva replied.

"Headmistress... Miss Shaw." He gave them both a terse nod before striding to the door. Sarah watched him leave, sad yet relieved. His movements were always so graceful, so measured. Even when making love, he held dignity and poise. As the door shut behind him, Sarah fought with the tears threatening to well up in her eyes.

"Well then, Sarah, I will show you to each of the classrooms in turn, and we will perform a brief assessment of each subject, so we can work out a teaching plan based on your abilities. If you'd like to follow me..."

Sarah stood as instructed, but they were interrupted by the sound of the portrait of Albus Dumbledore.

"I beg your pardon, Minerva. Would it be possible for you to send an owl to notify the professors in question, whilst I have a private chat with Sarah?"

Minerva looked at him hard for some moments before relenting.

"Yes, Albus, that's not such a bad idea. Dear Filius has two sets of good news that I shan't want to keep from him for too long."

She strode to her desk and laid out four pieces of parchment, laying a quill on each. Picking up one of the quills, she pointed her wand at it and muttered an inaudible incantation. At once, the other three quills became suspended in the air in the same position as the one Minerva held. She waved the quill back and forth, watching the other quills react, before setting it down on the parchment and began to scribble.

Sarah watched with fascination as the quills replicated every word and stroke on the other parchments. Once she had finished, she tapped her wand to the quill once more, and the remaining quills flopped on to the desk. Minerva added an additional passage to the first note before rolling each one up and addressing them neatly.

"I will meet you in fifteen minutes at the bottom of the spiral staircase then, Sarah. And Albus, don't be filling the poor girl's head with nonsense about Sherbet Lemons and the like," the headmistress added in mock-reproach, glaring over her spectacles before bustling quickly out the door.

Sarah looked at Albus and saw he was peering down at her with grave concern.

"Do you mind telling me what all that was about? Severus is as prickly as an echidna on a cactus. Whatever's happened?" he asked gently.

"Oh, Albus," Sarah replied, unable to hold back the tears any longer.

Chapter 30

Chapter 30 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Albus' face creased immediately into a frown of concern as he watched the trembling girl in front of him.

"Do you know how to cast a Muffliato charm?" he asked, noticing the other portraits were beginning to look on at this scene with great interest. Sarah nodded; it was one of the first charms Severus had taught her, in anticipation of their often noisy love-making. With shaking hand, she withdrew her wand from her bag and cast the charm so that only Albus could hear what she had to say. The portrait of Phineas Nigellus huffed with displeasure, his beady eyes regarding her with suspicion.

"Start at the beginning, my dear," Albus encouraged. "Take your time."

Sarah took a deep, shuddering breath and wiped her eyes delicately with a finger. This was the second time she'd cried in front of Albus, and she was afraid she was beginning to make a habit of it. The old man seemed so kind and understanding though, such a welcoming presence, and she honestly did not know who else to turn to.

"I went away last weekend to stay with some friends," she began, hands twisting in her lap. "I told Severus I wouldn't be back until Monday, but I'd decided to come home early on Sunday night to surprise him." Sarah neglected to mention the surprise involved underwear, high heels and a coat! She took another ragged breath and continued. "I got back late afternoon on Sunday and then went to his cottage. I crept in as quietly as I could and discovered he wasn't in the lounge. I saw a bowl of some kind on his desk, and I had stupid images of him having a facial treatment, but when I looked in the bowl there was a swirling grey mass of what looked to be smoke. I stupidly put my hand in and then got sucked into it somehow. And before I knew what was happening, I was watching a scene being enacted, like a memory, of a group of men. They were surrounding this poor, helpless woman, and then... and then..."

She couldn't finish the sentence, dissolving once more into tears. Albus closed his eyes as she spoke, shaking his head ruefully from side to side.

"The Pensieve," he muttered.

Sarah looked at him and blinked as he fixed his blue eyes on her.

"You stumbled across the Pensieve, which is a magical device for storing and examining memories. I fear you happened across a particularly nasty one, belonging to Severus. I blame myself entirely, naturally."

Sarah blinked again. "You don't understand. I saw Severus, but he was much younger... and the men cheered him on... and he was on top of the woman and... Oh Albus, he raped her! And then he pulled me back up into reality and he was so angry. I've never seen him look so fierce! He asked me what I saw, but I couldn't speak, and then he shouted at me to get out. And I haven't spoken to him since." She looked down, breathing deeply, her bottom lip trembling with emotion. Albus watched her for a few moments.

"Are you sure that is what you saw?" he wondered carefully.

Sarah's eyes snapped back up at him. "I'm positive!"

"Are you sure that is what you saw, or is that what you *thought* you saw?" Albus asked again. "Things aren't always what they seem, especially when it comes to Severus Snape." Sarah made a noise of protest, but Albus continued. "I happen to know of the very memory you speak of, since I too have witnessed it."

Sarah looked shocked, waiting for him to elaborate.

Albus looked at her gravely now. "As you have read, Severus was once involved with a group called the Death Eaters. The Death Eaters were supporters of Lord Voldemort, a powerful and evil Dark wizard who had a reign of terror over the wizarding world in the late 70s and early 80s, and who came to power once again just a few years ago, the crux of which saw him vanquished at the Battle Of Hogwarts. It is important for you to understand that the Death Eaters performed many, many acts of cruelty and violence towards Muggles, that is to say, non-magical people, as well as wizards and witches of Muggle descent over the years.

"Severus joined the Death Eaters at a young age; he was only nineteen when he took the Dark Mark upon his arm, and he was promised greatness, power and respect by Voldemort. Severus at that time felt sympathy for the ideologies they began pedalling; mainly, a propaganda that wizards should rule over Muggles for their own good, because wizards, given their natural powers, were superior. He'd assumed power would be swift and effortless, and he was in no way prepared for the depths of cruelty to which Lord Voldemort and his followers would stoop to in the name of superiority.

"Severus soon felt revulsion for the Death Eaters and all of their actions, yet one could not simply turn away from the Dark Lord, as they called him, and expect life to go on. The price of deserting Voldemort was death. Severus was trapped; his life consumed by acts of depravity and torture that he no longer wanted any part of. Eventually, Voldemort had his sights on killing the one person Severus cared for. It was with desperation that Severus turned to me for help, to protect both this person and their family. I agreed, and agreed to protect Severus also, but only on my terms, and for a heavy price. I demanded that Severus take an Unbreakable Vow with me, swearing to fight against Voldemort, to protect Hogwarts and its students, and to do anything I asked him to do to achieve that end. Breaking this vow would lead to his death. Hence, when Voldemort came back to power at the beginning of the 90s, he became a double-agent, staying close to Voldemort's side whilst simultaneously feeding us, the resistance, with information.

"As part of his protection, I required to see all of Severus' memories. I needed to see them in order to see what he was capable of and all that he'd done, in order to trust him and to make a decision about whether he should take a teaching post at the school. Alas, there were some truly horrific memories, but none pertaining to children, and so he took up residency as Potions master. In all the time I've known him, I've grown to love him as a son, and I've been constantly amazed at how much hardship he can continue to bear."

Sarah was listening to all this with fascination and horror. *What an appalling life he has lead,* she thought, and fresh tears pricked her eyes with pity.

"And so we come to the memory in question. Yes, I too have seen this particular memory, and what an awful memory it is. Did you happen to hear what Severus said to the woman?"

Sarah shook her head.

"No, I would assume not, with those disgusting Death Eaters braying like animals all around. Severus was afraid, and he actually asked the woman to forgive him, because he had no choice. You must understand that if Severus did not comply with any of these actions, he would be singled out as weak and tortured himself. You must believe me when I tell you it was just as much as a rape for him as it was for that poor, wretched woman."

Sarah looked at him with round, bloodshot eyes.

"But he didn't look afraid. He looked..." Sarah struggled for the right word. "He looked determined!"

Albus sighed. "Severus is what is known as an Occlumens; that is, he is skilled in the art of Occlumency. An Occlumens can hide their true thoughts and feelings from others, especially from those who try to access them by force by using a power known as Legilimency. Legilimency is a form of brutal mind-reading, if you will. People who are skilled in one of these arts are usually also skilled in the other, and Severus is no exception. Although, he prefers not to use Legilimency unless strictly necessary, as he views it as a form of mental rape."

Albus peered over his half-moon spectacles and watched Sarah as she struggled to take all of this in.

"Has Severus ever done anything to you to cause you any harm?" he asked gently.

Sarah looked at her hands. He'd Stunned her by accident, and his demeanour could be intimidating and brash, but Sarah had to admit he'd never hurt her by using force. "No," she replied weakly.

Albus nodded, satisfied. "Do you love Severus?" he asked softly.

Sarah met his gaze and nodded.

Albus looked relieved. "That is a start. I know what you have seen is terrible, but I beg you to trust him and to trust me. As you know, Severus is a private man, and I would not betray his secrets lightly, except I feel responsible for this situation, and I feel I must make amends."

Sarah looked at him quizzically. "Why on Earth would this be your fault?"

Albus sighed again. "It was my idea for Severus to borrow the Pensieve in order to resolve some of his feelings about the past. I told him if he failed to do so, it would interfere with his relationship with you." He smiled down at her sadly. "What an old, meddling fool I am. I hope you can forgive me. In my overzealousness to help you and Severus to find happiness, I fear I may have blown it to smithereens. I would not blame you for being angry with me."

Sarah paused and took a deep breath.

"I'm not angry with you, Albus. I know you love and trust Severus, and I understand why you had to do what you had to do. And I'm not angry with Severus, either. I'm just so angry about everything he's been through, everything he's had to do. It's just so unfair!" She sobbed and bit down on a finger, determined not to cry again.

"Life has been cruel to Severus," Albus agreed. "Severus has atoned for all that he has done, and I know he punishes himself each and every day for the things he cannot undo. I ask you not to judge him on his past. It's not what someone was which is important; it's who they are now. And Severus is a complicated, damaged and fragile

man, who needs time to heal. He is not, however, a bad man, no matter how he sees himself."

Sarah nodded and sniffed, processing this.

"Thank you, Albus, for being so honest with me." She gave him a watery smile.

"Dear girl, it was the least I could do. I would recommend, after your assessment, that you ask Minerva to show you to the library, where you can do some more background research into the war, and to the rise and fall of Lord Voldemort, so you have more of an in-depth understanding, rather than the brief outline I have given you here."

She sighed. "Then all I have to do is get him to speak to me again." She looked forlornly up at Albus, who smiled down at her in sympathy.

"Yes, that won't be an easy task. I would advise on persistence being your best strategy. From what I know of Severus, he would find it hard to contemplate that a woman found him attractive even if she were to strip naked and dance the Fandango in front of him!"

Sarah couldn't help but let out a small giggle at that. It was absolutely true!

Albus gazed at her kindly. "Don't give up on him, Sarah. It takes a special kind of bravery to love a man like Severus."

She smiled at him gratefully.

"Now, if you're feeling up to it, you better go and meet Minerva. You don't want her deducting house points from you before term time has even started!"

Sarah smiled again. "Thank you, Albus."

"Good luck, Sarah," he muttered quietly as she left the office and made her way down the spiral stairs. "You'll need it."

Chapter 31

Chapter 31 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Sarah managed to compose herself before meeting with the headmistress at the bottom of the stairs. Minerva was at first concerned about the pale, shaking girl, but then assumed her current state was down to pure nerves and so put on her most matronly of demeanours to put her at her ease as she lead her from classroom to classroom.

The assessments went well, all things considered. Although lack of practical Herbology experience, combined with notoriously tricky theories of Transfiguration, meant that Sarah was recommended to begin at first year level for these lessons, the headmistress noted that she should be taught from third year level in Charms due to her natural flair for the subject. Sarah had managed to Summon a broomstick from across the length of the classroom and then proceeded to levitate it around skilfully, making Minerva applaud with delight.

A dissection of her Sanicurus Potion, which she had prepared in her coaching lessons with Severus, showed great competency (and how could it not, with such a teacher, Minerva observed wryly), which lead Minerva to think she should be taught from second year level in this subject. Finally, Sarah's demonstrable knowledge of tarot, scrying, palmistry and experience of prophetic dreams lead Minerva to confidently place her at third year level for Divination.

"Firenze and Professor Trelawney will be so excited to meet you, Sarah," she told the younger woman. "I'm sure you will learn much from them. I have no doubt that the levels at which you will be taught will match your competency with no problems. If, however, you find the material too advanced, or indeed not challenging enough, do not be afraid to let either myself or Filius know and we can assess you once more. Oh, Filius is going to be beside himself at the latest asset to Ravenclaw, I just know it." The older lady smiled at Sarah, who returned her smile gratefully.

For the last point on the tour, Minerva showed Sarah the library. As they made their way down the corridors, Minerva asked Sarah about her Wiccan practices, and Sarah was happy to explain about the eight sabbats and a little of the philosophy of Wicca. Minerva was genuinely fascinated. "It would be wonderful to see if it's possible to combine the two disciplines," she opined. "This could open up many possible avenues of research."

Sarah thought about this for a moment as they swung round the corner and headed up towards the library doors. "Would I be able to complete a thesis on the subject?" she asked.

Minerva nodded briskly, holding the door open for her. "At NEWT level, that is to say, further education level, students' own theses form part of the overall assessment. I could imagine you would easily be able to complete thesis for Charms on a comparison between Wiccan and wizard spellwork."

Sarah's mind was going into overdrive. The Great Rite, when touched with wizarding magic, became something altogether more powerful. Maybe the same could be said for other Wiccan rituals? She had no time to dwell on this however, as Minerva began talking once again.

"Well, this is our library. Unfortunately, Madam Pince, our librarian, is still on vacation in Spain, but you will meet her soon enough. I am sure you will have plenty to talk about, as one librarian to another." Minerva walked forwards, cloak swishing behind her, as Sarah took in all the rows upon rows of wonderful leather bound books. In her eyes, this is what a library *should* look like beautiful architecture, the smell of leather and polish, and the promise of treasures hiding in every tome.

"This is the Restricted Section," the professor continued. "You will require permission to enter this area from your head of house or from myself. The material in here is restricted because it is deemed controversial or dangerous, and therefore access is limited to students. No books from the Restricted Section may leave the library." She turned on her heel.

"Just a few other things before I let you go, Sarah. We will arrange some more Floo powder for you, so you are able to come and go via the kitchens, as you did today. We have decided it would be sensible for you to obtain some wizarding robes when you are in attendance at the school. Not that you don't look positively lovely, my dear," Minerva added hastily, sensing disappointment on the younger woman's face. "This is just a precaution so you do not draw any unnecessary attention to yourself when coming to study in the library. Our younger students can be terribly inquisitive and if anyone thought a Muggle had invaded Hogwarts there would be chaos. Of course, we wouldn't expect you to wear a uniform, however. I hope you understand."

Sarah nodded and the older witch continued.

"Gladrags Wizardwear up in Hogsmeade should be able to accommodate you. They also specialize in formal dress robes, which you may need if you wish to attend our annual Yule Ball this year."

The older woman gave Sarah a leaflet in purple and orange with the words "Gladrags Wizardwear of Hogsmeade" flashing and sparkling. A pretty witch and a handsome wizard were posing on the front, turning and pouting, and at various intervals their robes changed into different styles, fabrics and colours.

"As you are aware, you will need to set up an account with Gringotts. I have left Severus to take care of this, and I'm sure he'll be able to answer any questions you may have."

Sarah's stomach flipped at the use of his name. She bit her lip. She wasn't so sure Severus taking her to Gringotts was such a good idea anymore, especially after the frosty reception she'd received this morning.

"As for your equipment, Severus will send it to you by owl this weekend. I think that's everything. I will send you an owl once I have had responses back from the other professors and provide you a timetable for your lessons. Do you have any other questions?"

"Actually, Professor, I was wondering if you'd allow me to spend a little time here in the library? As you're aware, this is my natural habitat and I'd love to spend an hour or two here getting acquainted with the place, if that's OK?"

Minerva smiled warmly at the young girl. "Yes, of course. I should have known this would be an absolute treat for you. Take as long as you want, dear. Just call for Winky if you need to find your way back to the kitchens."

