

Ripple Effect

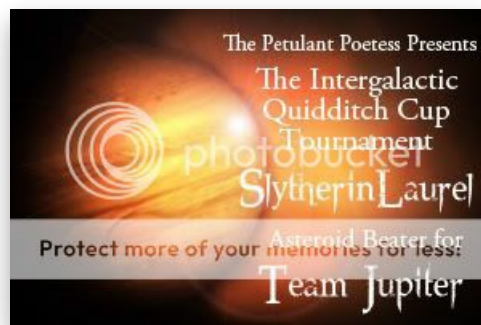
by Jupiter

Snape discovers Slughorn selling counterfeit ingredients and goes to pay him a little visit.

SlytherinLaurel - Asteroid Beater

Chapter 1 of 7

Snape discovers Slughorn selling counterfeit ingredients and goes to pay him a little visit.



The Sneakoscope should have been spinning like a pinwheel caught in a hurricane. In fact it would have been, had Horace not hexed it into oblivion. Now it sat serenely on the sideboard, blending in with various pieces of décor that the Muggles apparently found pleasing, not that one could speak highly of people's aesthetic when they left fish and chips wrappers in the rubbish bin when going on holiday. Horace may have managed to shut up the blasted Sneakoscope, but the greasy, fishy aroma hung in the air despite his best efforts.

Upon further contemplation, he probably ought not to have destroyed a magical object whose sole purpose is to detect the untrustworthy. These days, however, the bloody thing never stopped going off. Everyone had something to hide, be it a fugitive Mudblood friend in the root cellar or a favorite Muggle confection in the cupboard.

Horace was apt to lean towards the second of these two deceptions. The crystallized pineapple produced by wizard candy makers was, inexplicably, disappointing. He kept his vice secret, though. The Dark Lord's followers grew in number every day, and leniency in any degree was not part of their reputation.

Fleeing them was folly. Sitting here, hoping they wouldn't notice him missing, or wouldn't care about finding him, was even greater folly. They came for him last time, hunted him down until Dumbledore swooped in. Deep down Horace knew they would find him. There would be no refusing their invitation, be it to return to Hogwarts or to take a deep plunge into the North Sea. Either way, his beloved crystallized pineapple would not be going with him.

Snape ached for the wells of blood-red ink that used to line his cupboards. When things were simpler, when the Dark Lord's return was merely an unsettling itch at the back of his mind, Snape would sit at his desk for hours at a time as he savored the feel of slick red ink streaming out onto the students' papers. In those times, Snape's natural sarcasm could flow unfettered as he shot down the overconfident brats one paper at a time.

These days his ink was black. Every stroke and every slash branded itself into the page as he tread carefully in the minefield of his existence. From behind his new desk, Snape's carefully measured voice manipulated the school, clearing space for one master's followers while carefully overlooking space for another's to covertly plant their seed.

With his lifelong disregard for imbeciles bottled up, Snape's already limited patience dwindled. He labored to protect the pathetic brats from danger that they, even now, didn't truly comprehend. By the time he got around to ordering more red ink, his favorite shade would undoubtedly be discontinued.

Dawn had barely broken through the windows of the infirmary, and Snape was already seething. Pure dumb luck brought him to visit Madam Pomfrey with administrative minutia at the moment the Longbottom dunce was dragged through the door by his friends. The matron tried to interrogate the boy as to the source of his injuries, but the miscreant kept insisting he had fallen asleep while studying next to the common room fireplace. One look at the burns betrayed the boy to Snape. The angry red marks were certainly caused by heat, but not by any common flame.

The students awoke that morning to the first executive order of Snape's headmastership. In lieu of breakfast, all students were to report to the front lawn for dueling demonstrations and practice. The Carrows were ecstatic at the prospect of disciplining sleepy, sloppy minds that they had long been insisting were indecently coddled.

Snape took the opportunity to seek the help of the castle. Striding purposefully through the appropriate seventh floor corridor, Snape found the door he sought open gladly to him. The students certainly thought the space safe, as they required it to be impenetrable to hostile forces. It was, most likely, safe from individuals that meant them harm. They just didn't realize that he wasn't one of those individuals. Thinking, "I need to protect the students," was enough to gain him entrance.

Dumbledore's Army, now struggling without their leader, had once again set up its operations in the Room of Requirement. While Snape sneered at the tactical blunder of returning to a previous base, there were very few options left to the students. Now, entering quietly and with the help of cloaking charms just to be cautious, Snape assessed the space quickly. The couches were littered with pillows and blankets, suggesting they'd been slept on, while tactical diagrams and half-eaten sandwiches littered the room. In one corner, however, a chimney rose up to the ceiling. Beneath it sat a cauldron, precariously bubbling as it splattered drops onto the floor.

Silvery and viscous, the potion emitted an ethereal blue, completely odorless gas. Careful not to inhale any fumes rising from the brew, Snape performed a series of diagnostic spells that quickly confirmed his suspicions. One of the students, presumably not Longbottom, was attempting to brew the Invisibility Solution.

Invisibility spells were only minimally useful when trying to deceive a foe. Most responded willingly to variations of Finite Incantatem, making the user an easy target. Cloaks designed for invisibility were prohibitively expensive, if one could even obtain them. The Ministry kept a very close watch on such items now. An Invisibility Solution, however, could prove a practical and renewable resource, provided one survived the brewing process.

Snape cringed at the scribbled notes and haphazardly shelved ingredient containers, but they hinted at no fatal flaw in the process that would cause the burns Longbottom sported. The Lovegood girl was a brewer of acceptable skill, and the students were at least smart enough to use their members' strengths to greatest advantage.

Scrutinizing the space with greater care, Snape came across a vial with all too familiar handwriting. His gut clenched. The owner of this handwriting was not a charitable person. The ingredient, while not outrageously valuable, still carried a stiff price tag, and it would not have been parted with cheaply. To compound the situation, a whiff of the vial proved the untrustworthy nature of their dubious supplier. The ingredient was a fake.

Horace never heard the door open. His visitor appeared in front of him just as he had all those months ago. Severus Snape had always been the slippery sort, one that would just happen to be everywhere you didn't wish him to be, everywhere you thought you'd safeguarded from his likes.

"The Dark Lord has been exceptionally tolerant of your ungrateful behavior, Horace."

The overstuffed man, covered in a jade velvet smoking jacket, swallowed slowly as he stared, unblinking, at the man towering over him.

"We have gone to great lengths to *welcome* you back into the fold after your unfortunate crisis of faith this summer."

