

Shard

by MHaydn

Our team of writers return.

Demons

Chapter 1 of 4

Our team of writers return.

1. Demons

Tzorg sniffed the air. "Wizard."

Bazor extended his seven senses. "Dark, very dark."

With all the majesty befitting his kind, Tzorg placed his hands on T'tang's shoulders, and broad shoulders they were too for one so young.

"My young protégé, we did not expect such opposition when we set out," he said. "We must send you back to the village. It is your duty to ensure that our blood line continues."

"That means I shag every female in camp, right?" asked T'tang.

"That's one way of putting it," said Bazor.

Ha, thought Cho. They were afraid I would produce some dry, boring, bookworm narrative.

She swigged down more coffee, which seemed to be in abundant supply at this place.

The witch peered around the rock and gave her report. "Two of them. Large. Wings with talons. Claws. Spurs on their heels and razor sharp tusks."

The wizard peeked and ducked back behind his bush. "And blue fire coming out of their brains."

"Blue fire is cool," said Lavender.

"Especially if it comes out of your brains," said Severus.

Giving in to a sudden urge, Cho dashed off to the loo, leaving Theo to examine what she had written.

So this is what a Ravenclaw considers high adventure. Luckily, I can rescue it in time. he thought.

"You've transfigured into your new persona, the most powerful creature you can imagine and still be able to walk normally, right? You've been practicing

your stunning spell, right? You said you could take out an elephant, right?" asked Lavender.

He nodded assent.

"Right," she said, "I'll distract them."

She stepped into the clearing, hiked her skirt, and struck a pose. "Yooohoo, boys!"

"Is that a human female?" asked Tzorg.

"I think so," said Bazor. "Yuck."

"It's a wonder their species hasn't died out," said Tzorg.

"Hey," cried out Bazor. "Do boys put a bag over your head first? I've always wanted to know."

"What! What are you saying!" said Lavender, whipping out her wand.

The air sizzled.

When the atmosphere had returned to normal, Severus began looking for the jewels the envoys were supposed to be carrying. Irked by the wasted effort practicing his stunning spell, he pointed to the scattered parts and said, "You made the mess. You clean it up."

"Okay, okay," she said. "I'll handle it."

She took her broom and whumped out the smoldering bits of brain before they could set the brush on fire or maybe the peat on fire in this godforsaken moor. When she was finished, she examined the burnt and broken bristles. She was certain her broom would never fly right again. Right.

Trekking into the wilderness and waiting in ambush had left Severus feeling, well, depleted. He eyed Lavender: healthy, luscious, full of life, full of enough life to spare, really luscious. She wouldn't mind, would she? Since she had come willingly on this venture knowing what he was, she was practically inviting him, and he didn't want to face the fury of scorned lady. He considered the scattered bits of demon and decided he should act and act quickly and decisively before he met the same fate.

Lavender screamed and flailed as ice-cold fangs sank into a vein.

"Mmmmm," went Severus a few moments later, licking his lips. "That hit the spot."

"I know you're a vampire, and I know 'sneaky-predator' is your middle name," stormed Lavender, "but you can't do that."

She took a deep breath. "I wet my pants."

From MuseAmusant: Why transfiguring oneself for nefarious purposes is a really, really bad idea.

Origin

Chapter 2 of 4

Vampire!Severus comes into being

2. Origin

"It's a common failure of young writers," the editor told Biff, "that they want to jump immediately into the action without preparing the reader."

"Did you have something suitable in mind?" asked Biff.

The editor took up her pen.

After continuing for 6,000 years, First Principle plucked Acorn from Tree of Existence and brought forth Emperor who was to wait 12,000 years before striking Rock of Creation, but after 6,000 years, Emperor became impatient and said, "First Principle only had to wait 6,000 years," whereupon he struck Rock of Creation, and it, not being ready, split into five pieces instead of four, which should not have happened, and from the first piece came Heaven and Earth, from the second came Plants, from the third came Animals, from the fourth came People, and from the fifth, which, unlike the majestic appearance of the others, was flawed and ugly and jagged, nothing seemed to come but much seemed to flee, and while Emperor hid out of shame, First Principle marveled that the other four stones grouped themselves around the misshaped shard, and for the first time since his formation, First Principle felt awe at evidence that Chaos was a deeper imperative, which should not have happened.

