

The Charon

by Annie Talbot

For Severus Snape, Death is an ambiguous journey... one that may be longer than he thinks.

One

Chapter 1 of 10

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Image by Selinabl... Thank you, Sel!

When I reached the river's edge, I somehow knew where to go. But the queue was long... calm and quiet. Ahead of me, I saw people I knew, Death Eaters and Order members alike. Bright red hair marked the passing of a Weasley... one of the twins; I knew not which. A flash of pink drew my gaze to the shade of Nymphadora Tonks, her hand tucked into the crook of her husband's arm.

Weasley and Tonks were unchanged from when I had last seen them. Lupin looked younger. Untainted.

We all stood waiting for our meeting with the Charon.

Many thanks to Ariadne, whose comments on the first five drabbles of this series improved them immensely.

The Queue

Chapter 2 of 10

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Image by Selinabl... Thank you, Sel!

Time passed, but this did not seem onerous. I watched the queue behind me grow. The battle had taken many, it seemed, and was ongoing. More of my students appeared behind me; I looked ahead and began to discern them there. All nodded sombrely in my direction. I felt a distant regret at their deaths... at my own death. Older visages were changing, free now of stress and strain. The young ones, though, changed little.

And the queue stretched ever onwards, moving forward slowly as the boat returned and set off once again, oars slapping gently in the river.

Eternally.

Regrets

Chapter 3 of 10

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Image by Selinabl... Thank you, Sel!

I kept looking back.... I searched for blond hair, the flash of green eyes. Something that would show me that my twin oaths were fulfilled.

As I stepped into the boat, the Charon appraised me.

His voice was low and gravelly. "Unfinished business, eh?"

"I imagine that most of your passengers have left something undone," I countered. My regrets were my own.

"Fewer than you'd think," was his rejoinder.

The oars dipped into the water. The boat moved forward into the river. I fumbled for a coin in my pockets, but I could find nothing.

He shook his head. "No."

The Coin

Chapter 4 of 10

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Image by Selinabl... Thank you, Sel!

He held up a coin. It flashed impossibly golden in the gloom.

"This is *my* coin. My journey is done. Yours will be complete when your own coin appears and your traveler is coinless. My daughter awaits me... I ferried her this morning."

I squinted into his face. Ted Tonks.

"You will be the Charon until your work is complete. It could be an hour; it could be a week. It could be fifty years. Or longer."

I was undismayed. All I desired was to finish my tasks: to see Malfoy and Potter safely through to whatever finalities awaited them.

Many Souls

Chapter 5 of 10

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Image by Selinabl... Thank you, Sel!

I did not count time as the living do; I marked it with each soul that stepped willingly into my boat.

I ferried old friends, enemies, former students... distant relations and my parents' former neighbours.

Tom Riddle passed through early. The student who stepped into my boat was young... handsome. Of all my passengers, he seemed most fearful of what lay ahead.

I could not reassure him; I did not know.

Sometimes I caught glimpses of shades waiting on the far bank. Usually, I did not, although the souls I carried did and left my boat with great joy.

The Long, Dark Night

Chapter 6 of 10

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Image by Selinabl... Thank you, Sel!

I was not alone. There were hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Charons on the river. Some nights – and it was always night – the soft swishing of oars in the water created a rush of sound... others, it was a gentle rhythm lulling the rest of us to sleep. I was only called when the passenger was one I knew... someone whose life had touched mine.

The task of the Charon is to ease the soul's transition. No one should pass through the veil alone, uncomforted.

Sometimes I wondered about Black's journey. Sometimes I even felt sorry for him. Only sometimes, though.

Envy

Chapter 7 of 10

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Image by Selinabl... Thank you, Sel!

When Lucius Malfoy stepped into my boat, I debated whether to reveal myself. The soul who faced me was surprisingly older than I remembered. The Lucius I had known would have chosen to appear at the peak of his youthful beauty and power. Why did he value this distinguished, yet slightly worn, aspect?

Who had he become?

When I spoke, he smiled broadly. It was the first time I was greeted with pleasure, rather than mere respect. He told me of Draco's marriage and family... of the joys of being a grandparent.

For the first time, I envied the living.

Old Friends

Chapter 8 of 10

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Image by Selinabl... Thank you, Sel!

Many followed. Minerva, Narcissa, then awhile later, Arthur and Molly Weasley, divided by only a few souls – a short time. Each greeted me kindly. Each stepped out of my boat with the wish that they would see me soon, on the other shore.

I believed them to be sincere.

The next generation trickled in. I learned of the two whose transitions would end my duty. Draco had earned the respect of many in the financial world... he had become a man of character. Harry Potter was Head Auror. He remained undefeated.

I couldn't recall why that had once been important.

Twin Vows Fulfilled

Chapter 9 of 10

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Finally, Draco Malfoy joined me on the river. A prosperous man, I would not have recognised him were it not for his resemblance to his father. He was civil and kind... as to a long-forgotten acquaintance. I was pleased that life had filled the space of time so well.

Many souls later, a small man with black hair, green eyes, and a faded scar greeted me joyfully. He was joining his wife and his friends, he told me, as well as many who had gone before I took up the oars.

His work was complete.

And so, nearly, was mine.

Journey's End

Chapter 10 of 10

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With each new passenger, I checked my pockets for a coin. With the third – a woman who had been a firstie when I was headmaster and who checked behind her with every dip of the oars – a coin appeared in my hand.

I explained, and when we reached the other side, she took my seat and turned back to the river. I stretched, left the boat, and began to climb the bank.

Hands extended to assist me. One strong and masculine, the other fair and slender. I looked up into two identical pairs of welcoming green eyes.

“Sir...”

“Severus...”

Home.