"A mercy for which I am eternally grateful, Headmaster," Horace managed in an adequately respectful and sycophantic tone.

"You have a strange way of displaying your gratitude."

"Whatever do you mean?" Horace used his best doe eyes, which to an outside observer more closely resembled the expression of a bored walrus.

"Your ingredients on the black market, Slughorn."

"Yes?"

"Fake ingredients, you foul little weasel. We will not tolerate your inclination to make a quick Galleon when it endangers the work of our people."

"But--"

"Silence!" Snape hissed. "Every fake ingredient you sell goes somewhere, you filth, and if ends up in the hands of one of our own, what then? If a delay in research or an injury to a loyal follower were to occur, I assure you our Lord's tolerance of your questionable loyalties would rapidly disappear."

"Sir--"

"Due to concerns for your *personal safety*, I must insist that you no longer leave the castle grounds. Tomorrow I will send Amycus for his *random inspection* of your quarters. I strongly recommend that he not find you in possession of any compromising materials."

"Of course, Headmaster."

Snape eyed the man up and down before stalking out.

"A bit rich, him calling someone else filth," Horace sniffed at his departing form.

oohdear - Comet Chaser

Chapter 2 of 7

As Hermione ponders the effects of Death Eaters receiving contraband - Muggle guns - she is transported through time to experience a unique perspective on the situation first hand.



She hated guns!

She always felt as if she was a throw-back to some distant chivalric age. Always had dreamt that she was a knight in shining armor riding to rescue the damsel in distress, slaying villains...never dragons; she loved dragons.

There was something primordial in facing an enemy and overcoming them that had always appealed to her sense of right and wrong. She did not believe in striking an enemy in the back and never from a hiding place.

But guns negated all that; courage was no longer required. Hell, even skill wasn't an issue; one simply pointed the damn thing and pulled the trigger. And worse than that she hated the idea of shooting someone from half a mile or a mile away, and the victim did not even know who had shot them. That was for cowards and dregs, mostly Muggles, she sadly thought.

So, why, as a witch, was she thinking about guns or long-range rifles? Recently, murders had been committed, mostly of wizards who had been shot with guns, and no one knew who the culprit was. Some Muggle was smuggling guns to the Death Eaters, and they had learned how to use these despicable weapons. It stood to reason the Ministry of Magic could find out if someone had used the Death Magic immediately at the scene of crime, but they had no way of knowing who had fired the gun and killed a wizard.

These thoughts ran through her head as she walked on the garden path.

She looked at the falling blossoms and felt so sad. *This is what my life has become*, she thought. *One day I will fall like these blossoms, and no one will notice; someone will just trample over me as they do over these blossoms, and I would be yesterday's story. No one to cry over me, no one to wake up in the night and miss me.* She walked on the path, deep in melancholy and feeling very sorry for herself.

Suddenly, there was a loud bang like a bomb going off or perhaps just a cracker. No. It was a gun shot, some sniper taking a shot.

As she heard the sound, bizarrely, she wondered who had invented guns. And why. Why would one need such brutal weapons?

That question had been haunting her. *Who supplied the Death Eaters these weapons? Who taught them their use? Who is behind all this?*

There was another loud bang.

As she pulled her wand out, she stumbled and felt herself falling down, put her hands out to cushion the fall, but seemed to be falling in slow motion, and her hands and elbows appeared to be stuck to her sides. She kept on falling, as if there was a hole in the ground where she was going to hit; she just kept on falling...

Into deep darkness, she saw lights swirling, and then the stars whirling slowly in their majestic turning around some center nobody knew about; she saw the galaxies swirling slowly, receding, so slowly, until she could see the whole universe swirling slowly into a vast drain, and suddenly she came back to herself in a thud, a sound that would have moved the stars, the galaxies in their pre-determined path, it seemed to her.

Bang.

She could see through the eyes of someone and feel everything but do nothing else.

His name was William Hayes, and he was fighting somewhere in the sands of the Sahara. He had forgotten long ago why he was fighting...something to do with peace and righteousness and the evil of the Nazis, but everything apart from survival had been swept away a long time ago.

He sighted down the sights of his rifle at the center of the Swastika, let his breath out slowly, and gently squeezed the trigger. The German officer toppled to the right, his knees buckling. Hermione flinched.

He ducked into his camouflage hummock and pulled his long rifle in and hunkered down to wait for the night to set in.

Bang.

Her name was Katherine Brooks, and she held little Adam in her arms as he drifted off to sleep. There was a knock on the door; who could it be at this late hour? She carefully laid Adam down on the sofa and went quietly towards the door, her heart hammering and her mouth going dry. Peter was fighting, as were most able-bodied men.

The Great War had been going on for over three and half years, and still there was no end in sight. She opened the door. A man in a military uniform was standing there. One look at his face and it was like her worst nightmares had come home.

"Mrs. Brooks? Katherine Brooks?"

"Yes," she replied, almost a croak.

"I am so sorry to have to inform you that your husband, Peter Brooks, was killed a week ago in the line of duty. He was a very brave man. He died saving another soldier. He died for his country."

She staggered back... "Oh," her mouth opened, and a long, heart-wrenching wail emitted, and she fell down.

Bang.

His name was Joshua Williams, and he was in town to avenge the death of his brother Bill. No way was the scum who had shot his brother getting away with the murder. Lake Horn was a small town, and a stranger had ridden into town. Bill had been loading the wagon with supplies to take back to the ranch when he had stepped back and bumped into the stranger, who had just come out of the saloon. The stranger, whose name was Cody McHale, had taken offence, and although Bill had apologized, words had been said, and the exchange had become more and more heated until Bill had punched Cody full in the face. Cody had rocked back a few steps, wiped his hands on his bloodied face and, with a snarl, drawn his gun and shot Bill three times in the chest. As Bill had fallen, Cody had kept on firing and then kicked the dead man's body.

Joshua opened the doors of the saloon, walked up to where Cody was sitting drinking and said, "Draw..."

Bang.

He was shot in the arm, and it hurt like hell. He had the body of his buddy Zak over his shoulder, and he was trampling through mud, trying to avoid the Confederate army. They had been getting ready to set up camp when they had been ambushed by the Confederates. Gun fire had erupted from all around, and half of his company had been wiped out before some had managed to reach their guns and return fire.

Bang.

