

Beyond the Veil

by Melenka

Luna regularly visits the death room to study the veil and makes a remarkable discovery

Once more into the breach

Chapter 1 of 1

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"Why are you here?" Sirius asked. It was a rhetorical question. The girl on the other side of the veil could not hear him. Nor, for that matter, could anyone on his side. At first, the solitude had bothered him, too much like a prison for comfort. He was used to silence by now. On occasion, the form of another person would drift into view like some obscene shadow play, only serving to emphasize how alone they all were.

Except for the times she came to visit.

He snorted. It could hardly be considered a visit. She sat there, head tilted so that her pale hair brushed the floor as she knelt on the dais. Her fine lips moved, in prayer or meditation. Surely not with a spell. Such things left a mark the Ministry would be certain to trace. They could not know of her late night sessions. They frowned upon people showing an interest in things they themselves could not fathom. It made them feel small.

He shook his head and resumed pacing. Not that there was any boundary to the "room" in which he spent time. It was infinite, and full of nothing. His eyes kept shifting to regard the girl, despite his resolve to ignore her. It never did work. At least the attempt provided a distraction.

"Oh, pretty child, what might I try if I could reach through this gossamer curse? Nothing good, I'm sure. Well, nothing pure, at any rate. Good is so subjective, don't you think? Let me tell you my definition of good." He was glad she could not hear him, beast that he was. Ladies should not be subjected to his thoughts, and the sort of women who might appreciate them were forever beyond his grasp. He wondered if any of them mourned his loss. *Highly unlikely.*

Luna slipped through the door at the far end of the room. Every time she entered, the horrors of the fight with the Death Eaters returned. Considering how frequent her forays to the veil, newer memories should have taken precedence, but she'd stopped questioning the way her mind worked. Other people did so often enough that she thought her own addition to the process redundant.

As she approached the dais, she wondered who she might hear tonight. Such lonely voices, most of them quite mad, but each with their own stories to tell. The hope of hearing her mother's voice had faded, and she was now convinced that her original purpose for studying the veil had no point. Her mother was either not beyond that black curtain, or she was hiding behind it. This was not the place where they would meet again. And yet she returned.

A shiver of excitement ran through her as she knelt. It was a signal to **him**, an offering in exchange for his words. He was, of course, mistaken in his belief that she could not hear him, or he would never have gone on as he did. It had been quite a shock, the first time. She'd left in a hurry, so embarrassed at her reaction that she'd almost forgotten to close the door. She had been plagued by dreams she could not shake, dark, frightening, alluring, which had not abated until her next visit. She'd liked his thoughts on spellcraft far better. She wrote those down, too. The dreams that followed had been quite illuminating.

The pile of scrolls had mounted over the years, worn at the edges now, smooth where she set the stones to hold them in place, smudged from the brush of her fingers. Some of the information could be found in books, but she preferred to learn from his words, his imagery, given to her through a darkness that allowed for the passage of

sound, but nothing else.

She whispered a greeting, knowing he could not hear her. In truth, she was grateful for the barrier. She had made pronouncements in the shadows of that shadowed place, the sort to which one should not admit, much less give voice. She made another, a small sacrifice of self in exchange for knowledge.

She took out a ring Sirius had been rumored to wear. It was battered, the signet burned away to leave an asymmetrical metal blob. She'd spied it during a visit to Grimmauld Place and told Harry she liked the warped shape. Without a thought, he'd handed it to her. She placed the ring in a bowl, where it gleamed dully against the pure black stone. She didn't much care for the bowl, as it seemed to absorb more light than it ought, but it had been in her family for years and no ill had come of using it. Before the bowl, she laid a sapphire knife, made by a particularly talented stone cutter in Romania who might well have been a wizard. Finally, she unrolled a tiny scroll and laid it over the bowl. She sat back on her heels, looked up, and waited.