"Thank you, Professor, you've been very kind."

Minerva nodded crisply and bade her farewell. Sarah waited until she could no longer hear the clicking of the older woman's boots on the flagstone floor before turning her attention to the library. Her own research skills came in very useful, and before long she'd managed to track down books detailing the Battle Of Hogwarts, Harry Potter and his involvement, The Order of the Phoenix and, finally, Lord Voldemort and the Death Eaters.

She read voraciously until her stomach started to grumble. She had no idea how long she'd been in the library but it must surely have been hours. The more she had read, the more she admired Severus and felt deeply saddened about all he'd been forced to go through.

On returning from the school, Sarah stayed in her cottage for the rest of the weekend, waiting for her equipment to turn up whilst mulling over everything she had read. Eventually, on Sunday morning, she heard the familiar scratching and scraping sound of an owl at the window.

To her surprise, Severus had sent three massive owls, which, between them, had carried a substantially-sized trunk. Sarah ended up carrying through the front door as it was too wide and heavy to fit through her window and wondered how the owls had managed to carry it at all.

The trunk was packed neatly full of books, along with a cauldron, a *Basic Potion Ingredients* starter pack, blank parchment, quills, ink, a jumbo-sized box of Floo Powder, a pair of gloves made from dragon hide, a set of gardening tools in a little black leatherette case, a set of brass scales, a set of crystal phials with matching stirring wand, a beautiful and highly polished jet-black scrying mirror and, Sarah noted with a sharp intake of breath, a large crystal ball, wrapped in black velvet, complete with solid silver stand. The stand had what looked to be raven's claws as feet, intricately and delicately carved. She'd always wanted a crystal ball, and this one was so exquisite, so perfect, it almost made her well up with joy.

Severus chose all of this, for me. The thought made her heart swell.

She turned and saw one of the Great Gray owls ruffling its feathers and clicking its beak impatiently on the windowsill and noticed it had a piece of parchment attached to its leg, which it was impatiently trying to shake off.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she apologised to the owl, hurrying over to retrieve it. The owl allowed her to stroke its wondrously soft salt-and-pepper plumage after doing so before taking off and joining its companions, which were now circling above the cottage. Sarah recognised the elegant, spidery scrawl on the parchment immediately. It was, of course, from Severus. With shaking hands, she opened the note.

Miss Shaw,

In light of your decidedly unusual and informal enrolment and Sorting, I have taken the liberty to purchase the equipment required to further your magical education. Everything should be in order; if, however, you are in any way dissatisfied, Professor McGonnagal is in possession of the receipts, and therefore any further queries regarding equipment should henceforth be solely directed to her. She will also issue your timetable by owl over the next few days.

In addition, you may also need to purchase dress robes and other wizarding clothes, for formal occasions such as balls and similar appearances and events. Obviously, Professor McGonnagal is again best placed to give advice on such issues.

Regards,

Professor S. Snape

Deputy Headmaster, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Once again, Sarah read and re-read the note several times, trying to extract an ounce of emotion. Most of the way through, she felt nothing but bristling, officious contempt. At the last line, however, she quirked a smile at the dryness of the delivery. *So Severus.* Yet he'd thought of everything, left no avenue unexplored. Was it a gesture of his affection, or was he merely being professional, or worse, dismissive? Sarah hoped for the former. Either way, her mind was made up; she would go to Hogwarts on Monday evening and thank him personally for his effort and try to offer an olive branch.

Chapter 32

Chapter 32 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Sarah pondered about seeing Severus on Monday. She wanted to heed Minerva's advice about wearing wizarding clothes when visiting, especially as term would have by then started, but she didn't possess anything that vaguely resembled a cloak. She'd thought she'd done a pretty decent job of looking vaguely witchy for a Muggle so far, but now realised that there was far more than just magic that she had to learn regarding the wizarding world.

Sarah took a closer look at the leaflet for Gladrags Wizardwear of Hogsmeade that Minerva had given her. The banner flashed incessantly, and the witch and wizard continued to pose shamelessly. She noticed a scrolling piece of text running underneath the flashing banner, which read:

Muggle money accepted (5% commission)

A star-shape exploded in the corner, with text inside winking:

Open 7 days a week!

Along the bottom twinkled silvery letters:

Floo in and see us today!

Perfect, she thought, grabbing her bag and rushing to the hearth. *I hope this works*, she worried as she threw a handful of Floo Powder into the grate.

"Gladrags Wizardwear of Hogsmeade!" she announced, stepping into the emerald-green flames, and found herself caught in the familiar jostling and spinning sensation. Sarah much preferred travelling by Floo than Apparition, but still hadn't mastered a graceful exit yet. She coughed, stumbling into a small shop filled with rack upon rack of brightly coloured clothes.

A small, pretty blonde witch in bright magenta robes who was fussing with one of the racks looked up at her with a smile.

"Good afternoon, Madam. Welcome to Gladrags. Do you require any assistance?" The witch flashed her dazzling smile of perfect white teeth, looking Sarah up and down and noting her visitor was dressed in the Muggle attire of jeans and t-shirt. Sarah looked back at her and smiled sheepishly, attempting not to blush at what a Muggle novice she must look and trying not to feel intimidated.

"Um, yes please. I need to buy some robes and a cloak."

"Certainly, Madam," the witch replied smoothly. "Everyday wear or formal wear?"

"Er... both. I don't actually own any wizarding clothes at all I'm afraid." She gave the blonde witch an apologetic smile, and the woman gave returned her smile slowly as if a lightbulb had come on in her head.

"You must be Miss Shaw," the witch said, breaking into a grin. "Minerva McGonnagall came in to take a leaflet and told us to expect you within the next few days. My name's Imogen and I'll be more than happy to help you."

Sarah gave an inward sigh of relief. Between them, Severus and Minerva had thought of everything, and she was incredibly grateful for their thoughtfulness.

Imogen was indeed very helpful, helping Sarah to choose some beautiful robes to set off her colouring nicely. She chose some ivy green robes and some deep blue robes for everyday wear, and some beautiful rich purple dress robes in a satin-like material. Finally, she decided on a modest, plain black cloak ("Black does go with everything," Imogen agreed).

"I hope you don't mind, but I can only pay with Muggle money," Sarah told the witch as she began to wrap up her purchases. The witch gave her an odd look in return, as if she'd said something silly.

"There's no need to pay, Miss Shaw. We have a credit note here from Hogwarts to invoice them for whatever you've bought today."

Sarah raised her eyebrows. *Maybe it's the same with the equipment*, she thought. *Minerva will wait until my Gringotts account has been set up and then I can pay back whatever's owed in wizarding money. I'll check with her tomorrow.*

Sarah grinned and thanked the witch before bidding her farewell and stepping once more into the flames back to Spinner's End.

* * *

On Monday evening, Sarah returned home from work and had a light dinner before changing into her brand new green robes, covering them with her cloak and Flooing over to Hogwarts. She knew this was not going to be easy, but everything she'd learned over the last few days had stiffened her resolve to show Severus that she cared for him and, more importantly, that she understood. Plus, she was deeply grateful that he'd gone to such effort to gather her schooling equipment and had not scrimped on either thoroughness or quality. The issue of setting up the account with Gringotts was the perfect alibi for a conversation.

Pulling her cloak around her, she made her way out from the kitchens and into the corridor. She knew Severus' classroom and the Slytherin common room were both in the dungeons, and that seemed as good a place as any to look for him. She crept cautiously down the stone corridors which lead to the dungeons, silently praying that she wouldn't run in to any wayward students. It was gloomier and cooler down here. She knew it was a long shot to try his classroom, but she hoped against hope she would be able to find him, to say what she needed to say.

She passed the open door of one classroom and peered inside. This was the room Severus had pointed out as his old classroom, when he used to teach Potions. The walls were lined with shelves full of different-sized, dusty bottles and vials, each containing interesting-looking liquids of many different colours. There were also jars of something unrecognisable; it looked to Sarah to be various creatures pickled and suspended in clear liquid. She grimaced, her eyes scanning the desks. Rows upon rows of cauldrons lined the tables in a uniform fashion. The room was orderly, yet very clearly unoccupied. Disappointed, she moved onwards.

She passed several more classrooms until she reached the large, imposing wooden door she recognised as belonging to Severus' classroom for Defence Against the Dark Arts. Now she was here, she was sure she would lose her nerve.

It takes a special kind of bravery to love a man like Severus.

Albus' words came back to her now, and she clung to them like a talisman, drawing courage from them. Taking a deep breath, she brought her hand up and rapped three times.

"Enter," growled the rich, familiar baritone.

Sarah's breath caught in her throat. *Be brave*, she thought, pulling the cloak from her and turning the massive iron doorknob.

Severus snapped his head towards the door, and for a moment she saw a brief flicker of surprise in his obsidian eyes. Then something seemed to shut down, and he appraised her coldly. *That must be the Occlumency kicking in*, she thought. He stood in silence, looking typically unfathomable and waited for her to speak, quirked a black eyebrow at her.

"I wanted to thank you for getting my equipment for me. It was very kind of you." She met his stoic gaze bravely.

"The headmistress asked me to; naturally, I obliged," he replied in a bored voice, brushing off her gratitude expertly. "If you have any issues regarding equipment, I suggest you see her, as I made perfectly clear in the accompanying letter." His onyx eyes glittered malevolently.

Ouch. Tough crowd.

"Maybe so, but I wanted to thank you in person, in particular for the scrying mirror and the crystal ball. They're very beautiful," she continued earnestly.

Severus felt wrong-footed by this. *Damn the woman! Why wasn't she leaving already?*

"I can assure you, the objects in question are not out of the ordinary," he answered cuttingly, as if she was in some way foolish. "If that will be all, I have a lesson to prepare for." He drew himself up to his full height, crossing his arms and fixing her with his most hostile glare.

"Well, Professor McGonagall mentioned that you would take me to Gringotts"

Severus huffed impatiently. "Yes, I have been ordered to assist you on that matter, and I will notify you by owl once I have secured a meeting," he bristled. "Now, if you'll excuse me..." he said pointedly.

It's now or never. Deep breath.

"Severus... what I saw in the Pensieve "

"You will address me as *Professor Snape*, whilst you are on school premises," he hissed. "And I have no inclination to elaborate on what you saw. I believe the memory spoke for itself." He was clenching his jaw in frustration. Sarah knew she was risking making him very angry indeed, but she was going to have her say even if he hexed her in the process.

"I know it wasn't like that. I know you were forced to do things you did not want to do. I've been reading all about the Death Eaters. I know you're a good man."

Severus snorted. "You know I'm a good man? You have absolutely no idea of what I am capable of. And as for you reading "all about the Death Eaters", I'm sure that makes you *quite* the expert now." The mocking tone of his voice made Sarah's stomach knot. "Trust a librarian to take solace in books," he jeered.

If Sarah was stung by this, she covered it well.

"I know that memory is painful for you," she said quietly. "It shocked and hurt me, too. But it doesn't change my feelings for you. Why don't you let me share this with you? I still love you, Severus."

Severus strode over towards her angrily, grabbing the top of her arm and wheeling her towards the door. "This conversation is over," he snarled.

"Severus, please! I mean it, I still care for you. Don't you have feelings for me too? If this is too hard for you with me knowing, why don't you just Oblivate me, and then we can forget all about this?" she pleaded desperately as he jostled her through the open door. He stopped, a cruel smile forming on his lips.

"And just why would I want to do that?" he asked softly, a dangerous tone creeping into his voice. "I'd much rather leave you with the memory. It will remind you just what kind of man I really am. Maybe it will teach you to choose your company more carefully next time." He sneered at her with open contempt.

"Why are you doing this?" she managed to gasp before Severus slammed the door in her face. Sarah couldn't help but feel wounded; it was as if he'd stuck a white-hot knife through her. As much as she told herself not to cry, the familiar rock of grief became lodged in her throat and soon the tears were flowing. She knew he was hurt and angry about having his most diabolical and painful secret revealed and saw how deeply he believed himself to be a villain. But he was so cruel, the way he was rejecting her love, and at this moment it was difficult not to think he was as evil as he'd described, and difficult to cling on to Albus' words about trust and the goodness inside him. This was not the Severus she knew, and it pained her to see him strike out like a feral beast at her when all she wanted to do was soothe him.

Clutching her cloak around her, she fled back up the corridor, stifling her sobs.

Severus meanwhile rested his back against the old wooden door, the sound of the slam still echoing off the stone walls, and closed his eyes, his hands shaking *Why am I doing this? For your own safety and protection, you silly girl. It is for the best this way. You may be upset for a week or so, but you'll get over it. It would only cause you further pain to be involved with a man like me. It is good for you to see how I really am. You deserve someone better. You'll realise you are a fool to waste your love on me.*

He sighed loudly. His mind had reasoned that he'd categorically done the right thing.

So why does my heart feel like it's in a vise?

Chapter 33

Chapter 33 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Sarah's first reaction was to fly back to the kitchens and Floo back to the comfort of her own home to sob her heart out after the awful encounter with Severus. However, she'd had another motive for coming to the school this evening and wanted to ask Minerva regarding the payment of her equipment and how much she owed once she had set up a Gringotts account. Thankfully, at this time in the evening, all the pupils were in their respective common rooms, catching up with friends after their first day of lessons, so the corridors were quiet. She quickly found the nearest bathroom, rushed in and hid inside a cubicle until all her tears had been shed.

Composing herself after a few minutes, she washed her face and stared critically in the mirror. She looked tired, but that was to be expected. Splitting her time between the Muggle world and the magical world was already taking its toll, and she hadn't even had her first proper lesson yet. It was more the fact that she was bursting to tell someone, anyone, about her newfound powers, and to have to resist Summoning a book from the shelves at work was almost too much temptation to bear. Plus, she was constantly worried in case she would forget and accidentally perform magic in front of a Muggle and have this whole world taken away from her from breaking the Statute of Secrecy. Not to mention the nausea and hollowness from the situation with Severus. It was exhausting.

Deciding her eyes were not bloodshot and that did not look like she'd been crying, Sarah smoothed her hair down and made her way to the headmistress's office. Within a

matter of minutes she was stood outside the old oak door, rapping politely. The old lady's Scottish brogue greeted her with a stiff "Enter," and she swiftly closed the door behind her on the way in, pausing in front of the headmistress's desk. Minerva looked up over her spectacles, her eyebrows quirked in surprise, quill poised mid-sentence on her parchment.

"Sarah, what brings you here? Is everything alright?"

Sarah realised she must have looked anxious and made an effort to soften her facial expressions. "I'm absolutely fine, Professor. I just wanted to check something regarding my schooling equipment."

"Oh? Did Severus forget something? That would be most unlike him"

"No!" She said, a little more fiercely than she intended. "No, not at all," she continued, steadying her voice. "The equipment is fantastic. It's just he said that you had the receipts, and I was wondering how much it cost because I'll need to reimburse the school once my Gringotts account is set up."

Minerva peered at her curiously. "Receipts? I don't have any receipts. Severus took care of it all. In fact, he was really quite insistent about it. I'd speak to him, dear." She continued scribbling away on her parchment.

This was news to Sarah. *What is he playing at?* She cleared her throat.

"Have you been sent an invoice from Gladrags at all today? I'd very much like to know how much to reimburse the school for my robes."

Minerva's brows knotted into a frown on her stony face. "I've no idea what you're talking about. I've not received any invoice from Gladrags."

Sarah's mouth gaped open. *Surely... he didn't pay for everything?* Her pulse quickened at the very thought.

"Er, I'm sorry, you're right, it's Professor Snape I should be talking to about this. I'm sorry to waste your time. Goodnight, Professor."

Sarah hurried out of the office, even more confused at Severus' behaviour.

"Goodnight, Sarah," murmured the older woman, a thoughtful look on her face.

* * *

It was a curious phenomenon, Severus noted, that the more sex one had, the more one wanted. Having gone for long periods of time between sexual trysts, often years, he'd been used to dampening his occasional ardour with his wrist and had locked the sexual being within him away so successfully he had no longer considered desire as an appetite to be regularly fulfilled.

