

Heritage

by ZahariaCelestina

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Chapter 1 of 1

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I will always remember the day he walked through my office door. It was a terribly gloomy day in November. I had been successful in keeping November outside by having a bouquet of fresh flowers and bright autumn leaves on my desk, but the expression on that wizard's face simply sucked all the greyness of the sky and the peoples' moods right inside.

What I was about to do that day was a favor to Albus Dumbledore, a close friend of my sister. He had requested my services for one of his employees, a Potions teacher in Hogwarts who had trouble functioning at work because of the intense flashbacks he had. Albus had told me that the flashbacks were even occurring during the day, while the unfortunate wizard was teaching, and students were starting to notice his distress... when it was able to pierce through the soothing effects of the Calming Draughts he had practically been feeding on for years. I was not surprised to hear that the man was dependent on potions; people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder who want to reduce their symptoms often use that strategy... which only adds to their problems, after all. Knowing that the wizard was a Potions master made that assumption even easier to make.

I remember that, after I had closed my office door behind him, he stood in the middle of the room, looking terribly uneasy. When I asked him if something was wrong, he merely crossed his arms over his chest, and gave me a never-ending evaluative glance through heavy curtains of black hair.

"I hope you do not expect me to lie down on one of those ridiculous couches like Muggles do when they... consult," he finally said, very tensely.

"Do not worry, Professor Snape," I replied, hiding a giggle behind a welcoming smile, "I do not use the Muggle Freudian approach at all. The therapeutic approach I use is more down to earth and practical."

"Muggle in origin?" he asked, still standing in front of my desk.

"Part Muggle... part magical. And widely used in England, Germany, and America, if it will reassure you."

"Legitimency?"

"When absolutely needed... but never without my clients' written consent."

My answers seemed to help him loosen up a bit. Still staring at me suspiciously, he sat down, at long last, and accepted having to fill out the usual forms. Getting him to sign them had been quite a challenge; he had requested to read thoroughly each and every copy of the documents that would go in his file, and even insisted that I added two more clauses to insure my complete confidentiality.

The first session I had with him confirmed my doubts; he was indeed suffering from severe post-traumatic stress disorder, in addition to what sounded like social anxiety. Therefore, I was not surprised that he tried countless times to take control over the session's contents, eluding the questions that he did not like and trying to keep us talking exclusively about topics he felt confident about, which were usually related to his magical or teaching skills.

It had taken all of Albus' insistence to make him come regularly, but after a few months, he finally felt confident enough to tell me about his more trying times... notably the interpersonal difficulties he had encountered at school and those he had encountered at home. He spent a long time making harsh comments about the people who had hurt him in the past, and obviously gave me the same treatment when I successfully broke through his argumentation and highlighted his part of responsibility in the countless quarrels he had been involved in. I had been called, in turn, a fatty dunderhead, a skinny bloody genius, a delusional Squib and even, once, a boastful know-it-all (which seemed, for some reason I did not know, to be a particularly insulting remark, for him).

Each time it happened, I knew at once that I was hitting on the sensitive spots. I was used to that kind of attitude, and usually let it slide right off me, even if that patient really knew how to seriously tax my last bits of patience. It became so intense for him at times that he banged his fist on the desk or kicked it angrily, knocking my inkpot and spilling out its contents. The stains are still there today, nearly five years later, and each time I look at them, I remember the incredible challenge he represented for me.

When at long last he had decided to talk, if only briefly, about some decisions he had been forced to make in the past, he mentioned his parents and let slip a thing or two about a certain evening when his life took an abrupt turn. I was glad that he *finally* opted to speak a little more about himself and his mistakes instead of dwelling on those of other people, but the little he said unsettled him greatly. He missed our routine sessions for two weeks in a row, after that. I was not surprised; we had discussed many times how therapy would involve exposing himself to the trying memories he had in order to make them lose their anxiety-provoking impact, and I knew him well enough by then to expect that the vulnerability coming with it was very, very demanding for him. Still, I simply could not do cognitive restructuring if he did not tell me about his thoughts in the first place!

And yet he showed up on the third week. We were in March, and the birds were starting to celebrate the return of spring outside. Their merry chirping clashed completely with the painful glimmer I saw in his eyes, as soon as he came in and sat in front of me. He refused to take his cloak off, and merely wrapped himself tight in it.