At long last the army had decimated the Knights Templars. Jerusalem lay open to the army in white, thanks to the cannons they had managed to seize from the Christians. He had been given command of one of the cannons, and with his troop of ten helpers, he had loaded and reloaded the cannon and fired all day long at the Christian army. From this distance, they could see the havoc they had wrecked among the enemies, had seen human bodies fly like rubber dolls, arms and legs severed, beheaded bodies and wrecked pieces that had been humans a little time ago. People who had felt like he had, love, hate, compassion, battle lust, hunger, thirst, the dryness of the mouth, the loosening of the bowels. He had missed Soraya so much, and she was with child; would he ever see his child? Hold it in his arms, kiss the little face, watch it smile, watch it cry...

Bang.

Zhen Yuan held the body of his wife and screamed to the heavens, the sound ripping from his soul, sending shivers down the spines of the few onlookers; they clapped their hands over their ears while trying to make the sign of the Amida Buddha at the same time. Slowly shaking their heads, the few onlookers turned away from Zhen. *Poor man*, they thought. *How terrible, what a tragedy. But it is karma, what can you do? Dizang takes all of us in the end. What can be done? Those of the pure soul will find themselves reincarnated, and those who were not pure? Well, they would be reincarnated as well, but not as the People, maybe as insects, or animals, or worse even, as gwai-loh! Amida Buddha save us all from that end*, they thought as they walked away from the man in pain. So unseemly to let his pain show so, what a loss of face. But then Zhen was strange; nobody knew him well, and nobody wanted to.

"I will not lose you, Jian. Without you I am incomplete. Without you I am nothing. I cannot lose you, Jian. You cannot leave me!" he screamed over and over again, "Jian, come back, come back."

Hermione was Zhen. Zhen was Hermione.

From that day Zhen had locked himself in his home, reading all the ancient texts he could find, experimenting day and night to find the elusive Elixir of Life. Never again would someone close to him, someone he loved, die. He would find the way to eternal life. He would change the misery of this world. No more would those left behind, the bereaved, cry bitter tears for those departed, and never would anyone hear laments of the dead. His eyes were getting gritty from lack of sleep when suddenly something moved on the floor. He looked down, and the little kitten he had found in the market place and adopted was rubbing itself on his leg. Irritably, he pushed the kitten away with his foot; he needed celerity of thought all these long months and months of reading, of experimenting, had availed him nothing, and he was no closer to finding the elixir than he had been when he'd started. The kitten rubbed against his leg again. Intending to push the critter again, he stopped. He could not push the little animal away; his was the only love he had left in this life. As he reached down to pick the kitten up, his elbow knocked the small jar into the clay plate. He turned around after picking it up; there on the clay plate was the coarse mixture. He was going to sweep the mixture away when the kitten meowed and scratched his arm, almost drawing blood. He winced and held it up from the scruff of its neck and set it back down on the floor. It was beginning to get dark, and he went to the other side of the table and picked up the candle, lit it, and set it next to the mixture. He turned around as the kitten meowed again, scratching at the door. He went to the door and opened it, and as the kitten stepped out, there was a loud explosion behind him. He was almost hurled from his feet, falling down to his knees. In a daze and amazement, he looked where half of the table had been blown away, staggered to his feet, and walked slowly back to the table to look at what had happened. The first man-made explosion... Instead of inventing the Elixir of Life, he had invented gun powder, the Elixir of Death!

With a scream that was ripped from her soul, Hermione was back in the present, lying on the garden path, people still screaming and running. She screamed and screamed.

Finally, her mind all of a sudden crystal-clear, she swore she'd find the cause of this pain.

JTBJAB - Meteroid Beater

Chapter 3 of 7

As the war continues, Neville struggles to stay motivated as the Carrows' grip on Hogwarts tightens.



All the Hogwarts students sat in the Great Hall eating their lunch. The Carrows were marching up and down the rows between the houses, their wands drawn and their eyes narrowed in suspicion. The students were barely speaking; the whispered odd exchange was treated with glares and nudges from others in their house. Headmaster Snape had stopped eating at the school meals, instead choosing to watch over his school, his eyes sharp and a scowl plastered on his stern face.

Ginny rolled her eyes and shook her head. "Neville, we're very lucky Snape didn't punish us!"

"It wasn't my fault! I'm not even sure what happened; I know I wrote it down properly... I even used..." He looked around nervously. "I'll tell you after dinner."

Once the food was vanished and Snape rose to his feet, the students began filing out for their afternoon classes. Ginny smiled at Neville and nodded as they passed through the ornate doorway and went their separate ways.

Ginny clenched her fists till she worried her wand would break; her eyes narrowed as Harper crouched, and her gaze flickered over with distaste to Professor Amycus Carrow.

Ever since the Carrows had arrived, nobody had felt safe except perhaps those in Slytherin, but even they avoided the Death Eaters as much as possible.

"*Imperio!*"

Ginny danced out of the way, diving across the duelling platform before rolling up onto her feet. "*Stupefy!*"

"Miss Weasley, fifty points from Gryffindor! I don't believe first-year spells were what I asked you to use." Amycus leered. "I *will* warn you again!"

Neville relaxed. McGonagall's lessons were one of the few that were almost like the old days, the days when Dumbledore kept everyone feeling safe, even if it was only a cover for what was really going on.

Hogwarts just wasn't Hogwarts anymore. And with the absence of three good friends as well as many others, the small joy that lessons brought had been narrowed down in focus.

He carefully rubbed the Galleon between his fingers. It was his one connection to the so called Golden Trio and his lifeline for being able to continue on with his studies: Hermione. She couldn't speak often for obvious reasons, and as far as he could make out, neither Harry nor Ron knew that she did so. She never spoke of what they were doing or where they were, but he did know they moved a lot and that it was difficult for them.

He found it hard to take in that they were out there doing what they could, and he was stuck inside Hogwarts being controlled by the very creation that they were fighting against. But Hermione always made him rethink that. "You're the next generation, Neville. You'll be one of the few to help rebuild our world once this is all over. You need your qualifications and you need to stay studying. You've got the DA to think about."

So he'd been carefully building it up, taking in new members after carefully carrying through tests and retests... they trusted no-one. Luna had been his saving grace there; with logic and knowledge she'd devised a contract which bound tighter than Hermione's had, and Ginny's spell work was more subtle than the 'Sneak' punishment. They'd only witnessed it once, and that had been enough to still any others that were scared into telling.

Nobody liked the idea of their bones slowly dissolving.

