

The Augurey and the Serpent

by *star_girl*

It's 1994 and Severus Snape has his hands full with the Dark Lord's return. But Delphi Riddle has something much bigger in mind...

PART 1: ACT 1

Chapter 1 of 10

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PART 1: ACT 1

What do you wanna make those eyes at me for

If they don't mean what they say?

They make me glad, they make me sad,

They make me want a lot of things that I never had.

~Emile Ford and The Checkmates, "What Do You Wanna Make Those Eyes At Me For?" UK Number 1 on 9th January 1960 (Severus Snape's birthday)

August 1994

It was a clear and sultry night in Spinner's End and Severus Snape was feeling increasingly restless. The next academic year was going to be extremely challenging for him, to say the least. The Dark Lord had now taken up residency in his father's old familial home in Little Hangleton, with Wormtail drawing the short straw of looking after him and keeping him alive with constant feedings of a potion which included venom from Nagini. Of course, it had been Severus who had devised the potion in the first place and had shown Wormtail how to create and administer it, and how to milk a snake properly. Severus remembered how scared Wormtail looked when handling a viper for the first time, and how pathetic his first few attempts at the potion were. But Severus persevered until Wormtail got it exactly right. There was no way he was going to let Wormtail's incompetence reflect badly on his own Potions prowess. And, thankfully, the Dark Lord had been pleased with the results.

But if Severus had thought he'd been let off the hook for his hard work, he'd been sadly mistaken as the Dark Lord had yet another task for him, one of even greater significance to his return: the creation of a Resurrection Potion, one that would bring the Dark Lord back to his true form. Which meant Severus was spending his sleepless summer nights worrying about the future and researching obscure dark magic. He supposed it appeared to be a walk in the park compared to babysitting the homunculus form of the Dark Lord, but the pressure to get the Resurrection Potion right was high and he was sure he would repay any failure with his life.

He was flicking through a stack of ageing parchments he'd acquired from Borgin and Burkes detailing ancient Inferi rites when there was a sharp rap at the door. With a sigh, he rose and swiftly crossed the small tatty living room into the hall, cursing his uninvited visitor. Scowling, he drew his wand and ripped the door open forcefully with his free hand, fully expecting the rattish oaf Wormtail to be shaking and weeping in front of him from being chastised by the Dark Lord with a Cruciatius Curse for the umpteenth time. Instead, he was met with the sight of a pretty young woman dressed in what looked to be grungy Muggle clothing, leaning nonchalantly on the doorframe and smiling through a sweep of eyeliner and a slick of lipgloss. His scowl turned into a momentary flash of surprise. Even though he'd never seen the young lady before,

something about her mannerisms nagged him as being vaguely familiar.

"Alright Severus. Can I come in?"

Snape's hand gripped his wand tighter. "Who are you and how do you know me?" he asked slowly.

"I'm Delphini. But you can call me Delphi. And I know everything. Seriously, can I please come in? I'm sweating like a Boggart in a mirror shop out here. And I really don't have a lot of time." She shrugged her faded denim jacket over her slight shoulders, revealing slender arms and a thin black cropped vest top emblazoned with the words BLACK SABBATH in purple writing.

Severus tried in vain not to look at the young woman's lithe torso as she arched her back and finally wriggled out of the jacket, her tight low-slung ripped jeans providing a flash of smooth, pale, flat stomach. His wand remained raised. "What do you want?"

Delphi pouted and ran her black-tipped fingernails through the tendrils of silver-blue hair that had escaped her high ponytail and which framed her face, her eyelids heavy as she put on her best seductive expression and in a low, Marlene Dietrich voice uttered, "I want you to make love to me."

Severus stared at her blankly for a second before Delphi burst into melodic giggles.

"Well, that's not the main reason I'm here, obviously," she went on dismissively, waving a hand without a hint of embarrassment. "I'm from the future and I'm here to change to the past."

Now Severus looked at her like she was mentally unstable and went to close the door but Delphi slammed a scuffed army-booted foot in the gap to keep it open.

"Look, it's a long and improbable story, but the longer we talk out here the more chance of someone seeing us," she whispered urgently, plunging a hand inside her vest top and pulled out a long thin chain with a glistening object on the end. "Time-Turner. I make it August 1994, and that means You-Know-Who is working on getting his body back. Am I right?"

A muscle in Severus' jaw twitched, but he never lowered his wand.

"I told you, I know everything. I know why Harry Potter's green eyes make you angry and I know that your Patronus is a doe for the same reason." Her foot began tapping with impatience.

Now Severus' wand arm faltered as he took this in. Impossible was his first thought, but yet the girl had just implied that she knew his greatest secret as well as the Dark Lord's doings. "Why are you here?" he asked, his eyes narrowing in suspicion.

"I need your help," she replied simply, her hands open in a gesture of truce.

Severus mulled this over for a moment. A young time-travelling witch from the future needed his help. And she seemed to know a lot about him, the Dark Lord and perhaps even the outcome of the war. But that could make her very dangerous indeed. If she was here to help the Dark Lord, Merlin knew what horrors could lie ahead.

"And which side are you on?" His voice did not betray the unsettled feeling rising inside him.

"The right one, of course. I'm here to bring that snake-nosed motherfucker down." She stared at him defiantly, and Severus took the opportunity to brush her mind with his own with the lightest of touches, to ascertain her motives. The statement she had just given appeared to be the unwavering truth.

Delphi tore her eyes away, breaking the Legilimency. "Now do you believe me?"

In response, Severus poked his head out of the door and looked both ways in case it was some kind of trap, then wordlessly stepped aside and let Delphi in. As she slinked past he noticed what looked to be an intricate tattoo of wings on each of her shoulder blades poking out of the sides of her flimsy racerback vest top, and he tried hard not to imagine what the whole thing would look like on her naked flesh.

Despite his best efforts, Delphi had spotted him looking. "I'll show you mine if you show me yours?" she smirked over her shoulder.

A flash of annoyance, arousal and curiosity flooded through him at the same time as he turned from her and slammed the door shut.

PART 1: ACT 2

Chapter 2 of 10

It's 1994 and Severus Snape has his hands full with the Dark Lord's return. But Delphi Riddle has something much bigger in mind...

PART 1: ACT 2

Delphi walked through to the living room without invitation, glancing around at every corner. She carelessly tossed her denim jacket on the back of a threadbare sofa and began examining the spines of the myriad books that adorned floor to ceiling shelves along the wall, one hand tucked into the back pocket of her jeans as the other traced the worn leather covers. Severus watched her wearily from the doorway in silence.

"Cosy cottage you have here. A bit shabby though. It could do with a woman's touch." At this, she turned to face Severus, catching his eye and smirking as she moved her finger from the bookshelf and ran a delicate finger along her collarbone.

Severus remained unmoved at the apparent flirtation. "When are you from? And how, exactly, do you think I'll be able to help you?"

