

Beyond the Veil

by AntiPixie

What happens to a man beyond that shadowy veil that is death? Is it an eternity of peace or torment? Perhaps neither. Perhaps heaven is nothing more than a long, healing dream. A balm that can save even the most broken soul. And when you wake up... you are free. Warnings and rating for later chapters.

Act I: Part I

Chapter 1 of 2

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Disclaimer: This story is completely AU (Alternate Universe) in regards to the end of The Deathly Hallows. Written for fun and for the enjoyment of the Harry Potter fans. As in all lovingly-written fanfiction, I make no profit on this work. J.K. owns the HP universe, and far be it for me to steal a fictional baby so precious that it's become loved by millions.

Musical suggestions for Act I (Parts I-III): "Beyond Windows," Cyril Morin; "Time," Paul Cardell; "The Swell Season" by Glen Hansard & Marketta Irglova; "Cocoon" by Joydrop. All musical suggestions can be legally sampled via my Pandora profile: Search username AntiPixie.

Dedicated to HP fanfic writer Miamadwyn,

without whose wonderfully inspiring work I would not have written this fiction.

Beyond the Veil

This is a story about me. It is a story in which your hero (or anti-hero, if you will) dies in the first act. I will tell you about my life, about my death, and what life...yes, life...is like beyond that shadowy veil. It's a story about death, and love, and even redemption. It is my story. And if you don't like it, you can damn well bugger off.

Act I

Part I

I knew she had a crush on me since day dot. The silly little girl who wanted to please, and the professor who would never give her an inch. I'd like to think that I had some hand in her hard work, but I never assume good things when it comes to Gryffindors. In any case, I saw her. She grew close to the Weasley boy, but I'd catch her out of the corner of my eye, just a little interested and just a bit too red in the cheeks. She tried to hide it, of course, but she's no Slytherin.

Of course I never paid it any heed. It was a crush, and a stupid one at that. I tried my hardest to push her away...insulted her to her face once, something about her teeth being overlarge. But it was like I had blown on a gas fire to put it out. She came to me one day, during the summer before I killed the Headmaster. I was in the library for a few moments, researching one of the darker Black tomes, when I heard the soft sound of footsteps dragging over carpet.

"Excuse me, Professor?" Her voice was faint, tentative. I was sure she was going to ask for some bit of rubbish, either something to help out her loathsome cohorts or an answer to a question she had about some independent Potions research. Either way, I was not looking forward to it.

"You are excused, Miss Granger," I said tonelessly, staring at the book in my lap. A slight shuffling of feet proceeded. I did not look up.

"Professor... I have a question for you." A further shuffling of feet. I looked up and sure enough she was standing in front of me, cheeks ablaze in the candlelight, digging holes in the dusty carpet with the toe of her shoe. She wasn't even looking up to see that I had paid her any attention, so intent was she on her feet. The little chit wasn't going to budge until I gave her whatever it was that she wanted.

"I assumed as much when you walked in the door, Miss Granger. As I'd rather not hear the harping on of Mrs. Weasley or anyone else that I refuse one of our esteemed young guests anything, do continue."

She didn't say anything for some minutes. Nibbled on her lower lip a bit and wrung her hands for a moment. What came out of her mouth was low enough that I had to strain to hear it and ridiculous enough that I thought I had misheard. "I was wondering... just curious of course... are you involved with anyone?"

"Beg pardon?" She couldn't have meant...

"Are you... that is to say... you don't speak of your personal life much, Professor, and I was wondering if you had a wife or lover or... somesuch."

It was a ridiculous notion, of course. I, marry? I, have a lover? Apart from Potter's mother, I hadn't looked at a woman twice in my life. The insinuation that I had was repulsive, even though the girl had no idea of my former infatuation. I snorted, and it was loud enough to make her look up. "Even if I did, I'd hardly go about my daily life bragging about it." I slammed the book shut and set it on the end table hard enough to make the candle there go flickering, casting odd shadows about the room. "You know, Miss Granger, I hadn't originally assumed you to be a snoop, but you've just given me means to revise my beliefs about your character. Bravo. Pray tell, why are you bringing this up at all? Did you come here because you lost some silly bet?"

"No, sir." Her voice was barely above a whisper. Eyes glued to her shoes again.

"Then why?"

"I was interested, sir." More quietly whispered still.

"For what purpose," I hissed, the very match to the volume of her whispers, "could you possibly be interested in my personal affairs?"

"I... am..." She swallowed. "For... er." She didn't finish her thought, only shook her head. The rustle of her hair was another whisper. I stood up before her and peered beneath the mane. All I could see was her lips. They were wet and shining in the candlelight. They were shaking. She looked up at me all of a sudden, and it took all my control not to step back from the force of emotion on her face. Before she even said anything, I knew the reason behind this silly exercise. "For later."