Sure, there were undeniably some female students who blossomed in their seventh year into graceful beauties. But they were all so naive, so young, all fanciful and giggly, with a hopeless optimism which resulted from their immaturity. To Severus, they were still children, like little girls who dressed up in their mother's clothes and slapped on make-up, pretending to be grown-up. He never found himself attracted to any of them, no matter how pretty and well-groomed they were.

Severus was, it was commonly known, a borderline genius when it came to Potion making, and as well as being able to bottle fame, brew glory and put a stopper in death, he could also make several strong love potions and sexual attraction potions to bewitch the mind and ensnare the senses which, should he have had the inclination, he could have used on any number of unsuspecting women that had taken his fancy. Severus himself was not the kind of man to use tricks like this, even if his Death Eater comrades had taken advantage of his prodigious skills frequently.

Neither was Severus the sort of man to frequent the brothels in Knockturn Alley of his own volition, as consent was a big issue for him, and all the girls who worked there were, of course, under the Imperious Curse. Lucius had once offered to share a whore with him, as if he was offering Severus a sexual treat of such magnitude he would be unable to refuse. Severus was disgusted on many levels at the suggestion; at the thought of being in a sexual situation with Lucius Malfoy, at his blatant disregard for his wife, and for finding the idea of sex with one of those wretched women in any way arousing. He'd snapped back that he would never share a woman with anyone, to which Lucius had cruelly reminded him of the night he had lost his virginity.

He felt envious of Lucius' marriage to Narcissa, the latter of which doted on the former. Narcissa and Severus had developed an unspoken understanding as the years had gone on; maybe, in another universe, they could have made a formidable couple. Severus would have never acted on any of those thoughts. However, it showed the depth of respect he had for the woman that he'd agreed to take the Unbreakable Vow with her to protect her son.

As for her husband, quite how Lucius could willingly visit a prostitute or rape Muggle women when he had a devoted, beautiful, pure-blood wife who clearly loved him was beyond Severus' comprehension. Despite his often cold and impenetrable exterior, Severus was old-fashioned when it came to matters of the heart, and although he had no desire for children, he had once aspired to having a wife. For most of his adult life, he'd imagined Lily as his bride, torturing himself with dreams which had no way of coming true.

Yet Severus had never had as much as a relationship, let alone got close to taking a bride of his own. Throughout his adolescence and even when he was a young man, Severus had never attracted any female attention, his dour and fierce personality and unorthodox dark looks proved to be a hindrance to any burgeoning hormonal feelings he was experiencing. In truth, he felt if he couldn't have Lily, then he wasn't interested in having sex with anyone. That all changed on the awful night of his twentieth birthday, of course. As much as the experience was deeply repulsive, it set his mind into wondering just how the act could be between two people who wanted or loved each other. His involvement in the war against Voldemort meant he had to actively avoid getting close to anyone, which wasn't such a difficult feat for the moody, unapproachable Potions Master.

And so, until the time he'd met Sarah, Severus Snape could count the number of sexual experiences he'd had with women on two hands. This made it all the more remarkable that Sarah responded to his every touch, his every kiss, as if he were Don Juan himself. Although Severus had been limited in practical experience, he knew the theory of sexual relations inside out, and knew she wasn't faking her responses to him. He found it all rather baffling, but at the same time wonderful and special that they could stimulate each other to such heights of ecstasy.

For so long, he couldn't imagine loving anyone but Lily, until that is, the war was finally over, and he woke up to find her grip on his heart unusually absent. The change in his Patronus was the final proof that he'd let Lily go. From that moment on, he'd assumed his life would be absent of love and that he could never love another woman like he loved Lily. He had made peace with the fact that he would be forever on his own. That was, until the day he had gone to the woods in Spinner's End and caught sight of Sarah. Severus would not describe himself as being a particularly sentimental man, but he had known he loved Lily Evans from the moment he first saw her, and the same was true with Sarah Shaw.

They both had such overwhelming green eyes, yet that was where the similarities ended. Lily had pushed him away, to try and show him the error of his ways, for his own good. Now, twenty-odd years later and with a blacker, heavier heart, he was doing the same to Sarah: pushing her away for her own good.

Sarah was not Lily, though. Sarah loved him. Why did this terrify him so?

Chapter 34

Chapter 34 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Both Sarah and Severus felt broken after their last encounter. Sarah was not going to turn from him and wanted to support him, yet confronting him had seemed to make things even worse. Severus, meanwhile, had as usual turned his pain into anger and took his frustration out on a group of poor first-year Hufflepuffs the next day, bewitching his cloak into the form of a Dementor, making it whizz around the classroom with rattling breath and telling tales of such unspeakable darkness that it struck the fear of Merlin into them from their very first lesson. This did little to dampen the well-worn whispers around the castle that Snape had not renounced the Dark Arts at all and was biding his time in order to be Voldemort's successor. Snape had heard all the rumours, even from students in his own house, and found them deeply amusing, not to mention a useful tool to retain his notoriously rigid control over his classroom.

Sarah however was at a loss how to resolve the situation and how to approach him next. Although he had been completely foul to her, he hadn't told her outright that he no longer had feelings for her. True, he'd never actually said the three little words she'd been dying to hear from him whilst they were together, but neither had he said outright that he didn't care when she confronted him. Plus, the whole scenario regarding her equipment and clothing was puzzling. Minerva had, apparently, no part in payment whatsoever, or records that Hogwarts had paid for the equipment. This led to the logical conclusion that Severus himself had paid for everything, despite his protestations to the contrary. It was this that gave Sarah some comfort and some indication that he still had some feelings for her. She held on to this small nugget of hope, even through the nights of broken sleep and the constant stone of despair she seemed to be dragging around with her.

Severus had sent an owl to her mid-week stating that he'd arranged a time to visit Gringotts during Sarah's lunch hour on Friday. They would be meeting with a Goblin called Spineshank. Severus would come and meet Sarah outside the library at one o'clock and they would find a side-street and Apparate from there. Although it was quite risky in broad daylight, this was the only appointment Severus could pencil in that week, and he wanted to make sure all of her wizarding administrations were completed as quickly as possible so he could get on with business of ignoring her and being snarky and making sure she hated him. Sarah would bring her cloak, wand and Muggle banking details with her to work and dress in her long black skirt, a modest top and boots so as to not look out of place in either the Muggle or wizarding world. Once again, Severus had thought of all the details and, much too soon for Sarah's liking, Friday promptly arrived.

All morning at work she was watching the clock, the minutes racing past, and her stomach knotted and writhed as if a conger eel had taken up residency inside it. She had no idea of what she would say when she finally saw Severus again, and she knew he would be hostile and unwelcoming. This made the vines of anxiety twist in her gut even more violently.

At quarter-to one, Sarah collected her bag containing her wand and cloak and waited outside of the library, looking around restlessly with one foot tapping nervously. *Surely he's not going to turn up in his wizard robes in the middle of the day like this?* she thought, eyes scanning the crowd for any sign of him. She glanced up at the clock on the front of the building. Five-to. She began pacing, dread building in her stomach like thunderclouds.

"Looking for someone?" a familiar voice muttered in her ear. Sarah squeaked, startled.

"Shhh! It's me, you silly girl. I'm under the Disillusionment Charm so you can't see me!" he hissed. "Turn left and start walking, and take the second turning on the left down the alleyway. I'll follow. We'll Apparate behind the bins there."

The sound of his voice in her ear sent shivers down her spine, and it took a moment for her to compose herself before she did as instructed and made her way behind the bins. The alley itself was dirty and rubbish-strewn, the stench of garbage permeating the stale air. *Well, he certainly picked a romantic spot for it,* Sarah thought dryly whilst she put on her cloak and waited for him to catch up. A few moments later, she saw the black figure of Severus materialise in front of her slowly as if from out of thin air, his form at first ghostly before becoming totally solid. He peered down his nose at her.

"What are you waiting for? Let's get going," he growled.

Sarah stepped forward gingerly. In order to Apparate, she would need to embrace him, but he was like a tightly coiled spring and she was nervous to touch him after their last encounter. Snape huffed impatiently and pulled her towards him, physically wrapping her arms around him.

"Make sure you hold on tight. The last thing I need is you Splinching yourself," he snarled as Sarah's heart thudded from the sheer proximity. She rested her head on his chest and squeezed tighter, the familiar scent of his clothes and cologne sending a sharp pang of loss through her.

I miss you.

The words appeared as clearly in Severus' mind as if she'd spoken them aloud, although he'd not used Legilemency. Startled, Severus quickly drew up his psychological barriers. *I miss you, too,* he thought, trying to ignore her warmth and the swell of longing that rose within him as she nestled against him. Banishing such thoughts, he folded his arms across her and at once turned on the spot.

The squeezing, breathless feeling that accompanied Apparition washed over Sarah as she screwed her eyes tightly shut, grabbing on to Severus' robes until they landed squarely in Diagon Alley, just outside of Gringotts.

He released her immediately, turning from her and taking long strides up the white marble stairs, cloak billowing, and Sarah had to trot a little to keep up. She followed him through a set of bronze doors, then through a set of silver, until they were standing inside the lobby. Two wizard guards were stood either side of a long marble counter, wands in hand.

Behind the counter was a short creature with greenish skin. It had sharp, pointed ears and nose and long curling fingers. Its beady eyes glittered with recognition as they fell upon Snape.

"Good afternoon, Professor," said the Goblin politely, his eyes flicking from Snape to Sarah. "On time, as usual."

"Good afternoon, Spineshank," replied the professor coolly. "This is Sarah Shaw, who, as I mentioned in my letter, needs to set up an account today."

The Goblin turned his full attention on Sarah and gave her a sickly smile.

"Good afternoon to you, Miss Shaw," he crooned sycophantically. He was giving her the creeps. She nodded and responded in kind, trying not to let the revulsion show on her face.

"Professor Snape tells me you have a Muggle bank account, is that correct?" asked the Goblin. Sarah nodded as the Goblin reached under the counter and withdrew a very old and tatty looking piece of parchment, a golden quill that seemed resonate with light and something which looked to be a magnifying glass without the lens. He laid each of these objects on the table.

"This shouldn't take too long, Miss Shaw," the Goblin told her, smoothing the tatty parchment down. "I presume you have some Muggle money with you today? We do have a Muggle-wizard exchange facility here at the bank, but the minimum deposit for opening an account is £100, which at the current rate of exchange works out to be twenty

Galleons. For your information, there are twenty-nine Knuts to a Sickle, and seventeen Sickles to a Galleon."

Sarah looked at the Goblin blankly. Maths wasn't a strong subject of hers, and this seemed to be a very random and illogical way of working out currency. Both Snape and the Goblin noticed her look of incomprehension.

"Many Muggle-borns find wizarding currency a little taxing to understand at first. You will be issued with a complimentary pouch and conversion table before you leave to help you. You'll soon be throwing Sickles around in no time." The Goblin gave her another sickly smile, to which Sarah attempted a smile of her own.

"Firstly, I'll need to verify your wand as a security measure. We can only authorize an account to a person with a wand that belongs to them."

Sarah rummaged in her bag and retrieved her wand, passing it to the Goblin. Spineshank took the object that looked like a magnifying glass and ran the wand through it. The wand glowed a faint blue colour, and the Goblin nodded, apparently satisfied.

"Thank you, everything is in order there," he said, handing the wand back to her. "Now we need your signature." He pushed the tatty parchment towards her and handed her the glowing golden quill.

"Both the quill and the parchment are enchanted," said the Goblin. "It will recognize your signature and your signature alone. You will need to sign it every time you come in to withdraw or deposit some money. This is a security measure against the use of Polyjuice Potion. In theory, someone could steal your wand and take a potion to look just like you, and then come in here and access your funds. However, the enchanted quill and parchment memorises not only your signature, but the way you hold the quill and the pressure on the canvas. It's impossible to fool, or forge someone else's signature."

Sarah examined the quill, impressed, before signing the parchment. To her dismay, as soon as she'd written her signature, it began to fade into nothing, leaving the canvas blank. Then after a few moments, a gothic script emerged on the page:

Congratulations on your new Gringotts account, Miss Sarah Shaw. Your vault number is 893.

As soon as Sarah read this, the parchment faded once again to blank.

"Well, that's the account open. Now all that remains is to issue your first deposit," said the Goblin, returning the quill, parchment and wand verifying device back under the counter. "If I could take your Muggle money now, please?"

Sarah once again fished around in her bag and found her purse, pulling out five crisp £20 notes and handing them over. The Goblin placed the notes on the counter and clapped his hands over them. The notes disappeared from sight. Spineshank noticed her look of surprise.

"Twenty Galleons have now been deposited in your safe. To make life easier for Muggle-borns, we do have an automatic transfer facility from Muggle account to wizarding account by way of a spell called Dai Rectebit. You simply choose the amount you wish to enter your wizarding account from your Muggle account and how often, we cast the spell over your Muggle bank details, and you need never worry about chopping and changing currencies. The withdrawal will show up on the Muggle bank statement as GWB Ltd."

Sarah thought this was absolutely ingenious, and within minutes Spineshank had cast Dai Rectebit over her Muggle cash card.

"Would you like to take any money out before you leave today?" asked the Goblin, passing her cash card back to her.

"Yes, please, I'd like to withdraw six Galleons."

"Six Galleons," Spineshank repeated, clapping his hands over the counter once more. Six fat, shiny gold Galleons appeared, and he handed them to Sarah with another wan smile.

"Well, if that's all for today, all that remains is to give you our complimentary pouch and conversion card."

Spineshank reached once more under the counter and pulled out a black velvet pouch, very much like the one she saw Severus with at Jasmine's Restaurant. It had a little gold "G" embroidered in the corner. On top of the pouch was a card, the exact same shape as a Muggle credit card, with exchange rate information flashing across it.

Sarah thanked the Goblin gratefully as she and Severus bade their farewells, Sarah stashing her Galleon-filled pouch in her bag as they left. The Galleons were large and heavy. Sarah was puzzled as to why wizards hadn't invented debit cards yet. Once again, she struggled to keep up as Severus took long strides down Diagon Alley, finding a quiet spot to Apparate from.

Severus found his spot and waited for Sarah to join him. She scurried over, her heels clicking on the cobblestones. She was about to open her mouth to say something, but Severus unceremoniously pulled her into an embrace and once again the unpleasant sensation of Apparition took hold before they appeared back behind the smelly bins in the foul Muggle alleyway.

Severus was first to drop the embrace. Noticing her reluctance to pull away, he eyed her suspiciously.

"Thank you for taking me today," she said softly.

"Merely obeying orders," he muttered, reaching into his cloak for his wand. He turned as if to leave, but Sarah placed a hand on his arm.

"Severus... you didn't have to pay for my equipment, you know." Her green eyes were filled with tender gratitude *Damn her finding out*, he thought with a flash of annoyance.

"I consider my life-debt to you to be completely repaid now," he replied quietly.

"You've been very kind to me." She held his gaze. Merlin, it took all his strength not to reach down and kiss her right then.

"Kindness has nothing to do with it," he answered coolly before casting the Disillusionment Charm over himself and disappearing from view.

"Thank you," she said to thin air. From the lack of response, Sarah assumed he had gone, and he saw a flicker of disappointment cross her face as he watched her rearrange her bag before making her way back up to the library.

Kindness has nothing to do with it at all, he thought, his heart heavy with emotion.

Author's note: Dai Rectebit = pun on Direct Debit. I thought it was funny!

GWB Ltd = Gringotts Wizarding Bank Ltd

Chapter 35

Chapter 35 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Sarah had arrived early at Hogwarts on Saturday for her first day of lessons, weighed down by equipment. She'd been hoping to bump into Severus on her way around the castle but had no such luck. She kept her cloak tightly wrapped around her and her strides purposeful, ensuring she did not attract any undue attention from any of the students she happened to pass on her way to and from lessons. Although she enjoyed most of the lessons tremendously, the day itself actually turned out to be somewhat of a mixed bag.

Pomona Sprout, professor of Herbology, had an earthy humour to match her earthy hands and had decided to teach her about herbs initially as it would be most beneficial to grasp a basic understanding alongside Potions. Sarah threw herself into it with gusto, enjoying the calm, green serenity of the greenhouses, the smell of the soil and Pomona's jovial company. Homework was to read the chapter in *1000 Magical Plants and Flora* regarding herbs in preparation for a test next week.

