

Beyond Time and Space

by Lady Strange

What happens when Severus dies in the final battle? He returns as a ghost, of course. Chapter 1 opens with a news report and traces Hermione's thoughts on her former potions master's demise. This response to the WIKTT 'Ghost Challenge' maybe a little AU and OOC for some.

Chapter 1 - Reviewing Commentaries

Chapter 1 of 20

What happens when Severus dies in the final battle? He returns as a ghost, of course. Chapter 1 opens with a news report and traces Hermione's thoughts on her former potions master's demise. This response to the WIKTT 'Ghost Challenge' maybe a little AU and OOC for some.

Brief Author's Note: This is written in response to the WIKTT "Ghost Challenge". The details are as follows:

(A) Basic Idea & Gist of Story: Surely love can conquer death and so with all the talk about the possibility of our beloved Potions Master being killed at the end of book seven, this challenge has been issued -

(B) Gist of Story: Snape has been killed and his ghost now resides in Hogwarts, although he refuses to acknowledge that he's dead. Our smart little bookworm has returned to Hogwarts - for whatever reason you decide - and Dumbledore has given her the job of helping Snape come to terms with his passing, giving her orders to *do it any way possible by any means necessary!!*

(C) Requirements:

(i) This must take place after Seventh year. How long after is your choice.

(ii) How Snape is killed is up to you, as is why Hermione has returned is up to you as well.

(iii) Snape doesn't believe that he's dead at first, Hermione must convince him that he is.

(iv) After he has come to terms with his death he finds out the reaction that the Wizarding world had in regards to his death, which he must find out about and react to himself! The reaction from the WW is to be either, *Great Happiness* - Think off all those ex-Hogwarts students he taught! -, *Great Sadness* - Has the war ended, was he revealed to be a hero? - or just '*Oh Well.*'

(v) Snape and Hermione *must* talk about a way to bring him back to life.

(vi) The challenge should preferably end in one of the following ways:

- Snape is brought back to life (Happy!)
- Snape moves on to the other side (Sad.)

Hermione closed her eyes in a bid to seal off her tears and emotions at the memories. She was determined not to appear less than calm and impassive to her students. She should not be sorry for his death. It was selfish of her to dwell. She scolded herself into a stiff resolve. She ought to be happy that he has gone to a better place where dissembling would not be necessary. He could be himself at last; he was in a place with no suffering or worries he had finally found quiet. He was finally at peace. "Yes, Granger," she muttered to herself, opening her eyes, "He is in a better place." She leaned back into the grey sofa, curling her lips contemptuously at the sight of the discarded newspaper on her worktable. It had the wrong facts it sensationalised everything. She sank deeper into the sofa, resting her hands in a steeple at her lips. What

could one expect from articles in the Daily Prophet written by Rita Skeeter and Cornelius Fudge?

"At least she's mellowed and is no longer prone to gross embellishments and fabrications after her summer as a beetle." Hermione thought with a scowl. She frowned again in spite of herself as her mind wandered to the inaccuracies of the Daily Prophet's reports. Typically, its dismissive attitude towards Dumbledore resulted in the Order of the Phoenix's misnaming. The Daily Prophet did not even bother to find out that Severus had defected to Dumbledore's Order *before* he accepted his tenure as Potions Master. What did the press know? It only chose to publish news it considered scintillating. It only published the more dazzling aspects of the news so as to boost its readership circulation and sales. And what could be more sensational than a man whom everyone loved to hate turning out to be self-sacrificing and noble? Did they reveal that his hair was greasy from long hours staring down at a cauldron? No. Did they care to disabuse his students' opinions and reveal that he was a man who was almost always meticulously clean? No.

For all its praise of his work to the Order, how could the press choose to hide the truth as to Severus's true contribution to the wizarding world? He had led them through the secret passages of the catacombs under Malfoy Manor to Voldemort's lair. He had alerted them to Voldemort's change of plans. Voldemort had planned to forcibly seize Hogwarts but his plan was never out into act because Severus had suggested an impromptu attack. Dumbledore had agreed that prudence dictated an extemporaneous attack when Voldemort least expected it. Voldemort was then still engaged in recalling some of his Death Eaters from the Eastern European countries. Severus had informed Shacklebolt, Moody and the other Aurors in the Order of Voldemort's plans to hunt down Karkaroff in Eastern Europe before returning to Britain. Severus's tip-off had enabled the Aurors in the Order to intercept the Death Eaters there. Although they were too late to save Karkaroff, they managed to defeat the Death Eaters, don their robes in disguise and meet the rest of the Order in Voldemort's Inner Sanctum.

He had also done the thing that no one had done he had consulted Hermione Granger as to the plausibility of taking down Voldemort in a circular room of mirrors. Hermione smiled in rueful bitterness at the memory. Harry had been livid that he was not consulted and was roundly told off. She chuckled quietly in her eerily darkened chambers as she recalled Severus placing a blank parchment before Harry, asking him if he would calculate the possibility of his survival in the mirrored audience hall of Voldemort's Inner Sanctum. He had said in a manner of absolute gravity as if he had absolute trust in Harry's arithmancy abilities. Hermione laughed aloud recalling that Severus feigned a look of horror and dismay at Harry's scarlet confession that he did not know arithmancy. Certainly, Severus had never praised her abilities, but Hermione felt that his trust in her capabilities and calculations revealed more than any verbal praise he could have given her. She had always been the unacknowledged voice of reason behind the Trio, constantly sidelined by Harry's heroics and Ron's prowess on the Quidditch pitch. She was always only Hermione with her head in her books; little Hermione who knew nothing beyond her books; Hermione who was the laughingstock of Gryffindor because she had rebuffed both Ron and Harry for the sake of her studies and her stupid SPEW. Severus saw her for what she was really was an astute and silent observer; the under-appreciated mind that took in everything she saw without ever commenting on anything. He had been able to see that Harry and Ron silenced her words of prudence and caution in favour of unabashed heroics. He had been pleased to know that he was right Ron and Harry's curiosity had endangered the very fabric of the Order when they chose to enter Nagini's private chambers instead of the mirrored audience chamber...

Hermione wiped a silent tear off her cheek; it would do her no good to dwell on that which had passed. Drawing her robe closer to her as if suddenly cold, she checked her pocket watch and realised she had twenty minutes before her lessons. Casting a last look of disgust at the Daily Prophet, she strode purposefully out of her private chambers.

Chapter 2 - In the Crypt

Chapter 2 of 20

Albus Dumbledore muses on the war that has passed and the changes it has effected. Yet, something disturbs him...

Beyond Time and Space

Chapter 2 In the Crypt

There was a general sense of lethargy in the air at Hogwarts. Truth be told, the Headmaster found it disquieting to see the students and the general British wizarding public resume their former lives as if nothing had happened. The Ministry's tagline for the new post-Voldemort era was '*Rebuilding our World for your Tomorrow*'. How trite! Dumbledore sniffed indignantly at that thought as he walked past chattering students. He shook his head in a manner that hinted at both the kind comprehension and sad realisation at his students' innocence. They need no longer fear for their lives or worry for their families. They need no longer stare blankly at an empty seat in shock. How quickly the young forget! He shrugged mildly to himself as he strove to unstick two lemon drops; it was just as well the young were what they were; after all, they have their whole lives ahead of them. It was only the older set and those former students who had directly participated in the extirpation of Voldemort that harboured some regret of what might have been; only these individuals still remembered and mourned; only these would never forget. For the first time in his life, Dumbledore truly felt his age. He sighed as his thoughts flew to Ronald Weasley unhinged at St Mungo's; the psychological scars carried by his staff; Harry's unusual taciturnity and frequent incoherent mumblings as he rocked himself; Hermione behaving like Severus, wearing her bitterness on her sleeve like a badge of honour. Dear Severus, he thought, shutting his eyes briefly in anguish as he recalled the closest thing to a son. And he had lost him. Severus, who ironically received the recognition and acceptance he had so craved, when he lay cold and unaware of his true merit. He would never be acquainted with the full extent of his contribution to the Good. Only three of them Minerva McGonagall, Hermione and Dumbledore himself truly felt his loss keenly. Dumbledore knew that she was beginning to adopt all the hallmarks of the late Potions Master's unsociable and reticent disposition. He hoped with all his heart that he would not have to deal with another individual who brooded on losses and harped on the past.

For all intents, Dumbledore was right. Hermione Granger, though physically young and handsome, had acquired a certain cold hardness in her eyes, which gave her an overall shrewd and tired look. It was a look that went beyond her years. While to the untrained eye, she still appeared to be the bushy haired young lady with a studious nature; the remaining Hogwarts staff and students felt that she had taken to the fashions of middle age too soon. She had never been beautiful, that was true but she had an intelligent air about her, and an intently curious gaze that rendered her striking. Despite this general consensus, she had insisted on adopting an almost spinsterish look in choosing to live insulated in her chambers. Dumbledore sighed at the young recluse in her 'hermitage'. She had been both unwilling and unable to tame her frizzy mass of bushy hair; as such, she no longer wore it loose. Her hair was now permanently knotted into a large severe chignon at the back of her head. Though the volume and mass of her tightly wound chignon led to much student speculation as to whether Hermione's hair was as long as it was thick and bushy, they did not know for sure. Only Minerva, Harry, Dumbledore and Ron (if he had his senses) knew that she had vowed before the final battle that if any of their number died, she would never cut her hair. The last time any of the Order had seen her hair was the day before the final battle. It was waist length then and Minerva had taught her how to kink her hair without braiding it; for all Dumbledore knew, her hair could be so long that she could sit on it.

Poor dear, he thought, she had not been the same after the battle. The truth was none of them were. It was a shame (as was generally acknowledged) that Hermione had lost her habitual benevolent streak. Her innate bossiness was no longer tempered with a gentle smile; rather, it was delivered with an astringent dose of logic. Her hair bangs on her forehead framed her face becomingly and the angles of her cheekbones were more pronounced without her hair flailing in her face. However, instead of appearing neater, she came across as severe. Her fastidious neatness belied the resentment with which she now came to view the world and life.

Dumbledore watched her stalk noiselessly past him, her flowing skirt and robes trailing after her like a muggle bridal train. He shook his head she looked far too drawn in black and her prolonged desire to sit alone indoors rendered the pale pink of her cheeks to fade. The headmaster sighed with the realisation that Hogwarts' two brightest

students were thoughtfully insular and wilfully withdrawn. It was a terrible shame indeed. While Severus dressed to reflect the state of his mind, which was perpetually straight laced and buttoned, Hermione dressed with the intent to kill. literally. Dumbledore popped another lemon drop into his mouth as he stood at the door to a disused third floor classroom, leaning slightly as if to maintain his balance. His eyes swept across the room lighting on the bodies of Alastor Moody, Diotima Vector, Arabella Figg, Mundungus Fletcher and Sybil Trelawney. Following another sigh, he trained his eyes on a slim black figure bent over a rosewood coffin. He watched her silently as she discarded the precious day's floral offering and replaced it with a simple stalk of black tulip that she conjured. She murmured something to the body and kissed its lips as one would in a traditional Russian funeral. Dumbledore examined her closely as she repeated her ritualised flower offering to each body. She did not dress in an overtly sexual manner. Merlin Forbid! She portrayed herself as strictly androgynous and asexual, as Severus had. Her clothes, he noticed as she placed a ruby red carnation in Sybil's hands, were similarly buttoned from the throat, like Severus's. The buttons traced down the bodice of her basque ending at her hips. She did not dress in the simple Edwardian day dresses so favoured by Minerva; instead, she made her clothes in the manner of the late 1890s' hunting habits. It could not be denied that her figure and erect carriage were shown to the best advantage in the cutting, especially when her skirt trailed behind her whilst her robes billowed away from her now frail looking form. He sighed at the remote solitude she emanated as she made her way back to Severus's body. She touched the tulip lightly and murmured something. Dumbledore shook his head with something bordering onto regret; he would not likely hear any élan from the young lady for the rest of his days.