"You are interested... in whether or not I have a wife or lover... for later." I said nothing else for a long while. To say that I was unaccustomed to this sort of sentimental rigmarole was an understatement. With any of my Slytherins, I knew the proper procedure. Scoff, then offhandedly point them in the direction of a young buck of their own house with just as many snide remarks and a more appropriate age. I'd usually find the pair snogging in a dark corner of the common room days later. But the Granger girl... what did one do to get rid of a Gryffindor attachment? Not to mention the fact that she was already in tears from the pain of her confession. Yes, pain. I was not so blind as to see that coming to me had cost her no small amount of pride. Gryffindor indeed.

"I'm sorry, sir. I know it's not my place. But in two years, I graduate, and I'd like to..." Her voice broke, and she choked back a sob. I swallowed and looked up, staring over her head at the painting on the wall behind her. Even the gruesome sight of Saturn Devouring his Son by candlelight was a distraction from my current predicament. "Sorry. What I meant to say was that I graduate two years, and I'd like to keep up a correspondence with you. And being a female student, I didn't want to offend the sensibilities of any woman who might see you as... hers." Nice save, Miss Granger. Did you practice that in the mirror before you walked over here?

Now, what to do. Accept her lie as truth and let her save face? Scoff at everything she'd said and say she'd have her answer in two years time? No. I didn't have that much time at any rate... my life might be over within the next month. And she was a Gryffindor. Best to give her the straight answer to her hidden question. No matter how deeply it might cut.

"Miss Granger," I began, then faltered. I sat down again, moving my book into my lap. I fingered the cover, reading the leather binding like braille. If I was to have any peace for this year, I would have to be very careful with my response. Finally, I looked up. "Miss Granger, pretty lies don't become you. Nor do they become me. I understand that you may have some feeling for me. No, I do not have a wife or a lover. Nor will I ever. My life does not have room for a woman. No matter how intelligent a person may be, she will not change who I am. And who I am is a confirmed old bachelor. A bachelor whose life is, at the moment, on the line."

At this she spoke up, meeting my eyes for the first time since she entered the room. "But after the war--"

"After the war, I will most likely be dead."

She swallowed and looked at the floor again. "You say that like you're counting on it."

I said nothing. Better she think that I am nothing but morbid. Better she think that I have no heart to be touched. A heart that longs to stop beating.

"You may yet survive," she continued. "Afterwards... when I'm not your student anymore, maybe we could... meet."

"Ever the determined Gryffindor. You're just like Albus sometimes."

She raised her head high. And though tears streaked her face, she looked right at me as if she'd been this strong through the entire conversation. "I'll take that as a compliment."

I shook my head again and stood, book in hand. "This conversation is over, Miss Granger. I can only ask you to take my rejection at face value and not bother me again. You have Weasley and Potter to choose from. A few others as well, if I'm not mistaken. I'm fairly certain they'll be enough to keep you entertained after you graduate. In any case, it's late. Off to bed with you." I'd slipped into the Slytherin speech after all, but no matter. Just so long as she got the point. Without letting her respond, I turned around and headed out the door as quickly as measured strides could get me there.

"Thank you, sir. For not... making fun." It wasn't what she'd intended to say, I could tell from the dropping tone in her voice. But I stood for a moment in the door frame and turned my head to the side and nodded at her. Some small comfort that the bat of the dungeons had taken her feelings seriously, I suppose. But handling a delicate situation delicately was one of the things I did best.

And after all, no one was around to see the small kindness. So it got a Gryffindor crush off my back and cost me nothing. Grand.

But I should have known that would not be the end of it. Because this time, it was different. It wasn't just a silly crush to dust off at the end of a day, the way the Slytherin girls had been. No. Even if I had given nothing back, she was the first person to give me that kind of affection in any lasting way. She had given me the freedom to accept or reject her, the way I had been rejected for most of my life. And though it was a little childish, rejecting her that night was like getting some of my own back.

She had continued to care for me after my rejection. Every now and then, both that summer and afterwards during the school year, she continued to check on me, to see to my wellbeing. She liked to look at me, for godsake, and her attraction was unnerving but somehow so satisfying. I realized after a time that I took special care to be well-groomed for those occasions when I would run into her, both during her Defense classes and on the few occasions where she would come meet me after class.

It was always the same thing. She'd come during my pre-dinner office hours once she'd rid herself of her compatriots and knock on my door once she was sure no one else was inside.

"All right, Professor?" she asked.