Filius Flitwick, meanwhile, was extraordinarily impressed with his newest Ravenclaw addition and her talent for Charms, deciding to teach her first the theory of the Disillusionment Charm and then attempting the practical. Sarah hadn't managed full concealment but had achieved a ghost-like demeanour, which Filius had told her that even some of his fourth-year students had not yet managed. Her homework was to continue practicing the charm. She felt immediately fond of the tiny professor and was pleased she'd managed to create a good first impression in front of her head of house.

Transfiguration on the other hand was slightly less successful. Minerva had started at the very basest level, again covering the theory before the practice, which was changing a matchstick into a needle. Sarah only managed a strange hybrid of the two, and although she was extremely disappointed with her efforts, Minerva assured her that for the first lesson she'd done well. Again, homework was to continue practicing the charm.

Potions also did not go as well as she hoped. Aloysius Widdershins, the stocky Potions master, was a kind older gentleman with a softly-spoken voice and watery blue eyes. He had short, white hair and a white goat's tail of a beard on his chin. Although Sarah had followed his method of instructions down to the letter, her first attempt at Pepper-Up Potion turned into a disaster, the result being her cauldron ended up billowing great clouds of eye-watering smoke. Professor Widdershins explained that the preparation of her ingredients were to blame, rather than her ability to follow the recipe precisely. Cross-contamination of ingredients from using an unclean knife or tools could greatly disrupt the brewing of potions, and he kindly told her that this was usually the first mistake pupils made once left to their own devices and that for homework she should try brewing the potion again, being extra fastidious with her tools, and to bring in a sample for assessment next week.

Her last lesson of the day was Divination, at the very top of the North Tower, with the somewhat eccentric Sybill Trelawney. She was a thin, reedy woman, who smelled slightly of sherry and incense. Her enormous, jewel-encrusted glasses magnified her eyes, and she wore many beads and necklaces, which clashed with the sequins on her robes.

"My dear, Minerva has told me all about you," she breathed almost reverently. "It is so rare to find a student that has the gift of Sight, whose Inner Eye is responsive and opened." The professor blinked her hugely magnified eyes at Sarah in anticipation.

Sarah shifted nervously in her plush armchair. The woman was looking at her like she was the next Nostradamus *No pressure*.

"I'm very excited to be having lessons with you, Professor Trelawney. I'm sure I will learn much from you," she answered graciously.

The older woman smiled genuinely and placed a bony hand on hers.

"Much of the Sight is innate, my dear. My job is merely to help you channel that Sight." The woman was looking at her in such a way that Sarah had the feeling the professor did not often receive such enthusiastic comments from pupils regarding her subject. Sarah returned her smile as the professor blinked at her for a few moments. She then shook her head quickly, as if clearing her mind, before starting the lesson in earnest.

"Today, we will begin by looking at the branch of Divination known as scrying. This is the practice of gaining Sight through reflective objects. Scrying, as I am sure you are aware, can take many forms: through water, known as Hydromancy; through glass, known as Vitremancy; or through crystal balls, known as Gastromancy. There are other forms of Seeing which use non-reflective objects, such as smoke, known as Cremancy; and fire, known as Pyromancy. There are many, many more, too many to discuss now. We will in due course cover all of these mediums. Today, however, we will concentrate on arguably the most famous medium of sight, the crystal ball, and the use of Gastromancy."

Professor Trelawney plucked away a thin scarf which was covering an object on the table in front of them dramatically, revealing a shiny glass orb nestled inside a golden stand, the legs of which were carved into badger's heads.

"This is my own personal crystal ball. With wand work, a capable witch or wizard should be able to produce some effect with any wand, but it is their own that yields the best results. The same is true for divinatory equipment. It is a tradition for practitioners of Divination who have attended Hogwarts, that the stands of the crystal ball should reflect the house of the Seer. As you can see, I'm a Hufflepuff," she said proudly, "as were my ancestors. This particular ball has been passed down from generation to generation, from my great-grandmother, the famous Seer Cassandra Trelawney."

Sarah removed her own crystal ball from her bag as she listened with fascination to the professor's speech, unwrapping it from the protective swathe of black velvet before placing it on her own solid silver stand.

Trelawney noted Sarah's ball and the raven's claw stand. "Very nice, dear. Made by Mist & Fortune in Diagon Alley, I take it?"

"Er..." Sarah really didn't have a clue where it came from, but thankfully Trelawney steamrollered on, saving her the awkwardness of confession.

"Yes, one can always tell their high quality of craftsmanship. And not cheap either! It's good to see you're taking the art of Divination seriously by investing so many Galleons into the right equipment. It will last you a lifetime if you look after it. Spare the buy and ruin the Eye, I always say."

Sarah's mind was racing. *Just how much did this ball cost exactly?*

Trelawney then gazed at her seriously through her thick glasses. "In order to See, one must be in the right frame of mind. One's environment must be comfortable." At this, she gestured a hand at her room, and Sarah once again took in the thick material drapes, the lanterns, the chintzy chairs, the candles and the incense burners, all of which reminded Sarah of an incredibly ornate Bedouin tent.

"One must also be calm, focused, in a state of meditation..." The woman closed her eyes and sucked in great noisy ragged breaths through her nose, expelling them loudly through her mouth. Sarah watched in amusement, trying not to laugh as Professor Trelawney made accompanying swooshing hand gestures in time with her exaggerated breathing.

The professor snapped open her eyes and peered forward at the ball. "And then... when you are ready... you reach out, and open your Inner Eye... You are looking for

symbols. These could be images, or objects, or faces, or even colours. Do not be alarmed if nothing comes straight away. The clearest visions come when one is fully relaxed, in a trance. Be patient."

Sarah took a few deep breaths herself and drew in the sickly-sweet incense-filled air before gazing into her own ball. The room was so warm and comfortable that it made her a little drowsy. Looking at the distorted reflections was quite hypnotic. She found she couldn't be bothered to move her eyes in her drowsy state and just continued to stare and stare at the glass orb. Her breathing became more relaxed and soon she was almost entranced by the crystal globe.

Was that... clouds? she wondered, not taking her eyes away.

The clouds were grey and billowing. She watched as they shifted shape, swirling, forming then reforming. It reminded her a little of a Pensive.

Out of the clouds came a figure: dark, brooding, and fierce. It was Severus. His onyx eyes shone brightly. In one hand he was holding up a set of brass scales. The other was placed over his heart, clutching it as if in pain. Thick, black liquid was oozing out from beneath his fingers, rich like crude oil. Sarah somehow knew that this was not blood, but more like a toxin or poison. As she gazed into his eyes, she saw the shine in them begin to fade, until the spark of life within them went out, until there was nothing. Sarah understood. The poison was killing him.

Sarah snapped back into the present with a gasp, her heart racing and her throat dry with the realisation.

"What did you see, dear?" asked Professor Trelawney, a look of concern on her face, watching the younger woman closely.

"I... uh..." Sarah found she was shaking uncontrollably.

"Let me get you a glass of water. The first time the Inner Eye is opened, it can be quite overwhelming. Deep breaths, dear."

Trelawney scurried off to get some water, leaving Sarah's mind churning with what she'd just seen.

The scales... Poison... Was Severus really dying?

Author's note:

Hydromancy is the genuine term for scrying with water, Gastromancy is the genuine term for scrying with crystal balls and Pyromancy is the genuine term for scrying with fire. I made up the other two terms, however.

Cremancy from the Latin prefix cre-, to burn.

Vitremancy from the Latin prefix Vitr-, glassy, or like glass.

Chapter 36

Chapter 36 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

The first-year Slytherins filed in to the dimly-lit classroom amid much hushed whispers. Many of them were in awe of their dark and imposing Head of House, and rumours were deliberately spread by the older Slytherins which had made him even more fearful. Some said he owned the Basilisk which was discovered in the Chamber of Secrets years ago. Some said he was the true heir of Slytherin and that he would arise soon, more terrible and fearful than Voldemort himself. Yet others said he was part-vampire, which is why he preferred the dank confines of the dungeon and also accounted for his porcelain white skin. The first years had listened with wide eyes to all of these tales, and their first meeting with the stern professor at their Sorting did little to diminish the strength of these rumours. Now they sat and waited, eyes peering into the gloom, for their first lesson in Defence Against the Dark Arts.

"The Dark Arts is a branch of magic which, thankfully, very few witches and wizards are courageous and skilful enough to exploit."

The disembodied voice of Severus Snape filled the cold air with authority as the children squinted, looking for their professor.

"Those who do practice such magic, however, will stop at nothing to achieve the kind of power of which true mastery of the Dark Arts promises. The price of using this magic is terrible: death, destruction and torture are the lifeblood of the Dark Arts. The threat of its use within our own society is, even now, very real.

"However, I am not here to teach you the Dark Arts. I am here to teach you how to recognise them and how to defend yourself against them. With me, you will also learn about a host of dark beasts, fearsome creatures and foul beings. You will learn how to dispel Dementors, guard against Grindylows, and even vie with Vampires."

At this, Snape stepped forward from the gloom to a collective gasp of fear. His skin, although usually pale, was now a ghost-like white and seemed to glow with a luminance all of its own. His black hair, which usually hung in chin-length curtains framing his face, was slicked back. His mouth was red, in stark contrast to the pallor of his skin, and he hissed, bearing his teeth and showing unmistakable pointed fangs. One child whimpered. Another farted.

Severus fought hard with the desire to laugh at the terror he was instilling. With a flick of his wand, his appearance returned to normal, and the small children sagged in their seats with relief. He walked forwards with a swish of his cloak, satisfied with his opening gambit.

Teaching DADA was satisfying to Snape on so many levels. Firstly, he could be more creative in his approach to his lessons. Secondly, the marking was much easier and less time consuming, giving him more time to focus on his own personal Potion projects. Thirdly, it was an almost effortless way to continue cultivating a persona of fear amongst the pupils. And fourthly, the correct teaching of the subject was an extension of his protection for the children. As much as he often carped on about dunderheads and dull-witted students, Snape was fiercely protective of his students and of all the knowledge he could imprint on them, defence against evil was, in his opinion, of the utmost importance.

Another few flicks of the wand, and a white screen rolled in front of the blackboard whilst the projector at the back of the room shuddered and rattled into life.

"Today we will be looking at the ridiculous and onerous creatures known as Hinkypunks. Turn to page fifteen in your text books."

The children scabbled silently for their books whilst he allowed himself a small smile. He wouldn't hear a peep out of them for the remainder of the class, and he knew they would be riveted by everything he said. The poor kid who'd farted would probably be having nightmares for the rest of the term. Snape smiled further, turning and hiding his face behind his dark hair lest anyone see his merriment. One grin out of him could undo the whole act.

In truth, Snape had hated teaching for a long, long time. He'd realised eventually it wasn't teaching he hated: it was actually that he hated having to teach a subject which he had no desire at all to teach. Potions were a private passion of his, something he had been able to share with Lily, and a subject he was intuitively very good at. That was the way with Potions. You were either good at it and instinctively grasped its nuances and subtleties or you were bloody awful. In Snape's experience, 80% of students fell into the latter category, and it was mind-numbingly, jaw-grindingly, knuckle-whiteningly frustrating, not to mention dangerous. Defence, however, was like a walk in the park in comparison, and teaching it was natural and relatively stress-free.

After Voldemort's death, he was free to choose whichever path he wanted. He'd fulfilled his Unbreakable Vow with Dumbledore, he'd been on the winning side in the war... he had, by all intents and purposes, complete free will for the first time in over twenty years. He could have travelled the world, run his own potion business, or focused on his own projects full-time. Yet he actually found he didn't want to leave Hogwarts. It was his home. He'd fought so hard to protect the place, to leave after all that had happened would feel wrong. Finally, now, his peers and colleagues understood him, and whereas inevitable elements of the cranky, unapproachable and dour man remained, he was looked upon with fondness and high regard. He finally felt like he belonged, and it was a feeling he didn't want to give up. Teaching DADA had been the icing on the cake.

This all helped him to heal after the events of the war. He was, comparatively, happy. Beginning a relationship with Sarah was by far one of the most frightening things he'd ever done, but it only served to make him even happier. Until Dumbledore planted the idea about picking at old wounds, and the whole edifice came crumbling down around his ears. He'd yet to confront him about that.

"She had to find out about your past sooner or later," Albus told him later that same day.

Severus glowered up at the painting. "Having her walk in on a memory of me gang-raping a defenceless Muggle was not the way I'd wanted her to find out," he spat sharply.

Albus winced at the term "gang-raping".

"Of course, the Pensieve incident was most distressing for both of you."

Understatement of the century, Severus grouched to himself.

"But she still loves you, you know," Albus continued. "She told me."

"A man like me is not worthy of such love," he muttered, cracking his knuckles absently. Now it was Albus' turn to frown.

"Severus, your self-flagellation is both tedious and unnecessary. If you insist on pushing her love away, you will become a self-fulfilling prophecy!" The older man looked over his half-moon spectacles sternly at the younger one, who glared right back.

"If you don't mind, Albus, I think I may just ignore that little gem of wisdom, as taking on board your helpful advice is what got me into this mess in the first place!" he hissed.

Dumbledore had the good grace to twinkle sheepishly at this.

"I will admit, my overzealousness to see you happy seems to have led to this unfortunate situation," he began lightly. "But the truth is out now, and she's admitted she still has feelings for you. Maybe it's time for you to stop using Occlumency and try opening up for a change."

If looks could kill, and Dumbledore weren't a painting, he'd be dead twice-over.

"Maybe it's time for you to stop poking your dead, painted nose into other people's business!" he snarled, stalking out of the office and slamming the door behind him, leaving the portrait of Albus shaking his head sadly.

Chapter 37

Chapter 37 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Sarah had somehow managed to convince Professor Trelawney that her response to the sight in the crystal ball was due to the shock of the clarity of her vision. She had told the professor that she had seen a set of brass scales, which was part of the truth if not all of it, and that she'd interpreted that to mean that she needed more of a balance between Wicca and the wizarding world. Secretly, she believed this to be a truth, even if it was not remotely related to her vision. Trelawney meanwhile began heaping praise on to Sarah, telling her she'd seen a good omen in her morning tea leaves - that of an oak tree, which symbolises growth and spirituality. Sarah wasn't sure about that and hastily made her departure to the first place that came to mind which could provide both comfort and some answers - the library.

Her mind was still full of the image from the crystal ball as she weaved through the stone corridors. People were known to have died from a broken heart. Could people also die from the guilt, shame and anguish of their actions? Sarah's instinct told her that this was what was happening with Severus. From what she knew of him, Severus was indeed an intensely private man, and he probably never had either the inclination or opportunity to discuss his feelings in depth. Albus had told her he was a skilled Occlumens - maybe he was too good, and this was causing him harm? Sarah knew what she needed to do, but before she could approach this, she needed to get him to talk to her again.

The library was empty, much to her relief, and even being in the presence of the books gave her a sense of renewal and clarity of thought. Sarah had read many Muggle books on self-help and relationships, written by impossibly glamorous women with impossible ideas of how a relationship should be. Most seemed to underline the fact that the male should pursue the female and that women should not make the first move. *Those women had obviously never dated Severus Snape*, she thought with a snort. However, approaching Severus in a logical yet emotional, Ravenclaw way did not seem to work. She needed a different approach. Maybe she needed to fight fire with fire and be like a Slytherin? Treat a snake like a snake...

At this, a glimmer of an idea began to take shape in her mind. She began to research defensive spells, as she guessed she would need more in her arsenal than just Expelliarmus to confront him this time. She managed to find a few harmless yet useful spells, which she copied onto her parchment hastily. *Poor Bernard. He's going to*

have to be my guinea pig tonight.