Delphi let her hand flop to her side with a dramatic sigh. "You might need to sit down for this."

After a few moments of hesitation, Severus crossed the lounge and sat in a high-backed leather chair in the corner, his eyes never leaving the young woman as she paced the room back and forth, preparing to speak.

"I'm from 2020, but that's not relevant. What IS relevant is why I need your help. And for you to understand this, I need to tell you how You-Know-Who managed to survive

the Killing Curse back when Harry Potter was a baby."

"Go on," Severus said slowly, the memory of the attack as painful to him as if it had happened yesterday.

"He made Horcruxes. Ever heard of them?"

"An object in which a fragment of a person's soul is hidden for the purpose of attaining immortality," he answered coolly, as if straight out of a textbook. "It was rumoured that Herpo the Foul created one, but no-one had dared."

"Exactly!" Delphi interrupted, putting both hands on the back of the sofa and leaning forwards for emphasis. "Herpo the Foul created ONE Horcrux. You-Know-Who created several. Six, he'd thought, but there were actually seven in total. Do you know how a Horcrux is made?"

At this point, Severus frowned, concern beginning to spread over his usually unreadable features. "No."

Delphi's head fell forwards and she breathed deeply in and out through her nose before continuing. "You'll need to brace yourself for this because it's not pleasant, but it's something you need to know. Horcruxes are made by committing murder. The act of committing murder is what splits the soul initially. So You-Know-Who killed seven people to create his Horcruxes, the evil bastard." She paused to let that sink in for a second. "Six of those murders he committed to deliberately make Horcruxes, but the seventh was accidental. He'd had no idea he'd made the seventh Horcrux when he performed that murder. THAT murder was the murder of Lily Potter, and the seventh Horcrux was Harry Potter."

Severus looked like he'd been punched in the gut. His beloved Lily, not only murdered by the Dark Lord but also now an instrument in the Dark Lord's immortality. Her only child, living with a piece of the Dark Lord inside them. He felt physically sick.

When he next spoke, his voice sounded hoarse under the weight of so much unspoken emotion. "Do you wish to destroy these Horcruxes?"

Delphi walked around the sofa shaking her head seriously, taking a seat on one of the arms.

"Oh no. I intend to do something much better than that. I'm going to stop him making the Horcruxes in the first place." She gave Severus a meaningful look.

"And how are you going to do that?"

"Easy. I'm going to go back in time and change the copy of the book that You-Know-Who used to create his Horcruxes. So he'll THINK he's created them, but he hasn't at all. And then we'll be able to kill him." She smiled as innocently as if she had just suggested going for ice cream.

Severus raised his eyebrows at both the audacity and simplicity of the plan. "I do not see how you need my assistance. You seem to have thought of everything."

Delphi gave another sigh. "Well, this is the thing. I need the right tool." Once again she plunged her hand inside her vest top and pulled out the thin chain with the Time-Turner on the end, watching the little hourglass glinting in the dim light. "This Time-Turner is like the most basic bitch of Time-Turners and I need something better. It's a long story, but the first one I got hold of was really unstable and only let me stay in the past for five minutes, which just wasn't long enough to do what I needed to do. So then I stole this one from the Department of Mysteries and it's far more stable but it won't let me travel any further back than thirty years and then only for an hour at a time. I need to go back even further and for longer, because You-Know-Who created his Horcruxes when he was a young man."

Severus assessed the young woman in front of him, a growing respect of her plan and how far she had come to have gotten to this point.

"And how do I fit in to all this?"

She gazed at Severus and when she spoke next her tone was hushed and solemn. "I have it on good authority that your friend Lucius Malfoy is in possession of a Golden Time-Turner, specially made for him by one of his Unspeakable cronies. But THIS Time-Turner has none of the restrictions of the others; it can go back in time for up to a hundred years and for a limitless amount of time. My plan only works if I can use that Time-Turner. Malfoy Manor has more wards on it than Azkaban, so I need the assistance of someone who can come and go in Chez Malfoy without arousing suspicion and find the Time-Turner, namely you. Are you in?"

Severus thought back to the night of Lily's murder, of all the pain and anger that raged inside him to this day, and the desecration of her only living flesh by Dark Lord, and did not hesitate in giving his answer.

"Yes," he said firmly, and Delphi's dark eyes shone with triumph.

PART 1: ACT 3

Chapter 3 of 10

It's 1994 and Severus Snape has his hands full with the Dark Lord's return. But Delphi Riddle has something much bigger in mind...

PART 1: ACT 3

Delphi and Severus trudged up a secluded lane which led to the perimeter of the Malfoy estate. The night was still and quiet apart from the sound of gravel grinding underfoot. The combination of the gibbous moon and Severus' lit wand guided their way. After a few minutes of walking in silence, Severus eventually spoke.

"I have been thinking about your plan and there are a few things which do not make sense to me," he uttered in his deep drawl, looking resolutely ahead.

"Go on," Delphi replied calmly, trotting a little to keep up with Severus' brisk pace.

"Why don't you just go back in time and kill the Dark Lord as a baby? That would seem to be the most straightforward option."

"And one which could have the most severe and unintended consequences on the timeline," Delphi countered flatly. "Trust me, a big event like removing him altogether would change the world far too much, and not necessarily for the good. We have to keep HIS timeline running parallel to how it did before or it all goes crazy. And Killing You-Know-Who as a baby could pave the way for another evil wizard to rise up. YOU might grow up to be the Dark Lord without You-Know-Who there. What do you make of that?" She jutted out her pretty chin with an air of finality.

Severus shuddered at the thought, but had to concede that she had a point. He hadn't considered how important every little action and decision the Dark Lord had made and their knock-on effects, and how careful they would need to be to keep his timeline as it is now. But something else was nagging him.

"So why don't you merely destroy the book?"

"I had a feeling you'd ask that. If I destroyed the book, you can bet You-Know-Who would make it his life's mission to find another and the same thing might end up happening anyway, just a few years later, and then all our hard work would be for nothing. And I'm not racing around the world hunting down every copy like some deranged fucking librarian," Delphi replied casually, fishing in the pocket of her denim jacket for what appeared to be a strange, clear glass pipe.

She noticed Severus eyeing the thing suspiciously. "It's a Vape. A new-fangled way of smoking without the messy, smelly business of cigarettes." She inhaled a puff of caramel-smelling smoky vapour and then handed the end towards Severus. "Wanna toké?"

Severus merely wrinkled his nose in response. Delphi shrugged, took another puff and continued.

"So destroying the book is a no-go. But, if I alter the book in a way where creating a Horcrux does not entail murder, You-Know-Who won't kill anyone and therefore he won't actually end up creating any Horcruxes at all, but he'll *think* he has. So *his* timeline continues as it always had, just that he doesn't know he hasn't got eternal life."