Sirius looked at the collection of objects and grinned. *Foolish chit*. She'd spent a bit too much time amongst Muggles if she thought the useless artifacts required for their "magic" would have any effect here. At least the Ministry would not know. Spells might draw their attention, but silly rituals would set off not a single alarm. He wondered how she'd devised this particular scheme. If nothing else, it would be entertaining to watch her. If he was lucky, she might feel the need to disrobe first.

"I am a hopeless pig," he muttered. "I suppose I can't be blamed for finding you beautiful. You've grown into a fine woman. If you'd any sense at all, you'd spend more time with young men than in that dim amphitheatre, though I confess I'd miss you. To spend eternity without the opportunities to fantasize about running my fingers over your alabaster skin as you kneel on the floor there? Were I not already dead, the mere thought would prompt me to kill myself." He barked at his own joke.

She began to speak, but he could not make out the words, despite having become quite adept at reading her lips. He'd made a game of responding to her recitation of fevered dreams with dry monologues on the nature of magic. Her thoughts on the working of this spell or that were met with lascivious suggestion, each more elaborate than the last, none as depraved as his true desires. If nothing else, the woman made the afterlife a bit more bearable.

Luna tried to concentrate, but Sirius made it damnably difficult. She started the spell again.

"...my fingers tangled in your hair, pulling your head back until your spine arches, just a little," he purred. "Oh, the joy of watching your breath catch, feeling your pulse quicken, just there, where the neck meets the shoulder. A gentle bite in that spot can do wonders, love."

She closed her eyes, practically feeling his hands on her. If he did not stop speaking, she was more likely to strip and give him the show he'd requested than free him. It would serve him right, the randy goat. She ignored the stirring sensations he provoked and spoke the beginning of the spell for the third time.

He was working up to the good part. She always squirmed in such delightful ways before she fled. For one moment, he felt as though she could see him, so intent was her gaze. It took him a few seconds to realize she was bleeding.

She hadn't expected to get dizzy so quickly. She'd cut herself worse in the kitchen, the year she'd tried to learn Muggle cookery, and not felt even a portion so disoriented. Blood dripped from her hand into the bowl, soaking the parchment, covering the ring. The knife in her right hand seemed a distant thing.

"Mustn't let go," she mumbled as she drew the bowl toward her and curled her arm around it. "Mustn't let go." The deafening claxon of Ministry alarms filled the room.

"NO!" The vast space filled with his dismay. The veil shimmered and bowed, first outward a temptation he'd seen before then inward. He shied away, remembering the pain. If she passed through, it would make her mad, as it did most others. The advantage of time spent in Azkaban was that little could top it, so he'd remained relatively sane.

She crawled toward the veil, still clutching the ingredients of a curse she could not fathom. He watched, horrified, fascinated, until she was close enough to touch. He could not escape, had not tried after the first attempt, but he would not accept the same fate for her. He had to prevent her crossing, regardless of the cost. Perhaps the veil would grant him some mercy for good intentions. Gritting his teeth, he stepped forward into agony.

"No, no, no," she chanted as the veil wrapped around his form. His mouth opened as if to scream, but for once no sound emerged. She lurched to her feet, blood sloshing over the edge of the bowl to speckle her arm. It would be fine. She had more to give. Before that, she must stop him trying to leave. He would ruin everything, and she would not accept that fate for him. She spoke a charm, sure it would not work, and hurtled forward.

A thousand stinging nettles attacked her arms and legs. Something sliced across her skin until there was nothing left of her but muscle and bone and pain. She could not see, had no eyes, no mouth, no ears. She was emptied, shaken, turned inside out. Every thought, dream, hope, desire came rushing to the front of her mind, only to retreat before fear and sorrow and a loneliness that tore at the remains of her heart. The longing for death became all, but it was denied her. When the blackness came, she whispered her thanks into the void.

Her thrust through the veil caught him square in the chest, hurtling him backward. He managed to keep his feet. She did not. As she sank to the floor, he took the bloody bowl from her. With a thought, he produced a table on which to set the cursed thing, then retrieved the knife. She'd been more clever than he would have expected. Save for the paper, all her precious objects had passed through with her. Her clothing, on the other hand, was noticeably absent. He conjured a blanket and laid it over her. There was no point in checking her wounds. They would have been healed on the way through, all scars removed save the ones on her soul. Some things could not be cleansed.