Next there was the issue of the scales. *Balance*. Sarah turned her attentions to researching all about memories, from extraction to storage, and read more in depth about the Pensieve and its uses. Some time later, when she was satisfied with everything she had discovered, she headed back to the kitchens in order to Floo home. *Now I just need a way to contact him*, she thought, weaving her way through the scurrying house elves. She almost bumped into one, carrying a huge tureen full of soup. She apologised to the mortified elf, which bobbed and curtsayed, nearly spilling the soup everywhere. *Poor little things*, she thought. *Always so helpful*.

A light bulb went off in her head. What had Winky said, when she brought her here for her induction? *If you be needing me, you just call my name*.

"Winky," she said slowly, not entirely sure if this was going to work. With a smart crack, the elf appeared in front of her, gazing up with her large orb-like eyes.

"Miss Shaw is calling Winky, Miss?" the little elf squeaked politely.

Sarah grinned, thrilled that it worked and that the elf remembered her. "Winky, would you be able to do me a favour?" she asked carefully.

The elf nodded enthusiastically, making her ears flap from side to side. "Yes, Miss, Winky is here to help, Miss."

"Winky, tomorrow evening at seven o'clock, I need you to find Professor Snape and tell him to come to the Astronomy Tower. Tell him that a student is in great danger and he must come immediately. I assure you that no-one will be harmed, but he must not know it is me who asked this of you. Can you do that?" she asked the elf kindly.

The elf nodded once more. "Winky is finding Professor Snape tomorrow at seven and sending him to the Astronomy Tower, just like Miss said," she squeaked.

"Thank you, Winky. This is really important and I really appreciate it." She reached down and stroked the little elf's face, which beamed up at her excitedly.

After Floo'ing home and grabbing a light bite to eat, Sarah began the task of preparing for her plan. She felt terribly guilty for practicing on Bernard, but she had no choice. Bernard did not seem too bothered by Silencio but was agitated by Impedimenta. Thankfully, it only took her two attempts to get it right, and it took many cat treats, rubs and tickles for the disgruntled cat to forgive her.

"It will be worth it, darling," she muttered to the cat, tickling it under its chin as he began to purr, signifying his forgiveness.

Next, she decided to brush up on Expelliarmus by practicing removing a candle out of candlestick. She was pleased with her progress, but she still had the most onerous task left to do. Summoning her courage, she took out a crystal vial from her trunk and took a deep breath before placing the tip of the wand to her forehead and concentrating on the first memory.

The chubby little girl sat on the lawn, cradling a dolly in her arms. She could have been no older than five or six. The bright yellow sun was shining down from a clear, blue sky, devoid of clouds. It could have been a picture of perfection, were it not for the angry yelling emanating from the open door. There was a loud shriek, which caused the girl to jump in shock.

"Don't cry, Allie," the girl told the doll, rocking back and forth. "Daddy doesn't mean to hurt Mummy." She held the doll close, breathing into its matted hair. The arguing increased in volume until there was a bang and a blood-curdling scream. The little girl froze, fear etched on her tiny face, her green eyes wide. "Mummy," she whimpered, clutching the doll even tighter.

Sarah drew the memory away with her wand, lip quivering, patting the delicate silver frond inside the glass vial. Once it was safely inside, she placed the wand back to her temple and began focusing on the next one.

The schoolgirl hurried down the road as fast as her tubby little legs could carry her. If she could just make it to the bottom of the road without being seen, she might just manage to avoid them. Her heart was racing with the exertion, and sweat had started to form on her forehead and upper lip, making strands of hair stick to her neck and face. Suddenly, she heard the thump of footsteps approaching from behind her. Dread curled a cold hand around her insides. Not again.

The three boys caught up with her easily and began to walk in step with her. One of them, the tallest, and clearly the leader of the troop, started to crow loudly:

"Mirror, mirror, on the wall?

Who's the fattest of them all?

It's Sarah, Sarah Shaw!"

The other boys sniggered. Why me? Why is it always that song? she thought, trying to ignore the boys and walking as quickly as she could.

"You really are fat and ugly," said the second boy matter-of-factly. He was small and freckly, with dirty blond hair.

"Yeah," sneered the third, looming closer. "Fat pig! Oink, oink!" He swung his arm round and hit her squarely under the eye. Sarah recoiled, the sting making her eyes water, doubling over. The second boy stepped behind her.

"Go on! Kick her up the arse!" encouraged the first boy, and the freckly kid booted her with all his might. The force made her fall forward on to the ground. Sarah was sobbing now, trying to hide her face in her hands as they began a relentless assault, slapping, pinching, pulling at her hair. Sarah kept her hands over her face and did not respond save for her sobbing. Eventually, the boys gave up and left her crumpled on the floor, covered in bruises and her own snot and tears.

Sarah pulled this memory away and poked it down into the vial. She found her pulse had increased, and she was shaking slightly. The memories were difficult to face again, even though she'd resolved her feelings about them, but to her mind this was the only way to reach equilibrium. Steadying herself by taking a deep breath, she again brought the wand to her head and concentrated hard on the third memory.

There were lots of people, all milling around the front of a church, looking sombre. The girl was there, squeezing tightly to the hand of a younger boy. She looked to be a teenager now, and had lost most of her puppy fat, although she could not exactly be described as thin. She was dressed all in black, as were the rest of the crowd. She looked pale and tired, and had obviously been crying a great deal.

"So sorry for your loss, dear," a sympathetic old lady told the girl. She had rheumy, pale eyes and wrinkled skin.

"Thank you," the girl managed to reply hoarsely.

"Your mum was such a kind woman. She will be missed," the old woman continued, patting her lightly on the arm.

Sarah looked down and nodded, biting down on her lips to stop them trembling whilst fresh tears welled up, blurring her vision. She gripped the younger boy's hand even tighter, and he looked up at her, the sorrow on his face mirroring her own.

The old lady gave them both a sad smile and walked away, leaving them to their own private grief.

As Sarah brought this memory to the vial, she found her cheeks were damp with tears. She'd lost her mother over ten years ago and had come to terms with it. Of course, she missed her, and would give anything to have her back, but her absence was only a fact now. *The sun is yellow. The sky is blue. My mum is dead.* She was startled to discover how upsetting the memory of her burial actually was. She took a few moments to calm herself, wiping the tears on the back of her hands. *Be strong. One more to go.* For the last time, Sarah raised her wand, closed her eyes and remembered.

"John! Will you hurry up in there? I need a wee!" Sarah banged on the door crossly. He'd been in there for half an hour now. Was he constipated or something? A low moan issued from the bathroom in response.

"John? Are you alright?" Silence.

"John!" She began thumping on the door again incessantly. After a few moments, the door opened. Sarah was not prepared for what she was about to witness.

The white, tiled bathroom was splattered in streaks of shockingly crimson blood. The figure of her brother was bent over the sink, a razor blade clutched in one hand. His arm was dangling uselessly by his side, deep red gashes carved into his pale forearms, oozing droplets of blood onto the bathroom floor. His eyes were rolling in his head; he looked about to faint at any moment.

"John, you idiot! What have you done!"

Sarah drew the final thought into the vial and, with shaking hands, sealed it with a cork. She placed it carefully in a drawer and then collapsed on the sofa, shaking. She knew this part would be hard, but she wasn't prepared for it to be so emotionally draining. She brought her knees up and hugged them, taking in deep breaths. She felt the light patter of Bernard jumping up beside her, and he gave a consolatory meow. She reached a hand out to him with a watery smile.

"This was never going to be easy, was it?" she asked the cat, running a hand along his back and curving up over his tail. The cat meowed again before jumping off the sofa and trotting over to his bed, looking over his shoulder at her.

Sarah stretched languidly. "Yes, you're right. I do need an early night. It's going to be an interesting day tomorrow."

With that, she got up off the sofa and made her way up the stairs, giving Bernard a quick goodnight tickle as she passed.

Chapter 38

Chapter 38 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Sarah arrived at Hogwarts a full hour before seven o'clock, sneaking her way slowly up from the kitchens to the Astronomy Tower with her cloak wrapped tightly around her and her wand clutched tightly in her free hand. As it was Sunday, the corridors were empty, and Sarah had hoped that everyone would be in the Great Hall for dinner. The only presence as she crept through the corridors was the mournful shape of the Grey Lady, floating gracefully ahead. The sight of the school ghosts still startled her whenever she caught a glimpse of them. She hadn't yet come across Peeves or the Bloody Baron and was desperately hoping tonight would not be the night she would be acquainted with them.

Sarah slipped silently up the stone steps to the top of the tower. The coast was clear and no-one had seen her. She removed her cloak, folding it carefully before laying it across one of the wooden window seats. She leaned over the rail to take in the view of the clear, Scottish September evening. The sun was beginning its descent over the skyline, bathing the tops of the trees and the pale stone of the castle in warm golden sunlight. Sarah particularly loved the light of the change of the seasons between summer and autumn, the long sunny evening just mild enough before winter once again set in. She breathed deeply, filling her lungs with fresh highland air. She loved this place, and she loved the man who had brought her here. What she was about to do was very risky, but if she didn't take drastic action, the situation may never be resolved. At least this way she would be able to lay all her cards on the table and know one way or the other Severus' true intentions.

She sighed, turning away from the window. She smoothed her satin robes down, enjoying the feel of the material underneath her fingers. She'd decided to wear her new purple dress robes, as she thought they were both extremely witchy and more than just a little sexy. Part of the plan was to go on a full glamour offensive: she'd used irons on her hair to make it poker-straight and made herself up carefully using slightly bolder shades than she would ordinarily, choosing to make her eyes smoky, her lashes full and her lips a deep and luscious red. Her robes, although not terribly revealing, clung to her in such a way as to enhance her many curves and were cut to flatter her neck and cleavage. She needed to both act and dress Slytherin, whatever that entailed. Sarah's instinct was that Slytherin equalled vamp, and so that was the look she was going for.

She surveyed the available space at the top of the tower, looking for her vantage point. The room was octagonal, with glassless windows surrounding the periphery. To the left of the door was bathed in shadows, which were growing longer and deeper as the sun set. She would hide in the shadows and strike from there. Now it was a waiting game. She clenched and unclenched her wand hand nervously. What if Winky didn't give him the message? What if she lost her nerve? What if the words failed her or the spells didn't work? The more she dwelled on it, the more pathetic the plan seemed. She'd almost managed to talk herself out of it and was about to gather up her cloak to leave, when she heard the clicking of rapidly ascending footsteps speeding up the stairs. *Oh, God. Here we go.*

The door flew open, and the imposing figure of Severus Snape strode in with his wand out, looking to the right. She had no time to lose. Aiming her wand, she quickly yelled "*Expelliarmus!*"

Severus' head snapped to the left as he watched his wand arc out of his hand and into the air behind him. He spun around angrily to find the source of the spell, and she followed up with a loud "*Impedimenta!*" Severus was instantly frozen to the spot.

"What is the meaning of this?" he snapped viciously. "Show yourself!"

Sarah stepped out of the shadows, holding her wand out in front of her like a sword.

"I'm sorry about this, Severus, but you gave me no choice."

Severus opened his eyes wide with shock. His first impression was that Sarah looked absolutely stunning, sheathed as she was in deep purple satin. "You?" he breathed.

"Yes, *me*," she replied, walking forwards slowly and lowering her wand slightly. "Winky told you there was a student up here in great danger, and that student is me."

"What nonsense is this? Let me go, you silly girl!" he roared.

In a second, Sarah had closed the gap between them and held her wand up to his face in a threatening gesture. "Don't make me silence you," she hissed, with as much venom as she could muster. The surprise in his eyes echoed her own at the commanding tone of her voice. She managed to keep her cool exterior however, whilst Severus was becoming by turns irritated and aroused.

"I happen to be in very great danger," she continued in a low voice, walking slowly around him, wand held aloft, soaking up the unexpected surge of power that flowed through her. "I am in danger of losing you."

She stopped and gazed deeply into his black eyes.

"I know why you are pushing me away, and I refuse to accept it without a fight. Meeting you and being given the powers to enter into the wizarding world are the two best things that have ever happened to me, but I would rather live as a Muggle than spend another day in this world without you by my side."

Severus' mouth gaped open. He didn't need to be put under *Silencio*, he was truly lost for words.

"I love you for who you are, and who you have become, despite everything you have done and everything you have been through. To prove it, I offer you not just my heart, but some of my own worst memories." She reached into her cleavage, pulling out the small crystal vial of swirling, smoke-like memories. Severus watched, his body twitching at the sight of her pale skin. "Take them. I hide nothing from you. Then we can be equal."

She moved so close to him now, their bodies were touching. The air almost crackled with tension. She reached her hands up and ever so slowly inched them inside his robes, tracing them down the length of his torso before toying with the pocket of his frock coat, finally dropping the vial inside. All the while she never once broke eye contact. From the gentle brush of her fingertips, she could tell his body was beginning to respond to her.

"If you love me as I love you, come to my cottage in one hour. I will be waiting. If you fail to show up I'll presume you never had any feelings for me, and I'll never contact you again." She reached up on her tiptoes and placed a gentle, sweet kiss on his lips. "One hour," she breathed before turning on her heel and sweeping to the door. With a flick of her wand, she Summoned her cloak, and with another, she released him from her spell. She left the room hurriedly without once looking back, her heart hammering in her chest through sheer adrenaline.

Although now free from the spell, Severus stayed rooted to the spot for some time after Sarah's departure. He was absolutely stunned and more than a little aroused. *Once again, I underestimate the power of Sarah Shaw*, he thought, a smile pulling at his lips.

Chapter 39

Chapter 39 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Once Severus had regained the use of his brain and motor functions after Sarah's little performance, he fled down the stairs from the Astronomy Tower towards his quarters. He'd never seen Sarah so delectable or fired up. As much as her approach infuriated him, he was left very turned on by the incident. He planned to freshen up and Apparate straight to her cottage to apologise for being an insecure arse and then get on with the business of kissing and making up. *With extra kissing*, he thought, his lips quirking.

He reached into his pocket and felt the vial of memories she'd placed there. He had no doubt she had ghosts of her own; he'd already discovered her mother had passed on and that she had a bad relationship with her dad, although she never elaborated further, and Severus felt awkward to pry. But just the fact that she'd been brave enough to confront her own worst memories and then hand them to him, unflinchingly, was to him the equivalent of her handing him her very soul. He wouldn't watch them; there would be no need. They would discover all about each other in time. All he needed to know for now was that she loved him, she trusted him, and, he now knew, she was not afraid of him.

Severus swept around the corner, his mind filled with apologies and regretting the time he'd wasted being a stubborn git, when he ran straight into the stern figure of Minerva McGonagall.

"Ah, Severus, there you are," she breathed, sounding exasperated. "I've been looking for you everywhere."

"Is there a problem, Headmistress?" he asked impatiently.

The older woman peered over her half-moon glasses at the younger man, a serious look on her face.

"I'm afraid so, Severus. A third year Hufflepuff, Lola Butterworth, is now residing in the Hospital Wing due to the actions of two boys from your house!"

Severus met Minerva's disapproving gaze, his face solemn.

"What happened?" he asked slowly.

Minerva breathed in through her nose. "From what Miss Butterworth tells me, Lock and Bingham ambushed her on the way back from dinner. They sent Stinging Hexes at her, and when she retaliated in kind, they set upon her with their feet and fists. Madam Pomfrey says it's doubtful she will be concussed, but she wants to keep her in overnight anyway because of the bruising," she said with a sniff.

Severus felt a fire of anger swelling in his stomach. He may have been a Death Eater, he may be branded a rapist and even a murderer, but he had never, ever, raised his hand to a woman. That was for Mudblood scum like his father.

"Where are the boys now?" Severus asked, the calm of his voice not betraying any hint of the rage inside him.

"They are in my office, awaiting our return. Naturally, I told them their head of house would deal with this in the way he saw fit."

"Thank you, Minerva. If you don't mind, I will want to deal with this straight away... alone."

"As you wish, Severus," Minerva replied, watching the younger wizard sweep down the corridor in a billow of black.

Severus swung the door of the headmistress's office open with a bang, making the two boys jump. He glowered for a moment in the doorway before stalking into the centre of the room where they were standing. He looked from one to the other, his eyes glittering with malice.

"Professor McGonagall has just informed me there has been a very serious incident involving two pupils from my house," he muttered darkly. "Would you care to elaborate?"

