

Heartbeat

by Electryone

Severus Snape is dead and not happy about it. Unfortunately, his only link to the living world is a bushy-haired Gryffindor know-it-all.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 5

Severus Snape is dead and not happy about it. Unfortunately, his only link to the living world is a bushy-haired Gryffindor know-it-all.

Severus Snape hated being dead.

In the few moments before he had died, he had lain on the floor of the Shrieking Shack, finally feeling that he was at peace. He hadn't known quite what to expect from death, but he had been pleased in the beginning.

It was similar to being alive...his house was exactly the same and he had access to all the books that he had owned when he had been among the living. Everything else was the same too...even Hogwarts. When he had first arrived, he had been shocked to realize that the world of the dead mirrored the world of the living...the only difference was that here there was no pain or suffering. It was a utopia of sorts.

And that was what Severus hated so much about it.

In the beginning, he had been impressed by the conversations that he could hold with various famous people from the past. Debating the Theory of Relativity with Einstein, discussing the properties of the Elixir of Life with Nicolas Flamel and having chats with other Muggle and Magical scientists were all perks of being dead.

He figured that his mother would join him as soon as she died. None of the other Death Eaters, or even his father, were in the same place as he was. Was he in Heaven? It didn't feel like it.

Sure, he didn't have to deal with acting as a double agent, but he didn't have any of the pleasures that he had always longed for. He still had no friends (not that he had wanted friends in the first place) and the woman he loved still preferred the company of her idiotic husband and his idiotic friends.

He saw Lily Evans rarely. The first day after he had died, she had come with her husband to thank him for all the help he had given Harry. In the beginning, Lily had visited him often. In the beginning, she had seemed happy to see him. However, over time, her visits had become more and more sporadic until finally she had stopped coming altogether. He wasn't certain why, but she now seemed to be nothing more than an acquaintance. He would occasionally see her, but they would only speak in passing. It was apparent that she did not want to resume the friendship they had had as children. Lily's aloofness didn't bother him so much as the knowledge that he would be alone for an eternity and James Potter wouldn't.

In addition, all of the long-dead Muggle and magical scientists who had interested him in the beginning preferred to spend time with their spouses, lovers, and various family members. Not with a crusty Potions Master who had died young. They had made discoveries and inventions during their lifetimes that had changed both the Muggle and Wizarding worlds. All his work, though, had been in vain...he had died before he could share it with the world.

He could still brew potions here, but it didn't hold the same appeal. Dead people had little need for potions. He couldn't save anybody's life or help anyone. Even something

as basic as a Hangover Potion was useless...the dead could binge every night and never feel it in the morning.

There were many days when he wished that he had been a social butterfly while he was alive. Then maybe he would have friends, a wife, even after he was dead.

Not bloody likely, though.

Of course, even in his wildest dreams of being born in an alternate universe where he was raised by happy parents who loved each other, he couldn't imagine anyone describing him as "social", let alone a "butterfly". Had he done things right as a teenager, avoided joining the Death Eaters, he still knew that no woman would ever want him.

Severus sighed as he looked at the potion in front of him. The color had just changed to turquoise, which was exactly the way it was supposed to look. He didn't know why he was brewing the Draught of Living Death. He couldn't think of anybody in his world that could possibly have any use for it. But it was something to do. He really had no other way to occupy his time.

Severus finished bottling the potion and set it in a large, bottle-filled room next to his laboratory. Each time he made a potion, he put it on one of the shelves in the room, never to be touched again. He had accumulated so many that sometime in the next few months he would either have to cast a charm on the room to make more space for new potions or dispose of the potions that were in there in order to make room for new ones.

After quickly cleaning up his laboratory, he went into his small library and picked up Moste Potente Potions. Perhaps he could do the Invisibility Potion next? Sure, he already had several vials of it, but it was one of his favorites to make.

As he was pondering his next brew, there was a knock on the door.

"Severus!" a voice called.

Damn. It was Albus. The old man had been coming to visit him all too frequently and was peskier than when he had been alive. Severus briefly considered pretending not to be home. But Albus had known him for years...twenty-six while he was alive and another five after Severus died. He knew that Severus would be home at this time because where else would he go?

Severus rarely went out, except to get Potions supplies or go on sporadic visits to acquaintances. In the first two years after he had died, Severus had frequently visited with long-dead Potions Masters and Mistresses, and Muggle chemists. But he had realized that to all of them, the living world was of little interest, as they had been away from it for a long time. Spending eternity with their loved ones seemed to be more important. He felt like he was the only dead person who was all alone.

"Severus!" Albus said again. Pretending to be away wouldn't work. Albus would rap on the door until Severus finally conceded. What's more, Albus came to visit him every week, something that Severus could just barely tolerate.

"I'm coming, you crazy old coot," Severus mumbled to himself.

"Good morning, Severus," Albus said when he opened the door.

"Good morning, Albus," Severus said in a voice that held none of the cheerfulness that Albus' had. Albus looked exactly the same as he had when he died...like Severus, his hair hadn't grown and his features hadn't aged a bit. Not that the old man could have possibly done much more aging in his lifetime.

"I've have some great news!" Usually, "great news" meant that someone new was dead.

"Oh?" Severus said. "Who died this time?"

"Horace Slughorn!"

Severus nodded, showing little interest.

"Severus, we can go visit him right now. I'm sure that he'd be happy to see two of his old friends."

Calling Severus and Slughorn "old friends" was a bit of a stretch. Although he and Slughorn were both Slytherin Potions Masters, there was little for them to talk about. Every time they had spoken, Slughorn would always brag about his dunderhead students. The last time they had spoken...a year before the war...Slughorn had spoken of nothing except Harry Potter and Hermione Granger. Although his opinion of Potter and Granger had improved as they matured, he did not like how so many people treated Potter and Granger like they were the king and queen of the Wizarding world.

He *really* hoped that Slughorn wouldn't mention any of his old students when they met, although he knew that his wishes were in vain unless Slughorn had undergone a major personality change in the last five years.

Slughorn's house was crowded when they arrived. When a new person died, there was always a huge ado. Even when Severus died, he had been visited by many people.

Horace Slughorn was sitting on the sofa, sipping a cup of tea. He looked a little bit older than he had five years earlier when Severus had last seen him, and his large belly appeared to be even larger. He appeared radiant with happiness.

"Hello, Severus, Albus!" Horace said.

The men shook hands, and Horace gestured to two armchairs. "Please, sit down. Loretta!" he called loudly to an elderly woman who had been talking to some of his old friends. She walked over to them. "Severus, I'd like you to meet my beautiful wife, Loretta. Albus, I believe that the two of you are already acquainted." Severus felt even more pathetic. Even Slughorn had a wife!

"Severus, it's so nice to meet you. I've heard so much about you." Her eyes twinkled in the same annoying way that Dumbledore's always did. How had she heard about him? The man had died only recently...when would he have possibly spoken of Severus to his wife?

Loretta Slughorn laughed then kissed her husband on his wrinkled cheek. Severus felt a pang of envy.

They exchanged pleasantries and Loretta brought the two men tea. Slughorn almost immediately turned the conversation to rather unsavory topics.

"Severus, I have some exciting news." Severus tried to pretend to look interested. "Do you remember Hermione Granger?"

Severus cringed. Of course, he would have to bring up Granger. Next would probably be Potter and Weasley, followed by Longbottom. "Regrettably, yes. I had the misfortune of teaching the girl for six years."

Slughorn laughed. "Ah, Severus, you always did like to joke around." Severus didn't bother to tell him that it wasn't a joke.

"Hermione is one of the best students I've ever had. Imagine my surprise and delight when I found that she was pursuing a career in Potions." Potions? Hermione Granger's performance in his classes had been acceptable, certainly better than that of her friends, but did she really have the magical ability to create? She could probably recite the list of ingredients for any potion that she had ever encountered, but Potions required so much more than that.

"Hermione studied at Oxford, earning a Muggle degree in Chemistry and a Wizarding degree in Potions. It's quite amazing really...the girl attended classes and earned degrees in both the Muggle and Wizarding departments of the university."

Severus scoffed. "I hardly find that amazing. Certainly Miss Granger is not the first witch to attend a Muggle university."

"But there have only been two others in the past hundred years who have done both Muggle and Wizarding schools simultaneously. And neither of the other two studied in Potions. And her Master's Thesis was published in Potions Quarterly. The Wizarding world will see another Potions genius yet. I only had one student whose talent for Potions surpassed Hermione's, and he's sitting in this room with me."

Severus stood quickly and began pacing. He was absolutely furious. The Granger girl, with her limited skills, would spend the next hundred-odd years of her life brewing and creating potions, getting the fame and prestige that he had never received as a Potions Master. He had been too busy working for Voldemort and Dumbledore and trying to save the lives of her and all of her ungrateful Gryffindor friends.

"Severus, please sit down," Albus said with disapproval in his voice.

Severus took a deep breath. "Thank you, but I prefer to stand."

"Severus, you didn't hear the rest of my tale. Hermione is now going to be teaching at Hogwarts. I really think it suits her, don't you?"

"I'm sure that the girl has no idea how to handle a classroom full of hormonal and uninterested teenagers. I doubt that she'll last longer than a month."

"Now Severus, this is Hermione Granger that we're talking about. She can do anything she puts her mind to," Albus said.