Instead of adding to her natural grace and charm, the severe cut of her mock riding dresses seem to have sucked out her vitality and vivacity. She was not totally vapid as she was still an interesting study who charmed music boxes into playing the most doleful Mahler and Wagner pieces while she worked in her office. No, in place of the liveliness that once characterised her open manners, she now became intensely private. Her clothes now gave her a stern unapproachable demeanour, which was thought of as haughty yet pitiable in her misery. Dumbledore sighed aloud when he recalled Hermione's parents' worried letter. The Grangers did not know how best to lift their daughter's depression; they thought that if Dumbledore were to give her a position in an academic environment which she so loved, she would recover and be her cheerful self again. "None of us will ever be ourselves again," he thought sadly as he stepped into the makeshift crypt. Hermione looked up at him emotionlessly eliciting a start from him as she cast her unassuming penetrating gaze at him. It was a gaze that Remus Lupin had called 'cautiously careless' and he had been right. Returning her curt nod, Dumbledore greeted her with a small smile. He watched her gently sweep her fingers across Severus's face as if trying to capture his likeness before he faded into dust. She gave Dumbledore another brief nod before taking up her riding crop as she left the room. It disconcerted the older wizard somewhat that Hermione had ordered riding crops with her dresses. It seemed that she always carried one in her robes. She had been thus ever since the battle ended and it became clear that Severus was dying. Dumbledore could not curb a tiny shudder from flitting over his shoulders as he thought of Hermione armed with *both* a wand and a riding crop. Two dangerous items, two potentially dangerous items in the hands of an emotionally and psychologically traumatised woman. It was a discomforting realisation that she would not hesitate to use either on anyone who crossed her. Dumbledore rubbed his eyes, stung by the war's impact on his students. He felt that he was indeed getting too old for it all. Minerva had been right. It was the end of an era of sorts and what a ghastly era it was. Fraught with gratuitous anguish, persistent mental exhaustion and a pyrrhic victory. So the Order had prevailed. But at what cost? He looked at the bodies around him in poignantly; this cost was almost too much for his old mind. If having Hermione with them at Hogwarts mitigated her pain against what had happened to her friends, then he would keep her as far away from the Ministry as possible.

"Ah, Severus, my boy. Why did you have to leave when you now have everything you ever wanted in your youth?" he muttered, patting the body's hands. Severus's hands were as they had been when he lived. Cold and callused. Dumbledore smiled in spite of himself; Poppy had done a good job of preserving the bodies. There would not be any decomposition for a good long time. He was about to leave the crypt when a certain herbal scent infused with hellebore assailed his senses.

"Oh my!" Dumbledore exclaimed, mildly taken aback. "Does it mean then that..."

He frowned in incomprehension and at the improbability of the situation. Then, as if thinking better of it, he smiled quietly to himself. He would speak to Professor Granger; she would be better equipped to handle this state of affairs. That is, *if* his suspicions were founded. He only hoped that he would be able to accost Hermione before her lessons commenced. With that final thought, he followed the scent out of the crypt, stroking his beard in deep contemplation.

A/N: I know it's not terribly good a chapter. It's short, tedious and nothing really happens, for that. I apologise. It will be more exciting (somewhat) in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 - Metaphysical State

Chapter 3 of 20

A lone figure muses on the final battle. After much misunderstanding, Albus' suspicions are confirmed. Our lone figure eventually has a battle with our resident Potions Mistress.

Beyond Time and Space

Chapter 3 Metaphysical State

A solitary male figure seated stiffly upright in a tall armchair glowered at the sight beyond the window. The sky was azure blue with nary a cloud and the birds chirped happily, marking the advent of April. What an annoyingly perfect day! It would do better to rain and drown the merriment of the outside world. If he recalled correctly, the Order had defeated Voldemort. Bah! That was an insufficient reason to celebrate! Did not the dunderheads of the world know how to commiserate with the rest of the wizarding community? He had expected an air of subtle anxiety and quiet peace, not a kaleidoscope of moods from euphoria to maddening buoyancy! Unsophisticated philistines!

As his mind wandered to those who had died valiantly to secure victory, he could not help but think on the glaring future before everyone. He paused when he thought on the future before him. What was there for him? He had always been a mordant taciturn sort, even in his youth. He was still curious about many a thing but was no longer stupid enough to die for any cause. He was his own man after all; he served no cause but himself and now that it was over, he was well and truly free. He had been lost in such pleasant reveries when the clock on the mantelpiece chimed. He tapped his foot in annoyance; the Headmaster and the rest of the staff were late for their weekly meeting.

"Mr Smythe, why aren't you in class?" asked a greyish figure drifting before him.

He scowled disagreeably, narrowing his eyes at the self-absorbed spectre. "Professor Binns, you are on time for the staff meeting, I see."

"Meeting?" queried the spectre in response. "Dumbledore cancelled it yesterday. You're getting forgetful, Sebastian Smythe."

He cocked an eyebrow in astonishment and curiosity as to the reason for its cancellation. Before he could raise another question, Professor Binns drifted out of the staff room, presumably to his classroom. He smirked at his ghostly colleague. How imperceptive can one get? Surely, one would notice the difference in composition of a corporeal body and an ethereal one. What an ephemeral existence this was! In all likelihood, Binns had no conception of real time and space on the mortal plane. He was unable to remember the names of anyone, save the current Headmaster. Bloody Binns! And Dumbledore was no better. Forgetting to notify him of the changes to the staff meeting schedule!

Infuriated that he had not been informed of this recent event, he made his way to the dungeons, swearing under his breath. "Am I so inconsequential that no one apprises me of the latest developments? I should have known better than to trust Dumbledore! Redemption indeed! Ha! Not even a bloody pat on the back or thank you absolutely nothing after I saved Potter from that monstrosity of a wizard! I deserve more respect than that!" he fumed down the corridors.

Good, he thought as students whispered in hushed apprehensive tones when he passed them. He was pleased that he could still command *some degree* of fearful respect from students. A gaggle of Hufflepuff girls turned as white as sheets when he passed them, resulting in one fainting fit, a shriek and a scream. As he turned to face them, one particularly vacuous third year blonde fainted.

"Am I such a sight that you have to greet me thus? I am still your professor and should be accorded with more respect than this!" he hissed lowly, inching his face towards the cowering girls.

"Sir," the tallest of the girls began shakily, "You...look..."

"Scarred? Hideous? Or were you going to inform me that I have so improved in looks that you have to shriek, whisper, scream and swoon? Have I become Gilderoy Lockhart over night?" he snapped in a smoothly modulated voice, his eyes glinting in disdain.

"But Professor Snape, you should..." uttered the most petite of the Hufflepuffs timidly as she tended to her friend who had fainted.

"Enough, *girl!*" he retorted with a sharp impatient wave of his hand, his hair tumbling in front of his face. "You try my patience!" He violently flicked his hair aside. "Twenty points from Hufflepuff!"

The petite Hufflepuff objected with a light shake of her head as he stormed off, feigning ignorance at the whispers and shrieks that followed his wake.

Alerted by the sharp piercing screams, Dumbledore hastened to the source at the stairwell leading to the dungeons. Panting heavily, he could make out the cloudy dark image of billowing robes approaching him. Pushing his half moon glasses up his long hooked nose, Dumbledore saw that it was indeed Severus Snape. So, he had been correct in his surmise!

"Severus," said Dumbledore anxiously, still panting, silently wishing that his old legs did not tire him so. "A word if you please. We should talk in my office; come, walk with me."

Severus glared at Dumbledore, his eyes glittering as he quietly answered, "You wish to tell me about the abrogated meeting no doubt. Later, Headmaster; your *explanation* can wait till after my lesson!"

"Severus Xenophon Snape!" Dumbledore called out after he had swept past. "We really *must* talk."

The latter smirked in amusement at the note of desperate urgency in Dumbledore's voice. "I am already late for my lesson as it is. Next time, perhaps, your *would* be sent to me when meetings are to be held in abeyance."

"There is something you should know, my boy..." insisted Dumbledore as he ran alongside the younger figure, struggling to keep pace with him.

"After my lesson, *Headmaster,*" answered Severus with a slight bow before thundering past his employer.

Severus reached the potions classroom and was astounded to find it free from the grating voices of youngsters. Doubtlessly, they were planning to create some mischief, he thought. Bracing himself for the worst, he adopted his furrowed cross-me-at-your-own-peril look and entered the classroom. However much he was prepared for his students' remarks on his tardiness, he did not anticipate the sight of Miss Granger leaning casually at his old clerk's desk, fingers laced, evidently paused in mid speech. He raised an eyebrow at her presence in *his* classroom, at his desk. He was stunned to notice that she responded in kind to his intrusion.

The students, as if sensing the impending storm and war of words, kept perfectly immobile and silent. Staring at a pale Hermione, he politely questioned her with venom, "What are you doing in my classroom, Miss Granger?"

"What are *you* doing in *my* classroom, Professor Snape?" she snapped in a neat clipped tone, meeting his gaze unflinchingly.

"Shouldn't you and your friends be running amok at the Ministry? What are you doing in my class?" he persisted, approaching her in a slowly deliberate manner.

She remained where she was and drew her robe closer to her body. "I am *there* and *not* at the Ministry. *You* are interrupting my lesson, Professor Snape. Kindly remove yourself from *my* classroom."

All around, students either sucked in their breaths or gasped in shock.

"Continue your work, you lot!" she charged, aware of the students' silence. "Well? Get started or do I have to take house points? Mr Lennox, if you must explode yourself, kindly do it outside, otherwise, detention with Mr Filch! Well? Begin!"

The students rushed to obey her injunction when Severus waspishly instructed, "I believe *am* the Potions Master! These are my students and they *will not* be doing anything unless I tell them to! Do nothing! We are not brewing the draught of peace today! Return to your seats!"

Hermione glared at him angrily, wrapping her robe even closer to herself. "You don't seem to realise that you are no longer capable of teaching!" she hissed before shouting at a plump Gryffindor prefect, "What are you staring at?" The boy paled considerably at the looks he received from both Severus and Hermione. "Mr Lennox, I suggest you learn to read and use your limbs! Commence your work! It should take ninety minutes if you use your motor functions! Well? Don't just stand there! Get started!"

The students scampered about wildly, not wishing to incur her wrath.

She turned to him with a withering look. "As for you..."

"Miss Granger, cease your pretence; you are clearly unsuited to the teaching of this fine art," he opined, narrowing his eyes at her as he noticed her slight shiver.

"Good," he thought, "I have managed to unsettle her. How dare she take over my lesson! Does she think she is any substitute for me? Insolent girl! Damn her and her impudent cheek!"