The boys glanced at each other nervously, too terrified to look directly at their head of house.

"Look at me when I'm speaking to you!" he snapped.

The boys flicked their eyes up at the stern man, cowering in fright.

"From what I hear, the two of you have assaulted a much younger pupil, a girl, no less, and set upon her with such force that she is now lying in the hospital wing. Well? Do you deny it?" Snape's voice rose until it rang out with cold fury. It was all the boys could do to shake their heads in shame.

"The many picking on the one is both cowardly and disgusting, and when that one happens to be a girl, the matter becomes infinitely more serious. Does it make you feel like a big man, beating a defenceless young girl like that?" Severus found he was shaking with his barely-concealed rage.

The boys blinked. They'd never seen Snape so incandescently animated.

"You are spineless, revolting, disrespectful oafs, and I am ashamed to have you in my house," he spat.

"I'm sorry, sir," one of the boys mumbled.

"Sorry?" Snape asked incredulously. "You will be. Your whole house will be. You have no idea how serious this is. I am forced to make an example of you." Severus swept around the desk, deliberately avoiding eye contact with the portrait of Albus Dumbledore, who was watching this conversation with great interest.

"Firstly, I am taking away all points from Slytherin, and the hour glass will remain empty for the rest of the year."

The boys gasped. This was unprecedented.

"I mean to show you and the rest of the school that Hogwarts has a zero tolerance approach to bullying. I'm sure the rest of Slytherin house will be most grateful to you for demonstrating that so clearly to the rest of the school and for denying them once again the chance for the house cup for another year." He gave the boys a wan, thin-lipped smile.

The boys had turned almost as green as the Slytherin crests on their chests. Snape, who usually favoured his own house, had handed them the most severe punishment in living memory.

"In addition," he thundered, watching the boys swallow back bile both from the thought of how their fellow Slytherins were going to react, and from the fact their punishment was not yet over, "you will spend detention with me this evening, starting from now. You will first begin by each writing a letter of apology to Miss Butterworth, exploring in depth why the debasement of females by males is wrong, and what punishments you have received for your errors. You will then write a letter to her parents, detailing the same. And finally, you will write a letter to your own parents, explaining to them in explicit detail why, as of tomorrow morning, you are suspended from Hogwarts for two weeks!"

Severus thought the boys' pallor could not get any greener, but he was wrong. One of them dry-heaved with shock. The portrait of Albus Dumbledore watched all of this over his steepled fingers, nodding imperceptibly.

"I will, of course, be checking your letters for the use of spelling, grammar and punctuation. Once I am satisfied with your literacy, you will hand deliver the letters to Miss Butterworth before heading to the owlery. I suggest you take great care with your letters, as you will not be returning to your dormitories until they are perfect." He swept back around the desk and stalked to the door.

"Well? What are you waiting for?" he snarled. "Get your pathetic hides down to the dungeons now!"

With another fearful glance at each other, the boys followed their formidable head of house back down the spiral staircase, who swept down them like a black tempest.

Sarah had raced to the kitchens and Floo'd home as quickly as she could. Once there, she removed her dress robes and changed into a delicate pink matching set of bra and knickers, which had smatterings of black lace detail. She slipped a black see-through robe over this and rounded off the outfit with a pair of delicate black marabout-tipped, kitten-heeled slippers. She checked her hair and make-up in the mirror, pouting and striking seductive poses. *Purr. Sex kitten.* She made a clawing gesture at the mirror, giggling, before tottering down stairs to wait in her lounge.

Sarah never felt especially beautiful, apart from when in Severus' company. It wasn't that he complimented her; in fact, Severus rarely made verbal gestures of approval. It was from his look and his touch that she felt validation of how attractive he found her. His eyes would glitter with mischievous sensuality during their bantering sessions, and sometimes, at the peak of their love-making, after Sarah's eyes closed in abandon, she would open them to find him staring at her intently, the most beautifully studious look on his face, as if trying to memorize every crease and every detail. Severus' touch to her felt reverential, and he never made her feel like anything less than a goddess with each caress.

She took a deep breath. It was quarter-to eight. Fifteen minutes to go. When she had slipped the vial into Severus' pocket, she could feel the beginnings of his physical reaction to her and was sure the electricity she felt between them was not merely one sided. She knew she had taken a big risk confronting Severus in such a brazen manner, but she felt confident that she'd done all she could to change his mind. *So why do I feel so nervous?*

Eight o'clock came and went; Sarah stirred agitatedly on the sofa, chewing at a fingernail. *Maybe he's caught up. Maybe he was watching the memories. Maybe he's washing his bits thoroughly in light of what's to come.* She gave a grin at the thought of Severus lathered up in the shower; that was a sight she would never tire of.

Nine o'clock came and went, and by now she was feeling the stirrings of despair and its murky bedfellow, doubt. It had been a stupid idea. What was she thinking, dressing up like Morticia Addams on acid, firing jinxes at him and making demands on his time? He'd already pushed her away several times before; shouldn't she just take the hint?

At ten o'clock, Sarah was in floods of tears. He was not coming. Why would he? She curled up into a ball, sobbing, Bernard nestling beside her as if to provide comfort. By the time the hour hand had reached half-past, she had fallen into a fitful sleep, the tears still damp on her face.

Chapter 40

Chapter 40 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Severus had been so apoplectic at the behaviour of the two boys in his house, he was barely aware of the hours going past. By the time he'd finally deemed the boys' letters to be acceptable, escorted them to the Hospital Wing and then the owlery before leading them back down to the dungeons, it was almost eleven o'clock.

Severus looked at his fob watch with a rush of panic once the boys were safely ensconced back in the Slytherin lair. *She'd said one hour!* Cursing himself, and the two evil little brats he'd just had to waste his evening on, he fled through the grounds to reach a place where he could Apparate safely to Spinner's End.

As he fled across the school ground, the dread began to creep into his stomach. She'd given him an ultimatum, and he'd failed to turn up. She may well never forgive him for that. She'd laid herself emotionally bare, took a big risk, and had specifically given him one hour, or she'd never contact him again. Severus' stomach lurched. Had he blown it? Had he blown his chance for happiness by punishing two pathetic little dunderheads for their cruelty? He shuddered with apprehension before Apparating with a smooth pop.

* * *

Sarah had fallen into a fitful sleep on her sofa with her cat on her lap, the tears still damp on her face. She still wore her seductresses outfit, slippers and all.

Bernard shifted position on her knees, standing upright, apparently alerted by something in the other room. The movement and shift in weight caused her to open her eyes. Bernard was staring at the open door which led into the black of the kitchen, the slits of his pupils dilated massively. His tail was flicking from side to side in agitation.

"Bernard, what is it?" she mumbled, squinting in the light.

Bernard's tail continued to flick, and he let out a little growl.

"What, is it that bloody grey cat again?"

She saw Bernard's hackles rising as his hair began to stand up along his back. It wasn't unknown for other cats in the neighbourhood to try their luck by sneaking through the cat flap to steal food; Bernard usually won these territorial encounters, however, and was vocal enough normally to keep the most persistent offenders out.

Seeing that her old cat made no attempt to move, but continued to make strange growling sounds anyway, she moved him off her lap with a sigh and walked into the dark kitchen, expecting to find the cheeky grey Persian from down the road. To her chagrin, there was nothing there. She frowned. She was just about to turn back into the lounge when she felt warm breath on her neck.

"Forgive me," breathed the familiar baritone in her ear.

Sarah jumped with a gasp. "Severus?"

She felt an invisible hand entwine in hers and another turn her gently to face him.

"I would have been here hours ago, if I could. Please believe me."

She saw his form beginning to materialise in the gloom, becoming ghostly as it solidified. She was too shocked to respond, and her head felt fuzzy from being asleep. Was she dreaming?

He reached a hand to her face and felt the damp skin from her tears.

"I've hurt you," he said quietly, tracing her cheek with the pad of his thumb. "And not for the first time, either. I'm sorry, Sarah."

She swallowed; her throat was raw with emotion. She couldn't speak.

Severus reached into his pocket and withdrew the vial she'd given him earlier. Taking her hand, he placed it in her palm and closed her fingers around it.

"That was a wonderful and difficult thing you did for me, giving me your memories," he murmured, his low voice like a silken caress. "You offered yourself to me in a way no other ever has; it was the equivalent of offering me your very soul. But I do not want to take these memories from you. We will find out everything about each other, in time. You've shown me your unwavering trust in me, your unwavering acceptance, and your unwavering love. I'm sorry I pushed you away."

More tears started to flow, now. Sarah was overcome by his presence, by his words, by what they meant. She began to tremble.

"Please don't cry. I never want to make you cry again."

With that, Severus leaned down and kissed her face gently, kissing her tears away, folding his arms around her and feeling her quiver like a frightened animal in the cool kitchen, dressed only in her delicate underwear.

"I love you," he breathed, the tip of his nose tracing her cheek as she let out a sob and clung to him as if her very life depended on it.

"Severus," she murmured into his chest, holding him tight lest he slip away from her like a shadow.

Severus held her close, stroking her hair, and felt a little overwhelmed himself by her reaction to him. It was a far cry from the confident vamp who challenged him on top of the Astronomy Tower. She must have convinced herself between then and now that he felt nothing but contempt for her and that he wasn't going to come this evening. She'd had hours to work herself up into a state. He closed his eyes at the thought of causing her pain and squeezed her tighter.

They stayed in the gloom of the kitchen together, Severus holding her, rhythmically stroking her hair as he felt her sobs become less and less and her body stop trembling. Eventually, she looked up at him with shining eyes, and he cupped her face in both hands.

"Kiss me," she gasped, searching his eyes. It was a plea, a desperate need for reassurance. He felt his heart clench from her insecurity and vulnerability.

Carefully, Severus moved his face close to her hers, grazing her lips with his own, slowly and gently kissing her, trying to put as much emotion into each movement as he possibly could. He heard her sigh before kissing him back with gradually increasing ardour. His hands skimmed the sides of her body, feeling the warmth of her skin through the see-through material of her robe before tugging the draw string and letting it fall open.

Sarah felt the rush of cool air against her skin as Severus' fingers brushed in circles over her hips and stomach, all the while kissing her gently. Severus heard her moan into his mouth as she kissed him back and could feel the beginnings of gooseflesh on her skin as his long fingers swept up the small of her back.

"Take me to bed," she murmured between kisses.

Severus pulled her close to him and, as they kissed, Apparated to her bedroom. With a quick wave of his wand behind him, he lit the candles on the sideboard. With another, he vanished his clothes, leaving him naked. Flicking his hand, he sent both his wand and the vial of her memories floating gracefully to her dressing table before turning his attentions once more to her.

Sarah gazed up at him, half-naked in the candlelight; his black eyes shone with desire as he scanned her body, and the intensity of his gaze alone made her gasp. He stepped forwards, embracing her, tangling a hand in her thick brown hair and pushing his body against her. Sarah could feel the softness of his smooth pale skin and the urgent pressing of his manhood as his arousal began to grow. She buried her face in his chest and breathed in his scent, the masculinity radiating off him and making her feel small and feminine in comparison. She ran a trail of kisses over his chest, pausing over his heart, her hands slipping over his hips and squeezing them. Involuntarily, his hips thrust forwards, nudging her with his ever-growing bulge once more, yet he made no move to accelerate things.

Some women may have been frustrated at having to take the lead, but Sarah understood more clearly than ever that Severus would not do anything to her without her explicit consent and would doubt himself enough until she gave herself to him fully. He would never hurt her or force her to do anything she didn't want to. In her eyes it made him both a little vulnerable and a complete gentleman. It also had the added advantage that he would often literally leave her begging for more.

From Severus' point of view, he always marvelled at how much she wanted him, and how urgent she often sounded. He was unused to being wanted, either physically or emotionally, and her unashamed desire made his heart glow.

"Make love to me," she whispered, gazing into black pools of his eyes. Looking into them gave her a feeling of vertigo, the feeling of falling and not being able to stop. She wanted to fall forever into the abyss of his onyx gaze.

In response, Severus smoothed a strand of hair away from her face and gave her a swift kiss on the lips before running his hands behind her back and unclasping her bra. He teased the straps down her arms, never once breaking eye contact. With a little shrug, it came loose, and Severus slowly drew it away and cast it to the floor, exposing her breasts.

"You're so beautiful," he muttered, running his fingertips from the sensitive skin on her neck all the way down to the pink buds of her nipples. Sarah's heart swelled with love; never before had she felt so exposed, but never before had she felt so safe and secure and attractive. His magic fingers caressed her unhurriedly, and she closed her eyes, enjoying his touch.

Once he had her gasping, his hands slipped down to her knickers, running his fingers along the waistband. Gently, he manoeuvred her to the edge of the bed, making her sit and kneeling in front of her before slowly peeling off the scrap of pink satin covering her sex. He discarded it without a second look then parted her knees gradually with both hands. Sarah inhaled sharply at the cool air and from the concentrated scrutiny he was now lavishing on her most sensitive area.

He idly circled her core with one finger, noticing her hips rise to his touch, before deftly parting her silken folds with splayed fingers and reaching his mouth to meet them. He breathed in her scent, her musky marine smell calling to him, drawing him to her. With careful, measured laps, he began to lick her, savouring her sweet taste. His tongue danced and skimmed across her lips and then found the pearl of her clitoris buried beneath. Sarah moaned at his discovery, her back arching as he swirled and flicked, teasing her onwards to yet more pleasure.

"Severus..." she moaned with delight as his tongue darted rapidly from side to side, sending fresh waves of pleasure over her. He noted how her hips began to thrust in time with his lapping, and he knew she must be close.

"Please," she cried after a mere minute, "I need you inside me!"

Severus felt himself twitch at her pleading, his heart hammering fast with desire. Swiftly, he stood and covered her body with his own. His manhood was grazing her entrance as he again stared deeply into her eyes.

"I love you," he murmured, easing himself inside her, eyes locked together.

She whimpered as he filled her completely. It took only a few thrusts combined with some deft circling of his nimble fingers before she was arched into her climax.

"I love you," she managed to breathe in return, between her gasps and soprano moans.

Severus held himself inside her as she spasmed and gripped around him, watching her face intently and placing delicate kisses all over her face as she recovered. *I love you, Sarah Shaw*, he thought, slowly beginning to thrust again.

Chapter 41

Chapter 41 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Severus swept through the headmistress's office, removing the log book from one of the many creaking shelves and placing it with a thud on the desk. The responsibility of deputy head came with tedious administration that Minerva herself did not want to deal with. Still, he couldn't complain too much; the daily logging of incidents and detentions was still a thousand times better than having to grade another diabolical Potions essay. He opened the weighty red leather-bound tome and reached for the speckled quill resting neatly in the brass inkwell.

"You handled the episode with Lock and Bingham yesterday very well, Severus."

Snape glanced up at the portrait of Albus Dumbledore, his eyebrow quirked. He'd been aware of the old man watching the conversation with curiosity, but he hadn't expected approval of his actions. Not that such approval was needed, or even wanted, of course.

"It was no less than they deserved. No doubt, if Minerva had been the one to punish them, they would have escaped with nothing more than a week's worth of detentions and bruised egos," he sneered.

Albus inclined his head slightly, running a thoughtful hand over his long, white beard. "Yes, you may well be right. However, in this particular instance I can't help but feel the end justified the means. I think that, under the circumstances, you were positively lenient."

Snape gave a little cough of surprise. The word "lenient" in reference to his teaching style was somewhat of an oxymoron.

"What do you propose would have been the appropriate course of action? Expulsion? Thumbscrews? Crucio?" he asked, voice heavy with sarcasm.

The corner of Albus' mouth flickered with a smile. "I would not have been surprised if you had expelled the two of them for their misdemeanour; I seem to recall you once were going to expel Potter and Weasley for a comparatively minor offence. What was it now? Ah yes, the Whomping Willow incident... Could it be you're mellowing in your old age?"

Snape glowered up at the former headmaster, for the insinuation of the delivery of a lax punishment, the reminder of his intense dislike of the two insufferable Gryffindors, and at the jibe regarding his age.