"Did you have a question, Miss Granger?"

"Just that."

I'd sigh. "Healthy at the moment. It can change."

"Good. See you tomorrow." And she'd stare at me for a moment, then leave.

It continued that way for some time. Every now and then, no more than once a month, she would drop by. "All right, Professor?" "Homeostasis is functioning normally." "Good. My report's done. I'll see you tomorrow." Then again. "All right, Professor?" "Madam Pomfrey isn't bustling about here, so I'd assume so." "Good. See you tomorrow."

So there it was. She watched me, and I watched her watching me from the corner of my eye, careful not to show it. But I came to love that she was there watching me. I just couldn't let her, or anyone, know it. She kept her visits hidden from her friends. I kept them hidden from my Slytherins. And though we were never lovers, and though she never brought up our conversation again, there was a kind of secret understanding there. A tribute to you, my dear, that you were stubborn till the end. A damn shame, my dear, that the end had to come the way it did.

Final notes: As I have no beta (I'm a graduated English major and very concerned with being able to thoroughly critique the structure and general editing of my own work), feel free to leave constructive criticism in the comments section. I appreciate any help I get and will not take it as insult if you don't like my work.

"Healthy at the moment. It can change," - Sky Masterson, Guys & Dolls.

****A tribute to you, my dear," - adaptation of a quote from The Court Jester. Original quote: "A tribute to you, my dear Giacomo." - King Roderick*

Act I: Part II

Chapter 2 of 2

What happens to a man beyond that shadowy veil that is death? Is it an eternity of peace or torment? Perhaps neither. Perhaps heaven is nothing more than a long, healing dream. A balm that can save even the most broken soul. And when you wake up... you are free. Warnings and rating for later chapters.

Warning: This chapter contains character death.

Musical suggestions for Act I (Parts I-III): "Beyond Windows," Cyril Morin; "Time," Paul Cardell; "The Swell Season" by Glen Hansard & Marketa Irglova; "Cocoon" by Joydrop. All musical suggestions can be legally sampled via my Pandora profile, located in my profile link.

Part II

Five minutes. That's all it would have taken to prevent the terrible things that happened. If I had not been waylaid for five minutes, everything would have gone according to plan.

I felt the burn on my arm and a sensation like a finger sinking into my brain, petting the inside of my skull. "Severusss," he called, his voice filled with a malice I knew all too well. "Severusss, come to me. Come to the haunted house of your nightmaresss." The call went silent. I knew of the place he meant: the Shrieking Shack. I followed even though I knew that this time, this time of all times, it would mean my death. Something had happened, something huge. And I would die that night. In the haunted house from my nightmares. And fuck it all, I was ready.

I had everything I needed for death. A spell on my robes to repel bloodstains. A lemon drop in the pocket of my trousers to offer Albus when I saw him. More importantly, in a hidden pocket in my robes, I had a crystal vial of all the memories that proved my innocence, to be found on my person long after my death. Because I wanted to be buried with honor even if I did not live with it. Who knows? Maybe someone would even name a child after me someday. Ha! A child I'd never have to teach at least, and bloody nice it was to think of that. I could only hope that the cushioning charm I'd placed on the vial would hold if I fell. Pensieve memories couldn't be held in anything sturdier than crystal when it was outside of a Pensieve anyway, but it wasn't a nuisance I could get around.

So I flew there. It was quite a trick to fly without a broom. Mostly involved a complex charm cast on one's trousers. The words sound like a misspoken version of the, how shall I say it, *Engorgio* spell for men, which is likely why the Dark Lord has kept it from everyone but me. Rather embarrassing, that would be. To know that in order to discover the proper words for the spell, the Dark Lord not only tried to, ahem, enhance himself, but did it poorly? It would be the top story in *Witch Weekly*, to say the least. The learning of the spell was my "reward" for being the right hand of Slytherin's heir. How oddly fitting.

In any case, I was flying to my death when suddenly, a flock of birds strayed into my path. Strange, that. All of the other animals and magical creatures surrounding Hogwarts and Hogsmeade had flown from the smell of human warfare. But there they were, a flock of owls flying right at my face. For a moment I thought they were trained birds come to peck off my nose, and I flew backwards and up to avoid them, but they kept coming at me. I reeled away, almost lost my control and tumbled down for meters before I regained my balance. But rather than flying at me again, the owls continued to fly past, on some mission to which I'd never be privy. And then one last owl, a little white one, tried to keep up, with a pathetic high-pitched hoot that would have made my younger female students squeal. I noticed it was flying slightly to the left, as if its right wing was damaged. Sure enough, when I came closer, some of its right feathers were badly twisted near the ends. Not so badly that it couldn't fly, but it was a struggle to be sure. Seeing as though I was already on my way to death, I took the time to cast a quick spell to mend its wound before I went on my way.