"Oh" she laughed with barely concealed guile, "My faculties are fully in tact, whereas yours, Professor Snape, are not. Have you tried the simple exercise of breathing recently?"

Severus's mood changed for the worst and he closed in on the gap between them until he was nearly a few centimetres from her face. "Perhaps you wish to cease breathing, Miss Granger," he hissed vehemently.

Before Hermione could respond, they both heard a loud crash. The plump Gryffindor had fainted. Hermione swept forward to check on the boy and as she did so, the females in the classroom screamed in panic and disbelief. Some of the boys tried to run; others cowered into the corners of the room.

"SILENCE! Blasted dunderheads!" Hermione and Severus snapped concurrently. They eyed each other in mild surprise as the classroom quietened.

Once calm was somewhat restored, Hermione lifted a vial of something to Mr Lennox's nose and he gradually came to. However, as soon as he regained consciousness, he caught sight of Severus. He squealed, "Ghost!" And fainted again.

"Imbecile!" Severus muttered.

Hermione strode to the desk past Severus, causing the class to scream again. "Silence!" she commanded. Then turning her attention to Severus, realising that he still did not know the truth as to his present form, she spat, "You have upset my students with your theatrics, Professor Snape. If you will be so kind as to desist till four in the afternoon, I will elucidate this matter then."

"I WANT AN EXPLANATION NOW!" he bellowed, becoming paler with anger as his voice resounded throughout the dungeons. "What are you doing in my class?" he repeated, folding his arms.

"Isn't it obvious?" she retorted, glaring at him, her knuckles whitening from her tenacious grip on the old fashioned clerk's desk. "Keeping students in order; students that were quiet until you disrupted the lesson. You are not supposed to be here!"

"And where am I supposed to be? Dead, buried and forgotten? Disappointed to find me alive?" he sneered in a dangerously low voice.

"You *are* dead, Professor Snape," she said quietly. At that remark, a Slytherin girl deemed it fit to faint. "Look what you've done to my students!" cried Hermione crossly with an arm on her hip. "Take yourself out of my classroom before you frighten everyone to death!"

"I thought that was the intention, Miss Granger," he responded silkily in an almost seductive manner.

"THAT'S ENOUGH THE BOTH OF YOU!" boomed a wizen stern voice at the door.

"Professor Dumbledore!" she exclaimed at the same time as Severus greeted the voice with a smoothly muttered "Headmaster".

Dumbledore nodded at the both of them as he panted to catch his breath. "I will never run all the way down the dungeons again!" he declared rubbing his thighs through his robe. "Miss Heywood, Miss Fairfax," he turned to the Gryffindor girls on his left. "Kindly escort Mr Lennox and Miss White to the hospital wing." He then pointed his wand at the two limp figures crumpled on the floor, "Enervate!"

When the girls and the extremely shaken students departed, Dumbledore turned to the two Potions Masters and issued an order. "Professor Snape, you will accompany me to my office *now*; we *have* much to discuss. Professor Granger, I shall see you before dinner." He was so severe in his warning that the students were taken aback; they had never seen Dumbledore be anything but impartial and tolerant.

The Slytherins sucked in their breath as they saw both Hermione and Severus opening their mouths to protest. They knew instinctively that it would only yield unnecessary trouble. "NO objections the both of you!" insisted Dumbledore, cutting them off, proving the Slytherins correct. "Severus, please accompany me to my office *now*." Fully aware that he was unable to extricate himself from his present position, Severus bowed his forced asset to the Headmaster and swept out of the classroom.

Chapter 4 - Considering the Facts

Chapter 4 of 20

Having witnessed his present and previous potion masters' verbal explosions, Dumbledore speaks to them individually in a bid to remedy things...

Beyond Time and Space

Chapter 4 Considering the Facts

If Severus was furious with Hermione for presuming to act as Potions Mistress in *his* class, he did not show it. He was more livid with Dumbledore for ordering him out of *his* classroom like a common house elf and giving the chit of a girl the permission to teach a field that was his providence. Dumbledore made no attempt at conversation as they strolled back to his office. "It is just as well," thought Severus, still greatly piqued. He would have won the battle of wits against the insufferable know-it-all if Dumbledore had not arrived. Severus felt certain that he would have successfully wrested his authority in the Potions classroom back from Hermione if their argument continued. Although he was uncertain as to whether she would have allowed him to throw her out, he entertained no doubt at all that the girl was an excellent alchemist. She had been his best student; she had matched him word for word in their sparring incident and he had a distinct feeling that had the argument been more protracted, their volatile tempers would have gotten the better of them.

Unable to bear the older wizard's silence any longer, Severus asked his sighing companion, "What is all this nonsense about my demise?"

"Ah," began Dumbledore cautiously as he ushered the former Potions Master into his office. "You have technically speaking 'passed on'. Your body is in the crypt with the others."

"One would have thought that charlatan Trelawney would have had the sense to cower away from the prospect of battle," Severus snorted.

The older wizard shook his head. "Never doubt the Hufflepuffs' loyalty. She saved Aberforth at one point. And she was rather good at unusual hexes, you know, just as you are good at the dark arts."

"It is not an amusing joke, Headmaster," answered the frowning younger figure. Sitting opposite Dumbledore, Severus noticed the portraits of the other past headmasters and headmistresses peering at him with one open eye amidst their snores. "I am here, am I not? Then why am I supposedly dead? When I get the fool...POTTER! He must be the royal idiot perpetuating this myth of his invincibility vis-à-vis the former Death Eater's dubious loyalty to the Order!"

Dumbledore popped a lemon drop into his mouth, slowly playing with it as he struggled to find a way to show Severus the truth. "Harry is still at St Mungo's; he has become a little nervous. Too many knocks to the head, I suspect. You were *gravely* wounded, don't you remember?"

Severus folded his arms firmly, sinking deeper into the armchair. "The effects of the dark mark and the cruciatus are insect bites compared to the excruciating pain...Look, old man! I tire of your games. I have withstood worse sensations than multiple cruciatus curses. I have been at the brink of life in my flirtation with Death more times than you can count. Hasn't it occurred to you *not* to doubt my abilities at self-preservation?"

"I have never doubted you on that account, my boy," sighed Dumbledore, "I doubted your will to live. You have tried to take your life at several junctures."

"Which you prevented," reminded Severus quietly, "Do you know it takes a lot more than a mad man's spells to kill me?"

"And yet," whispered Dumbledore tiredly, his voice thick with emotion. "You did not choose to hold on to life when we brought you back."

"Utter nonsense!" Severus exclaimed, silencing the snoring portraits. "I am still here, stalking the corridors and terrorising the students. If anything," he added smoothly. "My actions at the battle have enhanced my 'fearsome' reputation among the students."

"By Merlin! Severus! The students fainted! You are an ethereal being; your body lies in the crypt on the third floor," reasoned the Headmaster, gently shaking his head with patient understanding. "For a week, we tried to save you. There was nothing St Mungo's could do for you. It seemed," choked the old man, "You had lost your will to continue with us. Minerva, Hermione and I watched you slip away quietly without a convulsion. You didn't make an effort..."

"Forgive me, Headmaster, but I believe you have had too much sugar in your system. It seems to be wrecking your logic," said Severus coolly drumming his fingers on his arms. "Perhaps you have forgotten that I put up a fight to almost anything?"

"I believed that you had found peace at last; that you were letting go...I was sad but ultimately happy for you. And now...you're here a ghost at Hogwarts as caustic and truculent as ever." Dumbledore dabbled his eyes with the hem of his left sleeve with a weak lopsided smile. "What unfinished business brings you back, my boy? "

Severus harrumphed with indignation. "My lecturing contract with Hogwarts has yet to lapse,*sir*. Which brings me to my point." He paused, clearly entertained by the older wizard wiping away his tears. The sentimental old goat, he thought. He offered a half smirk to the Headmaster and softened his tone, "My point being the fact that I was not duly informed as to the cancellation of the staff meeting. Surely, even an insignificant speck such as myself is capable of inspiring a modicum of something akin to mutual respect amongst my peers."

"You don't understand, my boy..."

"What don't I understand!" shouted Severus, losing his temper. "I know now that a lowly personage such as myself is inconsequential enough to be forgotten!"

"You are dead, my boy. Severus, listen to me! That's why I gave Hermione the Potions and Arithmancy seats."

"What!" he bellowed, turning paler with rage. "To think that I trusted you! Give me another good reason to hate you and *will* deliver a stinging hex to your weak knees!"

Dumbledore eyed the younger figure's ghostly wand at his chest with calm and silenced his worried phoenix with a look. "Have you noticed that you cannot breathe?" he asked, lightly brushing aside the ethereal wand. He froze for a moment realising that he could feel the spectre.

"Really? Then how do you account for my ability to sit in this chair without going through it?" questioned Severus in an ominously quiet voice. "I can detect your scent and I know you had Cadbury twirls this morning."

"You've always been a potent sort, Severus. You have a great deal of will power and grit. If you so will it, you can experience the senses as we mortals do. Do come to your senses and realise that you can control your otherworldly body as you once did your physical one. Hermione must have walked through you today; otherwise she wouldn't have looked so numb and cold. Yes," said Dumbledore thoughtfully stroking his beard. "It would account for the students' panic as well."

"You persist in believing that I am dead and *not* really before you?" challenged the exasperated figure, masking his infuriation behind incredulity.

"I know you're dead and I know your ghostly form is here. Why don't you go to crypt? Have a look and come back here to talk about it," Dumbledore offered kindly, a tear trickling down his hooked nose.

Severus stared at that glittering bead as it fell onto the desk, surprised to see more joining it when he looked into Dumbledore's eyes. "I see there is no talking to you in this vein. Are my chambers *still mine*?"

"In essence, they are, though they are physically Hermione's now."

"Good," the figure said, turning away from the teary Headmaster. "When you are better able to converse, you know where I'll be."

Dumbledore remained looking intently at the door long after his companion had left. Then he mumbled the strangled cry of dismay and unspoken affection, "Severus, my prodigal son, when will you learn to see your heart and mind? My poor boy..."

* * *

The solitary figure hunched over the escritoire groaned in frustration. The sixth year students were utterly impossible. How they made it to Advanced Potions, Hermione did not know. She looked disdainfully at the parchments before her all of them covered with blotches of inaccuracies and half-baked observations. Nearly every inch of the parchment was invaded by her compact red scrawls denouncing their originators' hypotheses while questioning their abilities. As she put aside the last parchment, she frowned. The day's events have proven to her that at least half her incompetent students must have bribed their way through OWLs to be in her advanced potions seminar. She viewed them as ineffectual dunderheads with short attention spans. If they were entered into a clumsiness contest against Tonks, she was positive that Tonks' crown would be relinquished to Mr Lennox. Mr Lennox was worse than Neville Longbottom, if that was possible. However, if Neville could make it as an Auror, there may be hope for Mr Lennox yet. Sipping the dregs of her tea, she wondered how Severus tolerated such idiocy in his lessons.