"Now that the reader is well prepped," said Biff, "all that remains is to flesh out the basic structure."

The editor beamed as Biff, inspired by the intro, filled the page with his scrawl.

No. No. No. Severus Snape was mentally screaming.

The Trio leaving him to die had given him the resolve to pour half the vial of potion into himself. Now, in the stasis it had produced to let him recover, he had seen Pansy Parkinson enter, cry out in shock at his condition, and pour the rest of the potion down his throat. He cursed himself for his own caution. He had been certain that when he needed the potion, he would be severely injured to the point that he would spill half of it. Half of it would save him; all of it might do something terrifying. He lost all consciousness.

He woke to find himself in a comfortable bed with Pansy sleeping in a chair next to him. He was thinking clearly except for the part of him feeling gratitude, a

previously unknown emotion, toward the one person who had tried to save him. She had probably condemned him by her efforts, but the thought that one person cared was pleasant enough that he harbored no ill will. He could guess the likely outcome. The one creature that could sustain incredible injury and survive was a vampire.

He had acquired the requisite blood and hair for a price he would not care to pay again in a place as full of peril as unrequited love.

"If you change your mind," the negotiator had said, "the antidote is scribed on the Scroll of Escroll."

"And where is that located?" he had asked.

The room had laughed.

"It's a joke," another vampire had said. "Once one experiences our existence, there are no second thoughts."

The room had laughed again, but in a manner that had made him flee to the streets where he had been surprised to find himself still alive under the sun.

Now, his getting out of bed had awakened Pansy who protested his being up and about.

"Who do you think you are, Superman?" asked Pansy.

Severus flexed muscles he didn't know he had; sniffed the air, taking in Pansy's scent which he recognized as virgin; felt deep hunger as he watched a vein throb in her throat; and said, "Who's Superman?"

"He's a character in non-wizard fantasy literature," said Pansy. "I like comic books. Is there anything the fuck wrong with that?"

"Do you have a favorite?" asked Severus.

"Scrooge McDuck."

"What does he do?"

"He says, 'Get back in there and capture that dragon. I'm paying you a whole ten cents an hour,'" said Pansy.

"Amazing. It sounds like the Malfoys," said Severus. "How in the world does a non-wizard know so much about us?"

"I put it down to artistic intuition," said Pansy.

She insisted on supporting him as they descended the stairs to the ground floor for tea. He was certain he didn't need any aid, but Pansy holding him was too pleasant to protest. Smelling her hair, bumping against her, they ricocheted down the stairwell.

Guico piano, thought Theo. *Older people have no fire.*

He wondered if the old folks knew they were on the brink of a revelation: canon Severus's unrequited love for Lily was not a saving grace but a character defect. Canon Severus had so little romance in his soul that he had expended all of it on a childhood friend and had none left for anyone who might have cared for him.

The next morning, Severus and Pansy were on their way to the bank. Mrs. Parkinson had received a tip that the authorities, not able to locate her husband, were prepared to take her into custody, and she had fled to France to join her spouse. Operating under the theory that even though the government was not letting itself be hampered by due process, it was a bureaucracy and it would take its own sluggish time to target Pansy, which meant Pansy had a day or two of freedom to settle family affairs.

At the bank, the goblin teller was refusing Pansy permission to visit the family vault.

"She has identified herself, and she is of legal age," injected Severus.

The teller looked into the eyes of the young lady's companion and saw goblins on pitchforks roasting over coals.

"Furthermore, she has shown you the authorization signed by her parents," added Severus.

The head teller tore his gaze away from eyes that showed unspeakable creatures feasting on goblin private parts and signaled an assistant to guide the hell-spawn to its desired destination.