Severus felt irritated. He didn't really give a damn about Hermione-bloody-Granger. One of the good things about being dead was not having to see Granger, Potter, or Weasley until one of them died. Although, with his luck, one of them would probably murder the other two in a fit of passion and then commit suicide.

"You know, while she was in her apprenticeship at St. Mungo's, Hermione came to visit me nearly every week. It was so nice of her. We had many interesting conversations about..."

"Horace! Enough about Granger!" Severus growled. Slughorn was momentarily taken aback.

"Very well, Severus," Slughorn said after a moment's pause. "Another piece of gossip, for you, though...did anyone tell you that Neville Longbottom was hired as the Herbology professor? It'll be so nice for Hogwarts to have more young people on the staff."

Severus kept silent but began wishing that he was drinking something stronger than tea. One thing was certain: he was most definitely not in Heaven. Listening to two old men talk about Granger, Longbottom, and the others in their year was worse than any sort of physical torture.

Severus left fewer than fifteen minutes later, after faking a headache. Albus, of course, knew that he did not really have a headache because dead people didn't get headaches, but he didn't say anything.

However, Severus knew that if he were alive, all the talk about the "Golden Trio", as the media had dubbed them, *would* have made him physically nauseous. There were so many talented wizards and witches in the world who had contributed to the fall of Voldemort, yet one would think based on the Daily Prophet that three teenagers had done it without any help.

Severus returned home to get some peace. He took the Stasis Spell off one of the long-term potions he had been working on. It was one that he had started three years earlier after a dinnertime conversation with Nicolas and Perenelle Flamel about the Philosopher's Stone. On average, he worked on it about two hours everyday. On days when he felt particularly inspired, he would work on it for the entire day, on other days, he would make simple potions just to pass the time.

His special potion was an attempt to reversing death. Everybody he had ever spoken to had said that one cannot go back to life, but Severus Snape was going to prove all those people wrong.

As Severus stirred, he began thinking about his life and his death. His life had been wasted, and his death...which should have been paradise...was also a complete waste. He had to go back. He couldn't live like this forever.

Severus knew that there was an option for people like him...the same that had happened to Voldemort, his father, and many others. All of them were in an eternal sleep, never to awake. He could sleep forever...but did he really want that?

The idea of making a potion to cheat death was not uniquely his. Many others had tried and failed before him. It was impossible. But if there was one thing that Severus Snape was capable of doing, it was the impossible.

Severus spent the rest of the day stirring and chopping, only taking a short break for dinner. Sometimes he enjoyed the small, tedious tasks involved in potion-making. It was rather therapeutic.

As he was cleaning his laboratory and getting ready to sleep, he heard a Pop, similar to the sound of Apparition, but slightly higher in tone.

He whipped his wand out and turned in the direction of the noise.

Hermione Granger was standing right in front of him.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 5

Severus Snape is dead... and not happy about it. Unfortunately, his only link to the living world is a bushy-haired Gryffindor know-it-all.

Earlier that day

Hermione Granger looked at the mess in front of her. Clothes, books, papers, photographs, and other miscellaneous objects were strewn all around the quarters of the Hogwarts Potions professor.

Unfortunately, they happened to be her quarters now.

But these were not her belongings. Horace Slughorn had just passed away, and she was to take over both his position and his old rooms. The latter seemed rather daunting at the moment.

Why had nobody thought to clean out the rooms before she had arrived? Of course, it was weeks before school began, and most of the staff, including Headmistress McGonagall, were away on holiday. As far as Hermione knew, the woman hadn't taken a holiday in thirty years, so she probably deserved it.

So, Hermione was stuck trying to clean and organize everything in the sitting room and the bedroom. Hermione started with the bedroom, the lesser of two evils. It took her about two hours to clear everything out.

Part of her felt sad to be cleaning up after a dead man. However, Slughorn had lived a very long life. And he had seemed...for the most part...very happy in the years after the Second Wizarding War was over. He had even offered to continue teaching Potions...an offer which Headmistress McGonagall had been glad to take him up on.

During her time at Oxford, where she was the only Potions major and one of only five Wizarding students, she had frequently met with Horace Slughorn. Her apprenticeship had been with Marianne Abbott, the lead Potions researcher at St. Mungo's, who had encouraged her to use as many resources and connections as possible. Hermione knew that there were few certified Potions masters and mistresses in the world, and Slughorn was the only one other than Marianne that she had known. He was only too happy to accommodate a former student who had received all O's on her N.E.W.T.s.

They had met for tea several times a month over the last three years, talking about new theories in Potion-brewing, her pet projects, and his pet students.

In their last conversation, he had told her that he was retiring (for the second time) and both he and Minerva McGonagall had agreed that she was the best person to take over his position. At that time, she had been finished with her apprenticeship for six months and had been a Potions brewer at St. Mungo's. Although enjoyed that job, teaching at Hogwarts had always been her dream. She had always been passionate about learning...and she wanted to inspire students to feel the same way.

And it was so rare that a job opened up at Hogwarts, she knew that she would be a fool not to take it. Hermione had accepted the job almost immediately.

Unfortunately, the day after Slughorn had told her of his retirement, he died.

She and several others had delivered eulogies about the late Potions master at his funeral. Although he had made some mistakes in his life, he had atoned for them in the past few years. He had been at peace when he died.

If only the same could be said about the Potions master before Slughorn.

It didn't escape Hermione's mind that her new quarters had once belonged to Professor Snape. Even now, over five years after his death, it still haunted her. The picture of him dying in such a horrible way on the Shrieking Shack floor often surfaced in her mind. She had watched others die that day, yet for some reason, Snape's death bothered her the most. It seemed like a horribly unnecessary death. To this day she wondered why he didn't have an antidote to Nagini's snake bite. He must have known that getting attacked by the snake was a possibility, so why hadn't he been prepared?

Hermione sighed. She hated when her thoughts drifted to Professor Snape. She couldn't change what had happened and neither could anybody else. Dwelling on the past was a waste of time; she should be thinking about the present and the future.

Unfortunately, the only thing that she could see in the present and the near future was the mess that had been left by Slughorn. She could use magic to make everything disappear...but that just didn't seem right. Every object in the world that was important to Professor Slughorn was right here in this room. Disposing of it would be easy with her wand, but it seemed like it would be very disrespectful to him.

She knew that he had children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren...she had met his daughter at the funeral. Hermione had decided to pack up all his belongings and send them to her when she had finished. After five hours, she had only cleaned out half of the sitting room. Slughorn had so many knickknacks that she couldn't imagine anyone, including his own relatives, wanting. He had items such as Chocolate Frog cards, stacks of articles from the Daily Prophet, decorative potions bottles, and several paintings of slugs. She had decided to put them all into a box and let his daughter deal with them.

Hermione was about to quit for the day when her eye caught something. It was a small box wrapped up like a present. The least she could do was send it along to the rightful recipient. There was a note on the top of it. Hermione slowly unfolded it.

Her heart skipped a beat when she saw the name at the top. It was for her!

Hermione...

I found this rare object on the Hogwarts grounds about two years ago, and I can't think of anyone who would appreciate it more than you, so I'd like you to have it. Think of it as a gift welcoming you to the Hogwarts staff. Good luck with your new position as Potions mistress.

Sincerely,

Horace L. Slughorn

With her fingers shaking, she began unwrapping the box. Had he known that this would happen...that he would die and she would be the one to find this gift? She took a deep breath as she put the paper aside and opened the lid.

Inside was a stone, one that looked like a black diamond. "What ...?"

She picked it up and was shocked by the energy, the magic she could feel inside it. The stone definitely had some powerful spells on it.

It only took her a moment to realize what it was. She had never seen it before, but there was no mistaking the carvings on the rock.

The Resurrection Stone.

She had read the legends of it...and she even knew that the Tale of the Three Brothers was no fairy tale. But never had she imagined that she would actually ever get to touch it...let alone possess the Resurrection Stone.

She wondered if she would ever have the nerve to use it. It was interesting that Slughorn had chosen to give it to her when he could easily pass it on to one of his children or grandchildren, or any of his old students. She felt privileged that he had decided to give something so unique and valuable to her.

Hermione kept the stone in her pocket all day. It was not far from her mind, and she found herself occasionally touching it. She was careful not to turn it around in her fingers. It was important for her to think before doing something rash like summoning the dead. Nothing good could come of it, right?

"You seem preoccupied tonight," Harry said to her.

Hermione snapped out of her trance and looked up to meet the stares of Harry and Ron. She was at dinner in a café in Muggle London with Harry, Ron, and their girlfriends. Harry had been dating Padma Patil for the last five years, and Ron had just begun going out with Lucy Bennet, a Hufflepuff who had been three years behind them in school. Both of the girls had gone to the lavatory to gossip...they had invited Hermione, but she declined...so now it was just the three of them.

Hermione tried to smile. "I'm just thinking about the classes I need to plan. I have so much to do before school starts! Speaking of which, did you hear that Neville got hired on as Herbology professor?"

"Wow, Hermione, that's great news!" Ron said. "You won't be the only person on the staff under forty. Neville's still single, isn't he?"

Hermione rolled her eyes. "You know that Neville's just a friend. And he's not my type."

"What is your type, Hermione? You've never had a relationship longer than six months," Harry said.

"You know all those buffoons weren't good enough for our dear Hermione," Ron told Harry jokingly. It was true that the men she dated did not last very long. But none of them had stimulated her mind the way that she craved.