"I see that you have not taken any potion before coming, Severus. Thank you. I appreciate that very much," I began, with a gravity that matched his mood.

"It has been tempting, however," he softly said, looking at me with a hint of reproach.

"You had flashbacks again?"

"Yes... every day."

"Which ones?" I gently asked.

"Well... we began talking about something, last time I came here. The flashbacks were about that..."

"You want to tell me about it?"

"Do I have to?" he asked, with a hesitation that suggested me he was ready to cooperate more.

"We have already talked about this, Severus... Your anxiety will not lower if you keep avoiding those thoughts. We do not have to make it too intense, at first. We can--"

"Fine," he interrupted. "If we have to... If you tell me this thing could really work, I will try it. What do you want to know?"

"Tell me about that night... you know, the night when everything changed, for you... Tell me everything that you remember from it... smells, sounds... everything that makes it real again, for you."

"I was sitting in the living room," he began, after a long and trying silence. "The flames were becoming low in the fireplace. It would be too cold in there before long, like always at that time of the year, but I did not care. My mother was sleeping on the couch next to me, tightly wrapped in her favourite shawl. She looks much prettier when she sleeps, you know.... Her face never displays such an expression of sweet peacefulness when she is awake. And that night, her lovely face was even free of any bruise or cut, for a change...."

He let out a long and painful sigh, and then ran an exhausted hand through his hair. Some fell right back into his eyes. Some stayed slick against his temples. I heard him mumble, "Blasted hair... Is it ever going to get less oily?" and then he completely stopped talking. I waited a couple of minutes, respecting his pace, but when I saw that his mind was lost in a place that did not seem too reassuring, I intervened.

"Severus, we have barely begun and I already feel you are somewhere else... Is there something wrong?" I asked, worried by the way his hands instinctively clenched against the armrests.

He did not reply. I was used to his silence, but that one had a peculiar sound that I recognised only too well.

"You are having a flashback right now, is that it?" I asked, leaning towards him.

"Yes," he tightly whispered, narrowing his eyes menacingly.

"Please... tell me about it. I want to see what you are seeing right now..."

"Believe me, you do not," he articulated, very slowly.

"If it is too difficult to put in words, I can use some Legilimency skills and witness it with you... if you let me in."

"I will not do this. I already told you I do not want to," he sharply replied. "I will never sign your bloody parchment."

"Then what can we do?" I asked, repressing a frustrated sigh.

"We are stuck there, I guess," he stubbornly retorted, crossing his arms and legs at once.

"Not of you come into *my* mind..." I suggested. "Would you accept this?"

"What? Me, come into your mind? To see what?"

"To *make me* see... I know that you possess astounding capacities as a Legilimens, Severus. Albus told me about them... and believe me, I am green with envy," I stated, trying to ease him into a calmer attitude by flattering his ego, which was fully deserved, nevertheless. "Bottom line is, I would not be able to break my way in against your will... but I am sure you can transmit some memories very well into my mind, however."

"You would let me enter your mind?" he replied, rising an incredulous eyebrow.

"I would. This is not standard procedure, but I am willing to make an exception. It is just a matter of give and take, Severus. I let go a little control... and you do the same."

He pondered the proposition for several minutes, arms and legs still crossed tightly. I think my prayers even included some of the Muggle gods, in my eagerness for us to

finally move on to what needed treatment the most.

"We can give it a try, if this is the only option," he reluctantly declared. "But I want you to... give me a sign if what you see is too much. Do you only possess Legilimency skills?"

"No, I can push you away if I want to. Or try to do so, at least. Either way, you would know... but it will not happen. I am ready for this," I confidently replied.

"If you say so... but I doubt it."

The wizard took out his wand and plunged his dark eyes into mine. I did not feel as reassured as I sounded, knowing what aggressiveness this man could display when he felt his back against the wall, but I only put my hands on my thighs and tried to take deep breaths. I saw his lips move and utter the incantation, and everything became black.

"You lousy scumbag! How many times did I tell you to get a haircut?" resounded a man's voice in my ears, giving me access to the flashback that had paralysed his thoughts moments ago.

I was struck by the gall that dripped from every word... and by the strange way those words were pronounced, as if that man had stayed in the cold for too long, and his lips were numb and frozen.