Severus thought for a moment. "But what does that mean for Harry Potter and the prophecy? Will he still be a target? Could he create an accidental Horcrux anyway? *And will Lily still die*, he wondered desperately.

"Ah, well, that depends when we're planning to kill You-Know-Who in his timeline, doesn't it?" She smiled enigmatically at him then, like she knew something that he didn't.

Severus had to admit that she appeared to have it all figured out. But still, it seemed a little too convenient to him, this beautiful rebellious witch from the future claiming to have all the answers. Was she really all she seemed?

"I cannot help but wonder, what's in this for you?" Severus asked carefully as they plodded ever onwards.

"Apart from saving countless lives and stopping one of the most evil wizards the world's ever seen, you mean?" Delphi gave him a half smile as she tucked her vape back inside the pocket of her denim jacket.

Severus gave her a side eye in return. "Yes. Apart from that."

"Aren't they good enough reasons?"

"In my experience, people's motives are rarely driven from pure altruism," he answered wearily.

Delphi laughed, her melodious giggle a counteraction to Severus' suspicion. "Well, obviously I want you to fuck my brains out, but apart from that—"

Severus stopped sharply, suddenly on high alert, putting his arm out to block Delphi from walking any further and cutting her off from her explicit train of thought.

"You should stay here. There are wards in place way beyond the perimeter fence and it would be dangerous to go any further."

He lowered his arm, seemingly oblivious to Delphi's previous comment. Delphi shook her head at his indifference and pulled out the Time-Turner from her vest, checking the little hour-glass by the dim light of Severus' wand. She watched the delicate stream of glowing sand trickling down from the nearly-empty upper chamber.

"I don't have long. I'll meet you back at Spinner's End in three hours."

Severus checked his pocket watch, nodded curtly, and then strode off into the night.

Delphi watched his receding form with a sigh. Then after a moment she resolutely clutched the Time-Turner in her left hand and with the index finger on her right hand, wound the hour-glass three times. The air around her became fuzzy and began to crackle before she disappeared into thin air with a pop, leaving not a trace behind.

PART 1: ACT 4

Chapter 4 of 10

It's 1994 and Severus Snape has his hands full with the Dark Lord's return. But Delphi Riddle has something much bigger in mind...

PART 1: ACT 4

Delphi was already at Spinner's End waiting for Severus when he returned from Malfoy Manor. She was sitting crossed-legged in front of the sofa on the floor of the sitting room with an open wine bottle next to her along with two chipped ceramic cups.

"Did you find it?" she asked without preamble as Severus swooped in, removing his cloak.

"It was exactly where you said it was, in a secret chamber under the drawing-room floor," he replied, taking a seat opposite her.

"I think that deserves a drink," she said with some satisfaction, pouring then handing Severus a cup full of wine. Severus took it from her with a noticeable trace of suspicion. "Don't worry, it hasn't got poison in it. I won't be offended if you check though. And sorry about the cups, I couldn't find any glasses."

Severus sniffed the wine and unselfconsciously cast a non-verbal spell on it then, satisfied he wasn't about to get poisoned, took a sip from the deep red liquid. "How did you know it was going to be there?" he asked after savouring a mouthful.

"I told you, I know everything. Malfoy Manor gets raided in a few year's time by the Ministry and they find all kinds of incriminating shit." She took a deep swig out of her cup, draining the last remnants and smacking her lips as she placed the cup on the floor. "So come on, then. Let the Niffler see the gold." She held out her hand expectantly.

Severus put his own cup down and reached inside his coat, pulling out a long, thin chain with a highly-polished glimmering golden Time-Turner dangling from it. Delphi

eyed it hungrily, leaning forwards to take it, but Severus abruptly snapped his fist shut.

"I don't think so. Not until you tell me who you really are."

Delphi slumped back with a sigh, running one hand through the end of her ponytail.

"I want to tell you, I really do. But it isn't the right time. If I tell you now, you'll jump to all kinds of incorrect presumptions about me and my life which will jeopardise the whole operation. Killing You-Know-Who is the priority and nothing can get in the way of that. I will tell you, I promise. But not right now."

Severus appraised the young witch in front of him. She appeared to be telling the truth and he supposed she did have a point about unconscious biases. But it still required Severus to take a huge leap of faith and trust this mysterious witch and he wasn't quite sure if he was prepared to do that yet; there was still so much he wanted to know.

"What happened in your time? Did the Dark Lord triumph? Is that why you're here?"

Delphi groaned with annoyance, her head rolling back with exaggeration. "Urgh. You ask so many questions!" But then her head snapped back and she grinned impishly as an idea came to her. She grabbed the now-empty bottle, swigging it to be sure all the dregs had gone then sensuously licking the lip to catch any drips, not breaking eye contact with Severus. "Let's play a game of truth or dare. If the bottle lands on you, you get to pick one."

Before Severus could protest, Delphi had already spun the bottle and it clattered on the wooden floor as the end slowly came to a stop in front of him.

"Truth. Do you trust me?"

"Not entirely," he replied slowly. "I need more answers."

"Fair enough," Delphi replied easily, and she spun the bottle once more. This time the end pointed at her.

"Truth. Did the Dark Lord triumph in your time?"

Delphi paused before answering. "No, the right side won, but at great cost. Many people lost their lives and that could have been prevented. There was a huge battle and it destroyed most of Hogwarts. So many people died..." She looked conflicted, as if she wanted to say more but couldn't. "You-Know-Who was killed eventually, but it was bloody and messy, and there's a better way."

Severus took this in as Delphi spun the bottle again, and now it was Delphi's turn to ask a question.

"Truth. Are you attracted to me?"

It was clear this wasn't a question Severus had been expecting. "You are not an unattractive witch, and one that clearly doesn't need my approval," he replied awkwardly.

Delphi smirked, and spun the bottle again. Once more, it landed facing her.

"Truth. Why is this so important to you?"

The smirk fell from Delphi's face then and she suddenly became very serious. She drew a deep breath before speaking. "All my life, people have assumed things about me, judging me on how I look and how they think I should act. Presuming that I'm inherently bad because of where I've come from, or because I'm slightly different. And I'm fucking sick of it." Her eyes were shining with emotion. "I'm not a bad person. I shouldn't be judged by other people's mistakes. I should be judged on my own actions, on my own merit. And I have the chance to do something fucking amazing and change the world for the better, so that's what I'm going to do."

She leaned forwards and spun the bottle with some finality, letting Severus take this in. The young woman clearly had more depth than he gave her credit for. The bottle skidded to a stop facing him.

"Dare," Delphi said with relish, and the impish smile was back once more as she rose and walked towards Severus. "Kiss me."

Severus didn't move, not knowing if this was some kind of trap, but still Delphi moved forwards until she had bent down in front of him, their faces barely inches apart. Her lips had parted and her pupils had dilated and still she moved agonisingly closer until her mouth brushed his. He could taste the sweet wine on her silky lips, the warmth of them sending volts of desire through him. His instinct told him he had to pull away before he did something they both regretted.