"I'm not that anxious to get married. I'd rather meet someone that really suits me than settle with just anyone. I don't want to spend the rest of my life with someone that I can't have a decent conversation with."

"But really, Hermione, when was the last time you had sex?" Did Harry need to be so blunt? She knew exactly when...two years and three months ago, two days before she broke up with David, her most recent boyfriend.

"That's none of your business. You know that I haven't had time for men. My research has been more important." Her two friends looked displeased. The two girls came back and the conversation, thankfully, took a turn away from her nonexistent love life.

As they arrived at the nearest Apparition point, Ron turned to her out of earshot of the others. "Hermione, you know that we only want you to be happy. Harry and I care about you as much as if you were our own sister."

"Thanks, Ron," Hermione said softly. She kissed him on the cheek then Apparated back to the gates of Hogwarts.

Throughout the entire dinner, she had been thinking about the Resurrection Stone in her pocket. She had been wondering whether she should ask Harry about his use of the Resurrection Stone. In the end, she had decided that he probably couldn't tell her anything that she didn't already know about it. He had only held it in his hand for mere minutes. Plus, asking him would bring about questions. She rarely kept secrets from her two best friends, but she wanted to test its properties and try to determine what type of magic had been used to create it. She would share it with them after that. When she arrived in her sitting room, she took it out and looked at it again.

Without even thinking, she turned it around in her fingers three times.

A dark figure appeared in front of her. She slowly looked over him. He wore heavy black boots and voluminous black robes. Her eyes traveled up the body to the face. Stringy, shoulder-length, black hair framed a face that contained a mouth set in a sneer and a large nose. His cold, black eyes stared at her.

Professor Snape.

Her heart began pounding. Why him? So many people that she cared about had died in the past, so why Snape?

"Granger, what the hell are you doing here?" he snarled. She didn't speak, just stared at him. She wasn't sure what she had expected. A ghost perhaps? But he actually looked just like he would have if he was still alive. Hermione felt her breath catch in her throat. Sadness welled up inside of her as the memories of that day came back to her. She took a deep breath to try to keep her composure.

He appeared exactly the way he had that day seven years ago in the Shrieking Shack. His clothing was the same as it had been that day, although she wouldn't really have known the difference because he had worn the exact same thing day in and day out when he was a Hogwarts teacher.

"Well?" he said. "Did somebody cast a Silencing Charm on you?" Sarcasm. This was definitely the same Snape. She decided to at least give him an answer, although she didn't know what it would be.

"I'm sorry, sir. I'm confused myself. Of all the people to summon from the dead, I don't know why you appeared." It was true. His appearance before her was completely shocking. Not only because it was he who appeared, but also because he looked and spoke just the way that he had when she was his student.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," he told her. "This is my laboratory. Please leave me alone."

Hermione looked around her, as if checking her surroundings. This certainly wasn't a laboratory.

"No," she said, "this is *my* sitting room."

"Miss Granger, I don't know what you're on about, but I want your Gryffindor pranks to stop. One of the nicest things about being dead is being away from you and your moronic friends, and I'd like that to continue."

"But sir..."

"Don't you have friends or relatives you can go to? Slughorn just died; go bother him. Or how about Albus? You're dead, Miss Granger. Certainly you wouldn't want to spend time with me. *I* don't want to spend time with *you*."

Hermione felt her body grow cold. All of this talk about death was eerie. "I'm sorry, sir, but I think you're mistaken. I'm *not* dead and I'm *not* in your laboratory. I've used the Resurrection Stone. Although I..." She didn't finish her sentence. Telling a former professor that she didn't wish to talk to him was certainly not the right thing to do.

He looked thoughtful for a moment, then said, "The Resurrection Stone, Miss Granger? Do you know nothing about the Stone? *You chose* the person you wanted to appear."

Hermione nodded, then decided to change her line of questioning. "Since you're here already, can you please talk to me? I have many questions and..."

"Granger, I don't have time for this!" He scowled.

"You're dead! What exactly is so important that you can't even spend a few minutes to talk to me?" How could the man be rude to her even after he was dead? She had spent six years at Hogwarts trying to impress him until she had found that it was impossible. Apparently it still was, for he was unwilling to have a conversation with her.

"Leave me alone," he said, folding his arms. He continued to stand there and glare at her.

"Please, sir, I really want to..."

"Miss Granger, please leave. I don't want to speak with you. "

"I *will* use the Resurrection Stone again," she vowed. "And if you appear, I will be more persistent."

"I can't wait," he said dryly.

She set the stone down on the table in front of her. As soon as he disappeared, she collapsed on the sofa. All the emotions she had experienced at the funerals, the

memorials, the yearly tributes to the war heroes resurfaced. She had tried to be strong, avoiding crying when others were around. But when she was alone, the tears had come.

And they came again. Seeing Snape for just a short time brought back so many memories of that day. She had never been his friend (not that he had ever been friends with any student) but she had long held him in high esteem, admiring his intellect, respecting his position in the war, despite the sarcastic and scathing comments he had directed at her.

After a few minutes, she calmed down and began to think rationally. The experience had certainly been strange. It was obvious that he didn't want to talk to her. Hermione kept going over the possible reasons why Snape had appeared instead of somebody else. She had known many people who had died. Why not Dumbledore? Or Remus? Or Tonks? She could think of at least ten people that she would choose to talk to before Professor Snape. Perhaps it was because she was in his old rooms? But then wouldn't she have seen Slughorn also? The next day, all thoughts of tidying her new rooms were cast aside for research on the Resurrection Stone.

Hermione read through the Tale of the Three Brothers several times, finding out nothing that she didn't already know. The main message of it was clear: Nobody can bring back the dead. *But they can still be insulted by them* she thought wryly.

She wasn't planning to try to bring back the dead; however, she did want to know a little bit about the Resurrection Stone. Perhaps she should have waited to use it. That had been rather stupid of her.

After a few hours of research in the Hogwarts library, she had learned a few important things. There was very little about the Resurrection Stone itself, but she studied up on the properties of it as much as possible. She was not an expert in gemstones, but she had found out a few things. After doing a few experiments on it...using her wand and several potions to test its hardness and its elemental makeup...she realized that, as she had suspected, it was a black diamond. The huge amount of carbon and the durability both pointed to that.

Hermione wished she could take it to an expert to have them look at it, but there was no way she could show anyone else the Stone. She knew that the diamond itself was rather rare. According to scientists, black diamonds originated from outer space and had arrived on Earth in meteors. Most of the diamonds had been found in Africa or South America. She wondered where this one had been found. Certainly not in Britain.

However, its extraterrestrial origin was nothing compared to the magic that had most likely been involved in changing it from an extremely rare stone into one of the Wizarding World's most powerful objects. The enchantments on it were amazing. She tried to figure out which charms had been used on it but was unsuccessful. It was some very strong magic. This stone was like nothing else she had ever seen or held. Even the Invisibility Cloak, with all the magic that had been used to create it, didn't radiate this much energy. As her hand touched the cold stone, she felt like her magic was getting stronger and that she could do anything. However, it was an illusion, of course.

Since diamonds were the hardest known minerals, she imagined that the carvings in it had been done by magic. She wondered if the Elder Wand had been used on it. Probably not...if the legend was true, the Peverell brothers had created their Hallows for individual reasons and hadn't shared with each other.

She read several articles that had spoken about use of the Resurrection Stone. Unfortunately, she learned little more than she already knew. The person using the Stone would summon whomever they wanted or needed to speak with the most (she had snorted in disbelief when reading that), and the dead person that appeared would look the same as the day he or she died.

Despite finding out everything she possibly could about the Resurrection Stone...namely its chemical makeup, and past accounts of the use of the Stone...it still wasn't enough. She still had no idea why Severus Snape had appeared.

Over the next few days, she did a lot of research on the Stone and the Peverell brothers. She spent a lot of time at the Ministry's library and had traced the genealogy of the Gaunt family all the way back to a man named Kadmus Peverel, who had been the brother of Antiochus and Ignatius Peverel. The Peverels had all been born in the 14th century. The spellings of the names were different but it was obvious that these men were the Three Brothers.

Finally, Hermione went to Little Hangleton. She knew that many people from the Ministry had looked at old documents in that house, but perhaps the reason that nothing had been found there was that they were looking for something different from what she wanted.

She wore Muggle clothing, but it was unnecessary since the village was almost completely deserted. Nobody saw her, or if they did, they didn't make themselves seen.

Hermione walked up the path to the Gaunt house and nearly stepped on a snake. She gasped, but managed not to cry out. The grass around the house was high, probably home to many other snakes. She hated snakes. When she got to the door, she cast a quick charm and found that there was nobody inside the house, and the only magic on the house was a weakened Muggle-Repelling Charm that had probably been cast over fifty years earlier.

Of course, because the Ministry had conducted investigations since Voldemort's death, she wondered if there was even anything left in the house. The bottom floor didn't appear to have been cleaned any time in the last twenty years, although it contained nothing of interest to her. There was little furniture...only an old sofa with torn upholstery that smelled of mold, and a table and chairs set in the kitchen. Hermione did all the proper locating charms to determine that there was nothing of interest.

The second floor was just as bare. She found a few papers, but they all were from the mid-18th century, after the Peverells' time and before Voldemort's time. Finally, she got to the attic. There were many boxes of old parchments. Hermione used her wand to perform a cleaning spell on the ground, then sat down and began searching. After three hours of leafing through old papers from the years 1300 to 1500, a letter caught her eye.

