

Lorelai-Stevens

Good & Evil

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Is Evil really always bad? Can Good disappoint us? Is love between the two of them able to remain or is it going to lead everything into disaster? Fanfiction epos about the second war against Voldemort. Katie B. / Adrian P.

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Is Evil really always bad? Can Good disappoint us? Is love between the two of them able to remain or is it going to lead everything into disaster? Fanfiction epos about the second war against Voldemort. Katie B. / Adrian P.

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Foreword

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Foreword

.x.

*One out of six starts a war of whim,
believing he'll go places.
while envy, fraud and sin erodes him,
he can't see what he faces.*

.

*The second out of six averts
what's in for the third
and finds towards the end,
what get's others deeply stirred.*

.

*Revenge and murder lead the third,
forbid her to impart
until one is to derive her
and gently touch her heart.*

.

*He who may seem trivial,
who's jealousy sets fire
will burn down in denial
and betray his heart's desire.*

.

*Five and Six are disparate,
each others actual enemy.*

Decided is their fate,

once to form real unity.

One life is lost, on life is saved.

Evil is hailed, Good is depraved.

They cause dread, they cause war,

they cause fraud and they cause sin

one manipulative Gryffindor

and her courageous Slytherin.

.x.

Tbc.

The Second Order

Good & Evil

Undisclosed Desires | Man in the mirror | Closure

Chapter 1 – The second Order

*"Time is short, and unless the few of us who know the truth stand united,
there is no hope for any of us."*

—Albus Dumbledore

June 24th to 25th, 1995

The Order of the Phoenix didn't exist anymore. According to Lord Voldemort's downfall in October 1981 it had been dissolved – no resistance was needed when there was no black magical villain to fight. The surviving members – those who weren't brutally murdered by Death Eaters – 14 in number, two of them permanently damaged by a curse and one lifelong in Azkaban – were secretly relieved. After all the war, all the losses and all that fear that had grown a constant companion during Voldemort's reign of terror, the Order only reminded them of things they rather repressed.

Piece lasted for almost 14 years.

Fourteen years in which many a Death Eater asserted that he had been under the Imperius curse and would have been unaware of his actions. Fourteen years in which the magical world was able to recover from the fright and horror. Fourteen years in which the Order of the Phoenix was nothing more than a colourless reminder of darker, more desperate times. Times, when there was no room for love, for family, for joy or happiness. Fourteen years to lick the wounds, to recharge power and arm oneself again.

For the second round.

Albus Dumbledore was pacing up and down his office; almost one hour had passed since a distraught Harry Potter had returned into the maze with the corpse of Cedric Diggory in his arm and had confirmed his worst fears. To be particular, the boy had surpassed even his most unpleasant expectations. The Dark Lord had returned and if one was to believe Severus Snape – and there was a good case to believe him – even more powerful and relentless than before. Nothing less than the return of exactly this man would prompt him to summon the "Old Crowd", the former members of the Order, head over heels into his school. Not all the members, of course. After all, the Order was a secret society and that kind of gathering in his tiny office would look highly suspicious. He charged Sirius Black to notify Arabella Figg, Mundungus Fletcher and Remus Lupin. By use of his patronus he had sent the rest of them a brief message to gather at Hogwarts as soon as possible.

It was time to bring the Order of the Phoenix back to life.

Near the desk a rotating silhouette appeared in the open fire. Coughing and covered in soot, Emmeline Vance stumbled out of the chimney and only a split second later the straw-blond Sturgis Podmore followed her example.

"What happened, Albus?" Emmeline asked immediately, tapping the ash from her coat. "Oh, sorry, Sturgis.

I didn't see you coming..."

"One moment of patience, Emmeline, my dear" Dumbledore said. Only seconds later, footsteps on stone were heard. The door to the headmaster's office flew open and Professor McGonagall appeared with a chalk-white face and her mouth cleared into an even thinner line than usual.

"Alastor was taken to the St. Mungo – his condition is stable, according to the circumstances, but he will have to stay there until tomorrow. No wonder, trapped in a suitcase for months, half-starved..."

"Moody?" Sturgis said incredulously. "Alastor Moody?"