It was six in the morning and so cold his breath was visible before him, but he ignored it and cast a light warming spell before he started off on his jog around the lake. Hermione was right, he was the next generation to help rebuild their world, and yet first there was a war to win. A war that he *would* participate in. A war that would mean he could avenge his mother and father, make them proud of him and his achievements. And he would need to be fit and at his best.

Smirking, he pushed himself onwards. It was going to be hard work, but the rewards would definitely be worth it.

The Carrows were tightening their hold on the student body, and Snape was finding it hard pressed to deal with them *If only the idiots would just do as they were told!* He now spent each evening redirecting students' detentions away from the more dangerous tasks and onto something more menial; but there were only so many cauldrons that needed cleaning or animals that had to be dealt with. He'd even had the Owlery cleaned twice, and it now gleamed.

With a suffering sigh, he decided he would have to be happy with the small successes he had had, such as with Slughorn and his damned fake ingredient. He had made sure that the small resistance group had the correct ingredients and had reinforced the wards around the Room of Requirement. He might not like what they were doing, but he was not about to let the Carrows destroy everything. Besides, there was no way he was going to leave their make-shift laboratory as it was; they at least now had the right ingredients even if it wasn't really suitable for a first year to brew in.

"So you've been using the coin all this time and didn't think to tell me?" Ginny stood in front of Neville, her hands on her hips and her face red and pinched. "I could have spoken to my brother... I could have told Mum they were okay. I would have known that they were *all* okay."

"I'm sorry. I made the decision to keep it to myself." He gulped. "It may seem like a bad choice, but I was trying to protect everyone. What if I kept up an ongoing conversation and then somebody stole it or I lost it. Her reply could be discovered!"

"But "

Neville narrowed his eyes and pushed himself up off the bench he had been seated on. "I refuse to be yelled at for something that is this stupid. Your brother and Harry don't know she's using it! You know they'd only use it to send silly, pointless messages, and that could cost them dearly." Looking down at Ginny now, he registered her look of surprise. "She made sure I didn't quit. That I didn't let it all go to waste."

"What?"

Neville sighed and crossed his arms, dropping his gaze so he wasn't watching her. "I've thought so much about how much easier it would be to just go home and leave this place. But I can't do it. Hermione made me see that."

"I see."

"You can speak to her as well, you know." He straightened his back just a little more, rolling his shoulders back. "I have to send a message at least once a day just to say I haven't lost it, and if I don't, then she won't use it or use any for that matter."

Neville has changed, and right in front of my eyes too. It's like he suddenly realised that with everything going on out there, someone like me or even Professor Snape... we're nothing.

He stood up to me and not many people do that. But he did share his secret and let me in on it all. I'm so glad that I got to send a message... school is definitely not the same without them.

Hermione has only sent me one message, and that was to talk about some strange dreams she's been having... and in all honesty I would believe they were some form of premonition. Snape has been so off lately and our detentions... other students must have noticed that they are not nearly as bad as people claim when they are first given them.

It seems slightly odd, that's all. Even if it is just a coincidence that just as Hermione starts having these weird dreams about talking to Snape, the Death Eaters go quiet on their activity. That our detentions are tamer than first expected and he seems almost protective over us all.

Very strange.

Hermione waited till the boys were asleep in their bunk before pulling out the Galleon that had been warming in her pocket. The frown of confusion was quickly replaced with a smile as she settled down on her watch to reply to an old friend's query.

She preferred to take the night-watch because if she wasn't working she would be awake anyway and it gave her ample time to check in with Neville and maybe send a message or two.

Even without seeing him she knew that he had been doing a lot of growing-up in the last few months. His replies were quite vague in detail where the school was concerned, but then she supposed with Professor Snape as Headmaster anything could be happening.

Rolling her eyes as the snoring competition between Harry and Ron started, she smiled and tapped the gold Galleon with her wand as she sent her reply.

AN: This week has been an interesting one and I hope everyone is enjoying both reading and taking part! :D Good luck to everyone!

~jtjab/madamsnape

Meteoroid Beater

carley9 - Moon Chaser

Chapter 4 of 7

Luna takes a stroll through the dreaming world and encounters an unexpected surprise in Professor Trelawney's subconscious.



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Luna was only just starting to recover from the last incident when she had decided to start again. She should have known that the ingredients she had acquired...the ones that weren't from her normal supplier...looked off. For some reason, they had molded slightly and had a sickly sweet smell to them. She should have known better than to

get the peyote from someone claiming to be an actual Native American shaman and unable to answer the questions she had asked her previous supplier.

Luna took a deep breath and cast Finite Incantatem on her bottle-cap necklace. After looking at all of her specimens, she chose one that looked fairly green still. She reapplied the glamour before going up to her room. Unlike the majority of the DA, she still slept in her dorm room in Ravenclaw's Tower. She didn't want to tell them why, but it allowed her to do her work in peace and quiet. It also prevented the majority of unplanned surprises. During the last incident, she had tried to give Hermione some information that could help her on their quest, but instead ended up pulling her through a past life regression. In a way, she was glad that Hermione didn't notice her lingering in the background...that would have caused more questions than she could have answered.

Once in her room, Luna went to her bed and applied a Silencing Charm on it. She had learned...from her former roommates...that she had a habit of talking aloud when she was in the middle of her 'dreams.' She grabbed a small mug and cast Aguamenti to fill it up. Then she cast a warming charm on it and carefully placed the peyote in the center. Watching the dried cactus soak up the water and slowly start to seep, she pulled it out after there was a small tinge of color in the cup. She placed the peyote on a small saucer next to her bed; she would be able to get one more use out of it. Placing the mug next to the saucer, she prepared for bed. She sucked on a small peppermint to help settle her stomach; experience had taught her that this helped weaken the nauseous side-effect that the peyote could cause. After she was finished, and the peppermint had melted, she got into bed and slowly began sipping from the cup. Once she had drained it, she closed her curtains and settled in for the evening.

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Elsewhere, the people Luna was trying to send a message to were getting ready to go to sleep. Hermione had just sent Neville a note with the fake Galleon and was getting ready to sleep. Tonight was Harry's night to take the watch. She had just settled in when she heard muffled whispering. Hermione thought it was just the boys whispering to each other and was entirely unaware that it was the ether whispering to her the answers she sought. She never heard what was said.