"It appears that age and even death has not stopped your incessant meddling and offering of unwanted opinions," he growled.

To his chagrin, Albus chuckled softly at this. "I am trying to pay you a complement, Severus. Your judgement was sound, and you made a bold statement to the whole school at the cost of your own house. Not an easy feat, I should imagine."

"I've done worse," he muttered darkly in response under his breath, loading the quill with ink and beginning to scribble away inside the ledger. For a few seconds, all that could be heard was the scratch of feather against parchment.

"Minerva tells me Sarah had a productive first day of lessons," Albus continued lightly.

Severus closed his eyes momentarily and exhaled slowly. He could see where this was leading.

"Filius was almost levitating with excitement at her progress at dinner," he replied, turning the page with a swooshing sound and continuing to scrawl.

"And how is Sarah?" the old man asked, steepling his fingers and looking over the rim of his spectacles.

"I'm not her keeper," Severus spat, dipping the quill rather more forcibly than necessary back into the inkwell and causing a few drops of blue ink to splatter on the mahogany desk.

"No, but you are her lover."

Severus glanced up again at the portrait and swallowed, unable to refute this statement. He saw Dumbledore's face light up with a triumphant smile at the lack of protest.

"So you have made up? I'm so happy for you both. I had rather hoped Sarah would be able to cope with your past, and she hasn't let me down."

Severus narrowed his eyes suspiciously at the old man.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked slowly.

Albus coughed. "Well, we know now that she is worthy of you, Severus."

Snape blinked several times, his mind racing. Then, his expression changed into a mask of outrage as the light bulb went off in his head.

"You meddling, geriatric old fool! You actually WANTED her to see my memories, didn't you? You wanted her to find them!" he thundered.

Dumbledore looked down sheepishly, tying a knot in the end of his beard.

"I admit, it was a very risky thing to do, to test her in such a way," he conceded carefully. "But I knew from the moment I met her that you have a great bond together, even if you would be reluctant to acknowledge it. If she passed this test, it would prove to you that she really loved you. And it worked, didn't it?" he asked evenly, blue eyes glittering.

Snape ground his teeth, making his jaw muscle flex.

"You interfering, reckless, manipulative bastard!" Snape shouted. "You had no right, NO RIGHT, to mess in my affairs in such a way! How dare you?" he began, sliding the chair back across the floor and stalking towards the painting.

"Severus, my boy, you have every reason to be angry," Albus retorted, holding his hands up in a gesture of surrender. "Once again, I say to you, the ends justified means. She loves you. You love her. All's well that ends well... I think I remember reading that somewhere." Dumbledore's blue eyes twinkled benevolently at the man he'd come to regard as a son.

"You could have ruined the best thing that's ever happened to me!" Snape's eyes glowed fiercely up at the old man.

"With respect, Severus, I rather feel you were on the cusp of doing that yourself," Albus replied quietly.

Snape fought the urge to blast a hole in the painting with his wand with exasperation. Once again, the meddling old man was right on the money; once again, he took a risk and it paid off. And, once again, his judgement of character was impeccable.

"I've a good mind not to invite you to the wedding for this," Severus muttered, tearing his eyes away from the painting wearily.

Albus' bushy white eyebrow sprang high up his wrinkly old forehead in surprise.

"You've proposed?" he breathed, face full of expectation.

Snape inwardly cursed himself for letting his secret slip. "Not yet. But soon."

Albus' crinkly blue eyes filled up with tears of joy. "Dear Severus, my dear, dear boy," he began, choked with emotion.

Severus glanced up at the portrait. The sight of Albus' joy on his behalf nearly made a tear spring to his own eye. He swallowed hard; now was not the time for silly displays of sentiment.

"I swear, Albus, if you interfere in my relationship one more time, I'll rip your portrait off the wall and feed you to the Aramantula!" he snapped, turning on his heel and billowing towards the door.

"Dear boy," was all that Dumbledore could whisper in return, mopping up his tears with the end of his long white beard.

Chapter 42

Chapter 42 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

"Severus?"

Sarah felt him smile into her hair as he entwined his fingers through hers.

They were lying in bed, in his quarters at Hogwarts, after enjoying another enthusiastic lovemaking session. They dozed happily with their bodies wrapped together like spoons. Severus had thoughtfully arranged for her Floo connection to be linked to his quarters so they could come and go as they pleased. Sarah loved his quarters and found them surprisingly opulent, as opposed to his tired and lived-in cottage at Spinner's End. Being at Hogwarts also had the added advantage of immediate room service and immaculate housekeeping, care of the ever-diligent House Elves. It almost felt like making love in a high class hotel, only better.

"Hmmm?" he answered sleepily.

"Please don't shut me out again." She squeezed his hand tightly. Severus planted a kiss on the top of her head and sighed.

"I am an unapproachable, mean, difficult, stubborn, defensive and secretive man. I cannot pretend to be something I'm not, Sarah. I am also unused to sharing either my secrets or my life with anyone. I cannot guarantee I won't fly off the handle again. What I can guarantee, however, is that I love you, and I will kill anyone who tries to harm you." He tightened his grip on her hand as he said the last few words.

Now it was Sarah's turn to sigh.

"You have such a low opinion of yourself, Severus," she replied quietly, stroking his thumb with hers. "You're brave, strong, generous, sensitive, protective, loyal, and you carry the weight of your guilt and shame around like Atlas himself."

Severus made a snort of derision into her hair as she spoke. He loved her hair; it was thick, glossy, and always smelled of roses.

"I mean it, Severus. You need to give yourself a break. We all make mistakes, and I know you have paid for yours a thousand times over. It's time to let go of all those horrible things and stop punishing yourself for things you cannot change. I know you always make yourself out to be the bad guy, but you are a true gentleman and one of the most moral people I know. I love you so much, and I wish you had a bit more faith in yourself."

There was silence for a few minutes as Severus took this in. He was so used to people seeing the bad in him and seeing people quick to judge him on what they thought they knew of him. Sarah, meanwhile, seemed to only see the good. For a long time, Severus was unsure if any good remained within him anymore, he felt so tainted with his actions. One look at Sarah and he knew that it was her that brought out the goodness in him. She relentlessly gave him the love he had craved for so long, love he craved but felt he never deserved. He squeezed her tighter.

After another minute, he spoke.

"Sarah," drawled his rich, smooth baritone.

"Hmmm?" she answered, kissing his fingertips. She loved his hands; they were so big and masculine, yet pale and perfect. His fingers were long and smooth, like they had been carved from marble by Rodin himself.

"The first Quidditch match of the season is on Sunday. Hufflepuff versus Gryffindor. Regrettably, I have to referee, due to Madam Hooch's unfortunate bout of Wizard Flu. Would you like to come and watch?"

Sarah turned over in bed to face him, looking up excitedly.

"I get to see you on a broom?" she asked, her eyes gleaming with glee.

Severus smirked. "That is correct. You will get to see my formidable flying skills."

Sarah giggled. "Modest, as ever."

"Of course." He smirked again, running a hand through her thick hair. "So, do you want to come?"

"Wild Thestrals couldn't keep me away," she replied, mouth twitching into a smile.

Severus chuckled and pulled her into an embrace. His little Muggle-witch. He couldn't remember the last time he felt so happy.

Over the following days, Severus had patiently explained the rules of Quidditch to Sarah so that by the time Sunday came, she knew what to expect.

It was a bright and breezy September Sunday morning as Sarah strolled across the school grounds with Professor McGonagall and her rabble of excited Gryffindors. She was surrounded by a sea of red. Flags were waved, and between the chatter and laughter, the pupils sang various chants and songs as they climbed the steep viewing stands.

"Gryffindor, Gryffindor,

The greatest team you ever saw,

Listen to the lions roar,

Gryffindor, Gryffindor..."

Sarah took her place next to Minerva, feeling butterflies in her stomach. The excitement was palpable and contagious. They chatted amiably, Minerva informing her that Gryffindor lost narrowly to Slytherin last year and therefore the pride of her house was at stake this year. Sarah smiled to herself as she imagined how delighted Severus must have felt to have triumphed over his rival house. Minerva's look of disapproval said it all.

Within minutes, the teams streamed onto the pitch in rows, red on the left and yellow on the right, each carrying a broom. They were led by, Sarah noticed as her stomach flipped, Severus, who was dressed in referee clothing and holding a sleek-looking black broom of his own in one hand and a heavy-looking trunk under the other arm. He was wearing black jodhpurs and black boots, with a vertically-striped black and white long-sleeved top tucked in. On top of this he wore a short black cape with a white lining. Sarah's mouth fell open; she had never seen him in anything other than robes or his usual smart suited attire. She admired the way the jodhpurs clung to his long legs and, with a flash of arousal, hugged his groin. It left very little to the imagination. Sarah glanced at Minerva and saw the older woman's head tilt slightly to the side, one

eyebrow raised. She resisted the urge to giggle and flicked her eyes back to the pitch.

Severus was saying something inaudible to the captains of each team, and they shook hands. Then he blew his whistle, and the teams kicked off from the ground, circling high. Snape opened the crate and released the struggling Bludgers, which whizzed up into the air and were swooped upon by the Gryffindor Beaters. With a blast from his wand, he sent the Quaffle soaring up, which was captured skilfully by a Hufflepuff Chaser. Finally, he released the tiny Golden Snitch and blew his whistle once again to signal the start of the game. He then swung his long leg over his broom and took off into the sky.

The crowds started to roar as the game began. A loud, male voice began a running commentary, echoing across the stands. Sarah was aware of the blurs of the balls as they zoomed across the pitch and the speed of the skilful players as they pursued them, but all she could focus on was the dark referee. She watched as the wind whipped his black hair across his face, hunched over his broom, dodging the balls and weaving in and out of play. He really was a superb flyer.

"... A beautiful shot on goal there by Jameson of Gryffindor, only to be blocked by a terrific dive by Jones of Hufflepuff..."

The game continued with aplomb, and in truth Sarah found it difficult not to be distracted by watching her beloved own the sky like a hawk. Points were scored tit-for-tat, and the game was so quick Sarah wondered how any of them stayed on their brooms. She watched Severus swerved to avoid the passing Quaffle before rounding and following the game once more. *I have to talk him into giving me a lift,* she thought with a grin.

Twenty minutes later, it was all over. Hufflepuff caught the Snitch but Gryffindor won by twenty clear points. Sarah smiled as Minerva took off her hat and swung it wildly around her head with joy. She noticed Severus' look of displeasure as he landed gracefully on the pitch and began to pack up the trunk, which seemed to be acerbated further by the raised voices chanting:

"Gryffindor, Gryffindor,

With Hufflepuff we wiped the floor,

Listen to the lions roar,

Gryffindor, Gryffindor..."

Someone's going to need cheering up tonight, she thought, making her way back down the wooden steps behind the boisterous crowd.

Chapter 43

Chapter 43 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Severus stared at the mirror intently, watching the figure of Sarah rising and falling on top of him. He saw her back arch and her thick mane of nut-brown hair cascade down her back as she tossed her head in pleasure. He watched her grind down upon him, then pull herself up off his thick length and grind down again, her hands on his pale shoulders the whole time. He saw his own pale hands reflected back at him, stroking the smooth skin of her spine and grabbing first her hips and then her arse for leverage.

He allowed his eyes to close as he lost himself in the sensations, hearing Sarah's little whimpers of pleasure in his ear. He moaned softly and then wrapped his arms around her, embracing her, as she rode him onwards to climax. Within minutes they had both reached their peak, Sarah pushing down on him as his hips thrust up, as he filled her tight space with wave after wave of his seed. White stars exploded behind his eyes as his growls intermingled with her urgent moans, and he held her ever closer as the intensity of their desire slowly ebbed away.

He nestled against her soft, heavy breasts, his breathing shallow, fronds of black hair sticking to his face. How had he almost let this wonderful woman slip away from him? He loved her, he needed her, and he had come to realise, she soothed his soul. Each passing day with Sarah was like a balm to his anguish, after his long years of torment and guilt. Being with her was so natural, even though they had met and initially coupled in such bizarre and extraordinary circumstances. She was like a breath of fresh air, and she brought out the goodness in him. He hadn't felt so free, so relieved of burden, for a very long time. He let himself be enveloped by her arms and sighed happily as she placed a kiss on his damp forehead.

Earlier that day, Sarah had crept into the woods at Spinner's End to perform a ritual. She felt as though she had been neglecting her Wiccan roots, although she totally loved her newfound wizarding abilities. The image from her very first Divination lesson had haunted her but she needed to wait for the right time in order to take action. And, at last, the time was here: Mabon, the Wiccan sabbat of the autumn equinox, with its association with protection, harmony and balance.

Sarah laid out her tools and altar as usual in the little clearing, hanging her flag in the same tree. The leaves were now turning a wonderful reddish-yellow-colour. All around her were the symbols of autumn, from the colours of the trees to the slanting golden sunlight of the evenings. On the altar she placed an apple and some grains to symbolise harvest. As the air held now held a freshness, she covered her body in a cloak of russet for the duration of the ritual.

Sarah wanted to heal Severus, both his heart and his mind, and she decided to use the element of fire to represent both. She built a little fire in the centre of the clearing, surrounded by stones. Once she had everything just so, she held her wizarding wand above her head and composed herself before drawing the circle. She wondered if her wizarding magic would affect her ritual, as it did in the Great Rite.

Sarah stood in front of the fire, inhaling and exhaling deeply and slowly, in order to reach a meditative state. With eyes closed, she envisioned a pure white light surrounding her. Now she had entered her magical state, she ran her hands over and around the flames, again and again. She focused on the image of Severus, his pain, his anger, his guilt. Sarah felt the energy of the element flowing through her and the heat of the flames. She imagined the strength of their love, burning bright, scorching away the hurt and the pain. She saw in her mind's eyes the healing fire flowing into his heart, cleansing and purging him. She visualised him letting go of the past and of the pure healing energy rushing through him. She continued to do this over and over until a feeling of peace came over her.

Sarah closed her eyes, inhaling and exhaling once more, swirling her wand into the shape of the sacred pentagram. She opened her eyes to see a golden vapour trail where she had drawn the star, gradually fading away like dust motes caught in the sunlight. Instinctively, she knew that her ritual had worked and that it was indeed touched with her wizarding magic.

Later, as she strolled back to her cottage, she reflected on how she would complete her ritual. She would make love to him, slowly and carefully. She would give each kiss

and caress meaning. She would soothe his body as well as soothe his soul. She would convey the depth of her love with each display of desire. She would show him, Severus Snape, that he deserved every drop of love and adoration she could lavish on him. Smiling, she swung round the corner and made her way up the garden path.

Chapter 44

Chapter 44 of 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

Severus was in his study, grading essays on defensive spells. September had leaked into October effortlessly and without incident, and Severus found himself feeling more relaxed than he had felt in years. He was beginning to sleep more peacefully; his recurring nightmares involving his near-death experience and the Dark Lord's return had all but ceased. He had a job that he loved and a woman that he loved even more. Severus was, dare he even admit it to himself, happy. But he was also afraid.

He was afraid that, at any moment, this happiness would be taken away from him. Severus was not used to feeling happy and content, and even though he was enjoying the feeling of normality, he was still afraid he might ruin it once again, just like he ruined things with Lily.

Lily. He had hardly thought about her for months. It had seemed impossible at one time that he could ever give his heart to anyone else, such was the hold she'd had on him. Severus was starting to realise that he had never felt worthy of her and that part of his attraction to her was that she represented something he wanted to be, but never was: popular, kind, socially accepted, and inherently good. Severus has always thought himself as bad and tainted. His father's abuse coupled with the bullying he suffered as a child and his subsequent slip into the Darkness had been a reflection of how he'd been treated, and therefore how he perceived himself: worthless, ugly, a misfit, and evil.

Lily had pushed him away because she had thought he'd been evil, too. That had caused him so much pain he'd cried at night for weeks. The reason he had invented the Muffliato charm was so that his dorm mates could not hear him sobbing his poor, wretched heart out, night after night. Lily, the one person who ever saw a scrap of good and decency in him, through his mistake, viewed him as the piece of scum that he was. What hope was there for him after that?