"The real one for a change" Professor McGonagall said with a confirming nod and pursed her lips. "I can't believe he had to go through all of this, an eternity in the dark, with his paranoia... And this Crouch-" She stopped and shuddered at the thought.

"Crouch?" Vance asked, now confused.

Suddenly appearing flames announced the arrival of Hestia Jones, who fought her way awkwardly out of the chimney, shook her black, curly hair and spread soot all over the carpet.

"Albus", called Doge delighted, who arrived next and crossed the room with just a few steps to shake Dumbledore's hand. "It's been a long time, yes, way too long... So much to do, so busy- But what happened? Your message was, well, very surprising, I'd say" he reeled in his whistling voice and looked around the room as if he had noticed just now that he wasn't the only visitor. Hestia was talking in restrained volume to Emmeline Vance, to find out why she was here. Dumbledore cleared his throat and where agitated voices had prevailed before suddenly was silence.

"I'm afraid," Dumbledore began unusually tense, "I'm afraid I owe you all an explanation. Please forgive my impertinence to ask you all to even come here late at night, but I have to tell you something that is going to put you in shock..."

Vance threw a nervous glance at Podmore, Professor McGonagall rustled uneasily with her robe.

"Lord Voldemort-" almost everyone in the room winced scared, Podmore broke the strange, glassy object which he had been turning in his hands – "Lord Voldemort" has been helped back to his full power by Peter Pettigrew and has obtained his human body. He's back. Severus Snape, who spies on the highest risk of his life for the Order, is currently attending a Death Eater convention of the second hour, to learn more."

For a moment there was dead silence. Then, when the brains around him had managed to collect the sense Dumbledore's words made, all hell broke loose: Jones gasped for air, Vance stifled a shrill cry, Doge panted breathlessly and Podmore was too thunderstruck to even blink.

"When?" he asked stunned.

"How-" Vance gasped, still in shock, and pulled up a chair to avoid falling over.

"Minerva" Dumbledore said and waved her over to the middle of the office, where they could all hear her clearly. Jones and Vance exchanged puzzled looks. The next hour, the former members of the Order of the Phoenix listened grimly to McGonagall's words, who was reproducing Barty Crouch Junior's story, then they fell silent again. Jones, who had repeatedly jumped up indignantly at McGonagall's report, was now slumped in a chair, staring at one of the portraits with a frozen facial expression.

Dumbledore also kept silent. He knew the story, he had guessed what was going to come and yet – now

that the time had come, it filled him with dread. He had known that Lord Voldemort would come back eventually – he had known it from the moment when the power of the Dark Lord had fallen.

"So, where are we going to go from here?" Doge asked into the awkward silence, his voice trembling. He was scared – of course, who wasn't scared in times like this? Amazing how quickly the old state had returned.

"The ministry must be informed," remarked Podmore and Jones nodded in agreement. "Someone has to go to the Headquarters immediately to give alarm."

"There's no use in that, Hestia." McGonagall disagreed, shaking her head. "Fudge was already here, Albus was talking to him. We cannot hope to get support from the Ministry of Magic. Fudge has expressed himself very clearly." She pressed her lips together and an angry snort through the nose told everyone what she thought of that.

"He isn't planning on doing something?" concluded Vance. "Is he crazy!"

"Must be, if he steps aside so willingly and paves You-know-Who's way to destroy the world and all of us with it." Jones said dryly, clenching her fist.

"Can't Barty Crouch Junior repeat his statement?" Fudge shall interrogate him, there is no way he can possibly doubt his statement." Doge suggested half-heartedly.

"Crouch isn't fit to be questioned, the ministry has already taken care of that very well." McGonagall said morosely. "Fudge insisted to take a Dementor with him as a personal bodyguard and, well, you're able to imagine the rest..."

A shudder went round. To their dismay, they were all able to imagine it very well.

"What about the Potter boy?" Podmore asked doubtfully. "He wase there, right? Fudge has to believe him."

"Oh please, Sturgis, if Fudge thinks of Dumbledore as a fool with way too much free time and imagination, do you believe in all seriousness that he's going to take Potters word at face value?" Jones prevailed on him and crossed her arms over her chest.