Hermione spat the tea into the saucer it was cold. It could only mean that she had been holed up longer than she had anticipated. "Bloody Potions' Sixth Years!" she cursed under her breath, ringing the house elves for hot tea. Her students were inexcusably atrocious! Their work was the cause of her cold tea! Their inaptitude, stupidity, silence and unwillingness to learn caused this! They had made her do something she had never done they made her lose track of time! At least, her arithmancy lessons were somewhat more fulfilling than her potions class. The students there did not blindly parade their ignorance. The arithmancy students bothered to read up before class; they bothered to raise questions and answer her quizzes. Hermione sniffed indignantly at the comparison now more than ever, she wondered whether the potions chair was cursed to suffer the ignominy of facing imbeciles. Now wonder Severus was always disagreeable! He faced these unsophisticated, unappreciative, wilfully unenlightened oafs all day. Noticing the hot tea in her newly replenished teapot, she set about pouring herself a cup of the calming elixir when Dumbledore interrupted her by floo.

"Not occupied are you, my dear?" the Headmaster asked with a twinkling smile.

She twitched her tired face into a grimace. "What does it seem like I'm doing?"

"We need to chat about Severus, Hermione," Dumbledore began.

"I still have fifteen minutes," she answered brusquely. "Unless, you think my memory is as faulty as Professor Snape's."

"No, I have no doubt that you are aware of our meeting," he chuckled at Hermione's Snapesque reply. "Would you mind popping into my office now? I plan to make an announcement at dinner, but to do that, I require your permission."

"My permission?" she snorted contemptuously before stepping through the floo network to Dumbledore's office. "Consensus is now de rigueur among Hogwarts' staff? I am all astonishment! Be plain with me, what do you want Headmaster?"

"Whatever gave you that idea, my dear? I am not a Supreme High Inquisitor. Sherbet lemon?" he chuckled, popping a sweet into his mouth.

Hermione wrinkled her nose. He had no business spoiling his appetite like that before dinner, Hermione thought, narrowing her eyes. "If this is about the disorder in my class today, I apologise. It will not happen again."

Dumbledore nodded in acknowledgement as he gestured her to sit, resolutely pushing the bag of sweets in front of her. "As a matter of fact, that's why I need your permission. I know it can be trying to cope with the workload of two subjects. Would you mind letting Severus have his potions..."

"Are you questioning my capability or my integrity as an educator?" she interrupted, her voice dripping with vitriol. "I have dealt with worse."

"No, no, my dear," Dumbledore offered quickly. "It would help Severus adjust if he were to do so something he is most proficient at."

"He doesn't have to teach to accomplish anything. He has only to scowl and all will be well," she spat after a hollow laugh.

"What if he co-taught your Potions lessons he has the first to fifth years and the rest are yours. The salaries of both seats are still yours," he said quickly to placate her.

Hermione tapped her fingers in studied carelessness on Dumbledore's desk, her eyes glazed in thought. *If I agree to return his lessons to him what will it do for him?*"

"He thinks he's alive."

"As does Professor Binns," she replied evenly.

"I want you to help him," Dumbledore said shakily.

"Help him? What do you mean *help him*?" she asked lowly, folding her arms defensively. She was clearly affronted by the suggestion.

"Help him apprehend the truth; help him grieve."

"Grieve?" she laughed disdainfully before challenging, "What if I refuse?"

"Then you will not receive your potions salary and you will no longer have your quarters."

"This is entrapment, Professor Dumbledore," she hissed. "Very well, let us say I help him what is expected of me?"

Dumbledore chuckled awkwardly as he answered, "He has to come to terms with his death. You should gently point him in the right direction. Be kind to him, the fellow is dead after all."

"How can I be civil when he is...a disagreeable Kappa!"

"Just be kind. He'll come around eventually. That's why I want you both in potions; you're an intelligent witch, Hermione; you've always known that quiet kindness is more effective than heated disputes. Be gentle with him."

"Gentle? With kid gloves? When...Oh! When I just want to smack him with a wet fish!" she declared with great exasperation.

Dumbledore choked on his chortle at seeing Hermione's basilisk-like glare. Offering her his arm, he said in a voice that matched the smile dancing in his eyes. "Thank you, my dear. Shall we hie to the Great Hall then?"

Hermione nodded her assent, mentally kicking herself for being so easily cajoled.

Chapter 5 - A Discovery

Chapter 5 of 20

Severus returns to his private chambers. After examining it, he becomes privy to an interesting sight.

A/N: For simplicity's sake, titles of books, journals etc are underlined and emphasises are italicised.

Beyond Time and Space

Chapter 5 A Discovery

That evening was unusually short for an all-enveloping darkness soon wrapped around the castle. This suited Severus perfectly as he re-examined his chambers. Astounding! Almost everything was as he had left it. If it were not for the pervasive smell of orange blossoms in the air, he was positive that the dungeons were still his domains. The sitting room was evidently used; there were scattered papers on the coffee table and the sofas. He stalked through to his library and realised that it and the sitting rooms were the only rooms she inhabited. He sat on the chaise lounge and traced his lips. Why wasn't the silly chit occupying the rest of his chambers? She had an expansive space to herself and she housed herself in the library. Extraordinary! Severus's keen eyes swept across the room, as he leaned further into the chaise. The chaise was definitely hers, he noted. He would not have used the uniquely feminine colour of mauve. She apparently slept on the chaise the number of cushions and the neatly folded duvet attested to that. She had shifted a modest wardrobe, a dressing cabinet and a screen into the library. Curious as to the contents of the cupboards, he made his way there, trailing his hand along the spines of his books. Interesting! She managed to cram all her clothes into the wardrobe; all of them black, even the tights and stockings. Ah! Severus noted with a smirk, she had finally acquired good taste. She looked good in black, almost regally so. Her wit was sharp and formidable...He shook his head; he *should not* indulge in such thoughts. The girl was insufferable! She had disputed his right to be *in* his classroom before *his* students! How dare she! He moved briskly to the small cabinet still seething with anger.

"First Dumbledore gives her my position, then he gives her my apartments! First she sought to humiliate me my classroom! Now she moves my furniture!" he muttered under breath, opening her drawers. Hmm, even her undergarments and gloves were black, or at least, they were predominantly black. Good! She wore knickers that covered her behind in its entirety! She's not one to succumb to those ridiculous modern contraptions that left nothing to the imagination. Fools! Do not the designers in the industry know that the state of dishabille is more sensual than the state of total undress! Closing the drawers, he stopped momentarily, for the items on the cabinet caught his attention.

"Mother," he whispered, tightly shutting his eyes with great emotion. "Mother," he murmured again, lighting his fingers on the small bottle of Coty perfume. It explained the

vaguely familiar orange blossom scent. Severus gently lifted the hairbrush and prior to running his thumb along its soft bristles, he played with the hairs stuck on it. "Damn this girl!" he muttered under his breath, replacing the hairbrush. It was almost a replica of his mother's. He arched a brow at the sight of the old fashioned 4711 loose powder and its ribboned powder puff. Miss Granger had exquisite taste he conceded that much. He frowned sombrely. No! He would not be charitable to her even if she shared his mother's taste. She had taken over everything that was rightly his with military precision she *did not* deserve any humane consideration from him. Mentally ranting thus, he came to the desk. Despite the fact that it was neatly arranged, as he had anticipated, one detail gave him food for thought. There was a half-empty teacup. It appeared that she had instructed the house elves not the clean the library and the sitting room. Unconsciously, he traced his lips again, as he thought on his mother. She had always sought to evade his father by hiding in the library. Once she had stationed herself there for a week before she was dragged out and beaten for protecting him. He shut his eyes with a pained look and turned away at the memory.

He looked at the desk again and found his well-thumbed copies of Plato's Republic and Machiavelli's Discourses on Livy sandwiching each other's pages. How dare she write in them! She even favoured the same books as mother! He recalled his mother's disappointment when he revealed that he had become a Death Eater and that he had killed his father. He had wanted her to be proud of him and he had failed her. Her weak health and his father's constant abuse of her finally took their toll on her and she wasted away at this news. Yet she did not revile him, she only called him a member of the 'Thirty Tyrants' and warned him to take care of his fate. On her dying breath, when she learned that he turned to Dumbledore's Order, she gave him his last lesson by informing him, "If you remember nothing, Severus, remember this: In the society created in Republic V, the best men and women who are true philosophers, passionately committed to *reason* and *trained rigorously in its application* would rule together as Guardians. A new education was needed to teach the Guardians to be 'philosophic, spirited, swift and strong', 'wise, courageous, moderate and just' so that such women and men will step forward and rule for the sake of the entire city's good. *Personal ambition corrupts the souls and natures* of ordinary men and women. *Men are corrupted* through the desire to distinguish themselves in the city to hear themselves being spoken of highly and being in the public limelight, while women are corrupted by the desire to enhance their own social statuses to push their male relatives to distinguish themselves in public office. Hence, *personal ambition has no place in the city* because it renders the city 'many and not one'. *This is why the family is abolished in the Guardian class to prevent the love of one's self and one's own* from causing the individual or the various family members from acting on this personal ambition or channelling their ambitions on each other. The Guardians cannot afford to be corrupted by any familial misunderstanding or complaints of their high-minded abstention from meddling in what is none of their business to become greedy, selfish and haughty minded with their abilities."

His mother had been right he should have paid attention to her teachings. Only she could rattle off stephanus numbers in a dire crisis. She had defended him using Plato and she died instructing him in the same. Why didn't he pay attention? Why? He could have saved himself the trouble of following Lucius Malfoy; he could have been contentedly insulated. Why could he not see the merit in his mother's teachings? The woman had been a seer, she had taught him indifference, calm and everything else; and he had learnt nothing but hatred. His reverie was fortunately interrupted; his keen hearing detected the entrance of another in his apartments. "At least I did not have to dwell in slumbering memories," he thought, making his way to the sitting room. "So," he mused, as he watched the figure resetting the wards, "She has deigned it fit for her to return after gallivanting with her precious dunderheads!"

Hermione waving her hand sharply front of her as if distracted by an insect while croaking in a voice hoarse with fatigue, "Lumos." As the rooms bathed in a soft flicking light of a few candles, Severus could make out Hermione hanging her robe and gingerly rubbing her neck, weariness printed all over her face. After casting a spell to remove the newspaper from the table to a muggle magazine rack by the sofas, she threw herself face-first onto the sofa. After lying still for a few minutes, she finally lifted her head. Severus was surprised to see how pale and drawn she had become. Before he could alert her to his presence, he heard a sharp feral hiss.

"What is it, Crookshanks?" she asked, as the half-kneazle jumped onto the sofa still hissing violently in Severus's direction. "Do you want milk? No? All right, off with you now, mamma needs to shower." Crookshanks purred his assent and rubbed against Hermione's cheek before giving Severus a final hiss. Then, he padded away to the library.

Severus shook his head in disapproval as she stretched languidly. She appeared much too thin. Interesting, she carried a riding crop, he noted, watching her leave the object aside. He could not help but notice the graceful manner in which she made her way to the library. A girl who reads Plato and Machiavelli cannot be all that unreasonable; he tried to speak again, however, he found himself tongue-tied. He could only watch her, as if entranced by her every movement. She sat before the makeshift dressing cabinet, her eyes emotionless, as she removed the bobby pins from her hair. He wondered how she did so without the aid of a mirror. Slowly, she proceeded to unwind her chignon and unbraid her hair, tossing her head lightly so that her thick cable cascaded down her back. Severus stared at the gently swaying mass where it hung close to the curve of her buttocks. He noticed that she had begun to undress as she made her way to the adjoining bathroom. He knew he should step out into the sitting room as a gentleman should, but his curiosity kept him rooted in the library. He was curious as to what she was really like.