"That horrible voice," murmured Severus, as much for himself than for me. "Even then, even as a grown man, it chilled me to the bone. He was drunk again, no doubt. He always took a special pleasure in calling me 'scumbag' when he had had a few too many glasses of Firewhisky... right before he went on with the usual lecture about the rest... the rest of who I was."

The man's voice resounded again.

"Bet you did not clean your room today like your mother asked you to do? Do you do that on purpose? Do you do that to annoy her? Do you realise how hard she works here, cooking your food and cleaning after you?"

"And you, do you realise she cries every day once you are gone? Do you realise it is you who makes her cry like that?" retorted young Severus' voice in my head.

But it only remained a thought. As I watched his face (he looked like a very young adult), appearing clearly in the memories Severus began to let me see, I realised that he still lacked the courage. Even then.

"Not that I feared the blow," he explained out loud, following my train of thoughts. "I had received so many for so many years... One more would not have really made a difference."

He just did not dare to defy him. Something inside him still trembled, still believed that he would not be able to defend himself. Being hit is one thing. Being humiliated in defeat is far, far worse.

"Yes, sir, I do realise that," said young Severus in my mind, answering his father docilely.

"Then why don't you get your lazy arse out of your room and help her from time to time, you idiot, instead of running all those smelly, useless, ridiculous potion experiments! Don't you think she has better things to do than cleaning the mess you leave each time?"

"I never leave any mess!" protested the younger voice in my head, reflecting again only a thought that he had kept inside. *"I never give her any additional work! And I do want to help her, but she does not let me! She is far too scared of you to let me lighten her chores around the house!"*

"Yes, sir. You are right, sir," he articulated softly, through clenched teeth.

"Ah, you're just like your mother. Just good enough to lower your head and obey. She does it better than you, son! And she does it with more gratefulness! She knows she would probably be begging for food right now if I had not taken her out of her hole, the little whore!" continued the infernal voice, cynically.

"Mum is not a whore, you bastard!" he exclaimed out loud this time, giving in to a fury he still did not control well.

My mind went completely black once more... but it was rather because my glance, fully trapped in my client's eyes, only saw the darkness of his dilated pupils, as if nothing else existed beyond them at that precise moment.

"I was still looking at the carpet, that night, and I knew the blow would come," he explained, in a rather dull voice.

Intimately linked with the memories he made me feel, I instinctively tightened all the muscles in my body and locked my jaws together, summoning all my courage to hold every moan, every sob, every yelp of pain inside... just like the young man in my mind was doing. A nasty feeling crept inside of me, telling me that the force of that blow would make plenty of room to just pile those up on top of all the others that were already in there.

But the blow did not come.

I saw him open his eyes. He was alone with his mother, that night, in the living room.

"My father had come back from the tavern two hours ago," he explained, "and, for a change, he was so drunk that he did not even make it past the hall. He had lamentably collapsed on the floor, his cloak still half on and his wand several feet away from his hand.

"He was still there. I could hear him snoring loudly from the corridor. But this time, I would let him stay there. That night, things were about to change. That night, it was not I who would painfully drag him to the guest room, hoping the noise would not wake my mother up. Hoping he would not brutally crash me into the wall and stagger to his bedroom, calling my mother with *that* voice... ordering her to..."

He stopped there. Once again, the right words had trouble finding their way through the tightness of his jaws... not to mention that of his throat. I simply waited to see what he would do, and I think my silence was appreciated; images started unravelling in my mind once again.

I saw young Severus put a trembling hand on his mother's forehead and caress her cheek with his thumb. She moaned softly and stirred a little on the couch, but she did not wake up. After looking at her for several minutes, he carefully got to his feet, left a soft kiss on her forehead, and walked to the hall.

"The monster was still there. The monster was still fast asleep. I was still safe," murmured my patient, mesmerised by the images as much as I was.

The corridor was filled with the acrid smell of cheap alcohol. He walked closer, slowly... not making a noise.

"You seemed to be used to tiptoeing around the house, it seems," I commented, doing the best I could to accompany him through this.

"This is a gait I have mastered with the passing years," he simply replied. "I have learned it from my mother. We were always running around the house like two little mice when the monster was home."