My dear son,

By the time you read this letter, I will be dead. The pain and agony of losing my beloved, your mother, and my inability to restore her life have been too much for me. I will join her soon enough.

I leave you this stone, my most successful invention, yet also my life's greatest failure. I spent a lot of time attempting to create something to revive the dead, yet I somehow fell short. I have spent years trying to find the missing charm, potion, or spell to do what I desired, yet it was impossible.

If you use this stone, it will show you the deceased person you most wish or need to see, assuming that person also wants to see you. I must warn you, however, that nobody can bring back the dead. Do not for one moment believe that it will. Do not use it as a substitute for what is real, what is true. Since your mother passed away, I've been trying to live in a fantasy.

Please do not make that mistake.

Good luck, my boy

The letter was unsigned, but she knew what it was and whom it was from. It was Cadmus Peverell's suicide note. When Hermione got back to her rooms that night, she used the Stone again. Snape appeared once again. The sneer that seemed to be a permanent fixture on his face had not disappeared.

"Professor Snape!" she said, surprised. *Can I not contact anyone else?* she wondered. It seemed that way.

"Granger, I told you not to bother me. Please. Go. Away." She had been expecting this animosity, so she ignored his words and looked at him a little more closely than she had the evening before. He wore the same black robes that he had always worn for teaching Potions. His hair was the same length as it had been, his skin still pale, his teeth still far from perfect. Overall, nothing had changed.

But she wondered....

Hermione couldn't resist the impulse to stretch out her hand and try to touch him. She expected her hand to go right through him. Hermione gasped when her fingers touched the cloth of his robes. She could feel his arm underneath her fingers.

She kept her hand on his arm for a moment. "Miss Granger, may I ask why you're touching me?"

Her hand snapped back as if burned. "I apologize, sir. I just wanted to see..."

"You wanted to see if I was a ghost, even though you already knew the answer to that question?" His tone was biting, but she didn't care. She changed the subject.

"I'm really curious as to why you're the person who came up when I turned the Resurrection Stone."

"Why indeed, Miss Granger. I'm sure that you can answer that question better than I can."

"Perhaps," she said thoughtfully. "What's it like? Death, I mean. People have spent millennia searching for answers, yet they never find out until it's too late. *But I can find out*, she thought, although she didn't voice it. It sounded too selfish.

"Miss Granger, you're sorely mistaken if you expect me to tell you the answer to the question that's been eluding people since the beginning of time," he told her.

Hermione sighed. "I'll talk to you again later, Professor."

Hermione put the Stone down on the table, and he was gone.

She tried not to be annoyed, although she began wondering how she could choose whom she brought back using the Resurrection Stone. Severus Snape seemed uninterested in making conversation with her.

Yet she wanted to keep talking to him. He was dead, but she felt like he was almost alive again. Talking to him like this almost made her feel like the events of the Battle of Hogwarts had never happened.

Of course, that was a ridiculous thought. He was dead. Nothing she did could change that.

That night, she couldn't sleep because she was too busy thinking about Severus Snape.

The next day she sat down on the sofa, picked up the Resurrection Stone again, and turned it. She used all of her will to concentrate on Lupin, Tonks, Sirius Black, Colin Creevey, and Dumbledore, hoping that one of them would appear instead of the derisive Potions master.

Severus Snape appeared once again. *Why?!*

"Miss Granger," he said. "Am I to expect that your invasion of my privacy will become a daily occurrence? If that's the case, please tell me now, so that I can clear some space in my very busy schedule."

"And what are you so busy with? You're dead, so I can't imagine that you have that many important affairs to attend to," she said snidely. He wasn't the only one who could be sarcastic.

"My *affairs*, as you call them, are none of your business. Now tell me what it is that you really want," he said.

"I ask nothing from you. I only wish to understand the nature of this fascinating object left to me by my predecessor. Professor Slughorn would have wanted me to use it. It's unfortunate that I can't contact anybody else."

"Can you think of any reason why I would be the one contacted?" he asked her. "Perhaps you are of the mistaken belief that I have a fortune hidden somewhere? Believe me, everything I own was left to Hogwarts upon my death to help cultivate the next generation of lazy students."

"I'm not interested in money."

"No doubt then you want the fame that your beloved Potter so desired. It's not enough that you and your two idiotic friends are the heroes of the Wizarding World; now you want to discover the secrets of life and death. Only then can you outshine Potter."

"I assure you, Professor, that you know absolutely nothing about me. Your guesses about my motivation are completely wrong. I have no desire to be famous, nor have I ever."

It was true; she preferred the reclusive lifestyle of a Potions mistress, staying out of the limelight except for the few moments of glory she had experienced when published in the *European Journal of Potions*, one of the leading journals in the Wizarding World. Still, that didn't make her famous; it only served to give her credibility in the (very small) Potions community of Europe.

"Miss Granger, what do you want?" he asked again.

"Just... knowledge. I have in my hand one of the most powerful and mysterious objects in the Wizarding World. It's only natural that I would want to learn more about it." He didn't respond immediately. She wondered what he was thinking, or even how his thought processes worked. He was dead, after all.

His voice was softer, rougher, almost nice. "Miss Granger, I understand that. But why me?"

She was silent for a moment. Then she spoke. "I apologize, sir. But I really don't have an answer to that question."

"You are one of the most exasperating witches on the planet, dead or alive," he told her, annoyance appearing in his expression.

"And you are impossible even when dead!" she fired back.

"That's quite enough, Miss Granger. Don't bother me again."

She threw the stone on the floor, and he disappeared. What a bastard! As if she ever *wanted* to talk to him again!

Hermione wished that it were easy to forget about the Resurrection Stone and concentrate on things that were real, not people who had been dead for many years. She had a lot to do...especially since she needed to start planning Potions classes. Slughorn had left her copies of his syllabus and all his lesson plans, but she wanted to change a few things around and adapt them to her own personal style. Seven different years of classes was a lot to plan for! How did all the teachers do it? Throughout the week, she thought a lot about the Stone. She had been constantly wondering why she could only contact Snape, and nobody else. Her confusion had been deepened by the knowledge that both the user of the Stone and the person who they contacted had to want to see the other person.

She could only think of one thing. She had been one of the last people to see him alive and always felt a sense of guilt. She had later found out that he died at least a half hour after she and Harry left the Shrieking Shack. She constantly wondered if there had been some way that she could have saved him. She wondered, did he want to talk to her too? So far, their interactions had not had much depth, but she knew that she could have an intelligent conversation with him if she was given the chance.

It was almost a week before she picked up the Resurrection Stone again. Even though Snape had told her to leave him alone, she couldn't help it.

"Professor," she said after using the stone. "How are you today?"

"Still dead," he said wryly. Had that been a joke? She wasn't sure, so she hid her smile. Did he know how to tell jokes? "Where were you the last few days?"

"I was here. I thought that you didn't want me to bother you anymore."

"Yes, well, I suppose that I can be inconvenienced for a few minutes everyday for the sake of the advancement of scientific research. Have you found out anything more about the Resurrection Stone?" She smiled. She had been waiting for a chance to talk about it with him.

"It shows the user a person that they most want or need to see. And it only works if the dead person *wants* to see the user," she said with amusement in her voice.

"Miss Granger, I assure you that I've never had any desire to see you since my death." His voice was unconvincing, she thought gleefully.

"Uh huh. About the Stone, it will not bring a person back to life, as Cadmus Peverell found out. You're not alive, although you certainly aren't a ghost."

"Obviously," he said dryly.

"I'm confused, though. I don't know why you are the one person I would most want to see." She realized how rude it sounded as soon as she said it. "Not that I don't want to see you, sir, but I, erhm..." Shit. She didn't know how to explain herself because she really didn't have any idea why he was the one her mind had chosen.

"Miss Granger, I realized many years ago that your social skills are sorely lacking. However, as I am dead, there is little that will offend me anymore. How is your personal research going?"

"My personal research?"

"Your investigation into the Draught of Living Death. You thought I didn't know about it?"

"But how could you? You're dead!"

He laughed, a sound that was so foreign, it nearly scared her. "You think that just because I'm dead I know nothing of the outside world? I've seen Horace Slughorn a few times since he died. Much to my displeasure, he talks of *you* all the time. He even has a copy of your Master's Thesis. It was very...thorough."

"You talk to Professor Slughorn? And you read my thesis?" Hermione was shocked. This was the first glimpse he was giving her into what life after death was like. How could he possibly get access to something that had been written after his death?

Suddenly the questions started coming out of her mouth, causing his relaxed features to become tense. "Where do you live? What else do you do?"

"Miss Granger, that's enough. I asked you about your research. I did *not* ask you to bombard me with questions."

"I apologize, sir, I'm just very curious. But I'd love to talk to you about my research."

The two of them began discussing the alterations she had made to the Draught of Living Death. He seemed very interested in what she had done for her Master's thesis and what she continued to do.

Finally, Hermione realized that it was getting very late. She couldn't believe that she had talked to Severus Snape for so long. What was even more amazing was that she had actually enjoyed talking to him about it.

Something in the back of her mind told her that it was not good for her to be spending so much time with a dead person. She needed to focus on what was real, what was alive.

She pushed those thoughts aside almost as soon as they came into her mind.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 5

Severus Snape is dead... and not happy about it. Unfortunately, his only link to the living world is a bushy-haired Gryffindor know-it-all.