Sirius sighed and continued to furnish the room, such as it was. Had someone done the same for him, the harsh transition to his new reality might have gone a bit more smoothly. He sank into an armchair and reached for the glass of wine on the table. It gave him the small comfort of the familiar, or what had been at one time. He was resigned to waiting until she came to, as there was no viable alternative. He hoped to observe the awakening. He'd witnessed a few, but they usually took weeks to come about. Most of those who entered simply dissipated, still unconscious.

"Ah, well. It's not as though I don't have the time." He sipped the wine.

If he'd been a good man, he would have created clothing for her. He was most definitely not a good man. Besides, the least she deserved for this stunt was a little mortification. If she proved coherent, he expected a protracted argument about whatever stupidity had caused her to kill herself in such an unusual way. It would not be enough to fill eternity, but it might make a good start.

Soft. That had not been a sensation she'd expected. She kept her eyes closed, lest her relatively pain-free existence prove a dream. Her fingers twitched upon the discovery of a thick fabric that felt remarkably like a wool carpet, the fine sort favored by people who cared about such things. The blanket over her was, most certainly, of a higher quality than she'd ever owned. It felt divine against her skin.

"Oh!" Her eyes flew open with the realization that she was entirely naked. It made sense, as only pure metal and stone made it through the veil. She'd counted on that when picking out the pieces for her ritual. Unfortunately, she hadn't followed the thought to its logical conclusion. A soft chuckle indicated that someone else certainly had.

Sirius sat in an oversized chair, rolling the stem of an empty wine glass between his palms. He looked nothing like the posters of a madman the Ministry had put up after his escape from Azkaban. His dark hair hung in waves past his shoulders, setting off eyes just slightly darker than silver. His skin held the flush of youth, his full lips curved in an indolent smile.

"Are you quite satisfied, or shall I stand so you can inspect the rest of me?" He set down his glass. "I should point out that turnabout is fair play, and I dare say you would be a bit more reluctant to display your charms than I."

She blushed, but refused to be cowed. "Where else should I look? I have, after all, come to rescue you."

"Rescue?" He snorted. "Were it even possible, killing yourself wouldn't have been the way to go about it."

"I'm no more dead than you are." She shook her head and instantly regretted it. A hundred large needles slid in and out of her brain, across her nerves, leaving her panting and ill.

He sighed. "It can take some time to reconcile yourself to the notion. Trust me when I tell you that we are in Hell's antechamber, waiting for a call that will never come."

"Neither one of us died. Not properly. That's why we're still here." She sat up, clutching the blanket to her.

"I'd hoped you would be free of the madness brought on by the crossing." He rose and stretched.

"While I believed you understood the things you told me over the years." She peered at him closely. "You had no idea, did you? All those recitations of spells, recounting your experience in crossing. You lied to Harry about it being painless, but I never told him that. I suspect if you really had died, the passage through the veil would have been like going to sleep, just as you said. You wouldn't have remained to talk to me, to tell me how to set you free."

He paced as she spoke, covering more space than even his long legs ought to. "What are you on about?"

She frowned. "Could you hear me when I was on the other side?"

"No sound penetrates the veil."

"Perhaps not in this direction." She could not suppress her smile as he halted to stare, eyes filled with horror. "Your instruction proved quite useful."

"Bloody hell," he whispered.

"Regret is entirely unnecessary. You gave me the key to unlock a great mystery." She thought for a moment. "More than one, really."

The blanket had slipped, providing a beautiful distraction to the awful truth of her words. He turned away. What had he said to her to relieve his boredom? Atrocious things, more so for being genuine expressions of desire. He could remember none of the conversations about spells, so cruelly administered to frustrate her. It was a good thing he had eternity to attempt to make up for it, as it would take at least that long to fashion a decent penance.

"Did you mean any of it?" She kept her tone light, but her insecurity bled through.