Returning to the Parkinson residence, Pansy insisted on visiting the greenhouse one last time. She noticed his fascination with the few black orchids they had.

"They're very valuable," she said.

He nodded agreement. They had been an important ingredient in the overdose of potion she had given him. Now, he was fascinated by the beautiful plant that had condemned him. Pansy remarked that they wouldn't survive the neglect they would receive when government officials took over the estate. For some reason, that made him sad. Noticing his reaction, Pansy temporarily lost her stoic attitude.

"Why can't they leave us alone?" wailed Pansy. "Why can't someone get rid of those inquisitors?"

She saw the fire in Severus's eyes and recoiled. "No, no, I didn't mean that," she said.

He gave her a quizzical look.

"Eliminating people is such a sad affair," she said. "No matter who they are, some one will miss them. The consequences reverberate through all time. Innocents suffer."

"You surprise me, Miss Parkinson."

"I never could have the things I wanted," she said. "Yesterday, I saw a stray kitten, and I wanted to take it home, but I didn't dare because I'm going to be a fugitive."

"You do strike me as a cat person," he said.

"I never got to have one when I was in school. It wouldn't have been safe among those louts. No one would take care of it if I left it home."

Severus held Pansy as the devastation of her life coalesced in the abandonment of a stray kitten to its fate. He was stroking her hair, offering solace to some one whose life had come apart. He was stroking her hair, inhaling her scent and feeling her form and having wild thoughts.

She recovered, sniffed, and said, "You must think me a silly girl."

"You're holding up well," said Severus, "but if you are up to it, we must act quickly. We need to collect everything of value and destroy or hide any incriminating accounts or records."

"Right," said Pansy. "Then we can seal this place and leave. We can doubly seal all the closets and cupboards. The government snoops will spend days breaking into empty spaces, giving us more time to escape."

For his amusement, Severus placed self-referential spells alternating with infinite-recursion spells around the innocent pantry.

"It hurts to look at them," said Pansy.

Back at his place, Pansy stretched out on the hearth rug as Severus lit the fireplace against the chill of an early spring evening.

"Join me?" she asked.

To his surprise, he stretched out on the hearth rug for the first time in his life.

"You're so comfortable," she said, snuggling around him with her head on his shoulders.

Still to his surprise, he held her as she sighed and soon fell asleep.

Lying on the rug, holding Pansy, Severus felt more relaxed than he had ever felt, felt Pansy was a marvelous person, felt better than he had ever felt. He fell asleep.

Men, thought Cho. For all their supposed lustiness, they never get it.

The Dark Stranger was walking down a dark ally, one that would never end. As he walked, he did things that made it darker. He couldn't stop himself. It was getting colder and colder.

Until.

A door opened, and he stepped into room of light and warmth and a strange lady sitting at a table. He thought he recognized her. Strange, since he had tried to forget everyone he had ever met. Why hadn't he forgotten this one?

"Of course, it had to be you," she said.

"And I am?" he asked.

"The one who ignored a little girl who had a crush on her professor," she said, "the little girl with short skirts constantly crossing her legs, who bought special satin knickers for the day she could flash you."

"And what happened to the little girl?" he asked.

"She grew up, and now, the kitten in her satin knickers is reserved for a rich aristocrat."

"You mean the stray kitten that you cannot keep for your own."

"You could not be so cruel if you were not so perceptive," was the reply.

"And what cruel thing would you do in return?" he asked.

"This," she replied, leaning over and brushing his lips with hers.

Severus woke with a start as Pansy's lips brushed his.

"I'm sorry," she said. "You looked so peaceful and handsome."

"Good intentions go a long way," he said as a shot in the dark.

"Really?" asked Pansy, relaxing a bit and giving him a soft kiss.

"Yes, like that," he said.

Severus's mind was racing. Did she honestly want attention from him? How much?

She embraced him again.

"That's what I want," he said, running fingers through her hair and giving her an adoring look. "It's what you're really like."