Delphi stood up abruptly as Severus moved his head to the side, trying but failing to completely hide her disappointment.

"Well, I think we've had enough of that game. Can I please have the Time-Turner now?" Her voice was brisk, almost businesslike as she held out her hand.

Severus could feel a blush rising from his collar and looked away with embarrassment from the young witch as he placed the Time-Turner in her palm.

Delphi held it up to the light, marvelling at the intricate engravings and the workmanship, and how the sands in the hourglass glowed even brighter than in the one currently hanging from her neck.

"Thank you for getting this for me. But I'm afraid this was the easy bit. The real work begins now. Are you still in?"

"I am," he replied, his face once more the inscrutable mask as he quashed down his feelings, his lips still tingling from their electrifying kiss.

PART 1: ACT 5

Chapter 5 of 10

It's 1994 and Severus Snape has his hands full with the Dark Lord's return. But Delphi Riddle has something much bigger in mind...

PART 1: ACT 5

Delphi awoke the following morning on Severus' sofa, desperately needing to pee and draped in a scratchy old blanket that definitely wasn't there when she had fallen asleep the previous night. With a small smile at the thoughtfulness of the gesture, she pushed the blanket off with a stretch and padded through the house to find the

bathroom, grateful that the Golden Time-Turner now allowed her to stay in the past as long as she wanted. She made no effort to be quiet, performing her ablutions whilst singing to herself. By the time her bladder was empty, her body washed and her clothes and hair Scourgified, Severus was now up and clattering around in the kitchen and making all the hallmark noises of preparing tea.

Delphi leaned on the door jamb and watched him magically pour hot water from the boiled kettle into what looked to be a teapot from the 1970's on a faded tea-tray whilst simultaneously retrieving a teaspoon from a shabby drawer. He made no effort to acknowledge her presence.

"Sleep well?" she asked cheerfully. "I slept like a baby. Must've been good wine."

Severus ignored this, sending the tea-tray zooming out in front of him and causing Delphi to pin herself flat against the door frame as it chinked and rattled, floating past her into the sitting room. Severus strode past quickly behind it and Delphi unpeeled herself from the doorway and hurried after.

"I am interested to hear exactly how you intend to enact phase two of your plan," Severus said as he set the tinkling tea-tray down on a rickety side table. "So far, you have told me *what* you intend to do, but have mysteriously omitted the *how*."

"Always with the questions," Delphi grumbled, flopping back onto the sofa. "Can I at least have a cuppa before we start with the Spanish Inquisition again?"

Wearily, Severus conceded, sending a cup of tea over to her followed by a small jug of milk. Delphi caught the tea in one hand and the jug in the other, pouring the milk deliberately slowly and stirring the cup with a flourish, tapping the rim of the cup with the teaspoon three times to get rid of the drips before taking a loud, exaggerated slurp. She could practically feel the waves of annoyance radiating off Severus. She savoured the moment and took another large gulp before setting the cup down on the side with a rattle and a big sigh.

"Right, then. You want to know about the book?"

Severus nodded, his patience clearly wearing very thin.

"OK. Well. As you might know, Armando Dippet was the Headmaster of Hogwarts before Albus Dumbledore, back when You-Know-Who was a pupil. He thought it was perfectly reasonable to host THE most evil grimoire known to Wizardkind, called Secrets of the Darkest Art, in the Hogwarts Library, where any curious child or would-be megalomaniac Dark Lord in training could get their grubby hands on it. More like Armando Dipshit, am I right?"

Delphi slapped her thigh and let out a bark of a laugh at her own joke whilst Severus listened closely, his face as usual stoic and betraying no sign of amusement as he waited for her to proceed.

"Anyhoo. Dumbledore had the good grace to remove the vile thing when he became Headmaster but by then it was too late, You-Know-Who had already created his first Horcrux when he'd been at school."

She took another big swig of tea, smacked her lips and continued.

"Now I know what you're thinking: Who did he kill to create his first Horcrux? Well, that was an unfortunate Ravenclaw girl by the name of Myrtle Warren, otherwise known as resident Hogwarts ghost Moaning Myrtle. We know that she died on 13th June 1943, when You-Know-Who was sixteen, so therefore we know that we'll need to change the book before he starts school, so before September 1938. Are you with me so far?"

Severus narrowed his eyes. "Yes, but that still doesn't explain how you're going to change the book."

Delphi held her hands up in a gesture of surrender. "Hold your Hippogriffs! I'm getting to that bit! Patience, Padawan."

Severus looked puzzled at being called a *Padawan* as Delphi drained her teacup before continuing.

"OK. So, we know Horcruxes are made by splitting the soul, and one way of achieving that is by murder. But, do you know how these things are made?" Delphi reached inside her vest and pulled out both Time-Turners, dangling from their delicate chains. "THESE, believe it or not, are made in a not too dissimilar way to Horcruxes, but in a less violent way. I'm no Unspeakable and all of this information I've learned through books but it sounds like the same Dark Magic as Horcruxes to me, just a bit more sophisticated. Time-Turners are created by shaving off a portion of the creator's own timeline. Typically, for one of the usual Ministry-approved Time-Turners it might be no more than a few hours." At this, she picked up her original silver Time-Turner. "But for something more advanced, to allow you to stay in the past for longer and to go further back, it would need more time from the creator. Maybe even years or decades." She held up the Golden Time-Turner, watching the sands slowly trickle through.

Severus was now rapt with attention, his black eyes gleaming at this new knowledge as he waited for Delphi to go on.

"I suppose you could compare making a Horcrux to ripping a loaf of bread in two – it's violent and inelegant, but it gets the job done. Whereas making a Time-Turner is much more precise, it's like using a very sharp knife to slice off a tiny sliver of bread. Does that make sense?"

"I think so," Severus replied slowly.

"Good. So, in answer to your question, my plan is to replace the Horcrux spell in the Secrets of the Darkest Art with the spell that is used to shave off time in order to create Time-Turners."

Severus thought about this for a second.

"So the Horcruxes will become accidental Time-Turners instead? Won't that create even more problems? And, how do you know the spell will even work?"

Delphi shook her head fiercely. "No, no, no. It's not the complete spell to create a Time-Turner. It's just the part that shaves off bits of time. Essentially, the Horcrux receptacles will house bits of You-Know-Who's life, rather than his soul. And I know the spell works because I tried it myself."

At this, Delphi fumbled in her pocket and pulled out a large, flat pebble, turning it over in her hands before tossing it over to Severus to examine.

"Looks like an ordinary stone, right? No magic to discern of."

Severus eyed the stone carefully before passing it back to Delphi.

"But watch this."