"I really shouldn't be doing this," he reproached himself, as she flung her skirt, petticoat, stockings, corset-like brassiere and other items into the laundry basket with a tired sigh. He sought in vain to speak, to extricate himself from the scene, but he was unable to tear his eyes away from her pale form. His throat had become strangely constricted and he felt the rest of his body react accordingly. Hermione was thin; it was true; but not unhealthily so, he mused, as he took in her figure. She had a softness about her and her bushy hair formed a halo on her head. Lovely, he thought, lovely from her untidy bush to her small breasts and small waist. She looked almost fragile like porcelain, *no* that skin *must* have been porcelain delicate and unblemished, save for a mole near her bosom. She appeared in every way perfect.

He surreptitiously followed her to the bathroom, choosing to remain at the door where he could be master of all that he surveyed. Severus knew he should leave if he wanted to contain himself, but his eyes were involuntarily drawn to her. Suddenly, he was filled with a desire to protect this petite delicate creature. She apparently liked her water hot, he noted, as steam rose around him. Leaning at the bathroom's doorway, he greedily watched her bathing ritual. Her tensions seemed to ease as the water claimed her. He smirked at the sight of her with her left leg outstretched, her toes pointed. "So her grace is acquired; Miss Granger had taken dance lessons," he mused at the performance, as his eyes followed her gentle deliberate extension of her arm to the right for her shampoo. Sniffing slightly, he deduced that it was white nettle. Apparently she hadn't poured enough onto her palm, for she was groping blindly for the bottle again. She was reluctant to open her eyes, as the shampoo suds had slid into that region. He contemplated a charm to extricate the suds but changed his mind. Severus smirked to hear her swear and he promptly pointed his finger at the bottle so as to lead it to her hand. He found it fascinating that she exercised whilst bathing a novel way of reliving the ways of the Spartans. If nude exercising looked anything like that, Severus would have been a time-travelling voyeur. Given the present circumstances, however, it was unnecessary for he bore witness to a programme that was for his sole pleasure. "*Goddess*," his mind said when Hermione lapped the water all over herself. "*Nymph*," he thought when she lathered herself in a caressing manner. "*Perfect*," he whispered, as she drained the lather from her body. "*Divine*," he mouthed to himself when she turned abruptly away from the shower to wash the suds out of her hair.

There she was, almost impossibly beautiful under the shower. Her eyes closed and her visage no longer heavy with the strains of the day. Her wet tendrils clinging closely to her body, and back. A heavy lock fell forward to her front, wrapping itself along her right breast and waist. In fact, although she looked composed, she appeared anything but neat. Still, Severus was not bothered by her untameable hair or the unruly curls of her bush. He saw her as a deity, like Diana, no a vulnerable goddess, who enjoyed the feel of water on her skin. Soon, all too soon, she reached to turn off the shower spigot. As she flicked aside the disobedient lock clinging to her front, Severus heard her hum. She had a most mesmerising bath ritual, he thought, watching her towel herself. "I really should wait for her in the library," he scolded himself when he caught sight of her wrapping her hair in the towel.

Deciding that removing his presence was expedient, Severus made his way to his library. A few minutes later when he had calmed the reactions of his ethereal body, she entered the room in a navy blue bathroom still humming. "Good evening, *Miss Granger*," he drawled silkily from the shadows near her chaise lounge. Instead of the smooth retort he anticipated, Severus was greeted by a half-muted scream.

Footnotes:

Forgive me if the references to Plato are dreary; they are important to the plot two chapters down. I have quoted from Plato's Republic. Republic V refers to Book V of the text. I have excluded the stephanus numbers from the actual quotes. If any of you wish to read it, I recommend the Allan Bloom translation.

The 'Thirty Tyrants' were a group of despotic men who ruled Athens after its defeat by Sparta in the Peloponnesian War

Chapter 6 - Proviso on Property

Chapter 6 of 20

What happens when Hermione realises that Severus is in her chambers? A confrontation and a lesson on property, of course!

Beyond Time and Space

Chapter 6 Proviso on Property

"Have I startled you?" Severus asked carelessly, stepping out of the shadows.

"What are you doing in my apartments, Professor Snape?" she challenged, recovering rapidly from her shock.

"What are you doing in *my* private rooms, Miss Granger?" he retorted, forcing himself to cease dwelling on what he had just witnessed.

"Isn't it apparent?"

"Do you mean you live here now?" he mocked.

"I see you've managed to get past my wards," she said coolly.

"It seems you are not as powerful as others paint you to be; you could not discern my intrusion," he gloated, curling his lips with a glint in his eyes.

"Let me see, how do I put it objectively to you? YOU'RE DEAD!" she hollered, her eyes reclaiming their hard edge. At that pronouncement, Severus shut his eyes as if wounded. His eyes felt as if a hot poker had pierced them he could not look at this fiery creature in the same manner any longer without a bodily reaction. "If only I had not been privy to that sight!" he mentally berated himself. "Idiot! Voyeur! Degenerate!"

"You've finally decided to think on it! Bravo!" she barked, folding her arms.

"You should try the intimidation act without the turban, Miss Granger. After Quirrell, the look is *démodé*," he responded, his eyes still closed. "Pray," he added after a brief pause during which he reopened his eyes. "Pray, enlighten me as to why everyone here seems to be labouring under this misapprehension of my death?"

"Because you are, *sir*," she quietly answered.

He curled his lips contemptuously while approaching her. "Then explain why I am still on this plane, facing the drudgery of this mortal coil! Don't you think I want to die? Do you think I enjoy this miserable existence where life is an empty succession of busy nothings?"

Crookshanks jumped out in front of Hermione and hissed at Severus in a bid to protect his owner.

"Out of the way, cat!" he shouted to no avail. Crookshanks remained where he was, glaring at Severus. "How touching, Miss Granger," he began, maintaining eye contact with Crookshanks. "It seems your cat has decided to engage me in a puerile staring competition. I should hex it into oblivion and put it out of its misery; perhaps then you'll see what death *really* is."

Hermione picked Crookshanks up defensively. "You will do no such thing! Shame on you, Professor Snape! Threatening a poor helpless creature like..."

"That cat is neither helpless nor defenceless," he interjected. "And seeing how well fed he is, I do not think it is poor either." He took a step forward and was met with a swat from Crookshanks' paw. "I rest my case, Miss Granger," he said triumphantly. "Perhaps you should return to Gryffindor Tower, I wish to be alone."

"These are no longer your apartments, *sir*!" she retorted, placing Crookshanks on the ground. After watching him pad away, she continued, "Or do property rights extend from beyond the grave? These are my rooms now!"

"Indeed? Then tell me why is everything just as I left them? Do not tell me some stupid maudlin lie. Do not tell me the house elves done so; I know you execute your own cleaning," he snarled, curling his lips scornfully.

"Such impudence! And to think I promised Professor Dumbledore that I would help you! You're a selfish bastard holding onto things that are not really yours!" she declared hotly, jabbing her finger at his ghostly chest. "Do you take anything with you when you die? No! Do these rooms belong to anyone of us? No! They are Hogwarts' property. I don't see your name labelled on everything in the dungeons!"

"Details, mere details, Miss Granger," he said quietly with a glare as he dismissively brushed aside her hand. "Have you read John Locke? If you've read Machiavelli, you should know Locke. He postulated, rightly in my opinion, that the state of nature is one where anyone can acquire a part of nature for himself without the consent of anyone else."

"But there are limits to acquisition," she countered evenly, her previous violent action causing her towel to fall to the ground.

"Did I say *'class dismissed'*? I am not finished! There are two principles limiting acquisition in the state of nature: first, we must leave enough and as good for others; second, we must not let anything spoil or go to waste under our care. Suppose Hogwarts is the state of nature. In adopting this section of Hogwarts as mine, I have taken from nature. I have left the rest of the castle alone, thereby leaving enough and as good for others. Because the dungeons are now mine, you cannot trespass on it or forcibly take it away from me without my permission. I have attended to nature, so to speak, because I have put my labour into rendering my quarters inhabitable, my office comfortable and my classroom organised. Seeing how I have put my labour into the area that is the dungeons, it becomes mine by default. Do you see how I have my dungeons more productive? I have turned it into a library, sitting room, and bedrooms. This is one of the fundamental principles of labour theory one must be rational and assiduous. Do you see how labour is incredible in transforming nature and spectacularly increasing the dungeons' productivity? I have improved on and increased the original state of nature that the dungeons formerly were. And you have not added to the store of nature. You have merely rested on *my* laurels. And to further exacerbate matters, you've allowed your part of nature to spoil under your care. Look at your empty teacup! And you claim to be the executor of this portion of nature! How can you be when you've done *nothing* to deserve it!" he lectured in a cautiously quiet yet arch manner.

"Even if that were so, you are dead and as such, are unable to exert any influence over nature," she replied, her chocolate eyes shining brightly with what she had just learnt.

"Really?" he drawled causally as he sat on the desk. "You have not been reading my books then!" He gestured to the library. "Tell me, Miss Granger, you reside here, do you not?"

She nodded at his rhetorical question, watching him trace his lips with a long tapered finger. "I thought so," he sneered, gesturing for her to sit. When she had done so, he continued, "Therefore, as an inhabitant in this section of nature, *which IS mine*, you are a part of it as well. And unless I am much mistaken, I had just contributed to nature again by improving on something in it, namely, you. If it were not for my labour, *id est*, teaching, a moment ago, you would still be the same Miss Granger ignorant of political philosophy." He caught a look of admiration from Hermione as she drew her bathrobe closer to her body. He flinched slightly as he persisted, "If I were dead as you insist and unable to contribute to nature as you intimated earlier, how was I able to add to your store of knowledge?"

Tucking her legs to her chest, Hermione glared at him in spite of the miniature lecture. "Does that mean you regard me as your property then? I ~~am~~ a piece of meat at the butcher's! I am *not* chattel! Blackstone's commentary does not hold in the wizarding world! It no longer even holds water in the muggle world!"

"Have you been paying attention?" he hissed in a low dangerous tone, not taking his eyes off hers. You are your own greatest property. However, your presence as merely another object, such as, say, these books, you come under my jurisdiction, not my property because you are an inalienable right unto yourself. Since you come under my jurisdiction as you are *in* and *on* my property, my 'land' as it were I have the right to improve upon you as I deem fit. And this I have just achieved."

"Indeed," she conceded. Severus noted with satisfaction that she had the good grace to look somewhat abashed.

"I suggest, Miss Granger, that you add analytical philosophy to your repertoire," he offered casually, forming a steeple with his fingers.

"Yes, yes, now can I get dressed?" she exclaimed, rising from her seat.

"By all means." He gestured nonchalantly to the screen in the corner, leaning back as if pondering a weighty issue.

"Well?" she questioned, folding her arms and impatiently tapping her foot.

"Yes?" he levelled at her, meeting and holding her glare. "Go get dressed."

"You are *in my boudoir*," she pointed out from between her teeth.