She deserved more than the truth, but it was all he had to give her. "Every last bit."

"Oh, good," she whispered in his ear. He had not heard her move. Only the silk of his shirt separated their bodies as she wrapped her arms around him and pressed against his back. "I especially liked that bit about..."

He blinked rapidly as she relayed, word for word, one of his ruder suggestions. Not even when he'd been alive had he blushed so furiously. He bit his lip and closed his eyes, but it only made things worse, as the entire depraved act sprang up in lurid detail.

"You made me a promise in that one. Do you remember it?"

He nodded, unable to form words.

"Fulfill it, and I will take you back through the veil."

"It can't be done," he said.

"Oh." She couldn't hide her disappointment. "The way you described it, I assumed you'd done it before."

"Not that! I did. Once. I was talking about crossing back to the world of the living. It is not possible."

"My whole life, people have told me that what I believe isn't possible, and I've frequently proven them wrong." She let go of him and walked across the room, the curve of her waist just as lovely as he'd imagined. He had no idea if the bed which suddenly appeared had been his doing or hers. She stretched out and regarded him with a wicked smile. "As I am convinced that I can get us out of here, and you are convinced that I can't, I propose a wager."

He simply stared at her in response.

"If you show me what I asked and I am unable to return us to the world, you can pick another of your other dissolute suggestions and I will comply."

"You realize there's no way I can lose this bet."

"Nor can I. At least not if you're half as interesting as you've made yourself out to be."

He never could resist a challenge.

Screams echoed into the chamber, a torturous gasping for stolen breath, a wracking sob. The guard on duty, having found no intruder, put his hands over his ears and fled. Moments later, the room filled with laughter, deep and rich, light and clear, fading into twin sighs.

"Your turn to follow directions." She ran her hand over his arm.

"As agreed." He rose, giving her a clear view of the marks she'd left on his back. For some reason, women liked to observe their handiwork. Or they had in his youth. Her sigh of satisfaction indicated nothing had changed in that arena. He clothed himself with a thought.

"That's a fine smoking jacket," she said. "But it won't make it through. I've clothes for us on the other side."

He said nothing. It was enough to humor her with the bloody ritual. Literally. He reached for a tiny paintbrush and dipped it in the bowl. She held her arm still as he wrote his name on it. A wave of his hand and the bowl was cleaned. He refilled it with his own blood, far less than she'd given in her haste, and waited while she painted her name on his skin. She held onto the knife, he the bowl, as they approached the veil. The words she spoke made no more sense when he could hear them, but the effect was incontrovertible. The veil swirled and sparked. He took her hand as they stepped forward, so they would not be separated when the attempt failed.

The light blinded them, burned them, stripped from them everything but the most basic truth: they were undeniably alive. The veil snapped back into place, buzzing angrily. Neither Sirius nor Luna heard it.

"Bugger me, she did it." A man's voice, vaguely familiar.

"Can you carry him?" The woman seemed to be speaking from a great distance.

"He's not all that heavy."

"Then get him out. I've got her."

"We're going to have a hard time explaining this." He worried too much. He always had. *Poor Remus.*

"Then let's not." Tonks, direct, as always. "For all we know, their memories have been wiped out. Some of ours were. Of course, we were quite dead."

"Forgetting their love would be tragic."

"So would remembering."

Sirius was unable to speak, or he would have protested Tonks' cynicism. If Luna forgot, he would remind her. She could make up her mind what to do with the information. They had exchanged their chance at forever for a much less predictable future, and he was content to see how it played out. *Still, an edited version of our history might be best.*

"It's fine. I wrote everything down." Her voice, thin and soft, drifted away to be replaced by the deep sighs of sleep.

Oh, hell. Or perhaps heaven. He would have to wait to find out.

A/N: This was for HogwartsClassof91, in response to this evil prompt: Luna always wondered where the voices in the Veil came from, what happened to the souls passing through it. As an adult, she is drawn to the strange structure time and time again and must investigate. What happens when she solves the mystery of the Veil ... and finds Sirius Black waiting for her?