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Luna found herself in a familiar corridor. She always pictured a neutral place in her mind before she slipped into slumber; it kept her from ending up somewhere strange and having to work hard to reach her destination. This night she decided to start out slow. She closed her eyes and pictured Professor Trelawney in her mind until she could feel movement rushing around her, and when she stopped, she knew her professor was near. She was a dream-walker, and while her physical body was in her bed, her spiritual body has hovering around Trelawney, looking for an easy way in. She concentrated on her and saw what the Muggle-born students would describe as a thought bubble appear over her head. Inside, she could make out the figures of Hermione and Headmaster Snape. She stepped into the bubble and was struck at how vividly Trelawney dreamed.

Hermione sat on Headmaster Snape's lap, feeding him cornish pasties from a picnic basket. In-between bites, she would plant kisses on his cheek and say, "One must keep the antidote on the interior, not the exterior."

After a third pasty had been consumed, he asked, "Want to see my snake?" Luna watched Hermione slide off his lap with a lecherous gleam in her eye. He unbuttoned his trousers, and a huge green and gold snake popped out. Luna merely watched as the snake turned on Snape and bit him in the neck. As Snape slid out of his chair, Neville came out of nowhere, carrying a sword, and sliced the snake's head off. Snape came out of his stupor and began crying about his snake being lopped off. Neville smiled at him as he pulled something out of the picnic basket and said, "Don't worry, I saved your rod and tackle!"

Luna decided that she had been scarred enough for one evening and pulled herself out of the dream. She shook herself and thought, *Note to self: never go in one of Professor Trelawney's dreams again.* She closed her eyes again and searched, or rather felt for, Hermione's essence. She had found her once before, but it had been difficult enough the first time. She opened her eyes to see where she was and was surprised to be standing outside her home. She took a deep breath and felt for her father's essence, breathing a sigh of relief when she could feel it coming from the house. Feeling a little better, she began her search again.

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While Luna searched, Hermione dreamed. She dreamed of the life she could have after the war. Being able to take her familiar to the vet without having to worry about someone wanting to kill her because she was Harry Potter's best friend; being able to visit Windsor Castle and play tourist without having to watch her back. She dreamed of being able to fall in love and never having to worry for her or her partner's safety. She dreamed of all the lovely things that she thought would happen as the ether began chanting, "She's coming... she's coming for you."

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Luna knew she had arrived when she could feel the warmth that always reminded her of her friend. She could see the spirits circling around her and slowly began banishing them. She wasn't banishing them in the traditional sense, but forcing them to move away from the sleeping girl. She could feel the passage of time and knew that Hermione would be waking soon if she didn't hurry. She could feel her strength start to waver and began chanting, "Hermione, let me in. I have a message to give you."

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Hermione could feel her dream shifting and changing. The positive feelings before gave way to a sense of urgency. She could feel some outside force trying to enter her dream, pleading with her to let it in. She could feel the edges surrounding her dream soften, and she could feel the light of the moon caress her face. She concentrated on the moon and could feel it drawing power from her; she willingly gave the energy because the moon felt like a friend, someone she hadn't seen in a long time...

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Luna knew the moment Hermione had allowed her in. The warmth of her friendship flowed over her, restoring some of her strength. She clasped the curly-haired witch's hand and said, "I have a message to give you." When Hermione nodded, she continued, "The 'dream' you were telling Neville about was a past life regression. I caused it while trying to get another message to you." She paused for a moment because she could feel something going on with her body. Someone must be trying to wake her up; she must have stayed too long! She frantically said, "The guns are being given to the Snatchers! Stay away from Malfoy Manor...!"

She felt herself forcibly yanked from Hermione's dream and back into her body. She woke up and had to lean over the side of the bed to get sick so she didn't mess her bed linens. Unfortunately for her, she got sick on Professor Trelawney's shoes. It was just before dawn, the pale light just barely filtering through the curtains. She didn't need any more light to see that the Divination professor was annoyed.

"Miss Lovegood, I was never made aware of the fact you were a dream-walker. If I had been, I would have let you know that invading other people's dreams is bad form!"

Luna just stared at her professor and said, "I didn't realize you have visions in your sleep." She tried to keep bile down as the scarf-swathed witch just stared at her. Then she continued. "Or you would know they were visions if you weren't drinking so much sherry all the time!" She could feel her stomach begin to rebel, so she cast another Aguamenti on her mug and took a few sips. "If you had been a dream-walker, you would have known that forcibly bringing someone back to their body could end up with you having puke on your shoes!"

Trelawney stood there, speechless, as the Ravenclaw got ready for the day. She would have to tell the Headmaster about this...

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Hermione woke a little later and looked around for Luna. She could have sworn she saw her there. She walked over to where the boys were eating and said, "I had the strangest dream last night..."

blue_paris - Gravity Keeper

Chapter 5 of 7

Hermione is caught off guard while taking a walk by another gun-wielding Death Eater. She decides to follow him to see what she can uncover.



A/N: A huge thank you to my wonderful (and rather speedy) beta, who wishes to remain anonymous.

~*~

It was a crisp, clear morning as Hermione began walking briskly down an old country trail. Something had motivated her to awake unusually early today – it was barely past six o'clock. She held onto her wand perhaps more tightly than necessary as her eyes scanned the grassy horizon.

Bang.

Hermione gasped and stopped in her tracks, her eyes wide in surprise. An attack? Here? She glanced in the direction the shot had come from. Not even thirty feet away, protruding from the sprigs of a fluffy bush, was the barrel of a gun.

Grasping her wand, Hermione took off without another thought. She was going to get some answers while she had the chance to.

Her feet pounding on the dirt, she kept her focus on the barrel as it was yanked back into the bush. As she reached the spot where the gunman had to have been standing, she saw a dark-clad figure hurtling into the eerie dark of the forest surrounding them.

Hermione stopped for a moment, drew a deep breath, and started running again, now being careful to keep enough distance between them that she could escape should he see her, but still maintain visual contact.

The figure darted between trees – he clearly knew where he was going. Hermione winced as she nearly smacked head-first into an evergreen tree, her palms receiving nasty scrapes as she deflected the wooden obstacle.

After several minutes, her lungs begging for more oxygen and her legs on fire, a small cottage loomed ahead. A shoddy wooden fence surrounded it, and a fire was clearly visible crackling in the garden.

The mysterious man came to a sudden stop in front of the fire, pulled something from within the folds of his cloak, and flung it forward into the burning pile of wood. It immediately turned a coruscating shade of green – Floo powder. "Borgin and Burkes!" the Death Eater roared and disappeared in a flash.