Delphi stood and pulled out her wand. She began muttering a charm over the stone and it glowed blue, much like the sands in the Time-Turner. After a minute tiny particles of blue swam up from the stone, swirling around into a kind of small vortex before suddenly rushing towards Delphi and surrounding her like an aura. After a few moments more, the particles clung to her, making Delphi glow eerily and then suddenly vanishing as they forced their way inside her. Delphi let out a cry of pain, breathing hard.

"What just happened?" Severus asked sharply.

"You just watched me regain an hour of my life," she replied, still a little breathless. "It hurts like hell cutting the time off and regaining the time, so You-Know-Who shouldn't question that he's done something terrible. But we're not going to tell him how to regain time, only how to shave it off and save it inside inanimate objects. So imagine that: he'll think he's made Horcruxes but actually, he's shaving off hours and years of his life. Imagine what that would mean. We could adjust how much time we want him to shave off. We'd be killing him slowly and he wouldn't even know."

Delphi smiled her impish smile then, and once more Severus was forced to admit that there was more to this beautiful and dangerous witch than he'd first imagined.

PART 1: ACT 6

Chapter 6 of 10

It's 1994 and Severus Snape has his hands full with the Dark Lord's return. But Delphi Riddle has something much bigger in mind...

PART 1: ACT 6

"How do I look?"

Delphi twirled around in a circle in the middle of the sitting room coquettishly, then put her index finger on her cheek with her mouth pouting in a playful pastiche of a sexy schoolgirl pose. She had skilfully transfigured some old Muggle clothing into a plain replica late-1930's Hogwarts uniform. It had been easy for Severus to access some old school photographs from that era in order for her to get the detailing right. With a glamour charm on her hair, turning her usual bluish-silver ponytail to dark brown curtains framing her face, he had to admit she made a convincing student. Watching her laughing and posing with her different hairstyle, Severus once more couldn't shake the feeling that she reminded him of someone.

"You look passable," Severus admitted, looking her up and down. "But your uniform needs House colours."

"And what House do you think I should be Sorted into?" Delphi's dark eyes flashed mischievously as she ran her hands slowly down her front. "Do you think the Head of Slytherin House can handle me?"

A flash of excitement flooded through Severus at Delphi's flirtation, but he soon stamped that out. "Which House were you in at Hogwarts?" he asked matter-of-factly.

Delphi's seductive countenance dropped immediately. "Well, it's a long story and one I have promised to tell you all about another time, but I was actually home-schooled. I never got the chance to be Sorted. I feel like I missed out there, everyone makes such a big deal out of it." She looked down sadly.

Severus raised his eyebrows at this. It wasn't completely unknown for children to be home-schooled, especially those who were very rich, or Pure Bloods who didn't want their offspring mixing with Mudblood riff-raff. But still, it was uncommon enough to single her out as being different. He could see why it could seem isolating, not having had the experience of being Sorted; Houses were what defined most of Wizarding society, for good or for ill, and nearly every adult had some good memories of Hogwarts. Even him.

As Severus pondered on this, Delphi pointed her wand at a tatty cushion and Transfigured it into a crude oversized representation of the Sorting Hat. "I'm going to Sort myself," she said by way of explanation. And with that, she plopped the enormous hat on her head, which slipped past her eyes.

"Hmmm... Where to put you?" Delphi mimicked the Sorting Hat, putting on a croaky voice. "You're loyal alright, and there's a smattering of bravery too. But I can see lofty ambition and underrated intelligence in you. Better be... SLYTHERCLAW!" she yelled, tearing off the hat.

"That isn't a House," Severus admonished, secretly amused at her display.

"I know. But I do feel like I belong in either Slytherin or Ravenclaw, I just don't know which. Perhaps I'm just a weird hybrid of the two. What do you think?" She suddenly looked very young and vulnerable, like a child in need of reassurance.

Severus watched the young woman closely. From her expression, it was clear that the answer to this question meant a lot to her, having never had the experience of being Sorted for real. He would need to be careful with his answer. "I agree that you have traits of both Houses," he replied evenly. "But it's your choice to decide to which you have the most affiliation. I believe the Sorting Hat does take people's wishes into account when Sorting them."

Delphi toyed with her grey tie, currently absent of any House colour, as she considered this. The obvious choice would be to put her in Slytherin without any thought at all. Obvious, given her bloodline, which stretched all the way back to Salazar Slytherin himself. She could not deny that she could be cunning, manipulative, ruthless and ambitious when needed. But then she thought back to all the times that people had made assumptions about her purely because of her lineage, and how she had been saddled with her parent's mistakes and prejudices her whole life without a chance to have her own identity. She thought of how she wanted to break free from the stigma of blood status, and how she had fought so hard using her limited resources to right the many wrongs her parents had inflicted on the world. She thought of how she was an outsider and a misfit from the start, a mistake of a child who shouldn't have been born in the first place. And then she thought of poor Myrtle Warren, the girl caught in the wrong place at the wrong time and who became Tom Riddle's first victim on his grotesque path to immortality.

"I'm going to be in Ravenclaw," she announced suddenly, and with a wave of her wand the tie turned blue, as did the trim on her jumper as the Ravenclaw crest appeared proudly on the front of her robes.

"Very well," Severus replied, trying to ignore the small surge of disappointment swelling inside him from her choosing Ravenclaw over Slytherin. "Are you ready?"

"I am. Do you have the spell?"

Severus nodded. "The parchment is in my pocket."

Delphi broke into her Marlene Dietrich voice. "And I thought you were just pleased to see me."

Severus' face was as usual like stone but the small glimmer of amusement that registered in his eyes did not escape her.

Delphi held out both hands in front of her, the impish smile now back on her face. Severus stepped forwards and held them firmly. Delphi couldn't resist squeezing them and swinging them lightly from side to side. She noted how they were cool to the touch, even in the warm summer evening.

"Do not wriggle, I do not wish to repair a Splinching accident." He glared down his nose sternly at her, and she mock-pouted back at being chastised but stood stock-still nonetheless.

After a few moments, they had disappeared together in a blur of Apparation. Their destination: just outside the grounds of Hogwarts.

PART 2: ACT 1

Chapter 7 of 10

It's 1994 and Severus Snape has his hands full with the Dark Lord's return. But Delphi Riddle has something much bigger in mind...

PART 2: ACT 1

I met my maker,

I made him cry.

And on my shoulder he asked me why

His people won't fly through the storm?

I said, "Listen up man, they don't even know you're born!"

- Oasis "D'You Know What I Mean?" UK Number 1 on 14th July 1997 (Delphi Riddle's birthday)*

It was almost dark when Delphi and Severus arrived on a patch of scrubby land just outside the Hogwarts grounds. She stumbled into him slightly having landed heavily on an uneven bit of earth, with Severus holding her upright as she used her hands to steady herself on his chest. She looked up into his face with gratitude, enjoying being close to him. Her gaze flicked from his eyes to his mouth. She thought he looked ravishing in the diminishing daylight.