"Nonsense, this is my library," he said coolly. Then catching sight of the chaise lounge and her flushed cheeks, he hastened to add, "Just this once, Miss Granger. I shall be in the sitting room." And he swept out. He was pleased with the speed at which his gesture of common civility was rewarded. Soon after he stationed himself near the empty heart, Hermione entered the room in a black housecoat. Her damp hair had by then ceased their previous creeping around her neck and he observed how much she resembled those magical porcelain dolls at Diagon Alley.

"Well?" she began as she walked before him.

"Well," he answered blankly, his eyes fixed at her damp bushy hair. "Her hair was long, her foot was light and her eyes were wild. A description quite analogous to what I see, isn't it?"

"Professor Snape, we need to discuss the matter of our lessons. You can have your potions classes back, at least, for the time being," she said in a business like tone, sitting opposite him. Noticing his thoughtful silence as he leaned on the mantelpiece, she decided to venture a polite question so as to ease the tension. "Would you like some biscuits? Accio..."

"It will not be necessary. I am not hungry," he snarled, curling his lips as if repulsed by the idea of food.

Her eyes lit up. "When was the last time you ate?"

"I do not recall," he answered slowly, inclining his head to the left, intrigued by her half-smirk.

"Think about it, sir," she insisted with an undisguised look of triumph. "You are welcome to your old bedroom, that is ~~if~~ you *can* rest. I shall retire for the night. Think on hunger, sir."

Before Severus could utter a sharp rejoinder, Hermione had already locked herself in the library, leaving him to mull over her strange words.

A/N: This chapter, though short, may be a little tedious, I apologise.

Footnotes:

"Her hair was long, her foot was light and her eyes were wild" is a quote from John Keats's poem La Belle dans sans merci

The reference to John Locke is drawn from his Two Treatises on Government; the state of nature argument is a combination of my readings on Hobbes and Locke.

Chapter 7 - The Oracle

Chapter 7 of 20

Hermione's dream sequence. May be disturbing to some readers.

A/N It is very heartening to receive such warm comments and in-depth reviews from reviewers who have emailed me. However, I also seem to be inundated with emails asking for clarification of certain things. Thus, I shall address them here:

(Question 1) I find it hard to believe that Hermione has changed so much in your story. She is so different from canon where she is a perky, know-it-all. I find it difficult to see/understand how Hermione can be so irritable and 'angsty'. I find it difficult to believe that Hermione can change so much. I find it difficult to believe that Hermione can give each of the dead OOTP member a flower in mourning and say that Snape is in a better place, and then shout and fight with Snape.

Answer: I did say that the tale may be a little too AU and OOC for some. Did you read Chapters 1 and 2 carefully? I have never interpreted canon Hermione as perky, but it's your opinion and I shall accept it with good grace. At the end of the war, people whom she respects and cares for die or change for the worse. Dumbledore was musing

on "the psychological scars carried by his staff." This means that they changed, both physically and psychologically. They have physical scars and emotional scars. Given these things then, do you expect people to feel the same?

Even Dumbledore has changed. He feels his age and is generally tired. He is no longer the sprightly creature we meet in canon.

You learn in Ch 2 that Ron is a blubbering idiot in St Mungo's (my word was 'unhinged' translation: stark raving mad, literally). His condition is a little better than Neville's parents and worse than Lockhart's. Imagine this to be one of your best friends would you be affected and upset?

You also learn in Chapters 2 and 3 that Harry is emotionally unbalanced. It is stated in Dumbledore's musings that Harry mutters nonsense to himself and constantly rocks himself over and over again in the same position. Imagine this to be one of your best friends would you be affected and upset?

It is also stated in Chapter 2 that Hermione is very much changed. Dumbledore states, *"Hermione [was] behaving like Severus, wearing her bitterness on her sleeve like a badge of honour."* For the many out there who think Hermione is 'perky' - She is now bitter, do you honestly expect her to be bubbly and cheerful? She has seen her friends, teachers, colleagues &ca die do you expect her to stay the same and be cheerful and happy?

The change in Hermione and most of my characters are stated explicitly in the text:

It is mentioned in Chapter 2 that Hermione is a "psychologically traumatised woman".

It is mentioned in Chapter 2 that Hermione "...had not been the same after the battle. The truth was none of them were."

It is mentioned in Chapter 2, "Hermione had lost her habitual benevolent streak."

It is mentioned in Chapter 2 that Hermione's "...innate bossiness was no longer tempered with a gentle smile..."

It is mentioned in Chapter 2 that Hermione's "...innate bossiness was... delivered with an astringent dose of logic."

It is mentioned in Chapter 2 that Hermione now comes across as "severe"

It is mentioned in Chapter 2 that Hermione "...had acquired a certain cold hardness in her eyes, which gave her an overall shrewd and tired look."

It is mentioned in Chapter 2 that Hermione "...[chose] to live insulated in her chambers."

There are many such hints in Chapters 1-7; but most of it is in Chapter 2. You must examine the text more carefully.

She has come out of the battle relatively unscathed, whereas Ron is mad and Harry is mentally unstable. Do you think she'll be happy and perky? Professors and other OOTP members she respected died do you think she'll be happy and perky?

Of course, she's bitter! It's called survivor's guilt. It's a case of "why did these things happen to people I care for but not me? Why must I see them suffer? Why must I who know them very well, reflect on how much they have changed? If I died, I wouldn't have to bear witness to all these painful things?"

She mourns the death of Severus. Yes, she is upset. She can see him for what he is and she accepts him for it. It is a great loss to what's left of the order and Hogwarts.

She is upset, *not irrational*. She knows that he has his psychological hang-ups; those psychological hang-ups won't go away because he doesn't want to be rid of them.

And if he lives, he will go through the rest of his life with those psychological hang-ups bitter, nasty and guilty. Given this then, the *rational* Hermione knows that he is better off dead. That's why she says he has gone to a better place in Chapter 1.

All right. Put yourself in Hermione's shoes. A friend or someone you respect has died unexpectedly, or so you believe. You are upset, yes? You mourn, yes? Did you expect the person to die? No. Did you want the person to die? No. You are in shock, yes? Pretend, it turns out that your friend didn't really die. You are shocked, yes? You are enraged, yes? You are annoyed, yes? You are irritable, yes?

Now, let us fill in the case study with the characters. Severus is dead and Hermione is made potions mistress in his place. She is upset because Hogwarts has lost a good teacher whom she believes she will not surpass. She mourns for his passing but is glad for him in that he will no longer have to suffer on earth. Preparations are made for his funeral. Then, he comes back as a ghost and turns her shattered life (which she is trying to rebuild) and her new life (which she is trying to adjust to) and turns it upside down. She is in shock.

He barges into her lessons and all but orders her out. She is cross.

He questions her suitability as a teacher in potions. She is livid

He questions her adequacy as a teacher. She becomes irritable and lashes out at him.

I am only following the natural order of things. Sociologists have proven the following: after an unexpected death, a person (the survivor) goes through the stages of (a) shock, (b) denial some people do not go through this, (c) anguish/pain, and (d) anger, (e) realisation, (f) acceptance, (g) copying, (h) remembering, and (i) letting go.

(Question 2) Why are your paragraphs so long and formal?

Answer: I follow the basic rule of writing as I have always known: one idea, one paragraph. If you think it is formal, that is your opinion and I respect that. I do not feel that it is formal. I have written this with more structure in mind and it's a plot of thought progression rather than pure dialogue for all 20 chapters.

(Question 3) Why is your grammar and spelling different?

Answer: British English has a different set of spelling and grammatical rules. I do not take to people saying that my betas did not do their jobs.

(Question 4) Why are there so many references to books and dead writers? Do they have any relevance to the story?

Answer: It is very astute of you to notice this. I did not mean for the plot to turn out didactic. When I wrote it, it was meant to be dialectic. When I wrote this, I was delivering two lecture series on Ancient Western Political Thought and Modern Western Political Thought. As I characterised my Severus, I realised that even in canon, it's what he doesn't say that's more important. This is very a la Xenophon (a contemporary of Plato and disciple/follower of Socrates). Hence, my hero has the name Severus Xenophon Snape. And yes, these elements have some bearing on the plot.

(Question 5) Why didn't Snape recover if he was out for a week before he died?

Answer: Let me see. If you read Chapter 3 carefully, you will realise there was *nothing, absolutely nothing* that could be done to save him. At my version of the final battle, he did not realise how gravely wounded he was. He was so badly "mangled" that he slipped into unconsciousness. He never recovered and he died.

(Question 6) How come Snape didn't fight to live? If Hermione, Dumbledore and McGonagall were keeping vigil by his bed and caring for him, why didn't he fight to live? Why didn't he come round? Why couldn't he feel their presence and be moved back to life?

Answer: A set of interesting questions but everything is in the text. You have to read the text slowly and carefully. I may say a lot in the story, but it's what I hint at and leave out that is interesting (at least to me). One suggestion: Read between the lines.

At the final battle, Severus was gravely wounded and then due to loss of blood became unconscious. It is stated in Ch 1 that Severus suffered from *severe internal injuries and irremediable damage to his organs*. ". There was really nothing to be done to save him. No skele-grow or organ-grow could help him; he was a dying wizard. One may have the willpower to live if there is something for you to live for. What does Severus have to live for now that the Voldemort is dead? He will feel that he no longer has any purpose as he will no longer be a spy. He will still be bitter and astringent because his biggest psychological hang-up is not being able to let go of his past being bullied by the people in school, abused at home, and his mother is dead. He will continue treating his students callously as an outlet for his guilt and self-revulsion.

I know I've been getting a lot of negative mail for killing Severus not making him fight for his life. Dear readers, think logically - One's organs are *irremediably damaged*, how can one survive? Even if one has the will to live, one will still die because one's organs are beyond repair.

Believe me, when you are unconscious (not comatose there is a difference), you will not be aware of your surroundings and the people around you. I suffer from epilepsy and frequent fainting spells/fits. This means that I tend to get blackouts and spells of unconsciousness. I don't know who is around me; how long I have been unconscious and so on. My mother claims that she sits by me and reads to me during my spells of grand mals, but do I really know that? I can hear nothing while unconsciousness. On waking, I am disoriented. Trust me, one does not know a thing of what goes on around one when one is unconscious. You don't even dream or think anything it's a perfect black. How can one fight then? You won't know anything until you have recovered from the fit.

Beyond Time and Space

Chapter 7 The Oracle

It was almost dark and the sky was an array of rich yellows, reds and oranges. Hermione saw that at the end of the horizon where it was almost deep purple, there was a construction of sorts. If she squinted hard enough, she could almost be sure of it being Grecian or Roman in style. Curious as to this structure and its purpose, she moved towards it and in so doing went against the cool evening breeze. As she approached the edifice, she had a dual sense of awe and trepidation, emotions which were heightened by the increased intensity of the wind. The wind whipped her fluttering gold-rimmed white robe about her while sharply biting her features. The dried leaves arose around her, engulfing her in a mad crescendo of autumnal colours and half-heard whispers. When Hermione regained the use of her faculties, she found herself safely deposited at the foot of the majestic building. It looked like a temple of sorts with towering ivory pillars and heads of the Greek pantheon craved at the top of the cornices. As she ventured up the cold marble stairs, a suspended basin lit up enveloping the immediate surroundings with a soft white light. The door at the top flung open, awaiting her entrance. She entered the temple proper with fear and anxiety at what she would find.