She put her arms gently around him. Her lips traced his eyes, his nose, his mouth. His hand was on the back of her neck.

"I would never get tired of this, never get enough of this," he said.

Pansy decided she wanted to be his witch for as long as she could. She guided his hands to her breasts. She reveled in the feel of his hands traveling all over her. She arranged herself to let him nibble his way up her thighs. She gloried in her surge of passion. She drank in the hungry gleam in his eyes. She thought she would go wild when he kissed her damp garment, kissed her damp garment right where it covered her sensitive nub.

"Are you sure about this?" he asked.

"It's mine to give," said Pansy.

The mechanics were supposed to be clumsy, but Severus enjoyed removing Pansy's knickers. He was entering her. She moaned. He almost stopped, but it was a moan of pleasure. He was all the way in. He loved it. He loved the look on her face. He made love to her, accepting all he was offered. Pansy was telling him it was wonderful. She was squirming. He felt her turn very wet. She was smiling at him. He felt her spasms. She looked ethereal. He came inside her.

He was holding her and wondering what would happen next.

She was thinking about her parents, alone and desolate in France.

"I want to stay until it's time for me to go," said Pansy.

Author's Note: Apologies for the length, but I couldn't manage Pansy in less.

Plots

Chapter 3 of 4

Severus the vampire branches out.

3. Plots

Cho was certain the readers were interested in more exciting material than a whining Pansy Parkinson and her straying kitten.

"I've been set on the Malfoys."

A revelation.

She spat out the words. "I was tracking the Parkinsons, but the senior staff decided the Parkinsons were the major threat and assigned their 'most promising agent' to them, moving me to a 'less demanding' position."

Severus remembered that, two weeks ago, Padma had been irked that she had been given the tepid Parkinsons while other agents got to tangle with the Malfoys, but now was not the time to be pedantic about consistency. He asked, "What happened?"

"The Parkinsons foolishly placed protective wards around the valuables they had to leave behind, and hence, our agents knew exactly where to look," said Padma, "but one of the wards, the one around the pantry, has already sent two of our best curse-breakers to the mental ward."

"Oh my," said Severus, evincing great sympathy. "Any hope for their recovery?"

Padma sadly shook her head no. "The most recent diagnosis is that their minds are caught in some kind of infinite loop."

"An infinite loop that paradoxically spirals deeper and deeper," said Severus

"How did you know that?" asked a surprised Padma.

Severus mentally kicked himself, but recovered by saying, "One hears rumors, especially about unusual and previously-unknown maladies."

Padma sighed. "Our security is not what it should be."

"Perhaps we should burn a never-ending candle for the curse-breakers," he said, "one that spirals deeper and deeper into itself."

"A good idea," said Padma. "I keep forgetting that you're a master of all the arts. But that gives me an idea. We could team up and catch the wizard who cast those spells. He's the most wanted sorcerer in all of wizard Britain. We could be famous."

Severus changed the topic. "The Holidays are almost upon us."

Padma sighed again. "'Almost upon us' is a good way of putting it."

Theo had caught Cho's smirk and concluded he had been left with the dull back story.

"It's really you. Is it really you?"

"I'm me, no doubt about it," he had replied.

It had been a Saturday in early autumn, and Severus had been enjoying the nippy weather at a sidewalk café when a lady had stopped in front of his table. After such an initial, informative exchange, he had felt he had to invite her to sit and to order a coffee for her. Who was she? What godawful thing from his past would she dredge up?

After she had realized he didn't recognize her and after she had attributed it to shock trauma, she had introduced herself as Padma Singh nee Patil. It had gradually come out that she was excited about meeting a hero of the second wizard war. As she had talked about the other heroes, he had slowly come to a realization. Pansy and her parents had also considered him a hero of the war, but comparing the different stories, he had come to the conclusion that Pansy and her parents believed him to be a hero for the side that had opposed Padma and company.

Had he been all things to all people? He would have to check this out.