Severus was stirring when she appeared again.

"Just a moment, Miss Granger. I need to put the Stasis Spell on this potion." He quickly murmured the charm, then turned back to her. "Good evening, how are you tonight?"

"I'm doing well, Professor Snape. Which potion are you making?"

He hesitated and looked at her. The expression on her face was so similar to the one he had always seen when she was a child. She was hungry for knowledge. In his mind, he debated whether he should tell her or keep it a secret.

Before he could come to a decision, the words began spilling out of his mouth. "I'm making a potion to cheat death."

She looked surprised.

"You mean... for yourself?"

"Yes, I suppose that I will be the test subject," he said in a neutral voice.

She sat in silence for a few moments. Then she spoke. "Maybe I can help you, sir."

"You, Miss Granger? What could *you* possibly help with?" The words were out of his mouth before he had a chance to think about them. He had been unnecessarily harsh. Although she was not the greatest Potioneer the Wizarding world had ever seen, the girl's potion-making skills were above average, and she was, at a young age, already above most of the others in her field. He had originally doubted her ability, but after reading her thesis, he realized that he had been wrong.

But she didn't appear to be particularly upset about his comment, or maybe she hid her feelings very well.

"You forget, Professor, that I have a distinct advantage over you in that I am *alive*. I have access to many things that you don't. I can dig up your body if necessary. I also am in possession of the Resurrection Stone, one of the few bridges between the dead and the living."

"I suppose that I have no control over your activities in your spare time. If you wish to brew potions that coincide with mine, you may. My only request is that you consult me before you exhume my body and conduct experiments on it."

"Of course, sir, I would never do that without your knowledge and consent." She was smiling. Was she happy to be working with him?

"So, sir, can you tell me a bit about what you are planning to do with the potion?"

"Very well. Do you know about the Philosopher's Stone?"

Hermione nodded. Of course she knew about it.

"Then as you probably know, the Philosopher's Stone was created with a potion called the Elixir of Life. It allows the user to resist death. Another question, Miss Granger: What are the ingredients in the Elixir of Life?"

"Unicorn horn, unicorn blood, phoenix tears, wormwood, and asphodel. And it must be brewed in a silver cauldron and cannot be touched by anything other than silver after the unicorn blood is added."

"Excellent, Miss Granger. One point to Gryffindor." She smiled at his wry attempt at humor. She could probably recite every single step, all the potential side effects, and the entire history of the potion. "And, Miss Granger, what happens if the person brewing the potion adds too much unicorn blood?"

"The person will die."

"And if the person is already dead?" He could see the thoughts forming in her head as she worked through what he was saying. "Miss Granger, the unicorn blood is the main ingredient of the potion. It's what gives the potion its potency. However, one can be hurt by too much of a good thing. But if there were some way to avoid being killed by it, the effects of the potion would be substantially greater."

"Great enough to bring back the dead?" She was skeptical, understandably. If a dead man had told Snape that he was making a potion to come back to life, he would have thought that the man was mad.

"I cannot be sure, but I believe that if I make modifications to the Elixir of Life, I can negate death."

She nodded thoughtfully. "Another question. Where will you get all the ingredients?"

"You forget, Miss Granger, that I am dead and in a sort of 'Heaven' where I can obtain anything I want. Procuring the ingredients is the easiest part of making the potion."

"This is so... fascinating. I'm going to sleep now, but I'll talk to you again tomorrow."

"Goodnight."

As soon as she had left, it occurred to Severus that she would probably never try to contact him again. His ideas were insane and morally wrong. Not only was it impossible to bring back the dead, but it was something that humans were not supposed to do.

For some reason, he felt almost sad about that. It wasn't that he liked her, but he had come to enjoy her company. She was no longer the annoying girl she once had been; she had matured into an intelligent and interesting woman.

Much to his surprise, Hermione Granger came at the same time the next evening.

"Good evening, Professor. I'm sorry for leaving so abruptly yesterday. I spent the rest of the evening and most of today reading everything I could find about the Philosopher's Stone and the Elixir of Life so that I could better discuss them with you. Did you know that Nicolas Flamel was the third person to brew a potion of that nature...but the others had less success than he did?"

"Yes, Miss Granger, I was aware of that."

"Oh," she said, looking a little disappointed. He smirked, amused. She had been trying to impress him with her knowledge. She didn't realize that he had also read everything that he could find about the Philosopher's Stone.

"I have an idea, though. In addition to increasing the amount of unicorn's blood, why don't we decrease the number of phoenix tears?"

"Miss Granger, what is the reasoning behind that?"

She began showing him several pages of complex chemical equations. He looked through them with surprise. The girl clearly had an understanding of potions that was deeper than that of most. She had broken each of the ingredients down into their Muggle counterparts, something that most people in the Wizarding world knew nothing about.

He would never tell her, but he was impressed.

After looking at all the work she had done, he nodded. "Very well, I can try that."

She was glowing with pride. Typical Granger.

"Sir, we need a way to connect our two worlds. I've been thinking about how we can use the Resurrection Stone. Your potion will bring you back to life, but you will still be in the world of the dead." She paused.

"Yes, Miss Granger, I realized that problem years ago when I first started the potion. I didn't know what to do about it until the day you came into my lab."

She smiled. "I'd like to use the Resurrection Stone in a way that's similar to a Portkey between the two worlds. I'll create a potion that connects the two."

"Miss Granger, have you ever created a Portkey before?"

"Yes, I have, sir. It's rather easy."

"Creating a Portkey is one thing, but this completely different. You do realize that it requires a lot of dark magic?"

"Yes, I'm aware of that. Anything that involves death is bound to fall under the category of Dark Arts." He didn't know why, but her nonchalant tone irritated him.

"Miss Granger, you're taking this too lightly. Using dark magic harms your soul. After using just one potion, performing one charm, you'll never be the same again. Are you sure that it's worth it?"

She looked straight into his eyes. "Yes, Professor, it's worth it."

Both of them sat there, deep in thought. Why was she willing to use dark magic to help him? Did she really know what it could do to a person?

She was the first to break the silence. "I didn't tell you this before, but I think I figured out why I can only contact you with the Resurrection Stone." Looking straight into his eyes with a sad expression, she said, "I could've saved you. I've thought about it often since you died. We were in the Shrieking Shack and I saw you on the ground. I'll never forget the way you looked. We thought you were already dead. Later, the Healers told us that you had died at least thirty minutes after the snakebite. You were lying there in pain the entire time, just waiting to die a slow death. I could have run back to the castle, got some antivenin. Or at least something for the pain..."

"Hermione, stop it!" Her eyes widened in surprise at his use of her given name, which had just slipped out. He never called students by their first names, even long after they graduated...it had always been important for him to maintain a distance between them.

"I am being completely honest when I tell you that there was nothing anyone could do. The snake venom began attacking my nervous system immediately. Even if you had managed to get to the castle and back quick enough to save me...which would have been impossible...I would be living the rest of my life as a vegetable, unable to use my mind properly."

"I'm sorry that you had to die in such a way, Professor Snape. You did so much for the Wizarding world, yet you never got anything in return. You didn't even get to live to see how good the world has become because of you. That's why I want to help you."

The world had become good because of him?

"I'm going to bed. Goodnight, sir," she said. Then she was gone.

They spoke every night over the next two weeks about the experiments they were working on. If he brought up a point that she was unsure about, she would spend the next day in the library doing research.

Finally, the night of August thirty-first came.

"Good evening, Miss Granger," he said after appearing in front of her.

"Good evening. The children arrive tomorrow," Hermione told him.

"Oh?" he said. She nodded. "One thing I noticed as the years went by is that the students get lazier and more stupid every year. It's been eight years since the last time I taught Potions, which means that they're probably eight times as idiotic as they were before."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "You've always been so cynical."

"And you've always been too quick to accept mediocrity. That's why you always allowed those two simpletons to tag along with you."

"As you know, Harry and Ron have become very successful Aurors and are much more intelligent than you give them credit for." He was baiting her, trying to get her angry. Although he would never admit it, she knew that his opinion of Harry and Ron had improved immensely over the years.

"That's good. Their performance in my class was absolutely abysmal. By the way, how is your relationship with Mr Weasley?"

She was surprised that he asked. This was the first time he had mentioned anything about her personal life. "Ron and I only dated for about two months. He's currently in a relationship with Lucy Bennet."

Snape smirked. "At least you quickly figured out that you were too good for him."

"Is that a compliment, Professor Snape?" Hermione asked with a small smile.

"Not so much a compliment as a statement of fact. Everyone thought that you and Weasley were wrong for each other...even Minerva and Albus."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "I'm sure all you teachers had more important things to do than gossip about students' love lives."

Snape laughed. "You haven't been at the Head Table at lunch time yet. I had more important things to do than talk about my students, but all the other teachers ever did was gossip. They had nothing better to think about than their students' love lives."

"You have an overly critical view of your colleagues. And your students."

"I do not. The students need someone to cast a critical eye upon them...they're too lazy. And don't forget, Hermione," he said, they're not my colleagues anymore. They're *your* colleagues now. I'm still dead."

Hermione was quiet for a moment. When she talked to him like this, she always forgot that he wasn't much more than a ghost.

"It's funny," she said. "Recently, I've talked to you much more often than anyone else, including my friends and other teachers here. I wish I could have spoken to you like this while you were still alive." She sighed, and stared at a point on the ground.