Severus did not need to use Legilimency to read what was on Delphi's mind. But it wasn't right, with her currently dressed like a schoolgirl. And besides, they had a job to do. She had to stop distracting him with her constant flirtations. It was enough to drive a man mad! He pulled away sharply and she tried to hide her disappointment.

Severus began striding towards the periphery of the magical wards purposefully. As he drew closer to the castle, the wards began to glow softly.

"Wait!" Delphi called, trying not to trip on various thistles and stones as she jogged to catch up with him. "I've just thought of something!"

Severus slowed to a halt and turned around. "What?"

"I'm not sure if the wards will let me through. They'll let you though, of course, because you're a teacher."

Severus considered this. "They'll let you through if you're with me," he answered after a moment, and held out his hand. Delphi broke into a grin and ran towards him, grabbing his hand once more with delight.

"I can't wait to see Hogwarts," she breathed, as they passed through the wards together and she took in the vista, the old castle looming up ahead of them.

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"Are you quite sure the spell will work?" Severus asked as they walked down the deserted school corridors. Delphi's head turned this way and that, distracted by the sumptuous décor, the suits of armour and the wonderful architecture that years of working in the place had made him take for granted. She looked like a kid in a sweet shop. He supposed he'd felt the same way the first time he'd set foot in the castle, too.

"Yes, it's the same one I tried out myself, remember?" She stopped suddenly in front of a magical painting of the Fat Friar, who nodded and raised his golden goblet to her.

"And how do you know exactly how much time the spell will need to remove?"

Delphi waved cheerily at the Fat Friar and then fell back in step with Severus. "Ah, well, I was hoping you'd ask that. That was the complex bit. I had to calculate how many years of You-Know-Who's life needed to be shaved off in order to kill him at a precise date and time. He was 54 when he killed Lily, and he was 71 when he died at the Battle of Hogwarts in this timeline. So I calculated we'd need to shave off around 17 years in order to kill him in 1981 before he kills Lily. Well, to be accurate – just over 16 and a half years, or 198 months. Now, back in 1981, he only had 5 Horcruxes, as he didn't make Nagini a Horcrux until around now, actually. So each of the 5 *Fauxcruxes* will house just over 39 and a half months of his life. Obviously, the spell is a lot more precise than that, going down to minutes and seconds, but you get the general idea."

Severus felt a wave of gratitude that she had planned to save Lily all along. But there was still more he needed to know.

"Will altering the Horcruxes somehow affect the prophecy? How do we know Lily would still be a target once they have been changed?"

Delphi didn't miss a beat. "Hadn't thought about that, to be honest. But I can't see why the prophecy would change. You-Know-Who still thinks he's created genuine Horcruxes and may still yet create an accidental one if he got to kill Lily, due to how she protected Harry. Which he won't, of course."

Severus pondered this as they rounded the corner to the corridor that led to the library.

"And what happens to the fake Horcruxes? Do they need to be destroyed?" he asked.

"The *Fauxcruxes* are perfectly safe as inanimate objects. They are merely chunks of time frozen in a receptacle, they do not bond You-Know-Who to this earthly plane like bits of his soul does. They could stay unnoticed forever unless someone who knew what they really were decided to use the spell on them to release the time. And the only people who know they are not real are me and you." She waved her hands with a flourish.

"Once again, you seem to have thought of everything," Severus murmured as they reached the doors of the library. He held the door open for her.

"What can I say? I'm a Ravenclaw," she grinned, and entered the library with Severus following after.

* A/N – I chose July for Delphi's birthday as the birth flower for that month is Larkspur, the common name for the genus *Delphinium*, many of which are a beautiful shade of blue (like her hair). The blue Larkspur flower is a symbol of support and trust. I chose the 14th for her birth date as it coincides with Bastille Day, the date of the start of the French Revolution, as Delphi is starting a revolution of her own! Lyrically, the song fits where I see the story heading too.

PART 2: ACT 2

Chapter 8 of 10

It's 1994 and Severus Snape has his hands full with the Dark Lord's return. But Delphi Riddle has something much bigger in mind...

PART 2: ACT 2

The library was silent and deserted. Thankfully, being both the summer holiday and well past eight o'clock in the evening, Delphi and Severus had the library completely to themselves. Severus had told Delphi that it was a teacher's privilege to come and go from the library at any hour, and to be able to access every single book, including those of a more nefarious nature in the Restricted Section.

As she stepped through into the centre of the library, Delphi craned her neck and span around, taking in the sheer enormity of it. She guessed that there had to be tens of thousands of books resting upon thousands of shelves packed together in hundreds of narrow rows. Just the thought of all that knowledge waiting to be consumed made her giddy; the amount of time she'd spent chasing down rare tomes to find out about time travel and using unconventional means to discover Unspeakable secrets when all the while, the sum of wizarding noesis was probably right here at Hogwarts.

Severus led the way to the back of the library towards the Restricted Section, the sound of his boots clicking on the polished parquet floor. "The fact you did not attend Hogwarts leads me to believe that you are either very rich, or come from a strictly Pureblood family," he mused aloud. She certainly had the fine cheekbones and fragile beauty associated with high-born wizarding nobility, even if her manners were somewhat lacking, he'd thought. And this had been gnawing at him since she had first mentioned it.

Delphi's eyes narrowed as she followed him through the winding bookshelves. "I told you, we're not discussing my origin story right now. I'm a fucking freak with Daddy issues is all you need to know for the time being. I'll bore you all about it when this is all over. But I need you to stop asking about it."

This did little to appease Severus' curiosity, but from the hard edge in her voice he could tell he would get no more from her at the moment. Still, she hadn't denied anything, so his theory might yet be right.

Stepping carefully over the rope that separated the Restricted Section from the rest of the library, he lit his wand and began searching for *Secrets of the Darkest Art*. He found it after a minute or two nestled next to *Magick Moste Evile* on the top shelf, and handed it silently to Delphi, who turned it over in her hands with a disgusted expression on her face.

"Great. We've found the bloody book, now we need to go back in time." She reached up on tiptoes and put the book back in its spot, and then rummaged in her school robes for the Golden Time-Turner. "Are you ready for this? It's quite a weird sensation if you haven't done it before."

Severus nodded, and Delphi wrapped the long thin chain of the Time-Turner around them both. Her face set in concentration, she murmured a calculation to herself as she wound the crown frantically. It seemed to Severus he could hear the sound of a bell tolling, and once Delphi released the crown the Time-Turner began to spin rapidly, the sands of time glowing bright blue, whilst everything around them became a blur of quickened motion. The light came and went as the sun rose and set giving a strobe effect, and all around them shadowy figures sped about, going about their day-to-day activities in high-speed reverse. Eventually, the action began to slow as the transition from night to day became longer and they landed with an undulating pop to what Severus could only presume to be the past. It was hard to tell though, as the library looked the same as it had for hundreds of years and it was the same time of day as when they'd left.