"Hardly." Podmore admitted gloomy.

"Potter has yet returned with Diggory's body, right? That should be proof enough, you'd say." Vance frowned.

"Not for the Minister of Magic, obviously."

"But not even Fudge could be that stupid-"

"Well, yes, as you can see-"

"But who besides You-know-Who would have killed him otherwise? Except Potter not a soul was in vicinity."

Podmore put on his There-you-have-it-face.

"You mean, Fudge thinks that Potter himself finished Diggory off?" Vance exclaimed in horror. "Impossible!"

"If he's really going to try to conceal You-Know-Who's return then that would fit his book just fine, wouldn't it? He simply maintains that Potter battered Diggory to death with the Triwizard Cup to win the tournament and he already has his scapegoat to present to the world."

"But-"

"Outrageous discussions aren't going to get us any further at this case," concluded McGonagall the issue harshly and looked at Dumbledore expectantly. "What did you have in mind, Albus?"

Dumbledore folded his arms behind his back. "What I asked you all to come here tonight. The same that has been the only thing we could do in the first place. To put on the best defense against Lord Voldemort and hope-"

Short silence ensued, while everybody was indulging in their own thoughts and Dumbledore strode over the the bar Fawkes, the phoenix, was sitting on. "... hope, that the Order of the Phoenix is able to take him down."

Emmeline held her breath. The Order – or at least what was left of it – was their only chance. Her stomach contracted painfully, as always when she failed to repress the memories of the first Order of the Phoenix. Dearborn, Meadows, Fenwick, the Prewetts... So many of them lost their lives in the fight against Voldemort and his Death Eaters and Emmeline had no doubt that this time it wouldn't be any different. Carefully she looked from Hestia to Elphias, from Elphias to Sturgis and back. Who would have sacrifice themselves like the Potters did? Which families would become extinct like the McKinnons did? And which of them would end up as human wrecks this time as the Longbottoms did? She shuddered. The Order was their only chance. They would fight, cost what it may.

She caught Hestias expectant gaze and nodded almost imperceptibly, before she rose.

"You can count on me" was all she needed to say, they would understand.

Hestia didn't even bat an eyelid once. "Not in hell am I going to miss this!"

"Ditto," Sturgis said lightly. What else? The war would outrun them all sooner or later. Doge nodded quickly. He was too afraid to speak – he feared his voice would fail him service.

A light smile slipped on Dumbledore's lips. He hadn't doubted for a minute that they would go to fight again. Too many friends to take vengeance for, too much was there to lose. He began to pace up and down again. "You know what to do... The Order of the Phoenix has suffered enormous losses, we are currently to few to operate. The first thing we'll have to do will be to convince people of Lord Voldemort's return. Hestia," he said to the Auror, "you're at the Head Quarters, you know best who's willing to join us."

Hestia nodded. She immediately took an entirely different attitude. Her gaze went sharp and she stepped into the middle of the room. "Shacklebolt, Abbott, O'Leary, Laurie, Tonks and Bell." she enumerated in a business-like voice. "Maybe Fawcett and Montgomery, too, but I wouldn't put my shirt on that man." She wrinkled her forehead hard. "I'm almost a hundred percent sure we're going to be able to convince Shacklebolt, Tonks and O'Leary of joining. Moody was Tonks mentor, she is alright, a little scatterbrained, but an ace at camouflage and disguise. Metamorphmagus, she could be useful. Shacklebolt worked at this vampire incident in Greenwich with me, I know his sentiments and he's a quite big shot. If Scrimgeour or Robards are promoted or plan to peg out anytime soon, he'll take over the Head Quarters, I'd bet my broomstick..."

She thought for a moment. "Abbott will be OK too – she may not join us because her daughter Hannah still goes to school and if Abbott is acting out against them openly, she might get her in danger, so she won't take the risk, but she's going to support us at least. Laurie and Bell are fresh from the academy and still a little bit

wet behind their ears, but both come from brilliant families who were already active in the resistance. They're definitely qualified. O'Leary has had her personal differences with the cursed Death Eater pack, so it's only going to be a matter of time until she's in."