Hermione came to a halt several feet away from the fire, hesitant and chary. There was no way she could just Apparate or Floo after him – undoubtedly there would be other wizards in the shop, and none of them would be any too kind to an unknown witch appearing out of nowhere.

She took several deep breaths as she thought about her options. *I'll start in Diagon Alley*, she decided after several moments, remembering Luna's warning from the previous night, to stay away from Malfoy Manor.

Taking a last glance at the flames licking and curling around the rapidly decaying wood, Hermione Apparated with *pop* that echoed in the dark woods.

~*~

Hermione surveyed the cobbled street and felt an overwhelming sense of grief. It was desperately empty now – just another sign of how absolutely the fear of Voldemort and the Death Eaters reigned over the wizarding community.

She began walking towards Knockturn Alley, a feeling of utter desolation creeping into her system. It was unnerving that not another soul was present. Shaking off the unpleasantness, she sped up and quickly reached the dark entrance to the other alley.

Ensuring her wand was easily accessible, Hermione peered around the corner, surveying the entrance to Borgin and Burkes for several minutes.

A lone figure ambled across the alley, entering a shop across from where Hermione was standing. She didn't recognize them – probably a good thing. After waiting another minute, she drew a deep breath and quickly pulled on the Invisibility Cloak she had... *borrowed* from Harry early that morning.

Hermione made her way swiftly towards the entrance of Borgin and Burkes, and after confirming that no one was within line of sight of the door, she slipped inside, closing the ancient wooden door behind her.

She moved around the magical objects and dusty shelves carefully towards the back of the shop, her eyes wide and alert. As she approached the back room, she could hear two clear voices conversing.

"There is no bloody problem with the shipment! I don't know what the hell you're talking about."

Lovely, Hermione thought. *You can always be sure to find some display of gaucherie in this forsaken place.*

She stopped outside the open door and peered inside. The two wizards were easily recognizable – Borgin, the owner of the shop, and Avery, the prominent Death Eater. Borgin was standing next to a disturbingly dusty cabinet; Avery was gazing into the crackling fireplace.

Borgin looked concerned; Avery looked rather disgruntled.

"If there was no problem with the shipment, why were there fifteen fewer guns than were ordered?" Avery asked sharply, his dark eyes narrowing as he glared at Borgin.

"Look, the man responsible for this entire gun parade will be here himself in a few minutes; you can bloody well ask him yourself," Borgin responded coldly.

Hermione's sharp intake of breath was thankfully masked by Avery releasing a long, exasperated sigh.

"All this foofaraw over Muggle weaponry." Borgin shook his head in disgust.

"Muggle or not, you can't deny that this plan is working out far better than any of us could have predicted," Avery answered. "The Ministry has no way of connecting our people to the deaths. It's quick, it's easy, and best of all, it's completely untraceable. That's exactly what we need."

Borgin grunted, his lips curling into a sneer. "Easy or not, with as many powerful wizards as we have on our side, we shouldn't have to be relying so heavily ~~on~~ Muggle contraband."

Avery sighed again, picking up a small statuette and idly twirling it in his hands. "Keep up with the times, old man. Soon we'll be utterly unstoppable. The Dark Lord knows what he is doing."

Hermione raised an eyebrow, wondering how many other Death Eaters were also vehemently opposed to the usage of Muggle weaponry. Perhaps a rift in their midst could be used to an advantage of some sort.

"That's the only reason I'm letting you lot plunder about my shop like it's your personal bloody playground," Borgin snapped. "Running around like headless chickens." He shook his head again. "It's not you I have confidence in, it's the Dark Lord..."

Avery glanced at him for a moment, his expression clearly conveying his boredom. "Yes, old man. It won't be for much longer."

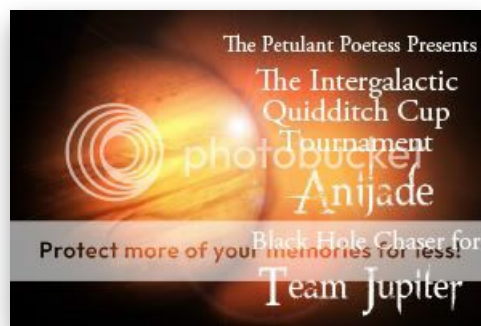
The fireplace sparked and hissed, a familiar green hue taking over. The two wizards and Hermione turned to watch as a cloaked wizard appeared.

Hermione gaped and barely concealed another gasp. *Oh, dear.*

Anijade - Black Hole Chaser

Chapter 6 of 7

Hermione receives a surprise as she discovers who the mysterious cloaked stranger is. What more will she uncover?



Hermione struggled not to make a sound as the man in the cloak appeared. The two wizards immediately drew their wands, prepared to protect their ill-gotten gains. She was still trying to figure out how they knew about Muggle weapons, much less smuggling them into the Wizarding world. Grabbing the closest item, Hermione found her face buried in a drape that reeked of Doxycide, and it made her a little light headed. Apparently the Dark wizards recognized the man since they lowered their wands slightly. "What are you two on about in here? Don't even have proper wards up. Anyone could catch you," came the deep voice and Hermione strained to recognize it. Perhaps the Doxycide was addling her brain as well.

"It's not like many people are gadding about this area at night," Borgin defended himself; he didn't like the goings on as it was, but being called on his gaffe wasn't the highlight of his night. Avery frowned at Borgin and growled. "Don't get so historical." The cloaked man chuckled at the common malapropism but was wise enough not to correct him. Avery continued talking to the man as he glared at Borgin. "We're missing some of the weapons; somehow they've gone missing and you know **He** won't be pleased." Sighing, the cloaked man looked around the room, managing with what Hermione was sure was a hooding charm. Turning to Avery, he spoke. "So how many exactly are missing and how soon can they be replaced?"

She watched as the three wizards got busy counting the guns, terrified of making a sound. *Surely there has to be a way out of here without getting caught or hexed in the back?* Hermione was getting used to the odor, but the urge to wee was making her wiggle. In the dark she was unable to check her footing and stumbled over something, causing her to fall. The sound caused all three wizards to draw their wands, and the one in the cloak moved in her direction. Thankfully the shadows were able to hide her, or he wasn't looking very hard, because all he did was grumble. "Merlin's maggoty haggis! Borgin, why would you stack glumbumble parts so haphazardly back here? Are you just begging for an explosion?"