"Hermione..." he said. Her heart began pounding as she lifted her head to look at him. His eyes were serious, and he looked as sad as she felt.

Slowly, he reached his hand up towards her face, as if to touch her cheek, then stopped, quickly pulling it away.

He stood up suddenly. She jumped when he moved so quickly...usually they would both stay seated, him in his laboratory, her in her sitting room. He began pacing. It didn't escape her notice that he was walking right through her table.

"Hermione, I hate this." She was surprised by his tone. He was so... serious and intense. "Being dead is like being alive, only there is less importance to it. I always thought that the afterlife would be peaceful and happy. I suppose it's peaceful, but it's certainly not happy. I spend every day alone with nothing to do. There's no point in making potions...dead people don't need them. I can read any book that was ever written in any language, but books are no substitute for human contact. I spend everyday waiting for you to call me. All of the people I loved during my lifetime don't want to spend this life with me."

Hermione felt sad for him. He didn't deserve this fate; after all of his sacrifices, he should be happy!

She tried to be positive. "Well, once we complete our potions, you can try again and get a second chance."

"Hermione," he said, staring at her intently. "Please don't get your hopes up. The probability that our ridiculous scheme will actually work is so small."

How could he say that? They had been working so hard, and she had been so hopeful!

"Who cares if the odds are against us? That it probably won't work? At least there's some chance! If there's any hope at all that you can live again, then we have to at least try!" Her voice was pleading.

"Hermione, I envy you. I wish that I could be optimistic in the way that you are."

"I wish you could too, Professor Snape."

"Severus."

"What?"

"Please call me Severus. Hermione, you're one of the only people I talk to anymore. The only one that I actually *enjoy* talking to. Can you humor me and pretend that you're my friend by calling me by my first name?"

She felt a smile form on her face. He enjoyed talking to her? That was surprising. She looked directly into his eyes. "I'm your friend, Severus," she said quietly. "I really like talking to you. It's something to look forward to everyday."

A smile...a real smile...formed on his face. She couldn't remember ever seeing one before. "Hermione, I'm afraid that you should say goodbye to me for the night. The students will be arriving tomorrow, and I imagine that you have a busy day ahead of you."

Hermione nodded. It was after midnight, so she really needed to sleep. Minerva wanted them to arrive in the Great Hall by seven thirty for breakfast. "You're right. Goodnight, Severus," she said.

"Goodnight, Hermione." His eyes met hers once more.

Then she set the Stone on the table and he was gone.

That night, her dreams were about Severus Snape...begging her for mercy while she tortured him, telling Nagini to kill her, giving her a failing mark for her efforts in the war, kissing her then casting the Cruciatus Curse on her. She awoke at six thirty and felt exhausted.

Hermione pulled her hair back into a bun and put on a set of black robes. After using a charm to get rid of the dark circles under her eyes, she felt like her appearance was at least acceptable for meeting her colleagues and former professors.

When Hermione arrived in the Great Hall, two minutes early, most of the other teachers were already there. Hermione quickly greeted everyone before Minerva McGonagall arrived, exactly at seven thirty. She sat in the empty seat next to Neville.

"Good morning, everyone. Welcome back to all teachers old and new. I'd especially like to welcome our two newest staff members...both of whom are former students that you all know well...Neville Longbottom, who will be taking over the Herbology post, and Hermione Granger, who will be taking over as our Potions professor." The staff members around the table clapped for them.

Then Headmistress McGonagall began distributing their assignments for the day as last minute preparation for the impending arrival of the students. Hermione was glad that she had finished her lesson plans already...McGonagall needed their help to do the final check of the wards on the school.

She and Neville walked around the castle grounds together, casting various charms. They were having a rather one-sided conversation, with Neville talking and her being lost in thought. She couldn't stop thinking about Severus. She was beginning to realize what the Resurrection Stone was doing...bringing two lonely, like-minded people together to attempt the impossible. She actually enjoyed talking to him, more than she could imagine talking to anyone else that she knew, dead or alive.

Unfortunately, he was right that they would probably be unsuccessful. Then what would she do? Continue talking to him? Probably. But then she would fall into the trap of the Resurrection Stone. She knew that it couldn't really bring back the dead, only tease the user until it slowly drove him or her mad.

"Hermione, did you hear what I just said?" Neville said. She snapped back to reality, noticing that they were standing near the Quidditch pitch.

"Oh sorry, Neville. I was zoning out for a moment."

"Oh. I asked if you would like to come to my rooms after the students are in their Houses. We can have a drink to celebrate getting through the Welcoming Feast."

She paused and examined him for a moment. He had truly grown up over the last five years. He was no longer the pudgy, insecure boy that she had known in the past. His face had matured and his body had grown rather nicely. Many women would now call him handsome. In addition, he had a confident air about him that had only appeared after the war was over.

"Sorry, Neville, but I have a lot to do before classes start tomorrow. Maybe another time."

"Yeah, sure."

She wondered if he saw through her lie. After the children were all settled in, she had been planning to talk to Severus, then do more research.

Damn, she thought. This isn't good. I'm declining my friends to talk to a dead man. What's wrong with me?

She realized that talking to him at night was not only becoming a part of her routine, but an obsession.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of 5

Severus Snape is dead and not happy about it. Unfortunately, his only link to the living world is a bushy-haired Gryffindor know-it-all.

She appeared in his lab about an hour later than usual the next evening. She looked a little more disheveled and tired than she had in the past.

"How was your day?" Hermione asked him.

"I'm still dead. I didn't leave the house. I worked on my potion and did some research. I know that you're only bothering with the niceties because you want me to ask about *your* day, so spare me the formalities and just tell me already."

Much to his amusement, Hermione blushed a little bit.

"Well, my day was pretty good. You know that it was the first day of school, right?"

"Really? After you told me at least thirty times last night, it somehow slipped my mind."

"No need to be sarcastic. Anyway, I had the Gryffindor and Slytherin first years in the beginning. They're kind of cute. I can't believe that I was ever that young!"

Severus snorted. The girl was setting herself up to get eaten alive by the children. "Cute? Don't be fooled into thinking they're cute. They're brats who will take advantage at the first opportunity. And yes, Hermione, you were that young and you were also a brat. A know-it-all brat, the worst kind!"

Rather than acting offended, she chuckled. "I'd like to see how you were at that age."

"Ugly, more awkward than I am now, and completely stupid and naïve." Hermione looked taken aback by his bluntness. She stayed silent for a moment, then finally spoke.

"I think that you're too critical of yourself, Severus."

"And I think that you're too eager to approve of everyone you meet. I grew out of my naivety, but it seems like you never will," he said viciously.

Immediately after he had said the words, he regretted them, for he could see the hurt in her eyes. Without thinking, he reached out towards her, momentarily forgetting that he was dead. "Hermione, I..."

He trailed off as his hand made contact with the skin on her arm. A strange feeling of warmth came over him, one that he hadn't felt in quite some time. He could feel the blood coursing through her veins, her pulse. It had been so long since he had felt human contact. She felt so alive, which reminded him painfully that he was still very much dead.

He could feel the inquisitive gaze of her hazel eyes. He was suddenly awash with desire, to touch her cheek, to kiss her lips, to brush several strands of her light brown hair away from her face. His gaze focused on her lips for a moment, then met her eyes.

A slight blush began creeping up her cheeks. Immediately, she turned her head away.

"I'm sorry, I should go. I'll talk to you again tomorrow night. Goodnight, Severus."

The skin, the heartbeat, the sensation disappeared all at once. His hand was now touching dead air.

Severus sighed. Had he crossed the line? Reaching out to touch her had been impulsive. She had felt so warm...he could only assume that he felt cold. That had probably been why she didn't want to continue talking to him.

Stupid! he thought to himself. He had most likely frightened her away. No doubt she thought he was nothing more than a creepy old dead man, which was actually pretty close to the truth.

The dead and living shouldn't communicate in this way, he thought. *It's just not right.*

That was why their experiment had to succeed. Otherwise, they would be doing this forever. Or at least until Hermione Granger got tired of him, which he hoped would never happen.

Severus spent all of the next day working on the potion. Since he had begun talking to Hermione, he had become extremely productive. He had gotten more done in the last few weeks than he had in the previous six months. Once he had found a way to get to the other world, his motivation had greatly increased.

If he continued at this pace, he could finish by Christmas. Hopefully she could create the complex charms and potions needed by then. Unfortunately, she actually had other things to do, whereas he could devote every moment of his time to this project if necessary.

But he had no doubt that she would succeed. He just hoped that both of their parts in this worked together.

"How was your day?" he asked when she appeared in front of him that evening. He had been worried that their conversation would be awkward after the previous night, but she just looked exhausted and unhappy.

"Um, it was okay."

"Just okay?"

"I had the second year Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw class brewing a Sleeping Draught to be tested later tonight, but one cauldron exploded. And the next thing I knew, eight of them had turned bright purple and were fast asleep on the ground."

Severus chuckled. "I remember in my first few weeks, I tried to get my Gryffindor/Slytherin fifth year class to brew Polyjuice. After a cauldron exploded, most of the class, including me, ended up in the Hospital Wing. All of us were horribly disfigured."

Hermione grinned. "Really?" He was glad to see her expression change; he didn't want to have shared a rather embarrassing story about himself for nothing.