"What about Dawlish? Proudfoot and McLeod?" Sturgis suggested and Hestia shook her head vehemently.

"Dawlish creeps deeper into Fudge's butt than he's tall, the little bootlicker. Proudfoot blabs too easy and McLeod misses nerve."

"Forsyth?" Podmore dared to try again and Jones furrowed her brow. "I haven't even thought of her... I have no idea. I'm going to suss her out a bit."

"Very good." Dumbledore nodded sympathetically. "In addition, a bigger part of Arthur Weasley's family will want to join the Order, I suppose, now that almost all of their children have grown up..."

"Poor Molly" murmured Emmeline and Sturgis nodded. The Weasleys had lost enough in the last war.

"The twins look exactly like Fabian and Gideon. I would have thought they were it, if I hadn't known better" said Professor McGonagall. For a moment she paused, then she shook her head, as if she had to shake off a troublesome thought. "Well, we cannot waste time. You-Know-Who might just plan his first move. We all know what we have to do."

They all nodded.

"Well then." McGonagall was breathing deeply through her nose and adjusted her cloak. "Go in and win!"

Tbc.

You-Know-What

Chapter 2 - You-Know-What

,Every beginning is difficult, particularly the beginning of the end.'

- Zarko Petan

The Daily Prophet, July 3, 1995

On the evening of July 2nd, a muggle burglar in Cornwall made one gruesome discovery: On one of his raids at a seemingly inhabited manor of the southern district, he came upon two bodies. The house was completely destroyed, the bodies in a non-portable state, he told the muggle police. Two employees of the Ministry took care of the situation. Although it was obviously murder, the investigation revealed no specific details. There was a loss of rounded half million Galleons. The identities of the victims have not yet been clarified. The Department of Magical Law Enforcement is asking for your help. Information should be directed to the Office for Investigation and Detection.

Reported by Dough Harmish

September 2, 1995

With a loud bang Miles Bletchley let his Potions book fall on the common room table. Adrian Pucey, who was just trying to draw a very complicated character for his Ancient Runes homework, looked up expectantly and raised an eyebrow.

"What's with that?"

Miles pointed to the book. "Apparently the book's previous owner thought it was super smart to add his two cents to every recipe. Something's always crossed out so you can't read it and the cover surely has seen better times." He flopped himself on the opposite seat with a sullen expression. "I gave my own Potions book to Gabriel, because he wasn't able to get one of his own at Flourish & Blotts, so I had to ask Snape for a book. This is the only one left and now I know why." He grunted. "It sucks."

Adrian took the book and opened it at its first page. "*Property of the Half-Blood Prince*", he read with furrowed brow. He looked at Miles. "Who the hell is the Half-Blood Prince?"

Miles shrugged. "No idea. If I wouldn't know for sure that this arrogant little bootlicker Malfoy was a pure-blood, I'd bet my broomstick that it's him. Who else would give themselves such a title? It's bloody stupid if you ask me."

Adrian flipped through the book from cover to cover. As Miles had said, on nearly every page stood hand-written notes on the sides. There were additional tips and guidance to existing recipes. With the feeling that this book would come in handy some time, he closed it and fumbled in his school bag until he found his own Potions book, then he offered it to Miles.

"Here. You can have mine."

"Really?" Miles' mood seemed to improve immediately. He grabbed the still brand new looking Potions book and tucked it into his bag, then his excitement gave way to skepticism. "And what do you expect in return?"

"What makes you think I do?" Adrian wanted to know.

"Well, it would be the first time in ten years that you'd expect nothing in return for a favor." Miles noted. "Do you remember that time when we were eight and asked you to help me smuggle my dad's magic carpet from the attic and you made me promise to give you my sneakoscope? Or in second grade, when I asked you to persuade Sidney Anderson in going out with me and you meant you'd only help me if I'd allow you to write off my Charms homework? Or at the age of ten, when-"

"I got it" Adrian interrupted him flailing. "I'm an evil son of a bitch. Tell me something I don't know. But, as a matter of fact, there really is something you could do for me."

His best friend sighed resignedly. "What would that be?"