"Are you alright?" Delphi asked, rubbing her stomach. "I've not been back as far as this before and I'm feeling a bit queasy."

Severus had to agree. He screwed his eyes up and took a couple of deep breaths in to steady himself. After a moment, the motion sickness abated and his thoughts jumped to more practical matters.

"How do we know what year we're in?" Severus asked, quite reasonably.

"That's always the tricky bit of time-travel," Delphi conceded. "You have to make calculations and then trust you've come to the right time. Finding out *when* you are is somewhat of an art." Her face then lit up with inspiration. "I've got an idea how we can find out."

She headed off to the front desk with Severus hurrying after, his brow furrowed with puzzlement.

"What are you doing?" he asked, watching her riffling through the desk, clearly searching for something.

"Aha!" was all she said in response when she'd found what she was looking for: an old-fashioned librarian's date stamp and ink pad. With one quick motion she dipped the stamp into the ink and pressed it into the palm of her hand, holding it up for Severus to read.

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Severus couldn't help but look impressed, even if he wouldn't admit it, as he followed her back to the Restricted Section. Her intelligence definitely belonged in Ravenclaw, he thought, but he couldn't shake the feeling that she was right about being conflicted in her House loyalty as there was clearly a healthy dose of Slytherin in her too. He watched her take *Secrets of the Darkest Art* down off the shelf and scan the pages.

"Urgh, this shit is disgusting," she said after a minute or two. "Really grim. I've found the spell section. Do you have the parchments?"

Severus wordlessly handed over the documents and watched as Delphi carefully erased the offending pages of the book with a flick of her wand, then magically copy the spell from the parchment on to the blank pages. The whole process took about ten minutes. When she was done, she got Severus to look over her handiwork.

"Looks convincing," Severus agreed. "The book does not look like it has been tampered with."

"Great. That's phase one done, then. But I've just got one more ickle teeny thing to do whilst we're here. It won't take a mo." And with that, Delphi began trotting out of the library, leaving Severus outraged at this sudden addition to the plan.

"Delphi! Where are you going? We need to get out of here!"

"Just popping to the Chamber of Secrets," she called over her shoulder cheerfully. "Be right back!"

Severus looked like his eyes would pop out of his head as he hurried after her, cursing loudly.

PART 2: ACT 3

Chapter 9 of 10

It's 1994 and Severus Snape has his hands full with the Dark Lord's return. But Delphi Riddle has something much bigger in mind...

PART 2: ACT 3

"What the hell are you doing?" Severus hissed, hurrying after Delphi as she swiftly headed down the staircase. "You might get killed!"

"I know what I'm doing," Delphi answered breezily. "Trust me."

"But what if someone sees you?"

"I'm the one wearing a school uniform. You should be worried about what happens if someone sees *you*. I hope you can cast a good Disillusionment Charm." She smirked as she rounded down another flight of stairs with Severus still bristling after her.

"Do you even know where the Chamber is, and how to get in it? And for your information, there is a Basilisk down there! One of the most dangerous creatures there is!"

Delphi stopped and closed her eyes momentarily, holding up her hands in a gesture of truce before speaking. "Honestly, Severus, I've got this. The Basilisk is fatal if you look in it's eyes, so I suggest you keep your eyes averted if you're coming with me. As for the rest, you just need to trust me. Please?"

Severus did not look happy. "Why are you doing this?"

"There is chance that Myrtle Warren might still be killed by You-Know-Who when he opens the Chamber. I have to stop that happening." And with that, she continued down the stairs and turned right into a corridor on the second floor, with Severus still at her heels glaring with exasperation.

"Hmm, it's got to be here somewhere..." she murmured to herself. "Aha!" And with that, she dived into a girl's toilet, leaving Severus hovering outside for a moment, not knowing if to go in or not. Letting her out of his sight made his skin itch, so despite his better judgement he followed her through.

"So what's your plan? Are you intending to kill the Basilisk?"

"Nope," said Delphi unhelpfully, bending over and examining the sink taps one by one until she found the one with a little engraving of a snake on the side. "I don't like killing harmless animals."

"So what, then?"

Delphi stood and withdrew her wand, pointing it at the mirror above the sink and cast a spell which ripped it from the wall and sent it soaring over to Severus, who caught it easily.

"We're going to make it commit glorious suicide, just like we're going to do with You-Know-Who. You'll need to bring the mirror."

Severus processed the plan as he watched Delphi lean in close to the tap. She appeared to be whispering something, but what he could not make out. Suddenly, the room began to shake as the sink started to move. The juddering sink sank right out of sight, leaving a large pipe exposed, a pipe wide enough for them to slide into.

"Coming?" she asked, before stepping inside the pipe and sliding away.

Clutching the mirror tightly to his chest, Severus followed after. It was like sliding down a very steep, slimy, pitch-black slide. He could hear Delphi laughing and whooping ahead of him as he passed many smaller pipe openings branching out in all directions. Down and down they went, surely deeper below the school than the dungeons, and just as he'd begun to worry that they would fall forever, the pipe levelled out and he shot out of the end with his feet landing heavily on the wet floor with a squelchy thud.

"Whoo, that was a rush!" Delphi cried, her excited voice echoing off the dank walls. She'd already lit the tip of her wand and the light from it cast an eerie glow on the damp stone.

"Are you sure you know what you're doing?" Severus replied, in a tone that suggested that he did not for one minute believe the answer.

"Of course. When we get in there, you need to keep that mirror in front of you at all times. Any sudden movement, shut your eyes. OK?"

"But what about you?"

"Don't worry about me. I told you, I've got this."

And with that, Delphi went striding off into the dark tunnel, leaving Severus to follow in her wake.

The tunnel turned and turned again, almost doubling back on itself into a large spiral shape, until they rounded yet another bend and saw a solid wall ahead on which two entwined serpents were carved, their eyes set with great, glinting emeralds.

"*Open*," said Delphi with a hiss, and the emerald eyes seemed to flicker in the dim light as the serpents parted and the two halves of the wall divided and slid smoothly out of sight.

"Parseltongue?" Severus gave Delphi a sharp look as his stomach seemed to flood with cold water. "Who are you?"

"I told you, no questions," Delphi replied calmly. "Trust me. Now come on, I need to concentrate. And keep that mirror up."

Together, they slowly entered the Chamber, which was very long and dimly lit. Severus held the mirror in front of his face, staring down at his boots as they carefully edged forwards, trying hard not to look around at the details around him. Towering stone pillars were entwined with more carved serpents, supporting a high ceiling lost in darkness, and casting long black shadows through the murky greenish gloom.

Delphi stopped suddenly and cocked an ear. Then, holding her wand to her throat to magically amplify her voice, she spoke loudly and clearly in Parseltongue.