In his eagerness to learn more, he had listened intently to Padma. In his appreciation of her as quite the dish, he had complimented her on her role in the conflict. As a result, she had insisted they meet again next Saturday. He had agreed. It had been a long time since he had sampled Lavender.

The editor could see where the young writers were heading, but the text needed a boost to propel the plot forward.

Of all the things that bring people together is not the most binding a combination of passion and mutual advantage, a mix that satisfies our deep yearning for a meaningful personal life and our desire for position and respect among our fellows, and does not the interaction of these two forces both propel each toward a satisfactory realization while, at the same time, enriching all outcomes to the point that minor irritations and small conflicts are smoothed over and obstacles, both major and minor, are overcome with such alacrity that even those involved are surprised at what they accomplish, and is not such an arrangement so desirable that when presented an opportunity the ones offered such a chance will ignore all counter arguments and all contrary evidence to seek this very gem of existence, and is it not the case that their determined pursuit to form such a union, despite obstacles, comprises a major part of the impetus that produces success.

Dang, that's good, thought Biff. A hard act to follow.

Friday afternoon arrived like the 4:15 Express bringing relatives one has never met.

"Do you think she'll come? It's only for tea. I fixed Darjeeling. Do you think she'll like it? It's my favorite. She won't want to put milk in it, will she? We only have candied orange peel and two kinds of biscuits. They'll go well with the tea. Do you think I should have got candied pineapple instead?"

There was a knock on the door, and Severus left Padma to her fretting to admit Mrs. Malfoy who entered, accepted a seat on the sofa and a cup of tea, and asked, "Is this a trap?"

"On the contrary," said Severus.

"In that case, let me pour a cup for you, darling," Mrs. Malfoy said to Mrs. Singh, "and by all means, sit beside me and tell me your plans for proceeding against me and my family."

"Nothing is secret anymore," complained Padma.

"We do have plans for proceeding against you," said Severus, "and we were hoping you would like them."

Severus and Padma were eager to tell Cissy about having sold a plan of community service to the government. The Malfoys were to fund several public works projects and provide low-cost loans to businesses devastated by the recent conflict. Mrs. Malfoy was rather cool about the proposals even though the pair stressed that the cost of community service would be no greater than legal fees and confiscation of Malfoy properties. Mrs. Malfoy was more combative than they had assumed.

Severus and Padma, however, had another card to play, and they dealt it like the joker in a high-stakes round of seven card stud. The Malfoy family could give grants. Brit wizard society had about a dozen first-class Potion Masters and about twice as many first-class jewelers. The post-war economic slump had hit them hard, and some generosity could secure their services and create a monopoly position.

Mrs. Malfoy perked up. "That has possibilities. Severus and the Patil family can operate the enterprise behind a front, and no one will know they are the beneficiaries."

Severus had prepped Padma. Mrs. Malfoy would not believe their offers were sincere unless he and Padma benefitted from the arrangement. Now, he was thinking that the prep was unnecessary. Cissy's suggestion of a clandestine operation had Padma's eyes shining like a girl discovering bad boys.

As the conversation proceeded, Cissy and Padma insisted that Severus join them on the sofa instead of sitting alone and aloof in his chair. The two moved closer as the discussion proceeded. By the time everyone agreed they should adjourn, think things over, and meet tomorrow, the two girls were almost upon a boy whose badness remained to be plumbed.

Throughout the discussion, Severus had been absently-mindedly agreeing with whatever Cissy and Padma were enthusing over while dividing his time between comparing their breasts and observing the pulsing veins in their throats.

"Oh, Severus, being with you is great," said the girls. "You treat us like real people."

Bloody hell, thought Severus.

Theo saw his chance to leap in with some twisty and raunchy stuff the story desperately needed.

As Severus waited for the pair the next morning, Pansy's overdose kicked in. He had been thinking of going Masai: Keep a herd of cows and have blood for breakfast, milk for lunch, and raw meat for dinner. As he reviewed his options, he was thinking Cissy and Padma had all of the above. And they looked better and smelled better than cows.