While the older Severus talked, the younger one stopped walking inches away from his father's head. He crouched down and looked closer. His black locks, freckled with silvery white, covered most of his face, but his prominent nose still emerged from them. Loud snoring sounds came out from that nose, and his long and vast back rose with deep, regular breaths. His hands were large and sturdy; they were slightly swollen and their knuckles were covered with scratches.

"He had gotten into a fight again," said my client very tensely. "He probably even started it."

Young Severus seemed to hesitate for a few seconds in the corridor, but finally chose to sit down silently, next to his father's head. He let out another long sigh that gently brushed against his father's hair. After several minutes of silence, a quiet whisper slipped out of his mouth and shut all the words that might have wanted to come out of my patient's lips.

"Father... there are so many things I have always wanted to tell you... and now that I am here, I just do not know where to begin. Why do you drink so much, father? What is that ugly thing you are trying to drown in alcohol? But... then when I think about it, I prefer you drunk than sober. At least, when you drink, there are times when you are just normal, when you just want to laugh. Until you take a few more glasses and become that monster I have to call 'sir'.... Have you always been like that, father? Mum says she loves you.... Were you loveable, at a certain point in your life? When did you transform Mum's love into fear, father?"

"There are so many questions I would like to ask you.... Why did you let me live here if you did not want from me? If Mum had to pay the mediwitch in secret so she would only simulate the abortion spell? What had I done to make you hate me so soon? To make you start hitting me when I was still in my mother's womb?"

New sigh. I saw young Severus bring both of his knees to his chest and encircle his long legs with his arms. My heart started beating faster; the air seemed terribly cold in that corridor, all of a sudden.

"I did try to become worthy of you, father. I did work hard, every single day of my life, just like you asked me to do. I earned the grades you wanted me to earn, I took the lessons you wanted me to take. It only spared me some nasty remarks when you were in a good mood. What did it give me, father? What did you give me, other than pain, fear, and disappointment?"

"Where were you when I needed your advice? Who was there to defend me when I needed your protection? Mum was not strong enough, father, I needed you! Because of you, I had to raise myself alone, to grow up alone, to learn the lessons of life alone!"

His voice became strangled; his throat was definitely too tight. And yet he forced himself to keep looking down, calmly. After a minute or two, his lips stretched into a bitter smile. His eyes were as dry as his mouth when I heard him speak again.

"After all, this is probably the best thing you taught me, father. Loneliness. Being able to defend myself alone. Well, here is something to make you proud; I have learned it well. So well that somebody even recognized my talent. He said he understood me, father, can you believe it? He said that he saw a great potential in me, that he believed in my capacities, and that he had the means to push them to even greater limits than those I know now. He offered me a place at his side, where I will be surrounded by people who respect me. For who I am, father! For all the things I can do! He promised me I will find brothers and sisters at his side. Helping hands when I will need them. Powerful friends who will offer me splendid opportunities.

"Far more than what you have ever offered me, father.

"I know Mum would be disappointed if she knew. That is why I am sitting here, at your side. You would not even care if you really listened to the things I say. But Mum will never know. Mum does not need to know; all she needs to know is that soon, I will come back here and bring her to a place where she will not have to lower herself to suit each and every of your needs all day long. Where she will not be fed with insults, orders, and slaps. If you knew how tired I am to hear you scream! I cannot stand the loudness of your voice anymore!"

"Oh, come on, you dunderhead! Stop snivelling like a girl and take it like a man!" resounded the nasty voice in my mind, emerging from memories that did not belong with those he was showing me.

"Severus? Everything all right?" I asked, getting glimpses of his hands grabbing the armrests again.

"And there it comes again," he said, in a voice that growled with anger. "That urge... that urge to just get up and kick him in the face... kick, hit, push... until exhaustion makes me crash next to him!"

He paused. We were both trapped between past and present... trapped in the intensity of the memories that invaded both of our minds at that moment. I was about to intervene when he spoke again, in a calmer voice.

"No... no, not that. At all costs, not that. All I had to do was breathe, clench my teeth, and let it go away. And it is exactly what I did....," he said, with a sadness that made each word weigh a hundred pounds.