Borgin made a move to pick them up, not even bothering to apologize or explain himself. He was stopped by a wave from the cloaked man. "Don't bother. We have to get these to his Lordship before we're all punished. Get back to counting." Both Avery and Borgin gave him mutinous glares but got back to work, knowing they would be thrown under the bus should there be any complaints. Twenty minutes later the count was done with Avery giving the final accounting. "Alright then, the total miscount is fifteen short, but Borgin here assures me he can get the replacements no later than tomorrow night." He gave a warning glare to Borgin, who gave the hooded man a

reluctant nod. "You're both lucky, you know; with his Lordship's triskaidekaphobia, you could have been in for a world of pain." At that comment both wizards started and then nodded. All the Death Eaters knew that hitting the number 13 in any instance meant worse punishment than just doing something wrong. Satisfied, the hooded wizard nodded.

"Alright then, take them and go, I'll meet up with you at the Serpentine for an Ogdens before we're called." Glad to be off the hook, the two wizards shrunk down their smuggled goods and quickly Apparated out of the shop. Hermione heard the hooded man sigh before moving closer to her hiding spot. "Still taking chances, I see, Miss Granger." Being called out by name sent shocks through her, and she struggled to get back on her feet. The hooded man bent slightly to reach down and pull her up, her mouth agape in surprise. "So, now you have an idea of what's really going on. I trust you'll pass the information on to Potter and his ilk?" Hermione could only nod in wonderment. The hooding charm ended, and she found herself looking up at Professor Snape's face. "My, my, I have managed to stun the know-it-all. Close your mouth, Miss Granger, I have to get you out of here in case anyone comes looking for Avery or Borgin."

Still silent, Hermione found herself being held tight, and they vanished with a pop. When they reappeared, she had managed to regain some of her wits. "But I don't understand! You're... you're one of them." Sneering, Snape shook his head. "Use that marvelous brain of yours, Granger, for some original thought. If I were truly one of them, don't you think I would have offered you up to Him?"

Hermione's mind whirred at both his compliment and his logic. "You might have a point there, sir. So all this time--you've been on our side? Why haven't you let anyone know, for, I don't know, support?" Snape rubbed his face in frustration and sighed. "And when would have had time to call up this said support? I am under near constant observation and must keep up appearances. I am limited in how much I can assist the Order."

Now that she really thought about it, it did make sense; there had been rumours of Death Eaters living at the castle, and Hermione imagined that it must be very frustrating for the man risking so much to help them, if he was really helping them. "Alright then, what should we do?" She couldn't help but wonder if he knew how important his response was to her.

"I can take you as far as the stream, and then you've got to get back to Potter and Weasley. Tell them what you saw. I strongly doubt they will believe that I am trying to help, though. Come on, then, I don't have much time before I'm called before the Dark Lord."

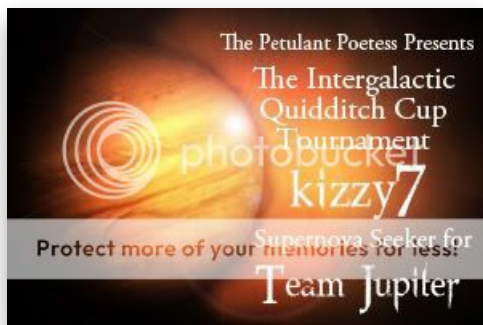
She nodded, still mulling over all she had learned in a very short amount of time. Part of her wondered if it was really safe to trust him. Thinking back, she remembered the Headmaster showing total trust in the Professor, but Harry had told her about watching the professor murder him. What was real? The guns were real; she had heard the plotting before the professor had arrived. So that would be the information she would pass on, about the Muggle weapons being used by Dark wizards. That could be useful, and for now she would keep how she knew that a secret, until she had more time to think things through.

"Alright, Professor, we should go. And thanks for taking care of me... again." Hermione added. Snape gave her a short nod as they Apparated away.

kizzy7 - Supernova Seeker

Chapter 7 of 7

Snape discovers the identity of the Death Eater providing munitions to Voldemort.



The clearing was quiet, the dying embers of a fire glowing dully nearby the tent. Hermione coughed...the smoking logs and scattered, dusty footprints denoted someone was still awake. She pushed aside the thick canvas flap of the magically-expanded tent.

"Who's there?" came a demand, dark and rough, and the tip of a wand was at her neck.

"Ron," she sputtered. "It's me. Come on."

His wand emitted a feeble light into the darkness of the tent, and she could see he wore the Horcrux and it was ~~was~~ *live*, pulsing like a heartbeat against his flesh.

Pale skin and bruises, she thought. *Oh, Ron!*

He lowered his wand infinitesimally and rubbed against his chest, right at the spot where the locket touched his heart. He flinched as his knuckles brushed against the burnished gold, bringing his fingers to his mouth as if they bled.

"Where've you been?" he asked, flopping next to a deeply sleeping Harry. "I mean, would it kill you, Hermione, to fucking *tell* us what you're doing instead of just thinking we're too stupid?"

"Oh, come off it, Ronald!" she said, rolling her eyes even as she could feel the outline of her fake Galleon in her pocket. Crouching next to Harry, she gently shook her friend awake.

"Sup?" he mumbled, reaching automatically for his glasses. "Hermione?" His hair was sticking up at all possible angles, crisscrossing against his lightning-bolt scar. For a

blessed minute, he looked like a child, such a child. She poked him playfully in the ribs.

"Wake up, Harry. I've something to tell you."

Ron abruptly stood up and crossed his arms. "Well, obviously I'm not invited to your little gossip session. So I'll just go and leave you two... alone," he spat. "Cause you don't want me anyways," he mumbled as he left the tent.

The intruding blast of cold nighttime air and the venom laced through Ron's voice made her shiver. "Ron's been acting weird lately, huh?"

Harry shrugged. "Meh. It's just Ron. So...?"

Again fingering the outline of her Galleon...it had become almost a talisman for her...Hermione began to tell Harry what she'd learned that night.

He almost never slept. Not anymore. Prowling the castle had become an obligatory routine...catch any foolish children before the Carrows could, await summons from the Dark Lord...and so through the Dungeons and up, up to the Astronomy Tower he stalked, scouring every magical inch of Hogwarts. Excepting his own office, where the saddened portrait of Dumbledore haunted him, it seemed, through the endless parade of nights and days.

Into the Room of Requirement now, and the DA must have had a recent meeting. A fire still cracked and popped in the grate; half-eaten sandwiches and jugs of pumpkin juice littered the tables.

Kids, he thought as he eyed the mess. *They're just kids.*

Snape stiffened. Was that...?

Yes, a sound, the soft tread of footsteps. And then...