He almost smiled thinking of it. That had been the first day he realized how satisfying it was to take House Points.

"Yes. I hope you took off a hefty amount of points from the student who caused the explosion."

"Twenty."

"I would have taken at least fifty. How were your other classes?"

"I'm quite pleased with the Gryffindor and Slytherin classes so far. They've behaved themselves rather well. I mixed up the entire class so that every student is sitting with someone from the other House. So far, nobody has hexed another student in my class."

"That's good." His classes with the two Houses had always given him a lot of headaches. He wondered if the animosity between the two had cooled over the past five years. It was doubtful; the students were probably on their best behavior since it was the beginning of the year. Most likely Hermione would be pulling her hair out within a few weeks. "And the ability of the students?"

"Much better than I expected."

"I suppose that would be the case if you had no expectations whatsoever. I've always found that the majority of students lack the motivation and mental aptitude to gain more than a superficial understanding of the subject. Each year, my expectations got lower and lower. Rarely were they exceeded."

He could remember few instances where one of his students had done better than he had predicted. Hermione Granger was one example. Even when he first met her, he had not been overly impressed with her Potions ability. She certainly had much more motivation than her peers, but her high scores had been, in his opinion, due only to her talent for memorization. However, her work after graduation made him realize how extraordinary her ability truly was. Perhaps his inability to realize how capable she was had to do with his disapproval of her friends, who had been mediocre Potions students.

"How is the potion coming along?" she asked him, changing the subject.

"Quite well, actually. I added the phoenix tears today."

"Wow, Severus, that's wonderful. I'm planning to devote my entire weekend to our project. If I work every weekend over the next three months, I think I can finish it."

He was fairly certain that if he had had a pulse, it would have quickened at the sight of the look of hope in her eyes. Because he knew that the hope was for his future, his life.

After the two of them had said goodnight, he went to his living room and relaxed in a large chair by the warm fire. He thought...as he had many times in the last twenty-four hours...back to the previous night, when he had touched her skin. He wanted to do it again. Was it because of the life in her? Perhaps. But inside of him was a different feeling, one that he had only experienced with one other person.

He knew that it wasn't just because she was alive, or because she was there and nobody else was. The spark in her eyes, the passion in her voice when she talked about her work had all slowly worked their way into his heart. Every time he saw her, he felt almost happy. The amazing thing was that he hadn't felt this way since he was a teenager.

He was falling in love with Hermione Granger.

The two of them fell into a routine. Severus would research and brew during the day while she was teaching. They would talk every evening after dinner for anywhere from two minutes to five hours. Hermione would usually spend the weekends working on modifying the Resurrection Stone.

She had slowly gotten used to teaching her classes, and she came to the realization that perhaps teaching was what she was meant to do. She enjoyed working with the students much more than doing pure research. She loved the looks of curiosity on their faces, the enthusiasm that some of them had for Potions. Of course, there were a handful of students who preferred sleeping to classes and practical jokes to Potions, but the majority of them were, for the most part, good learners.

The highlight of her day, however, always came after dinner. She really enjoyed talking to Severus Snape. In the beginning, he had been abrasive and some of his remarks had been downright cruel, but the two of them had warmed up to each other. She had spoken to him every night over the past three months, and she couldn't imagine not doing so.

She was a little afraid, though. What would happen if their project failed? Would they always talk like this, with only the Resurrection Stone to connect them? She would go insane.

Hermione sighed. Her feelings for Severus Snape confused her. She found herself growing more and more fond of him. She constantly thought back to the night when he had touched her. His hand had been cool, but a jolt of electricity had coursed through her. Had he felt it too?

He hadn't touched her since then. It was probably better for both of them that way. He had been right when he had told her not to get her hopes up. In the end, she might end up feeling horribly disappointed and heartbroken.

She had been making a lot of progress with the Resurrection Stone. She had brewed a complex, dark potion that she had poured on the Stone. Currently, she was at a point where she could charm objects, then give them to him while holding the Resurrection Stone in her other hand. In the past, they could see only each other. Now if she was holding something, it would actually appear to him, and he could keep it even after she let go of the Stone. It also worked the other way...he could give her an object from his world.

She had considerably weakened the barrier between life and death. It wouldn't be long before the two of them could pass through it.

"Hermione," Severus said to her one Saturday night in December, "I need your help with one more thing in this experiment. I need a special ingredient and only you can provide me with it."

"Oh?"

"I need a vial of your blood."

"My blood?" she asked with uncertainty in her voice.

He looked uncomfortable. "I wouldn't ask for it if there was any other way, but I've come to the realization that this will not work without the blood of a living human being."

She was quiet for a moment. Of course she should have expected it...human blood was necessary for a potion of this nature. But it felt strange for her. If the potion worked properly and brought him back to life, her blood would flow through his veins until he died a second time. It was quite an intimate thing to share.

Despite her reservations, she nodded. "Of course, Severus. Just give me a few minutes and I'll get it for you."

She put down the Resurrection Stone and walked to the Hospital Wing. Luckily, Madam Pomfrey was out and the few students who were present were sleeping, so there was nobody to ask questions. She found a sterilized needle and stuck it into a vein in her arm.

Hermione had taken her own blood before, but she didn't like doing it. She was certainly not squeamish, but throughout the entire time her blood was draining into the vial, she kept her eyes averted and told herself that it was absolutely necessary to help Severus.

"Here it is," she said after summoning him again. She gave him the vial.

"Thank you, Hermione." He stared into the vial for a few moments. Had she done something wrong? It was certainly human blood, but he seemed mesmerized by it. "Thank you," he said again.

She nodded. "You're welcome. Is everything okay?"

He snapped out of it and quickly changed the subject. "Of course. How has your project been coming along?"

"Very well; I think that I made a substantial discovery today. We'll see tomorrow."

"May I ask what it is?"

She smiled secretively. "You may, but I won't answer. It's a surprise."

She spent the rest of that evening and the next day working on the Stone. After trying an extensive number of charms, she was confident that it would work.

That night, she turned the Stone three times. Suddenly she was hit with a rush of cold air. She was no longer in her cosy sitting room at Hogwarts; she was now in his laboratory, in the world of the dead.

"Good evening, Hermione," he said.

Hermione didn't speak. She could only look in awe around her. As far as potions laboratories went, it was fairly ordinary. Perhaps the normality was what amazed her most about it. The setup was very similar to her own lab. It had white walls and several workspaces with a few stools. Various ingredients on shelves lined the walls, and several doors led to other rooms, presumably for storage. He had cauldrons of various sizes and materials, several of which had potions in them. She could see a large silver cauldron in the corner, and she knew immediately what it was.

Severus Snape had been watching her questioningly.

"Hermione, what in the world are you doing?"

"Looking around your lab. It looks very much like my own."

"You can see it?" he said. Although he rarely showed emotion, she could hear the delight in his voice.

She gestured towards the silver cauldron. "May I?"

He nodded and walked with her to it. She stared down at the deep red liquid, bubbling inside of it.

"I just added three drops of your blood into it last night. Now I have to let it sit for five days."

"And then?"

"I test it."

Chills ran through her body. Perhaps it was the cold air of death around her, but more likely it was the idea that it might be over soon. And she could not predict the outcome.

"Severus, give me your hand." He held out his right hand and she took it in hers, which held the Stone. Suddenly they were out of his laboratory and in her quarters.

She kept his hand in hers, knowing that if she let go, he would be gone.

"Hermione, this is amazing," he said. She looked into his eyes, which rather than studying their surroundings, were staring at her with longing. Her heart began pounding in her chest. For a moment, she thought that he was going to kiss her, but he just pulled her to him, his left arm around her. His right hand was still intertwined with hers.

He held her for quite some time that evening, neither of them wanting to let go.

Finally, she pulled back, still keeping his hand in hers. "I'm going to sleep, Severus. Good night."

Impulsively, she stood on her tiptoes and gave him a kiss on the cheek. Then she let go of the Resurrection Stone and his hand. The Stone fell to the ground and he was gone.

She picked it up from the floor and looked at it. Who would ever guess that a simple black rock could be so powerful?

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 of 5

Severus Snape is dead and not happy about it. Unfortunately, his only link to the living world is a bushy-haired Gryffindor know-it-all.

Severus looked in the mirror. His pale skin, large nose, and greasy hair were still the same as they had always been. One of the negative things about being dead was that he could not easily change his appearance. Before tonight, he had paid little mind to it. However, after Hermione had touched her lips to his cheek the previous night, he couldn't help but want to look better. Unfortunately, he seemed to be a hopeless cause. He would never be handsome, especially if he remained dead for the rest of eternity.

After running a comb through his hair...with no effect at all...Severus went down to his laboratory. It was six thirty, and she usually contacted him around seven. He spent the next few minutes checking on his potion. It was nearly finished, with only four more days to go. Then he would be ready to try it out.

If the potion failed, there were two things that might happen. The first possibility was the best case. He would die again and return back to his current state, and they would have to start over. However, it would be very frustrating to start from scratch after spending so much time on this one.

The second possibility was one that he didn't even want to consider. The most spectacular failure would result in him dying again, but this one wouldn't have him returning to this state. His soul would be gone forever, and he would fall into an eternal sleep.

All of their calculations suggested that the outcome would be perfect. He and Hermione had gone through all possible scenarios where the potion would fail and worked to correct them. But despite all the research they had done, he was still uncertain.