"I... I am looking at you now and I am scared, father," continued young Severus in our minds, after taking a long breath. *"There is so much hatred inside of me that I fear it will all explode, one day, and make me become like you. And I do not want that to happen. I hate the monster you are. I hate the parts of you I see in me when I look at myself! I hate the features you gave me, the voice you gave me, the hands you gave me... I hate the very blood that flows in my veins, for it is a part of you that just will never go away from me!"*

"But I will become a better wizard than you, father. I will not become the feeble man you are. I will gain power and respect, you will see. And rest assured that I will keep thinking of you as I do, always. I will keep you in the back of my mind and spit on the memory of you with each success I have. I do not want you to be proud of me anymore, father. It is I who will never be able to be proud to be your son."

I saw him get up again and walk quietly around his father's body that was still lying motionless on the floor. The snoring had stopped, his breathing was less regular. The wizard was still not moving, so he believed him to be still sleeping soundly. He grabbed his black cloak in the hall closet, buttoned it up, and pulled the hood over his head. With a hand on the doorknob, he looked back one more time.

"From that moment on, I began to see things in another context. I already felt a bit more confident and powerful, standing next to the still form on the floor that did not look so threatening anymore," explained my client, as I saw the corner of his lips curl up... into a sneer.

The young adult I saw in my mind did not look at the furtive tears that rolled down his father's cheek, right under the thick curtain of dark and white hair that covered his face. He only opened the door and walked out into the coldness of the night.

"Just as I closed the door behind me, I heard the old grandfather clock ring," he said, breaking the link between us, leaving only his present image for me to see. "Three rings.... It was time. Too soon. Too late. Too late to walk back. And now... now I am a man filled with regrets. And when you really think about it... that is all I have to offer... regrets."

He had strangely shrunk in his seat, when he stopped talking, but his crossed arms and legs shielded him protectively from any threat that might have swooped down on him during that brief moment of vulnerability. I knew it would not last long that day. I knew he would snap his shell shut sooner or later, but I was patient; it was the beginning of the healing process. I knew he would take the risk to disclose things to me again and, maybe, even start feeling the appeal of opening up again a little.

Regrets were a wonderful thing to offer, in his case. It was better than anger... It was easier to handle than violence, even if it was self-inflicted. He made me hear and see

many awful things afterwards, but I did my best and kept walking at his side through his difficult journey. That long journey only convinced me more that he had a lot to offer, indeed, far better than regrets! Making him see my point of view took a long, long time... and yet, when he said goodbye at the end of our last session, several months later, there was a clearly different feel in the way he shook my hand and nodded a silent appreciation of the work we had done together.

Sometimes, leaving a part of your heavy load behind you has that peculiar effect...

I saw him once more, a few years after that last session. I was in Diagon Alley in a flower shop, choosing colourful flowers for my sister, who had finally been promoted at the Ministry. It took him some time to recognise me (it took me a second; you do not forget that wizard easily after you meet him), but I calmly kept my eyes on the splendid irises that were in front of me. My clients usually feel slightly uncomfortable when they meet me elsewhere than in my office, as if their secrets might suddenly start flashing on their foreheads... or on mine!

Severus hesitated for a few minutes, looking absentmindedly at the flowers around him, but finally opted to remain on his side of the shop. He chose an opulent bouquet of red roses and went to the back of the room to make his purchase. I got a glimpse of a small object falling from his pocket when he took out his wallet, and I was very pleasantly struck to recognise a rattle... which he picked with a left hand that showed me the furtive but unmistakable shine of a wedding ring.

When he walked out of the store, he risked a side-glance in my direction. My eyes were respectfully turned down towards the carnations next to me, but I was giving them a radiant smile nevertheless. He made more than one woman's day, buying those flowers, believe me!

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Reviewing will NOT harm you... I swear! :o) Give it a try!

Since I have read the few glimpses about Severus' past, I have wanted to write about Severus' relationship with his father. It finally "came out"; I hope you enjoyed that little essay! It was originally shorter, but the Spring Faire Festival's rules requested an Original Character, so I changed the context a bit and added a mental Healer to the plot. I hope it works! Reviews are always welcome and so appreciated! :o)

And most importantly (last but not least!), a special thanks to Vaughn, my *amazing* editor, whose generosity, wonderful patience, vibrant intellect, lively sense of humour and invaluable friendship made this short novel possible. Working with you is, as always, an immense pleasure, dearest!