No, no, no, raged Severus, appalled at where his thoughts had taken him. What was that saying, "Better to light a single candle than rage against the darkness"? But he didn't have a single candle in the house. He raged against his lack of foresight.

While Theo fetched more coffee, Cho read his effort and scoffed. No mere wizard could match the female mind for twisty and raunchy.

Mrs. Singh arrived early the next morning and fussed over the tea and biscuits until Severus insisted she sit quietly on the sofa while he fixed her a hot chocolate. She was almost calmed when the message arrived, complete with profuse apologies, that Mrs. Malfoy was unavoidably detained because of domestic complications. For reasons beyond his understanding, Padma's distress distressed him, and he sat beside her on the sofa, took her hand, and assured her that nothing was lost for, after all, were not her opinions, free of any caution she might feel around Mrs. Malfoy, imminently worth listening to. His heightened senses detected a warming and softening that seemed to reach to the young lady's core which made him bold enough to suggest they spend the day making scenic trips that would relax them and let them consider all the options from a fresh perspective. For reasons beyond his understanding, Padma's return smile warmed and softened him to the core.

Padma wanted to start with the Holiday decorations in London which Severus found himself enjoying and that worried him. It was a sign that he was continuing to undergo ominous transformations.

As they were relaxing with a spiced cider, Padma leaned closer and mentioned that she and Cissy were impressed by his knowledge of herbs for aphrodisiacs and pain killers.

Was that what we were talking about while I was mesmerized by the pulsing veins in their throats? He wondered.

"And we liked your suggestion about using the potion and jewelry masters to produce high-end cosmetics and accessories for the non-wizard population," she said.

I must have done some inspired muttering while I was staring at their boobs! thought Severus. *Go me.*

They were on a cliff, sipping wine and watching the waves crash ashore, when Padma, looking a bit flushed and wistful, said, "This is like something people do with my sister."

"Your sister?" he asked.

"She's the sociable and pretty one," said Padma. "I met my husband at her wedding. He was the best man"

It flashed through his mind that Padma's husband might have been hoping that Padma was like her sister. He said, "I can't imagine making these arrangements with the Malfoys with your sister."

Padma smiled. "Are you saying drab, studious people have their uses?"

"Drab? The Malfoys are dangerous people." He plunged ahead. "And attractive people, and you did not come off looking second best yesterday."

Did he really just say what I thought I heard, wondered Padma.

"Do you think Cissy's domestic complication was Lucius?" asked Padma.

"Making a quick visit from wherever he's hiding in France?" added Severus.

"Now's the time to have a raid," said Padma. She giggled. "We could catch him with his pants down." She smirked. "And hers too."

Padma was thinking that when her husband returned home, his interest was in what was for dinner. She had attributed that to her drabness, but this wizard was saying she wasn't drab.

Padma couldn't stop her speculations. "Do you think she greeted him at the front door? Do you think they got past the foyer?"

"Maybe he snuck in the back entrance," suggested Severus.

"Oh, what a bad boy," said Padma.

Images of Cissy mounted on behind ran through Padma's mind Cissy moaning and turning sloppy wet as Lucius plied his ivory rod; Cissy clutching the sheets as she came for him. She wondered how she would look if Severus mounted her from behind. With his ivory rod sliding in and out, turning her wet and making her wiggle. Would she finally experience coming for a wizard? Would he hold her hips and pound into her until she surrendered? Would he exalt as she did peaches and cream for him? Would he cuddle her afterward?

"But maybe Lucius is a romantic soul," Severus was saying, stretching out on his cloak.

"Maybe he would gently approach Cissy," said Severus, reaching up and stroking Padma's hair.

"Perhaps he would be gradual," said Severus, letting Padma stretch out beside him.

"Slow and gentle," said Severus, coaxing Padma into snuggling.

"Letting Cissy express herself," said Severus, letting Padma caress him.