I thought that maybe this would be the final good deed that kept me out of hell.

I flew back towards my destination and once I arrived, I witnessed... horror.

"Severusss. You're a tad late, but no matter, boy. It's over." The white face turned to me, its red eyes deep-seeing and triumphant. "You see, we've won."

Fresh blood splattered the walls of the old shack. Ronald Weasley was slumped against one wall, eyes closed. The blood wasn't his. Harry Potter laid spread out at Voldemort's feet. It wasn't his either. I turned to my left. There she lay, mouth open, wand still clutched in her hand. Her jumper was red. Her jeans were red. Her neck was gone. Hermione Granger was dead.

Instead of me, Hermione Granger was dead and gone.

I swallowed. I looked back up at the Dark Lord. When I was on my way here, I'd felt no fear. No remorse. Finally, I would be free. But now, as I absorbed the information from his deep red eyes, I grew cold from my fingertips to my heart, all warmth bleeding out of me. As his mind grabbed hold of mine, I watched what had unfolded in horrifying clarity.

Five minutes ago, the Golden Trio had spilled into the room, Harry Potter at the forefront, his friends at his elbows. They formed a triangle of strength and love, prepared to do anything to finish this. Harry Potter said that he would let no more good wizards die tonight. Voldemort had laughed. Three wands were raised, and one raised back.

And then Nagini, in one swift and easy movement, tore out Hermione Granger's throat. While Ron Weasley was crying in helpless agony over the sudden loss of his beloved, Voldemort spoke a quick charm and the boy was thrown against the wall, cracking his head hard against the splintered wood. Harry stood for a minute, looking over the devastation of his allies while the Dark Lord laughed.

And then the boy said something quite peculiar. "I understand now." And with fearless eyes, Lily's eyes, he turned to the Dark Lord and said, "Do it."

The green curse was cast. Then I had walked in through the front door. His eyes let go of my mind. A sickly smile was plastered on his slitted white face.

"I was going to kill you, you know," he said, prodding the child with the toe of his boot. "You were always my most loyal ssservant, but I was under the impression that the Elder Wand was not obeying me because as you took it from that old fool, you were its master. But now... I am uncertain." He held it up to the light, dim as it was, and rolled the old wood between his fingertips. "Perhaps I had to show it that I was strong enough to defeat my final opponent. In any case, Severus, know that I would not throw away such a valuable tool as yourself, not if I had doubts."

"You are most gracious, my Lord." I gave a stiff bow, allowing myself a better view of the dead boy. Lily's boy. We had failed. Everything had failed. "Your orders?"

"Carry this carcass to the castle for me. It's time to end the farce our enemies call a battle." In a billow of robes, he swept out through the door and flew away. Nagini slithered after.

I knelt down in front of Potter and wiped the hair from his face. James' hair. Strange. He was pale, but still so warm. Warm as the blood from the girl's neck that had splattered down upon him. Had what Albus insinuated once upon a time actually been true? Had it worked? "Potter," I whispered. "Potter. Wake up, Potter." I looked over at the boy's spectacles, lying a bit away from his face. I picked them up and placed them on his nose before feeling for a heartbeat at his throat.

The air was thick with the smell of blood. I wanted to retch, but I didn't dare give into my instincts for at least a bit longer. Neither can live while the other survives... neither can live... "Bloody hell, Potter, for all our sakes, *LIVE*."

A breath. A choked cough. The boy was alive. I pulled his head to my chest, not from any sort of affection for the little brat, but I didn't want him to see her. Didn't want him to see Weasley. Not yet. I had no idea what had happened to him in those brief moments, and if Albus was right (and he'd always been right), Potter needed to be at his best. He needed to fight that last fight.

Hands too large to be a child's pushed against me, and he managed to sit up, fixing his glasses properly on his face. But when he saw who had held him, he snarled and grabbed his wand, holding it to my throat before I even thought to reach for my own. "Bravo, boy," I said. "But I'm not your enemy."

"No?" he asked. "You killed Dumbledore. You took over my school, the only place I ever called home. You work for the monster that just killed my best friends AND nearly killed me. Give me one good reason I should trust you, Snape. Give me one good reason I shouldn't kill you right now."