"Come to me, serpent. I am the heir of Slytherin and you are compelled to do my bidding!"

To Severus, it just sounded like hissing and he'd had no idea what Delphi had said, but he now knew for sure it was Parseltongue and the noise of the inhuman speech made the hair stand up on the back of his neck.

After a moment, a sickening scraping sound of what could only be scales over stone could be heard from just ahead of them as the giant Basilisk answered the call of the snake language and obeyed Slytherin's heir.

Delphi ducked behind Severus and pressed close into his back. "Keep that mirror up, it's coming," she breathed.

Closer and closer came the serpent. Severus could hear it hissing as it drew near but only Delphi understood what it was saying: *"I am coming, Master. I am here to obey you."*

Delphi said in return, *"Let me see you, beast of Slytherin! Come to me!"* And then she held her lit wand and held it just in front of Severus, in order to illuminate the mirror.

The scraping got louder and louder and suddenly stopped, followed by a terrible scream and the sound of several tons of dying Basilisk keeling over on to the ancient stone floors. And then, there was silence.

Severus slowly peered over the mirror as Delphi stepped from behind him.

"Dead," she announced with a note of glee. "Killed by its own gaze. It's quite poetic really."

Severus chanced a look at the dead serpent, and winced at what he saw. The beast was terrible, thick as an oak trunk with poisonous green scales and fangs as large as a man's hand. Its bulbous eyes looked as if they had been melted away with acid, leaving gaping black holes.

"Right, let's clean this mess up shall we?" Delphi got to work vanishing the giant snake, which took several attempts as it was so big, leaving Severus mulling over what he had just witnessed.

She could speak Parseltongue, the rarest of languages that was associated with Salazar Slytherin himself. Legend had it that the Chamber of Secrets could only be opened by Slytherin's heir. Which must mean...

"You're related to him, aren't you?"

"I don't know what you mean," Delphi replied, vanishing the mirror for good measure.

"Slytherin. You're descended from Salazar Slytherin."

Delphi turned and faced Severus, her expression serious. "I renounce the symbol of the serpent and all that it stands for. I am the new past. I am the new future. I am the answer this world has been looking for. I am the Augurey."

Severus blinked, not fully understanding the Sphinx-like riddle in answer to his interrogation.

"Oh, and I'm also bloody starving. Let's get some chips." And with that, she began walking towards the Chamber doors, leaving Severus staring at the brilliant yet puzzling woman in front of him like she was slightly deranged.

PART 2: ACT 4

Chapter 10 of 10

It's 1994 and Severus Snape has his hands full with the Dark Lord's return. But Delphi Riddle has something much bigger in mind...

PART 2: ACT 4

"Mmm. I love chips."

Delphi was once more sitting crossed-legged on the floor of Spinner's End, picking out deliciously fatty wedges of potato from an expanse of grease-stained white paper and devouring them with relish. She had shed the schoolgirl outfit and dark hair and was back to her usual pale-haired and blue-tipped self, although this time she had Transfigured her clothes into metallic silver leggings and a tight black vest with a see-through mesh top overlaid to go with her habitual faded denim jacket and scuffed army boots.

Severus eyed her as he slowly ate some chips of his own, the taste bringing back all kinds of memories about his Muggle roots. He had to admit that she did not look like a person who had just brought down the fiercest creature in the wizarding world, and yet she'd done it without as much as batting an eyelid. There was no doubting she was brave and clever, if not overly reckless. She was a Parselmouth and therefore, he was sure, related to Salazar Slytherin himself. As was, he reminded himself, the Dark Lord. But he was quite sure the Dark Lord had no siblings, so exactly who this mysterious woman could be and how she could possibly be related to them both, he had yet to fathom out.

They had travelled forwards to September 1981, just after Severus had started teaching at Hogwarts, to be sure there was no way of him banging in to his past self. It made sense, of course, but it felt like Delphi's plan was beginning to reach its apex and yet he still did not know how it was going to resolve or indeed, if what they had achieved so far had played out in the way they wanted it to. Severus, as usual, had many more questions.

"I have been thinking about your *Fauxcruxes*," he began after swallowing a chip. "What would happen if someone managed to release the trapped time from them?"

Delphi sucked the grease off her thumb with a smack of her lips. "That's a good question," she replied, her eyes narrowing with thought. "It depends what spell was used I guess. We know Unspeakables use a different spell to harness the trapped time and convert it into Time-Turners. If someone were to destroy the *Fauxcruxes*, presumably it would cause some kind of ripple or warp in spacetime given the amount of conserved time in them. That could actually be pretty dangerous. Like a black hole."

Maddeningly for Severus, she carried on eating her chips as if she'd just announced something as mundane as the weather.

"Shouldn't you have thought of that *before* we changed the book?" Severus' tone was even, but there was an edge to it that didn't go unnoticed by Delphi.

She sighed. "I think it's low risk, to be honest with you. Dumbledore doesn't get wind of the Horcrux idea until the 1990s, and You-Know-Who will die next month if everything goes to plan. So in the new future, the idea of Horcruxes will be irrelevant as they clearly don't exist as You-Know-Who will be dead."

Severus thought about this for a moment. It made sense, but the *Fauxcruxes* seemed like they had the potential to be powerful and dangerous objects in the wrong hands.

"How can something with the power to destroy the world be low risk?" he asked, not unreasonably.

"Well, the thing is, You-Know-Who was very smart about the objects he chose to be his Horcruxes. Apart from his snake, which was a living entity and would of course die at some point, and Harry Potter, which he didn't know about. Oh, and his diary, which was just a diary," she added dismissively, waving a hand in the air for emphasis. "But the other four, the ones he created as a younger man – they were trophies in the very real sense of the word. Precious objects that people would covet to own, not to destroy."

Severus swallowed another chip as he took this in. "And what were these objects?"

Delphi counted them off one by one on the fingers of one hand. "Salazar Slytherin's locket. Helga Hufflepuff's cup. Rowena Ravenclaw's diadem. And one of the Deathly Hallows – the Resurrection Stone, encased in a beautiful yet cursed ring."

Severus raised his eyebrows. Truly, the Dark Lord had excelled himself in finding the perfect vessels to contain his immortality. And the Hallows it seemed were more than just a child's story. But still, he had more questions.

"Do you think it would be possible to add the time from the *Fauxcruxes* to someone else's timeline in order to extend their life?" he mused.

Delphi finished her last chip and screwed up the paper wrappings into a ball. "Quite possibly," she answered. "Well, that's what the Philosopher's Stone does, doesn't it? Maybe we have actually created dormant mini-Philosopher's Stones just waiting for the right spell to unlock them." She grinned then, like she had just become aware of her own genius.

Severus suppressed a smirk but his eyes glittered at the possibilities. It looked like Delphi, whoever she really was and however she happened to be related to Salazar Slytherin, truly did belong in Ravenclaw after all.