He stared at her for a moment when she arrived. She was wearing a set of light blue robes and had her brown hair pulled back into a plait. Her eyes sparkled as she appeared. For the first time, he actually felt that she was beautiful.

A sinking feeling hit him. There was no way she would ever be interested in him. Why would someone young, pretty, and intelligent want to spend time with a surly old Potions master?

Research, he thought. If they were successful, she would gain fame and fortune. She could publish her findings in every Potions journal. Had that been the reason?

"Good evening, Severus. How are you today?" Hermione said

"I'm still dead," he said emotionlessly.

"I have good news, Severus. I worked all day, and I think I'm finished!"

Hermione held out the hand that held the Resurrection Stone. He put his index finger on the Stone, which felt warm to the touch.

She counted quietly, "One, two, three."

The pull beneath his navel was familiar, yet almost foreign. It had been so long since he had actually needed to use a Portkey, for the dead could Apparate from one place to another with ease, no matter what the distance.

He kept his finger on the Stone as he looked around her sitting room. He hadn't really looked at it closely the previous evening. It was the same room that had once been a part of his quarters, with a few differences. She seemed to have roughly the same number of books as him, but she had put many pictures of her friends and family on the wall. The colors were more feminine...he had always preferred black, but she had decorated in a variety of pastels.

"Let go, Severus," she said. He took his hand away.

And he was still there.

He smiled.

A look of surprise appeared on her face. It was so rare that he smiled earnestly...and he knew that...that people often became confused at the sight. She had seen him do it a few times, and each time, she had the same reaction: surprise.

"Tell me, Hermione," he said uncertainly. "Why did you do this?" She had worked so hard for him. He had a secret hope that she helped him because she cared, but knew that it was unlikely.

"I'm doing it to help you, of course," she told him.

"Why would you want to do that? Are you honestly saying that your work has nothing to do with fame or fortune?"

She shook her head, looking almost insulted. "In the beginning, Severus, it crossed my mind that if we were to do this, we could become famous for breaching the barrier between the living and the dead." She looked at him sincerely and her voice got softer. "However, as I've grown to know you better, I've come to realize that you deserve a second chance at life. And I want to help you start again."

He put his arms around her. The look on her face was unreadable for a moment until he realized that her face held the same desire as his own. Slowly, he brought his lips to hers.

The heat from her body burned through him as she kissed him back. He couldn't remember enjoying a simple kiss during his living days, but this one had been rather nice. She pulled him onto the sofa, and he began trailing kisses down her neck.

"Severus," she said breathlessly. "What would happen if you stayed the night here?"

A strange feeling washed over him. Was she propositioning him? He couldn't remember a woman ever doing that while he was alive. He wanted to say yes. It had been over ten years since he had been with a woman. But, he knew that sex with a dead man would be unsatisfying for her. He wasn't sure if any couple had ever attempted it, but he did not want them to be the first.

"I'm not certain, Hermione. You must remember that I don't even have a heartbeat. Just wait a few days."

She nodded and pulled away.

"I wonder how long you can stay here without having to go back," she said. He could see the wheels spinning in her head...no doubt another experiment was blooming in her mind.

"I'm not certain. I don't want to test it. Playing with life and death is a dangerous thing."

"Indeed." She paused for a moment. "Sometimes I'm afraid of what will happen to us in the future. We're meddling with things that humans are not supposed to meddle with. But then I remember that what we're doing is for good."

He touched his fingers to her cheek. "You're sacrificing so much for me, Hermione. I don't know how I can ever repay you."

"You can make sure the potion works. And don't die again until you have great-grandchildren and are older than Albus Dumbledore."

"I'll do what I can."

Four days later, the potion was finished.

Neither of them knew what to expect. They had decided that he would use the Portkey to come to her sitting room, then drink the potion.

She came to his lab at seven o'clock that evening.

"Is there anything here you, er, want to take with you?" Hermione asked. She looked embarrassed, as if she knew that it was a stupid question.

Everything he had here came from the world of the living. "No, Hermione, just the potion." He picked up the bottle that had been sitting on one of his work tables.

"Are you ready?" she asked quietly. He nodded.

She held out her hand. He took it and let the Portkey take him to her rooms. She set the Resurrection Stone on the table and sat on the sofa.

"Severus, if this doesn't work..." Her eyes were worried. He sat down next to her and put his hand on her cheek.

"If it doesn't work, we'll try again." He was being overly optimistic and she knew it. He didn't know *what* would happen if it didn't work.

She kissed him. He savored it for a moment, then pulled back.

"I love you, Severus," she said. She looked as surprised by her declaration as he was. Nobody had ever said it to him except for, on a few rare occasions, his mother.

He looked longingly into her eyes and pulled the cork out of the bottle and drank.

The potion felt warm on his tongue as it slid down his throat. The warmth spread throughout his entire body.

He gasped as his heart began beating. His dried up veins and arteries were no longer dry. He could feel the blood...originally her blood...rushing through them.

She was staring at him in fascination. Well, it wasn't every day that she saw a dead man come back to life.

He watched her. Suddenly her face changed, and he realized that it was because *his* face had changed. A pain comparable to the Cruciatus Curse had suddenly come over him. For a man who hadn't felt pain in over five years, it was unbearable.

The blood was rushing too fast, up to his head. He was dizzy, and his body felt like it was on fire.

He could feel her holding him and hear her voice saying his name.

"Severus, what is it?" she was asking.

Nothing, I'm fine, was what he wanted to say, but the words refused to come out of his mouth. A few seconds later, he completely blacked out.

Hermione felt his body slump in her arms. Part of her was ready to panic, but she knew that she had to keep a cool head.

At the moment, his life was in her hands. And if she didn't save him . . . Well, she didn't want to think about that.

Hermione put her arms around him and pulled him to the sofa, momentarily forgetting about her wand.

His body was hot and his pulse was erratic. She supposed that she should be thankful that he actually had a heartbeat. However, it was difficult to ignore his ragged breathing, which made it seem like he was gasping for air. She went into the bathroom and grabbed a few medicinal potions from the shelf, knocking over several bottles in the process. The sound of the glass breaking brought her to reality, and she realized how scared she felt. What if she couldn't revive him?

She returned to Severus and poured a potion down his throat, using her wand to make sure he didn't choke on it. The potion was one of her own creations, and it contained the same herbs used in fever reducing potions, in addition to ibuprofen and a few other Muggle ingredients. She had found it to be very effective, and Madam Pomfrey had even used it in the Infirmary.

There was little else that she could do that wouldn't counteract the effects of her potion. So now she just had to wait.

Hermione sat on the ground next to him and put her head on his chest. "Severus," she said softly, "please stay with me. You have so much to live for right now. Please..." Her voice cracked and she felt tears in her eyes. She couldn't lose him, not like this. Having him die again so soon after he had begun living would be such a cruel twist of fate.

She stayed in that position for quite some time, until she realized that his breathing had become less irregular. Hermione took her head off his chest, his shirt wet from his tears and looked at his face.

He looked peaceful. She felt his pulse again. Normal. A sob escaped her throat, this one from happiness. She knew, could feel, that he would live.

Hours later, Severus woke up. He took several deep breaths and realized that he had a heartbeat again.

He was alive.

He looked around him, trying to make out his surroundings. Slowly, he sat up and looked around the room.

A few candles flickered on the walls, and he could see the outline of the massive four poster bed that he had slept in for many years.

He had woken up in this room many times in the past, but this had to be the first time that he wasn't alone. His eyes fell on the woman curled up next to him, her hand in his.

"Severus?" she said sleepily.

"Yes." His voice was weaker than he would have liked.

"The potion worked," she said, relieved.

"Thank you, Hermione, for stating the obvious." His dry observation was, unfortunately, followed by a fit of coughing.

She calmly handed him a glass of water, unfazed by both his remark and his coughing.

Almost the moment he gave her back the empty glass, he was asleep again.

The next time he awoke, it was day.

He blinked a few times and looked around. She was still there, but this time she was sitting in a chair reading a book. He watched her for a few moments. Her brow was furrowed in concentration.

"Always the scholar," he finally said.

She jumped then set her book down on the table next to her. "How are you feeling?" she asked.

"Like I have the worst hangover of my life. What time is it? What *day* is it?"

"It's two o'clock p.m., Wednesday, December twenty-third. You took the potion yesterday at eight p.m."

He was silent for a moment.

"What happens next?" he asked.

"It really depends on you. Nobody knows that you're alive except for me, so it's your decision. You know your options...you can go into hiding for the rest of your life, you can go straight to the Ministry right now, we can contact the headmistress..."

"No, I don't mean that. What happens next with you and me?" He hated asking the question; it made him feel weak and insecure, but he had to know.

Her face changed, and her voice wavered a little when she replied. "That also depends on you," she said softly. "I meant what I said earlier."

I love you, she had said. He had not responded back. Love for him was such a strange thing. The feelings that he had for Lily had grown from friendship to an unrequited obsession. Was that love? Of a sort. He had loved her, certainly, but would he have been happy to spend an eternity with her? He wasn't sure. It was a teenage love that had gotten out of control due to outside circumstances. With Hermione, though, it was different. His love for her was that of an adult, not just an inexperienced, adolescent boy.

"Hermione, of course I feel the same way as you. I'm not a romantic person, but I can tell you that I love you. And as I start my life again, I want you in it."

She sat on the bed next to him and kissed him. He took her in his arms, looking forward to a new beginning.