My mouth pulled up in a sneer, a retort right on the tip of my tongue... and then it hit me. The stench of blood and corpses. The near-end of my own life. Everything, pain on top of pain, difficulty on difficulty. Everything, and now a grieving boy was threatening to kill me for something I'd tried as hard as I could, for seven bloody years, to prevent. And I was worn right the fuck out. My sneer faded. I looked over at the girl, ignoring the wand at my throat. "I'm tired, Potter. I'm bloody well spent. And now I have to carry your supposedly dead body to the battlefield." I looked back up at him. At Lily's eyes. So beautiful, even in his face. Even when they were staring daggers into me. "My Patronus is a doe. Perhaps you've seen something like that before?"

His jaw dropped. Before he could react, I took the crystal vial of my memories from my robes and shoved it into his hand. Moments passed, but I could hear the pieces clicking together in his head. Once he was finished, once I could tell that he was ready, I gathered him up. "Play dead," I whispered, and we flew out of the door. Leaving his friends behind us.

When I arrived, the boy limp and acting as well as he could be expected to in my arms, there were two lines, a stand-off between light and dark. I settled on the ground right next to the Dark Lord, and as requested, placed the boy at his feet. What happened afterwards was a blur. It was so strange and unreal, watching it all take place. I didn't feel like I should be there. It was exciting, no doubt, watching Nagini's head roll across the field. Watching Harry Potter "come back to life." But I was so tired. I cast spells by rote memory. Dodge, parry, shield, cast. Dueling was something I was comfortable with, something I could nearly do in my sleep, even when I was dueling like a Death Eater trying not to kill anyone. And if my concentration lapsed a bit in my casting, well, I had already prepared for my own death, so as long as no one died by my hand, who gave a shite?

And then Potter did something that caught my attention and my interest. He declared to the Dark Lord, and to both sides, that I was never Voldemort's servant. That I had been "Dumbledore's man" all along. It was more than true, and it caught my opponent (a severely wounded Nymphadora Tonks) by surprise for long enough that I was able to cast a quick charm that shed my Death Eater robes.

Thank you, Potter. Let him gaze upon me. Let him stare as I walked right up to him. Let him cast the final blow to end my life and all my endless waiting.

But the final blow did not come. The Dark Lord screamed and raged and something like "How could you do this to me, blah blah," but at that point I didn't give a fig for rage. So fucking tired. I walked over to stand next to Potter, unharmed and unblemished. Unlike anyone else in the room, I had not a scratch on me. Like a miracle.

We must have made quite a sight. Severus Snape and Harry Potter, standing side by side, wands extended toward the Dark Lord in the final moment of the final battle. And then we won. I barely remember the event, it happened so quickly.

Without speaking a word to each other, much less to anyone else, Potter and I left the castle to collect his friends' bodies. I picked up Miss Granger, and he picked up Weasley. He was devastated, of course. But then, miraculously, he found a pulse on the boy and rushed him off to the intensive care unit on Hogwarts' grounds. Weasley was unconscious and certainly had a concussion, but if that was the majority of the damage, he escaped much more intact than any of Tom Riddle's other victims, save Potter himself.

Granger, of course, had no neck on which to take a pulse.

I cast what spells I could to stop the spread of the blood, not difficult since she had lost almost all of it. When I picked her up, she was stiff and sticky and cold against me. That was always the most disturbing thing for me about touching a corpse. How quickly they stiffen, how easy it is to mistake a human body for an object once the soul has left it. Her hair hung down over my arm, the only part of her that had any life left. It rustled quietly as I moved.

I wanted her to look up at me. I wanted her to say, "All right, Professor?" And if she could, then I would have said, "Better than I have been in all my life, now that I am free." But of course, I wasn't better. I was free, but I was not all right.

The only girl that had shown me such kindness, ever since Lily Evans called me friend, was dead. The only girl that had ever shown a lasting attraction to me, that could have grown into love eventually, was hanging stiff in my arms. She was nothing more than a husk covered in dried blood.

I carried her to the castle, to that hall of dead bodies and mourning survivors. Closed my eyes. Everywhere, the sound of tears. Tears of joy that we were all free. Tears of sorrow at what we'd lost. I hadn't wept for anything but the loss of Lily Evans. Not for years.

I sat down at the table where I'd laid the corpse of the girl who had a silly little crush on her Potions professor since she was eleven years old, and I wept.

I wept until the sun rose. I wept at the massive funeral the next day. I wept when Harry Potter turned and called me the bravest man he had ever known. I wept when Kingsley Shacklebolt, Temporary Minister of Magic, granted me full pardon. I wept because instead of saving them, I had saved my own useless life by arriving five minutes too late.

And the day after the funeral when we began rebuilding the castle, I stopped weeping.

And I began, instead, to plan.

As always, criticism welcome. Thanks to those of you who have read and reviewed. You're in my heart as I write. I always aim to please.