Outrageously, he could feel a wand digging into the lower part of his back.

"What are you doing here, Snape?" came a voice. "Give me a reason not to curse you right now. I know... I know a bunch of hexes now!"

"Mr. Longbottom," he responded, turning slowly, his arms outstretched.

For moments, they stared at each other, and Snape was amazed that Longbottom's gaze not once wavered. Snape could efficiently neutralise the boy with a bit of nonverbal magic, but he didn't. Wouldn't.

Finally, Neville lowered his wand. "You shouldn't be here, Professor Snape."

"And neither should you, you foolish boy. Amycus patrols these halls, as you and your...*friends* well know."

Neville sheathed his wand and reached into the pocket of his jeans, pulling out a glowing golden coin.

"Bugger," Neville muttered, his eyes shifting guiltily between the Galleon and Snape. "Erm, I'll just go then...."

Wordlessly, Snape Summoned the coin, and it flew confidently into his open palm.

Guns, Neville, was emblazoned across the dragonhead. *They have guns.*

"You run along now, Mr. Longbottom," Snape growled in his most threatening of timbres. "Or it'll be detention and house points."

"But sir, I need that Galleon..."

"I think not," he said, gesturing for the door. "Now go."

Neville left, lumbering arms and legs and his face tweaked suspiciously, and Snape turned his attention to the mysterious coin. Had he perhaps discovered how Granger was communicating with the unfortunate inhabitants of the castle? And idiot boy...he had simply pulled the coin from his pocket without any consideration of the consequences. Good lord, what if...

But no matter. No good thinking of such things. He pressed his wand to the coin, inscribing a message onto the gold.

With whom am I speaking?

A brief moment...undoubtedly, the recipient was confused by the inexplicable appearance of proper grammar and correctly formatted sentences...and a reply boldly appeared, warm in his palm.

Professor Snape? This is Hermione.

Another moment, and then...*Hermione Granger, sir.*

A part of him was tempted to ask the girl precisely how many 'Hermiones' she imagined him to know, but he only touched his wand to the coin in reply.

Miss Granger, worry not about the Muggle weaponry.

When she didn't reply, he slipped the Galleon beneath his frock coat and left the Room, the soles of his shoes clacking loudly in the emptiness.

The Dark Lord's eyes glinted red in the oppressed opulence of Malfoy Manor, and the tall, golden candelabras glimmered like stolen jewels in the shadows. Snape counted twelve... thirteen of his compatriots.

Good.

"Severus has asked us here tonight," came a hiss, high-pitched and sputtering. Snape winced behind his expressionless mask. To him, the Dark Lord's voice was nails on a chalkboard, the dying shrieks of tortured children, the wails of the eternally damned.

A cough, and Snape tilted his head. Across the way was Slughorn, his chin wobbling precariously beneath the silver Death Eater's mask.

"He believes," continued Voldemort, "that these... *Muggle*... armaments are unworthy of our mission. Now," and here he tucked his spiny, grey fingers underneath his chin, and his lipless mouth smacked in anticipation, "thoughts? My followers?"

Silence settled like a thick, strangling quilt over the room...Slughorn's chubby, bejeweled fingers ceased their incessant drumming, shuffling and whispering stilled. Eyes shifted...who would speak first? And risk defying the Dark Lord?

Snape suppressed a laugh. Cowards, all of them. "Though I do not doubt that my Lord's intentions were noble, these... guns... are beneath us *awizards* of the purest, highest order," he said smoothly.

Voldemort's expression did not change, and Snape knew with chilling certainty that he could die here tonight.

"Well," said Goyle, his gruff voice shaking with uncertainty. "I think... I think it's bloody well nice to pull that tribble."

"*Trigger*, you fool," said Lucius. "My Lord. I believe you know how I feel concerning this matter. I despise anything... Muggle."

Snape could well imagine the look of contempt curled on Lucius' lips.

"Don't want to soil your purty hands, eh, Malfoy?" spat Goyle.

"Precisely. I..."

"Silence." At Voldemort's command, the dining room again stilled. "I have made my decision... My supplier? Slughorn? What say you?"

Should have known, thought Snape.

"Well," said Slughorn, shifting in his seat. "We've had reasonable success with the killings, though some... some claim it's a bit too messy. And no problems with the supplies..."

"Load of tripe, that's what that is!" interrupted Avery. "Why, just last night we had..."

Avery's whiny voice was cut off with abrupt wave of Voldemort's hand. "I agree with Severus. I will not have Purebloods wielding Muggle weapons any longer. Horace, make the arrangements."

Finally, Snape thought. *Somehow... I'll have to let her know.*

It was late that night, and he was exhausted. Too exhausted to even think properly straight. The Galleon still rested in his pocket, but he hadn't heard anything from her since the previous night.

Not that I care much about pathetic Potter or the Weasley moron was his vicious thought. His shoulders slumped as he meandered slowly up to the Headmaster's office.

By the stone gargoyle near the foot of the stairs, Luna Lovegood danced in the moonlight, her blonde hair flowing in the still air as she twirled.

"Headmaster," she said dreamily, as if she had expected him. As if she had been waiting for him. "Do you by any chance know where I could find a pillar box?" She gestured airily towards a stack of addressed envelopes sloping on the first step. "I'm mailing all the Muggle newspapers, you know..." She lowered her voice conspiratorially. "I wrote a treatise. About the guns."

He pressed two thin fingers against his temples, hoping to ward off the impending headache. "Miss Lovegood... No. It's past curfew. You should be in Ravenclaw Tower, not dillydallying in the stairwell. I do not have time for this."

He made to brush past her, but she grasped him round the forearm with surprising strength in her light, bony fingers. "Professor Snape." And she was staring at him with large, luminescent eyes that reflected the moonlight in the empty corridor. "Just remember, sir, keep the antidote on the interior. The *interior*."

Impatiently, he shook his arm loose from her grasp. "Ravenclaw, Miss Lovegood. Now."

She was still twirling when he entered his office, and the sad, wizened eyes of Dumbledore's infernal portrait greeted him, jolting him with guilt so painful, so visceral, he doubled over.

"Severus..."

He shook his head. "Not now, Albus."

Slipping quickly into bed, he clutched the Galleon between his palms and closed his eyes.

Much later, he slept.

A/N The words I used for this week were dillydally, tripe, and pillar box. Big thanks to blue_paris for beta'ing! I also just want to thank the members of Team Jupiter. It was lovely to meet you.