But as for Sarah... Sarah did not run from him. She had seen the worst of him, the most atrocious act he had ever committed, and yet she stayed. He had been cruel and nasty and he tried to push her away, but she had come back to him. She did not think he was evil. She thought him brave and strong, and... good. And she loved him. It made his heart swell each time he thought of it.

He stopped scratching on the parchment with his quill and placed it on the desk with a small sigh. His mouth twitched as he noticed the black and white photograph propped up on his desk. He loved that picture. It was taken spontaneously, just a few days ago. They were on the sofa in Sarah's house.

He'd bought her a wizarding camera after much pleading on her part for him to show her one, not owning one of his own. The picture was taken at an angle because she had been holding the camera up, fooling around with it, whilst he was behind her, arms around her, burying his head in her neck to distract her and to not get into the picture. Bernard, her old tabby cat, marched back and forth across her knee, mewing silently and generally being a nuisance with his tail getting in the way. She was smiling and laughing, and he would look up occasionally, his black eyes glittering, a smile creeping on his face, too.

A smile formed on his mouth now. This was his family. He looked more happy and relaxed in that picture than he had done in years. It was difficult to believe it was the same man as the surly looking one in the annual school photo taken last year, hanging in the entrance hall. An idea formed in his mind; he could not wait. Pushing his chair to the side, he hurried to the headmistress's office straight away.

"A Halloween Ball, Severus? Are you quite sure?" Minerva's voice was ringing with disbelief, and she was looking at him now with concern. She knew what Halloween had always meant for him: the heartache, the guilt, and the loss. The reminder of his perceived betrayal and the only person he'd ever cared about. The school had always celebrated Halloween with a sumptuous feast and had pumpkins adorning the hall. Severus rarely attended these, even. But a ball?

"Yes, Headmistress. Halloween is a wizarding holiday that even Muggles have heard of and celebrate. It is a specifically magical holiday. We should do more to promote it."

The older woman couldn't have looked more surprised than if he'd awarded fifty points to Hufflepuff. She thought on this for a moment.

"Well, it does seem as if many of our old traditions have been sadly lost by the wayside... When I was a girl, we'd play apple bobbing, forking for apples, and fishing for treacle scones in bowls of flour, before leaving a Sickle in a Pumpkin Pastry outside for the dead. I'm sure the school ghosts would enjoy a bit more of a celebration, too." The headmistress cocked her head to one side. "Maybe we could get that ghost band in to play, what were they called again? Phil Phantom and the Spectres?"

Severus gave a tight smile. "An excellent idea. May I suggest, Headmistress, that we use this ball as a way of crossing over between Muggle and Wizarding traditions also? I believe it may assist both Muggle-borns and purebloods to discover something new."

Minerva was regarding him now with a look that was nothing short of awe. It took her a few moments to respond.

"Severus... that is a wonderful idea! Simply wonderful!" She gripped on to the younger wizard's arm with bony fingers. "Celebrating the traditions of both worlds, to encourage cohesion and understanding by using a familiar holiday..." She looked at him now with such pride and maternal love that he had to look down to avoid her gaze in case he blushed. "I shall get on to it straight away! Inform the faculty, and please get all heads of houses to notify the pupils. This will be the best ball Hogwarts has ever seen!"

Severus smiled as he watched Minerva bustle down the corridor with renewed vim and vigour. One thing was for sure, it was going to be the best Halloween he'd ever had.

Chapter 45

What happens when two types of magic collide? Severus Snape is about to find out...

News of the upcoming Halloween Ball had certainly lifted everyone's spirits around the castle over the following two weeks. For the students, naturally, it was their favourite topic of conversation besides the next Quidditch game of the season, but amongst the staff also the Ball was discussed at length at meal times. Minerva was unnaturally jubilant, and even the ghosts seemed excited. Severus would not show it, of course, but he was very excited too, albeit for a very different reason.

Although Halloween was a celebrated Muggle holiday, it had held such crushing memories for him for so long that it was difficult for him to remember a time when it was associated with anything other than murder, hatred and regret. That's when it hit him, that he had the power to change that. If he wanted to, he could make the date significant for an entirely different reason, one that had memories of joy and light. Sarah had explained to him that Halloween was also a significant date in the Wiccan calendar and was one of the eight sabbats, known as Samhain. This all but sealed his decision to suggest the idea of a Halloween Ball to Minerva. The more he thought about it, the more it seemed like the perfect point in time to erase any last residue of the stain of Lily and his life's sacrifice for her and to start his life afresh.

So now here he was in the Great Hall on the evening of Halloween, clad in his dress robes of deep, lustrous black velvet. The exquisite tailoring set off his tall, lean frame handsomely. Ivy-green silk could just be seen peeking out from the collars and cuffs of his frock coat. His raven hair hung in thick and glossy curtains around his pale face. Although he was usually impeccably dressed, Severus had taken extra special care getting ready this evening. Not that Severus was a vain man, far from it. The reason for his relentlessly smart attire was because he wanted to distance himself from the scrawny, ragged boy he used to be: the one who was always dressed in mismatching second-hand clothes from the thrift shop, picked on for being different, for being poor.

As soon as Severus had money of his own, the first thing he did was invest in smart clothes. He was on first-name terms with Madam Malkin, and he got a Christmas card from her every year, she valued his custom so highly. Severus was not a man to fritter away money on trivial things, but if he bought something, he would buy the best. His generous salary, with additional weighting for his deputy head and head of house duties, combined with his free board for the majority of the year, meant that Severus had more Galleons than he knew what to do with. It was a far cry from abject poverty he grew up in.

In truth, Severus wanted for very little. Apart from his predilection for elegant attire, Severus' other luxuries included books, Potions paraphernalia for his private lab, and the odd case of Firewhisky and elf-made wine. He also had a Dai Rectebit spell cast on his account for several Galleons to go to St Barnabas, the wizarding orphanage just off Diagon Alley, although the Goblins were sworn to the strictest secrecy regarding this particular transaction. Apart from this, Severus had no use for money. He found he enjoyed spending it on Sarah, and that it made him feel good. He knew that Sarah was not used to such generosity from a man and frequently chided him for spoiling her, although deep down she was very touched and knew he was trying to show her his feelings for her, as opposed to buying her love.

Severus looked around the hall and took in the decorations. Massive pumpkin lanterns flanked the teachers' table, which had, for the purposes of the Ball, been turned in to a buffet table. It was laden with bowls of punch and pastries, sausage rolls, sandwiches, cakes, the finest Honeydukes sweets and confectionery, and all manner of sweet and savoury delicacies. Toy bats had been charmed to swoop across the enchanted ceiling, dodging the suspended candles, and thick tendrils of cobweb were draped over every available wall. Students were milling with excited chatter, some gathering around to watch as Professor Flitwick took charge of organising the apple bobbing and other games in one corner.

Severus felt his stomach tighten as he watched the door swing open, but it was just a crowd of fourth-year Gryffindors bustling in amongst a sea of laughter and noise. *Where was she?* Severus hated waiting, and on this night of all nights, the waiting was making him nervous. He grabbed a Butterbeer from a tray that floated past and took a swig, merely for something to do. He winced after he swallowed; he hated Butterbeer. Just then, a happy-looking Professor Sprout joined him at his elbow.

"Trick or treat?" she roared, grinning madly. Severus raised an eyebrow at her attire. She was dressed in a giant bumblebee outfit. No-one else in the whole school apart from the jovial Herbology professor was in fancy dress, but this did not seem to discourage her in the slightest.

"If those are your dress robes, I'd go back to Gladrags and demand a refund if I were you," he replied archly.

Pomona slapped him merrily on the arm. "Don't be such a grumpy Grindylow, Severus! Come and play pin the tail on the Thestral! It's lots of fun!"

Severus fixed her with a look that could stare down a Hippogriff until Pomona finally let him be with a loud "Sulky snake!" resonating in his ears as she waddled off. He wasn't sure what punch she'd been drinking, but it sounded to him like it had been laced with some of Professor Trelawney's finest sherry.

His eyes scanned the room once more until they settled on a small group of female Slytherin sixth years standing nearby, whispering and pointing at him and giggling behind their hands. Severus glowered at them. One blushed, one started to tremble and one covered her mouth with her hands with a tiny squeak. *Such juvenile behaviour, and from my own house,* he groused to himself, draining the Butterbeer and dumping it unceremoniously on the next charmed tray that floated by.

"Someone's getting lots of admiring looks."

Recognising Sarah's voice, he spun around. There she was, looking as lovely as he had ever seen her. She was wearing what looked to be the same sexy satin dress robes she'd worn at the top of the Astronomy Tower the night she gave him her memories, although it looked like they had been charmed into a deep, midnight, Ravenclaw blue. Her hair was pinned up on her head with delicate diamante clips, and she had a fine pendant at her throat. Severus had to remind himself to breathe, she looked so lovely. She smiled at him warmly.

"You look..." Normally so lucid and erudite, suddenly Severus just couldn't find the words. Exquisite? Beautiful? Amazing? Gorgeous? None of these adjectives seemed superlative enough to describe how he felt. Sarah didn't need to hear a single word more from him, however; his hungry gaze told her all she needed to know. She grasped the crook of his elbow and leaned in slightly.

"And you look so delicious I want to strip you off and eat you right here," she purred, smirking up at him under her lashes. Severus' eyes opened wide and a flush briefly crept on to his alabaster skin before he managed to employ his Occlumency to calm himself.

"Cheeky witch," he growled, smirking right back. He composed himself and looked at her face intently. She was smiling at him broadly, and practically levitating with excitement.

"Is there something you want to tell me?" he drawled, wondering what frivolity had captured her imagination now.

She clutched his elbow. "Oh, Severus, you'll never guess what! Minerva owled me and told me to come to her office before coming to the ball tonight. She said she had a proposition for me." She looked up at him again, her face radiating joy.

"Go on," he replied, not entirely sure where this was heading.

Sarah took a deep breath.

"She wants me to teach Wicca! Here at Hogwarts! And I said yes!"

Severus was totally surprised at first. He had thought Sarah would be the perfect replacement for Madam Pince due to her lengthy librarian experience and interest in being an archivist. But teaching? It took him a matter of seconds for the implication to sink into his brain. This was perfect! They could work here, together! Sarah could teach and learn at the same time. She would be immersed in this world, but still get to practice her Wiccan roots. Severus had to employ his Occlumency with even more might, lest he shout out loud with joy. Now was the time. Years of practice meant he was able to return to his usual straight face and keep it looking stoic and stern.

Sarah noticed his lack of enthusiasm and he watched her smile droop, crestfallen.

"Aren't you happy for me? For us?" she whispered. Behind them, the ghost band struck up their instruments and began playing a swing version of Celestina Warbeck's "A Cauldron Full Of Hot, Strong Love."

"Well, this gives us an entirely new dilemma, does it not?" Severus drawled, gazing at her intently, his face revealing nothing.

"What do you mean?" Sarah asked with mounting panic rising in her chest.

Severus shook his head ruefully. "This changes everything."

Sarah's mouth gaped open. Her heart pounded with fear and dread.

"I just don't see how this is going to work." His black eyes bored into green, glinting, enjoying the suspense of her temporary discomfort. "After all, there can't be two Professor Snapes."

He swiftly pulled a small, dove-grey box from his pocket, opened it, and pressed it into her hand. Inside, nestled in a bed of grey velvet, was a ring. It was platinum, with an octagonal diamond in the middle, which was flanked by two emerald-cut sapphires. Either side of the sapphires were two triangular-cut emeralds. It was absolutely the most stunning piece of jewellery she had ever seen.

Sarah's mouth continued to gape as she took in the meaning of this, gazing at the light winking off the incredible ring. A shiver ran down her spine. "Severus... you can't mean..."

"Marry me," he said brusquely, his hands on her upper arms, his fierce, coal black eyes burning into hers. "I love you, and I never want to let you go."

Sarah trembled as shock gave way to pure joy. "Oh goddess, Severus! Yes! Of course I will!"

She swung her arms around his neck and laughed and cried all at the same time. Severus held her tightly and was aware of dozens of pairs of eyes watching him, but he didn't care. This was the happiest moment of his life, and he was going to savour it, gawping dunderheads or no gawping dunderheads.

Eventually, she released him, looking down at the little grey box she still had clutched tightly in her hand.

"Aren't you going to try it on?" Severus asked, taking the box from her. Carefully, he removed it with nimble fingers and took her hand in his. Looking into her eyes with a small smile, he slipped the ring over her wedding finger. It fit perfectly. Sarah watched him for a few moments before launching herself at him with gusto, kissing him passionately right there in the middle of the hall. Severus froze momentarily, but soon he was kissing her back with just as much abandon as students and teachers alike began whooping and cheering.

"I never knew he had it in him," he heard Pomona say to Flitwick loudly. The group of sniggering Slytherin girls looked as if someone had smeared Kneazle droppings under their nose. Minerva flapped her hand in front of her face as her bottom lip wobbled and her eyes misted up with happiness. Almost on cue, Phil Phantom and the Spectres started playing "Love Potion Number Nine," to the deep amusement of everyone in the vicinity.

Later on that evening, Sarah and Severus took a stroll in the moonlight by the lake, arm in arm. The fathomless, still inky water reflected the bright silver orb flawlessly.

Eventually, they stopped at the stump where all those months ago, Sarah had slapped him for laughing at her fear of the Giant Squid, and shortly after, they'd first revealed their feelings about each other. Severus sat on the stump and pulled her towards him. Sarah nestled into his chest, and he squeezed her gently, a bloom of warmth filling his heart. He exhaled through his nose into the cool night air.

"I love you," Sarah murmured, squeezing him back.

"I love you, too," Severus drawled, stroking her hair. Those words had rarely escaped his lips in his forty years of being on the planet. Now he'd said them, it felt like he couldn't say them enough. The change within him over the last few months was incredible. He felt loved. He felt happy. And, wondrously, he felt healed.

"How did this happen? How could I possibly feel so happy?" he mused aloud.

Sarah smiled up at him, the moonlight shining in her big green eyes.

"Magic," she whispered, kissing his nose.

THE END

Author's note:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank every single person who read or reviewed this story. It's my first attempt at writing a novelette, and I've never written anything this long in my life before! It's been amazing to get such good feedback and very encouraging also. I do appreciate you all for sticking with it and for all your support, without it I don't think I would have got to the end. Thanks must go to all the admin team here at TPP also for their patience and for correcting my appalling grammar! Shocking for a Ravenclaw really ;-)

I wrote this story because I became aware of parallels between JKR's magical realm and Wicca, and I was surprised at the crossover. If anything it made me respect JKR's work even more, because she did her research and she did it well (although I noticed she has an irrational hatred of Capricorns!) I also felt, like many of you on here, that Severus Snape deserved a far happier ending than he actually got.

I have added footnotes throughout where I felt it was appropriate, but I thought I'd take a few moments to clarify. Most things I have written about Wicca are true, including the dates and names of the sabbats and their meanings. The only exceptions to this are Sarah's own spells. I chose the name Sarah for the character because it means "Princess" in Hebrew. I thought it sweet that the Half-Blood Prince should find his Princess. I have tried to stay true to "Canon Snape" as much as possible, in terms of his personality and also his background. I have my own theories about the nastiness he would have been involved in as part of the Death Eaters, and yet I find it difficult to believe he would have felt no remorse for his actions. I realise much is open to interpretation with Snape, but I felt it was important to show not just the snarky side, but the human elements too. He may have veered wildly off course at certain points, but it was all for the cause of the plot!

As for Sarah's engagement ring, diamond obviously is traditional for such a ring, but I also wanted to symbolise the colours of their two houses, joined in one ring. The eight sides of the diamond represent the eight sabbats of Wicca, and the triangular shape also has resonance with Wicca in terms of the hierarchy of learning.

I won't go into more detail, but if anyone has anything further to add or to ask about the story, feel free to get in touch.

I am currently co-writing a story with morgaine_dulac which is posted here called "Star Sisters" under the pseudonym sevs_starsisters, if any of you lovely people are interested in reading my latest project.

Other than that, thanks again. Couldn't have done it without you!