"Being a loving partner," said Severus, receiving Padma's deep, yearning kisses.

"A true companion for all time," said Severus, feeling Padma's warm and soft body against his, watching her hair become undone.

Padma was concluding it was just the wine and he couldn't be looking at her like that and she couldn't be forgetting where she was and she couldn't be thinking the things that she would never think.

I will unpin my hair and let it cascade, around my shoulders it will cascade, and he will stare speechless, as speechless as me at what is happening, as devoid of words as a young girl who aches, who aches as she never has before, where she thought she would never ache, and my hair will spread across the pillow, splayed across the sheets, and the young girl splayed across the sheets, awaiting his hands, his hands that led me here, led me with light touch and shining eyes, and my eyes will shine, shine at his light touch, the touch that reaches deep, deep into places that would forever be secret, places that were secret from me, the deeps I never thought I had, touching me deeply, forever deeply, forever touched, and he will look at me, and I will look at him, and he will see me looking, looking at how he is looking at me, how he is looking at me as I thought no one ever would, as he touches me as I thought no one ever would, and I will touch him, touch him with everything, with all that I have, all my deep places, all my secret deep places, he will know, and I want to touch him deeply for if I cannot I will go mad, mad with the deep emptiness of his not touching me, of his not looking at me, not seeing me, but he will, I know he will for otherwise the world would have existed for nothing, and nothing will be for me, but he will, and nothing I have will be secret, and it will be deep, and all once thought gross shall be beautiful, and all once thought lost shall be found.

Prompt from MuseAmusant: Candied orange peel, dried herbs, a candle

Darkness

Chapter 4 of 4

Our story comes to its inevitable ending.

4. Darkness

"I was making progress against those Malfoys. I was building a good case. Then, the supervisors went ape-shit over a few protective wards and I was reassigned to the Parkinsons and the Malfoys were given to Padma Singh who couldn't handle the criminal proceedings and proposed some namby-pamby community service. Now, as regular as clockwork, those slimy gits sacrifice some retard who's thrown into prison faster than you can say 'Bob's your uncle,' and the government is happy and Padma is the girl of the hour and the Malfoys go scot free."

"It doesn't seem fair," said Severus.

Theo was thinking that, of course, Cho could spout some female spite. Big deal. Well, he would show them that back story could have bite.

He supposed it was his fault for being in this predicament. He had fallen into the trap of many whose vocation was risky and unpredictable: a few select routines, of no apparent consequence, that gave his life structure. Everyone knew a dark stranger spent the early evening relaxing over café au lait at a modest outdoor café. Thus it was that a lady had arrived who acted as if she was from his past even though he could not recall her. He wasn't certain he wanted to, especially since she seemed put out that he didn't recognize her, and he was of the opinion that people were more eager that one remember an

injury they wanted to redress than a favor they wanted to repay. Whatever wrong he had done her, she appeared more interested in general conversation about abstruse things. Had they been fellow academics in a previous life? Was she being patient in preparing a very cold dish?

He was thinking that he should avoid this Mrs. Weasley, as she called herself, but whenever he was downwind of her, his nostrils would flare and he had the urge to impregnate her. He wanted it to happen as she was looking into his eyes, aware of what he had done to her and having the realization give her an orgasm that drained her.

In his less dark moments, he thought he should just bite her.

Ah, the excesses of youth and their search for excitement, thought Biff. *Speaking of which, let's see what the editor wrote for her experiment in dialogue.*

"Henderson from Department of Mysteries believes duality rules magic."

"In what way?" asked Severus.

Mrs. Weasley perked up. She wouldn't even try to mention this to her husband. She said, "He thinks every spell has a counter-spell."

"Does the counter-spell undo the original or does it cancel it?" asked Severus. "It's possible to untie a knot, but it's not possible to tie another knot that undoes it."

"Arithmancy," said Mrs. Weasley. "If there's an answer, it probably lies in the structure of things. But Henderson doesn't do Arithmancy; he's a scholar cataloging spells and their antithesis."