"Welcome to Delphi," resounded a lilting feminine voice that slowly materialised into a beautiful raven-haired woman reclining on a divan.

"I'm sorry to intrude; I should not be here," said Hermione backing away calmly.

"No, my dear, I have waited *long enough*. Come closer," commanded the woman, causing the doors to slam shut and lights to flicker around a basin and the altar before her. "Approach," she said, persevering in her invitation and Hermione found herself transported to the basin and altar. "You wish to consult the Oracle," commented the woman as she elegantly raised herself on her elbow. It was a statement that did not encourage an answer; accordingly, Hermione gave none. It was just as well for she felt her throat suddenly constricted and parched. "What do you have in exchange?" asked the woman as she sat up brushing away some powder on her black toga.

"Sorry?" enquired Hermione bewilderedly as she rummaged through her memory to place this semi-familiar woman.

The woman glared, curling her lips into a patronising smile. "Which would you prefer making a goat sacrifice or paying four obols?"

"Erhm...I don't seem to have any money with me and I don't believe in the slaughter of innocent animals," Hermione said, nervously rubbing her arms.

"And yet, you approve of the mercy killing of other politic animals?" challenged the woman testily, narrowing her eyes. "I have already performed the goat sacrifice this evening. Four obols. You have a purse on your wrist, *child*; four obols then."

Hermione looked to her right wrist and saw a reticule favoured by ladies during the Regency period. Thoroughly bemused, she opened the purse to find it filled with an assortment of sickles, knuts and galleons. "Will knuts do, madam?" she asked shyly as if she were eleven again.

"Knuts, obols, kopecks they're all the same to me," shrugged the woman disinterestedly, staring down her aquiline nose at Hermione as she swung her head gracefully to the left.

Following the woman's indication, Hermione deposited the knuts into a ceramic bowl that had materialised to her right.

"*Paideia catharsis*," intoned the woman before seemingly slipping into a trance. "*Kalos hairesis*," boomed the woman's echoing voice as if a sonorous charm had been cast. The lights of the temple gradually grew to a blind light before flickering twice and fading away. "Interesting," she commented, tapping a long finger on her cheek. Before Hermione could pose an enquiry, the woman continued her ritual. "*Horismos*," she commanded before frowning deeply. "*Anankaïos hamartia*".

Then, as abruptly as she had gone into her trance, the woman regained her normal speaking voice. The woman gave Hermione a calculative mysterious look that could be read as almost a smile. "It seems, my dear, the Gods mean for you acquire a virtue that you lack. They have advised me to tell you this: Lion in front, serpent behind, in the middle a goat."

"I don't understand," said Hermione, biting her lower lip in consternation. "You've just described a Chimaera."

"There is a certain type of human being," explained the woman in great annoyance, "who constantly experiences, sees, hears, suspects, hopes and dreams extraordinary things. This type of human is struck by his own thought as from outside, as from above and below, as by his type of experiences and lightning bolts; who is perhaps himself a storm, pregnant with new lightning. He is a fatal one around whom there are constant rumblings and growlings, crevices and uncanny doings. This being is in *your acquaintance*. This *being* alas is a being that often runs away from itself, often is afraid of itself but too inquisitive *not to* 'come to' again always back to himself. *Forsake him not*, this one."

Though disturbed by the woman's words, Hermione did not flee. She chose, instead, to frown at the enigmatic explanation. "Doesn't that mean this whom you speak of is merely an inexorable opponent?"

"My dear, you have forgotten..." answered the woman, studying her in a leisurely bored manner. Catching Hermione's colour at the scrutiny, she looked directly into her eyes. "Fear not, something will evoke it...eventually," sneered the woman in a sharp commanding tone as she rose. "The Gods have spoken. Acquire the lacking virtue and consider the lion in front, the serpent behind and the goat middle. Now leave!"

Before Hermione could venture any further clarification on the matter, she found herself swallowed by thick white mist. Then, she woke with a start.

Upon opening her eyes, Hermione immediately ran a hand across her forehead. Relief, however, proved too short-lived, for she realised that she had broken into a cold sweat. Her hair bangs latched on to her forehead like creeping ivy. Her back was wet with perspiration and she was cold extremely cold. What a disturbing dream! The woman had given her a strange prophecy! Hermione, being the sensible creature that she was, did not accord the study of divination with any respect. No doubt the woman was a fraud like Trelawney. But if so, she would not have used the Iliad's reference to a chimaera ad verbatim. Just who or what was the Chimaera? What was its significance? More importantly, who was the being the woman described? It certainly did not resemble anyone Hermione knew. She scowled as she drew her knees to her chest in deep thought why was this dream so important? How was it possible that it could perturb her so? Frustrated, inexplicably irate and psychologically distressed, she summoned her empty tea things and hurled them at the door.

"Stop it, Granger!" she scolded, trembling in spite of herself. "Be calm, be bold, be resolute, be rational. This is just another one of those dreams of self-affirmation that you

used to have as a girl. You have dealt with the chips on your shoulder before, you can deal with this one too."

"Are you insane, Miss Granger!" growled a dangerously low voice outside the door.

"I'm all right, sir, nightmare," she responded, sounding very much like a teenaged self again.

"See that it *does not* happen again! I am having enough trouble resting as it is!" hollered Severus's vitriolic voice.

Hermione lay back on her chaise fully awake, analysing her dream. It was not a nightmare; that was certain. There were no monsters or strange apparitions; just the temple at Delphi. She had only seen the Oracle. Why then did it frighten her? Moreover, Severus wasn't helping. He had not even been vaguely concerned! The selfish pig was only being himself the crime was hers she had interrupted his attempt to rest. She smirked her satisfaction at that thought. Severus Snape could neither rest nor eat and he still did not realise it. What an inattentive fellow he was so much for his methodical mind!

"Merlin, no!" she exclaimed in a whimper, her hands flying to her mouth. The woman had described a philosopher not simply any philosopher, but one who was a philosopher in the ancient sense of the word. She had described the most feared philosopher she had described the logician. The logician and philosopher was none other than Professor Severus Snape! He saw, heard, suspected, hoped and dreamed extraordinary things! He viewed everything not concerning himself in an aloof manner *'from the outside'* as the woman had said. Furthermore, he has always been regarded as a brilliant scholar *'a storm with new lightnings'* and as intimidated by the woman, Severus Snape was indeed the same being that *'often runs away from itself; often afraid of itself'*; he was truly *'too inquisitive not to return to himself'*. Hermione gasped in shock and terror. Who was this woman? She seemed almost like NO, it cannot be!

"Could it be?" Hermione gasped in horror. "Could it be a reflection of what I've become? Am I like that now? Have I become that which I swore not to become if I should enter academia? Have I become like Professor Snape?" She sat up again, frightened yet pleased with herself. Now that she had unravelled the woman's cryptic explanation, she strove to extrapolate the meaning behind the reference to the Greek Chimaera.

"Hmm..." she muttered, moving to her desk before pausing to stroke the sleeping orange ball there. "The head of a lion, the tail of a serpent and the middle of a goat." She slapped her forehead as the first two pieces fell into place. The head of the lion presented Gryffindor. Good Merlin! Did it mean she had become a serpent?

"No," she cried in sudden realisation. "It refers to both Professor Snape and I! I have become like him. I've turned from a Gryffindor lioness into a Slytherin serpent. And Professor Snape he's the serpent with the head of a lion. His actions throughout his years at Hogwarts spoke for themselves. And his mind is certainly worthy of Gryffindor bravery. However, his ineffable mind has achieved the greatness promised to the Slytherins. How does the goat fit in?" she asked to the library, pacing nervously. "How does the goat link the lion and the serpent?"

After an indeterminable lapse of time, she snapped her fingers waking Crookshanks who stared lazily at his inimitable mistress. "Of course!" she exclaimed to her nonchalantly yawning pet. One obtained the bezoar from the stomach of the goat. Goats are naturally resistant to all kinds of poison; goats were the only creatures capable of eating arsenic without harm. The goat mitigated the excesses of both the lion and the serpent. It meant that she and Severus had to find a middle ground if he is to come to his senses and realise the truth of his death. Hermione strode to one of the shelves and pulled out a book. After much desperate page flipping, she came to what she had been seeking, namely, the words *'prosthe Platōn opithen te Platōn messē te Chimaيرا'*.

"Plato in front and Plato behind and in the middle Chimaera," she translated thoughtfully biting her index finger. It made perfect sense now the middle, the goat, in other words, represented the enigma that was at the heart of both the lion and the serpent. It is mysterious precisely because it appears incongruous between Hermione and Severus. The enigma, therefore, referred to that something that they were both hiding from the chips on their shoulders. However, as with all such chips, they always became more apparent when one hides them.

"It's all Homeric!" Hermione exclaimed with a light smile, her heart quietening considerably. "The Plato-Socrates dynamic! I will use cruelty to temper my kindness to the Professor and help him through this. Perhaps I will heal this hate in me. I will quell this irrational harping on losses!" With that exultation, Hermione found that she was able to sleep soundly for the rest of the night.

Footnotes:

The reference to "politic animals" is a double entendre. It can mean (1) man is the only political animal, and (2) cunning and devious creatures, for in Shakespeare's time, the word 'politic' referred to someone that was sly and conniving.

The Regency referred to is the English Regency, not the French Regency.

My classical Greek is still very shaky, so forgive me if this glossary is lacking:

Iron obols performed important functions in Ancient Greece in that they were set up as sacred objects in two of the most important sanctuaries. In order to query the Oracle, one needed to make either a goat sacrifice or pay obols.

If you follow the classical Greeks, the *Pythia* was the priestess at Apollo's oracle at Delphi. She is the medium through which Apollo's will to be known to those on earth. A believer would make a sacrifice and present a question to a male priest. The male priest would in turn present the question to the *Pythia*. Seated on her bronze tripod in the *adytum*, or inner chamber of Apollo's temple, the spirit of Apollo overcame the *Pythia* in this sacred chamber and inspired the prophecy. After the prediction has been made, the priest would interpret the *Pythia's* response for the questioner.

However, I have combined the role of the *Pythia* and the Priest in my reinterpretation of Apollo's oracle. Hence, the woman in black in Hermione's dream is both the medium and the interpreter of the vision.

Paideia stands for the education or culture of man in general.

Kalos refers to something that is morally or physically beautiful, noble, fine and right.

Hairesis can be loosely understood as choice.

Horismos can be understood as definition.

Anankaia loosely means necessary.

Hamartia loosely means compulsory error.

Chapter 8 - Revelation

Chapter 8 of 20

Hermione decides to act to show Severus that he is well and truly dead, with some rather unexpected consequences.
Hints as to what's to come around.

Beyond Time and Space

Chapter 8 - Revelation

"I want an essay on the properties of moonstone in potions, due Friday! Pound it, Miss Watson; you have a mortar and pestle. Unless you want to pound the remnants of your brain with it?" Severus's silky voice rumbled in the potions classroom. Hermione suppressed a chuckle as she prepared her Arithmancy lesson in his office. She could hear every single thing occurring in the adjoining room and she was tickled. Somehow, it did not signify any longer that she no longer taught Potions. She still would receive two salaries, for she officially held the Potions and Arithmancy chairs. At least, Severus was decent enough to let her use his office. He had even condescended to share their chambers. Well, what else could she call it? She could call herself a tenant who lived in his library, but it was not entirely fitting. The apartments in the dungeons were assigned to her after all. She shook her head to clear her mind of the faintly confusing thought.