"Go to Montague and tell him that I'm not going to play anymore this year." Adrian said quietly and brushed aside black bangs of his tousled hair. "He'll have to get himself a new chaser, whether he wants to or not."

"What?" Miles spit out dumbfounded, who wasn't too fond of the idea of playing in the Quidditch team without his beast friend. "But why?"

"I have my reasons" said Adrian tersely and stared fixedly at his homework while the grip around the pen in his hand tightened and made his knuckles turn white.

"Are you sure?" Miles wanted to know, who completely missed out on Adrian's tension. What else is new? Miles never had been the attentive, sensitive type. He always completely passed up on emotional states and as a comforter he was entirely useless. "Montague's going to kill me! The bearer of bad news is always a bad guest, you know! What am I supposed to tell him?"

"You'll think of something." Adrian assured him and put his books into his bag before he got up. If only he didn't have to think of something. "Invent something. Tell him I had a bit too much fun with women and my healer says sitting on a broom in the near future wouldn't be ideal." He faked a mischievous grin, patted on Miles' shoulder, swung his bag over his own and fled from the common room and the company of his best friend as long as he was still able to keep a straight face at the thought of his reasons not to play Quidditch.

Katie Bell was working in the library on an essay about the breeding and treatment of reel roots, which Professor Sprout had already encumbered them on the second day of school, when suddenly the two students appeared at her table from whom she had thought up till now that they didn't even know where the library was.

"What's happening, Kates?" George Weasley greeted her.

"You all right?" his identical twin brother Fred added. Without waiting for an answer they sat down left and right from her on the bench.

"You've got to help us," he demanded and grabbed her essay.

"I do?" Katie said amused and snatched the piece of parchment, before he was able to make fun of her bad phrasing.

"You do," George probated and held the essay in his hand before she could even blink. "You'll get this back as soon as you've helped us." He frowned as he skimmed the text. "Your diction is horrible!"

"With what do you need my help, you buggers?"

"No need to be rude, Ms Bell," Fred looked around cautiously, as if a troll could jump out between the bookshelves at any second. "Angelina is going to show up in-" He threw a checking glance at his watch. "- ten and a half minutes and look for us. And as soon as she gets here, she's probably going to be fire spitting with rage because Harry incurred detention in Umbridge's class and by sheer chance -"

"- we had absolutely nothing to do with it -"

"- Umbridge may or may not have found newt eyes in her daily cup of tea after that and for some reason she thinks that we are behind that and gave us impositions."

"Whatever gave her that idea." Katie said sarcastically. "Let me guess, now you want me to make up an alibi for you to delay the good scolding?"

"Exactly. You are the most talented liar we know -"

"Well thank you very much," Katie grumbled.

"- not to mention that people believe absolutely everything you say -"

"- and nobody would ever come to the idea that this lovely, decent, well-behaved girl with the blonde curls and the button nose that always looks like it would never even hurt a fly would do something that's against the rules -"

"- especially since she's a prefect."

"Which is, by the way, a reason not to be friends with you. But we want to, anyway. See it as a charity thing," bantered Fred and pinched her nose playfully.

"Say no more, I got it, you're safe with me," Katie grimaced while the twins beamed mischievously and almost crushed her to death.

"We LOVE you, you know that, right?" Fred smarmed and ridiculously batted his eyelashes. "Honestly Katie, you have ALWAYS been our favourite."

"Yeah, as if one of you two even knew how to write 'honestly'," Katie sighed. "Alright you toadies, stop the nonsense and give me back my paper." She demandingly held out her hand, but George hesitated and bagged the essay. "I'd rather not. Trust me Kates, it's for your own good. Your phrasing is dreadful. It's even worse than Fred's."

"Eh!" Fred protested.

"Sad but true," Katie shrugged her shoulders indifferently and took a look on the big, ancient clock above the library door. "So, according to my time reckoning you have eight minutes left until Angelina shows up. Educate me on why Harry has detention with Umbridge after only one Defense Against The Dark Arts lesson?"

"Oh you are going to love this," Fred put on a gleeful grin. That irritated Katie. "Why would I love Harry being in trouble?"