"Even if he doesn't get to the heart of the matter, he is likely to come up with some good information," said Severus.

Mrs. Weasley gave a sad smile. "Maybe there's a spell that undoes scholarship."

He gave her a questioning look.

"My in-laws have been making remarks about my being an aloof wife," she said.

Severus shook his head in polite disagreement and asked, "How can they think that?"

"They think I studied too much at school, and I haven't reformed, that I can't reform and become more human."

Severus was looking into serious, concerned eyes. "But you were preparing yourself, weren't you?"

"Yes," she said, "for the type of life I wanted."

"And the type of person you wanted to be with," added Severus.

"Do you think so?" she asked. "But look how it turned out."

Mrs. Weasley changed the topic. "Do you think there's a counter-spell for that monstrosity in the Parkinson pantry?"

She couldn't resist teasing him and asked, "Do you think it can be canceled or will it have to be undone?"

The breeze had carried the aroma of a married woman who did not know she was flirting. 'Something to sink his teeth into,' as they say. Severus sat silent, not daring to smile at the risk of revealing his true nature. Nor did he dare stand at the risk of revealing his true state. He would burn this witch at both ends.

The editor could no longer persist in a style of writing that had no subtlety.

Come through for me, Biff, prayed the editor.

Some day in our lives

There will come a time

When we can relate Severus's tale

That proud grand moment

When he faced the test

Of raving curses cast by the best

A strangely transformed

Cruel strong monument

Of clever spells cunningly wrought

How bravely he stood

Where no other dared

Waving his wand weaving magic

And we should not look

Into the reason

For the brave stand of this one man

We leave it to others

To shamelessly tell

The dark secret that served him well

For a heart bled out

The absence of hope
Is no reason to not go on
He was more than brave
No longer human
When full circle he faced himself
For his amusement
He performed the deed
That set him free from all others
In a grand display
He betrayed himself
Became the thing he now destroyed
He vanquished the bounds
That did guide his way
That gave him hope that kept him sane
From this time forward
No one would approach
The baleful wizard that all now feared
How shattered the life
How empty the soul
At triumph's door when all alone

Cho was certain Biff and the editor had gone off their trolley. It was a warning about pursuing a life of publishing. Or a warning about being too professional. This place could use some hanky-panky. She knew she could.

Mrs. Weasley was proud of herself when Severus agreed to take on the Parkinson Pantry Problem. She nodded with satisfaction when he declared it a multi-layered ward. She had second thoughts when removing the first layer blew out all the windows. She had doubts when removing the second layer vaporized the ceiling and roof. She began to worry when removing the third layer destroyed the back of the house. She became frightened when removing the final layer punched a hole in the face of the Earth. She was nearly hysterical when the last ward sputtered out. And when Severus turned to her and calmly said, "I hope this place was insured," she was terrified that the exercise had deranged his mental faculties.

She insisted on escorting him home, convinced that his amusement over her concern was proof that he had been psychically damaged.

At his flat, she spread several quilts in front of the fireplace and started a fire, and knowing it was essential to keep him warm and supply him with human company, she stretched out beside him and, to be on the safe side, snuggled against him. She graciously accepted his stroking her hair and telling her that her moral support had been essential. Humoring him was the first step in the healing process. His making her feel more relaxed and comfortable and warm than she had ever felt was a sign that he was regaining his humanity, making her so relaxed and comfortable and warm that Mrs. Weasley fell asleep in his arms.

She easily convinced her department that Severus needed constant attention to regain his balance. No one wanted a raving Dark Wizard. Her husband and his family merely shook their heads and muttered about her being too dedicated to her job.

It was their second time when he said, "Make love to me."

Mrs. Weasley did. Tenderly. As she had never done before. As she wanted to do more and more as she realized she was losing him. And as he slipped deeper and deeper into darkness, she became more and more human. Mrs. Weasley never felt more human than on the day she came for him as he made her pregnant.

END