"It's less the fact that he is in trouble but more the reason why he is in trouble that you're gonna love, Katiekins," corrected Fred and straddled the bench, while George took over the thread of the story. "Our dear

Professor Umbridge tried to talk the Boy-Who-Lived-Like-Four-Times into believing that You-Know-Who is still nothing but a flight of fancy and that Cedric Diggory just dropped dead because he felt like it. You might be able to imagine what Harry thought of that."

Katie could only shake her head at the fact that the Ministry of Magic still got the nerve to deny You-Know-Who's return where it already received missing person reports and tidings about murder, like the one in July about two people getting killed in Cornwall, which dead certain beared the hallmarks of the Death Eaters. "What did Harry do?"

"Nothing much, really. Told her the truth about Cedric Diggory's death and went all rebel, when she tried to stop him," George reported with distinct pride in his voice.

Fred pretended to wipe away tears of affection. "Attaboy."

"We raised him well," George agreed with a nod.

"You're both oddballs," Katie stated, shaking her head. "But while we're at it, talking about You-Know-Who," She made sure nobody was listening and lowered her voice. "Anything new regarding the You-Know-What?"

"Nah," Fred said quietly and disapprovingly shook his head.

"Mom found our Extendable Ears so we couldn't tap any secret information anymore and now that they know that we're snooping, they use weird code words or only talk about the secret stuff when they're convinced that we're asleep," George said and it was obvious that he was still angry about being out of the loop. "With you?"

"Neither," she retorted displeased. "My brother sent me a letter but nothing we didn't already know about. There are still people missing, Fudge is further on thinking Dumbledore is only trying to suppress him and the Aurors are tied up in knots because they're officially not allowed to do anything about it. They feel useless while You-Know-Who and his lapdogs are out there building up an army."

She frowned. "But he managed to convince two of his friends to join the You-Know-What."

"It's not much, but it's a start," George said thoughtfully and Katie scoured her brain looking for a memory in which she ever saw a Weasley twin this serious.

"I wish we could do something useful instead of just sitting around waiting for something to happen," Fred said passionately. "But as long as this Umbridge is at our school, there is nothing we can do to support the You-Know-What except trying to convince others that everything Dumbledore and Harry said is true and we all know how well that went."

He scuffed. "Stupid gits, repeating everything the Daily Prophet writes like bloody parrots."

"We'll think of something," Katie said doubtfully, more to convince herself than Fred.

As long as the Ministry refused to admit You-Know-Who's return and as long as Umbridge strayed at Hogwarts to weed out rebels, there really was little to do for them. Lost in thought she looked around at the mostly empty library, when two students caught her eye, sitting on the ground and leaning on a shelf while they were observing passing students without talking to each other. They wore dark grey Hogwarts uniforms, including the required white button-down-shirt underneath and loosely bound silver-green ties. Katie's facial expression darkened.

"Perhaps there is something we can do after all," Fred began who had followed Katie's gaze.

George, as usual, had already divined his twin's thought and nodded. "We always worry about the danger that's gonna threaten us outside of Hogwarts, but what about the danger within it?" he said meaningfully, pointing towards the Slytherins with a nod. "We all know that the serpents are sympathizing with You-Know-Who's views - as you can tell by just looking at Malfoy, that little prick, or Flint. Who assures us that they're not going to defect at the very first opportunity?"

"Someone should definitely keep an eye on that bunch before they get any daft ideas," Fred muttered assenting. "We still won't achieve much with that, but at least we won't be sitting around idly."

"Your sense of mischief would be deployed reasonable for once," Katie concluded and poked George's side amicably.

"True that!" George rose and stretched himself luxuriously, before he took a look on the clock and startled. "Dammit, Angelina is going to be here any second. Look alive, Fred."

"Time to buzz off, indeed", Fred admitted and leapt to his feet for a mocking bow. "It's been a pleasure doing business with you, Miss. And remember, -"

"Don't tell anybody about the You-Know-What", Katie rattled off, nodding. "I know, Sam has been telling me the same thing over and over and again." She rolled her eyes and shooed them, as she noticed approaching footsteps which sounded suspiciously like Angelinas, who was always stomping like a herd of hippogriffs when she was pissed off. She only just saw two ginger bobs disappearing behind the next shelf, as a snorting with rage quidditch captain built in front of her desk.

"Where are those muppets," Angelina demanded to know.

"Who?" Katie asked sanctimoniously and pretended to write her Herbology essay.

Angelina walked around Katie's table and started picking books from the shelves to peer through. "The spawn of the devil, the reason I'll go grey at twenty. They must have come past here, Ernie Macmillan told me." Katie had a fancy that Ernie didn't tell her voluntarily. Angelina's eyes narrowed to slits and she looked at Katie searchingly. "You would give the word if they had stopped by, wouldn't you? For the purposes of our long-term friendship and whathaveyou?"

"Seriously, Angelina, whom would I help rather - you, with whom I'm friends since my first day at Hogwarts and who always runs interference for me on the Quidditchfield, or the twins of chaos who dyed my hair green with a spell in second grade and have put toads into my bed." She put on her most innocent, trustworthy face. Angelina's expression softened and she sighed yieldingly before she sat down on the edge of the table.

"Makes sense. Somehow," she admitted and grabbed Katie's second, half-finished essay. "It's just that they're driving me nuts! I have no idea how Oliver managed to schedule a regular training for three years when I'm only captain for a day and already am struggling because three members of our team got detention! I bet something like this never happened to Wood."

She frowned, looking at the essay in her hand. "Wow, Katie, you really should do something about your diction."

From time immemorial, being a Slytherin had required a mixture of indifference, callousness, obstinacy, the ability to form their own opinion and the pigheadedness to insist on the very same. But above all, one needed to be thick-skinned. When the Sorting Hat had sent him to Slytherin, he did expect a certain extent of

rejection. It had been quite clear to him that the other students would be surprised by the hat's choice, especially due to the fact that all of his siblings had been sorted into the Houses of the "good guys".

His *flawless* brothers. His *perfect* little sister.

He could feel her looking at him, but as soon as he looked up she quickly turned away and spoke at a low voice to the two redheads at her side. If she knew what he knew she would pass away the arrogance. Prefect. He almost gave a humourless laugh.

At first they all tried to cover up their dismay about his house affiliation and act normal in dealing with him, but as soon as they noticed that not only his but also their own popularity suffered from it, they gave it up pretty quickly. He would have been able to live with that - his siblings turning away from him, because they preferred their unblemished hypocrite friends over the wily Slytherin brother - but it weren't only the students from other houses that shunned him.

Once the House knew what his family thought of them, he was met by nothing but suspicion. His classmates avoided talking to each other in front of him, let alone with him because they thought he would extravert their little secrets. Until his current best friend took a stand for him and put an end to this nonsense.

By now it was own decision not to talk to his classmates, apart from his best friend. Well, the term friend was debatable - they kept each other company, sat together at dinner, teamed up in class and in exchange they accepted one another's self-chosen solitude without asking stupid questions. None of them had ever questioned the agreement and it had always worked perfectly.

Just as at this very moment as they sat side by side on the floor in front of the shelf, enjoying the library's silence knowing that either one of them was bothered by something, but also accepting that neither one of them wanted to talk about it. They simply needed company.

A loud, imperious voice made him shy away from his thoughts and he looked over at the Gryffindor prefect, only to witness how the very same girl flat-out lied right into her friend's dewy-eyed face without even batting an eyelid. Nothing new; it only confirmed once again what he already knew anyway. Year-long bottled up anger was simmering in the depths of his stomach and spread throughout his whole body.

How easily they could have swapped places. How easily he could have been in her place, being popular with his classmates and the teachers, being prefect and member of the Quidditch team and how easily she could have been in his place, spending her Hogwarts years in the dungeons, where even her own condisciples excluded her and where everyone could see who she truly was.

"Gabe, you okay?" Adrian asked firmly, anxious not to invade his privacy.

No, he thought. "It's all good," he answered instead and his friend pulled back into his self-imposed silence. His instinct told him to ask Adrian about his well-being, who seemed to deal with something since he had entered Hogwarts this year, but their agreement kept him off. Company in exchange for not interfering. That was the deal.

And Slytherins always adhered to deals.

Tbc.