In the last few days, he had come to tolerate her presence as a necessary evil. He had not spoken to her, nevertheless, she knew he had not been able to sleep or experience hunger. He had not realised that he managed to gain entrance to his library even though she had locked and warded the doors. Hermione put down her quill and gathered her books, listening to Severus's thundering next door. He's still the same, she thought with a wry smile. He did not care that he kept her awake most of the night with his nightly reading and muttered oaths. Hermione realised that she had to help him grasp what he had become so that he could move on. Rising from the desk, she hugged her books close to herself and opened the office's door to the Potions classroom at the exact same moment he dismissed the fourth year students.

"Will you walk me to my classroom, Professor Snape?" Hermione asked, keeping her eye on the rambling students who scrambled to depart. Many of them looked horrified that she had emerged from his private office.

"You're not due for class for another two hours. Are you going to make another eulogy to commemorate my supposed passing? What is this about, Miss...Professor Granger?" he growled, reluctantly acknowledging her as a colleague. He had enough common civility in him to give her credit as it was due. After all, she was a witch famed for her intelligence.

"You...Oh, come on, *please*, walk with me," she said adamantly, without appearing to press her point.

"If it will shut you up," he complied, briskly passing her. "Well?"

Hermione smirked at him whilst he reset the wards to the rooms. "Let me put my things in the Arithmancy room first, then, I'll lay my claim on you."

"You will do no such thing, ridiculous chit!" With a mild flick of his wrist, he gestured for her walk before him.

"Is that gallantry, Professor Snape?" she teased sardonically, waltzing ahead.

"Basic courtesy, Professor Granger," he replied as he materialised to her left. "You left me to my own devices for nearly seventy-two hours. That merits *some degree* of civility."

"Are you well rested?" she asked, simultaneously scowling at fleeing students. She laughed inwardly at how silly the students were flying from the dungeons' inhabitants.

"Your snoring kept me awake," he lied. "I can hear it in my room. That blasted *Meistersinger* overture can drive a man to distraction!" He hoped that she did not know he had often crept to his library during her office hours to consult the books on the source of his gnawing feeling of displacement.

"I'm sorry," she muttered, lowering her eyes demurely and choking back a chuckle. She flashed him an intelligible look as she recalled the previous night. Severus had slipped to the library and opened her Wagner music book whilst he read.

"You generally sleep well, I presume," he asked, deliberately allowing her to precede him so that he could watch her form for a few minutes.

She decided to toe the line by baiting him. "Have you tried the Dreamless Sleep Draught?" She had caught him off-guard at that moment because she suddenly spun around to face him. However, his mental preparation for a verbal confrontation was ill founded, she had merely wanted to use her back to push the heavy doors of the Arithmancy classroom open.

"Do you want your books to fall on your feet, or shall I cast a levitation spell for you?" he asked belatedly, scowling at his lack of manners.

"As you can see," she said, after putting her books on the desk, "I've already done so." Brandishing her crop, she swished it dramatically through the air, closing the curtains. This drew a half smirk from Severus. "Shall we go riding in the evening if the weather holds?" she asked, baiting him once more.

"I have never been one for equestrian sports the sun and I are not friends. If it rains, perhaps," he answered lowly before adding in a silky purr, "What is the purpose of this conversation, Professor Granger?"

"Walk with me and you'll find out," she said pocketing her crop and shooing him out of the room so that she could set her wards. "The third floor has been renovated lately. It is now an excellent vantage point for spying on recalcitrant students."

"I thought you protected the dunderheads," he sneered.

She glared at him in retaliation. "In the same way you did us."

"Is that not Filch's responsibility?"

"Sir, you of all people should be aware of pleasure in pain."

He raised an eyebrow, intrigued, as they ascended the stairs. "In what sense, Professor Granger?"

"To soothe our own, sir. Threatening students soothes *our pain*; a method of catharsis, as it were."

"I'm impressed you discovered this," he hissed as he strode into the first room which caught his attention on the third floor.

"This is not what I want you to..." Hermione stopped when she saw the Mirror of Erised slowly revolving into view. Severus stood before it, evidently flabbergasted by what he saw. "We're not supposed to be here," she sharply announced, clapping her hands for emphasis as she beckoned him to return to her side. He merely stood in front of the mirror, violently becoming paler. She watched his eyes glaze over in pain and something else that she could not place.

"Professor Snape," she said, moving towards him before looking into the mirror herself. Although she thought she heard him utter *'Mother'*, she attributed the unlikely sentiment it to her over-active imagination.

"What do you see?" he asked quietly, staggering away spasmodically as if stupefied by the sight.

"Myself before the war," she replied crisply, "And you?"

"I cannot say," he whispered, his hands violently trembling.

"Cannot or will not?" cried Hermione as she brusquely turned around, leading him out of the room.

"It is of no concern to you, Professor Granger," he snarled, his eyes dangerously narrowing as he recoiled from her touch.

"This way, Professor Snape," she instructed, withdrawing her hand with as cold an expression as she could muster. She could feel the misty form. Why? How? Did he have that much control over his surroundings and his otherworldly self? She was intrigued. "Here we are, sir, mind your step."

Severus looked around the semi-dark room, focusing his eyes on the dimly lit candles and long wooden boxes. "Why have you brought me here?" he demanded, snapping his head aggressively at her direction.

"Why have you followed me?" she responded tiredly as she glided towards the rosewood box.

"You asked me to escort you, not without force, I might add!" he accused, approaching her slowly. As he passed Moody, Sybil Trelawney, Diotima Vector, Arabella Figg and Mundungus Fletcher, the candles by their sides flickered and extinguished one by one.

"Did I coerce you?" she retorted, waving a black tulip that she had just conjured violently before her.

"YOU LED ME HERE ON FALSE PRETENCES! Haven't I seen enough of death!" he shouted, slowly approaching her as he watched her drop the black tulip gently into the rosewood coffin.

Lightly brushing away something in the coffin, she cried, "When is too much enough, Professor Snape? You, of all people, should know that one is best punished for one's virtues."

"I do not know what preposterous object is at the heart of this, nor do I want to know! Release me this instant!" he screeched in his purring dulcet voice.

"I have no power over you. I am here and you are there," she explained impatiently, as she folded her arms.

"You *do not* understand, Professor Granger! I will reveal nothing to you!" he bellowed, approaching the rosewood coffin but not daring to look into it.

She snorted indignantly, evidently suppressing the urge to hex him and roll her eyes. "We are well met then. We both say nothing: you because you reveal nought and I, because I conceal nought. At least, look in and tell me what you see."

Severus peered in the coffin and stumbled forward; his hands shaking with rage as he lifted his ghostly face to hers, "What sorcery is this?" he asked, his face ashen with the realisation that he had seen his corpse. His disbelief soon turned ugly when the veracity of the matter sank in. It was indeed himself; it was not a mere likeness. However, he was unable to compose himself immediately. He reacted in the only way he knew how he lashed out at her with all manner of vituperative accusations. "You did this! The mirror, the wax effigy! You did this! Insolent girl! How dare you! Viper!"

Facing him with her full petite height, she declared stoutly, "I did nothing! It seems we are at cross-purposes*sir*. The high spirits of *kindness* may look like malice."

"I WILL NOT stand for this!" he shouted, enraged by her forced calm. He raised his ghostly wand at her and proceeded to enunciate clearly, "Legilimens."

Hermione made no attempt to stop him. She gave him unfettered access to her mind and memories. The flood of images caught Severus unawares as they inundated him. He saw himself at the final battle; the struggles to recoup their losses; the insane methods deployed to save the lives of the ailing, Harry's half-coherent stuttering, Ron's madness and himself slipping away from life. When it was all over, Severus stumbled backwards aghast, glowering at Hermione in disbelief. As a result of the recent intrusion of her mind, she was likewise privy to some of his thoughts. She too recoiled in shock when she felt his pain, anger and confusion. She realised that she had seen a heavily veiled woman with a familiar voice beckoning to Severus in the Mirror of Erised. He had seen himself as he was now a pale spectre, clad in black, translucent and desolate. She almost felt sorry for him. Almost. She shook her head to clear that thought how could she feel pity for him? Pity was cruel, especially when the person in question would rather die than have someone pity him. What a neat paradox, she thought, Severus Snape is dead and there she was actually feeling almost sorry for him.

After staring at each other with a myriad of unspoken emotions and thoughts between them, Hermione finally spoke when her breathing slowed. "We *know* now, don't we, Professor Snape?"

"Indeed," he whispered quietly, trying to steady his voice. "It must have been a terrible expression for you to watch your friends...and for what you did to help" He paused shortly before continuing in a barely audible tone, "Thank you."

She looked at him placidly, in a bid to encourage his dangerous serenity to return. "It doesn't matter; pain tells us we're human."

"But, ah!" he snarled, regaining some of his normal pallor though his hands were still shaking. "Terrible experiences pose a riddle whether a person who has them is not terrible."

"I know you're not," she offered kindly, extending her limp hand to him, her palm facing the ceiling.

"If we train our conscience, it kisses us while it hurts us," he spat, examining her hand with feigned indifference before he condescended to place the barest tips of his fingers on hers. She shivered slightly at the sensation. "Not too cold?" he mocked, his lips curling in self-satisfaction. "I'm always like this, now *more than usual*."

She smirked wearily, closing her fingers lightly on his, "We must talk; now that you know, we have much to discuss."

Chapter 9 - Tainted Beliefs

Chapter 9 of 20

Severus's thoughts on his death leads him to question Hermione more intently on his demise.

Beyond Time and Space

Chapter 9 Tainted Beliefs

"Impossible! How can it be? Why should that be? Why couldn't I see it? Why couldn't I feel it?" Severus reproached himself. "Merlin, Judica me," muttered his left brain to his right, at the feeling of Hermione's warm fingers on his. Depositing her at her Arithmancy classroom, he promised to dissect the matter with her later that evening. Though her eyes betrayed nothing, she gave him a light pressure on his fingers that, in itself, spoke volumes to him.

"What are you staring at!" they barked in synchronisation at students who gaped at them with wide opened eyes and mouths. Watching her shut the door with a final apologetic look at him, he picked himself up to his chambers.

"Why cannot I sense my death? How could I not have felt it!" he muttered angrily balling his fists. "Merlin, Judica me. Quare me repulisti, et quare tristis incedo, dum affligit me inimicus. Why? Why? Why?" his brain screamed at him. Was he so obtuse so as not have noticed his own passing? He buried his head in his hands when he sat down in his private sitting room. Dumbledore had seen it but his obduracy blinded him from acknowledging it. A sense of guilt and shame washed over him. He literally had nothing left and yet he was on the mortal plane. It had taken a silly Gryffindor know-it-all to show him how inobservant he had been. He laughed hollowly at himself. "So, the great logician had lost his perspicacity! Little wonder then that Professor Granger denigrated him. She had been justified."

He laughed again bitterly and he, Severus Snape, who had never been dependent on anyone, was left to sift through the crumbs of what Dumbledore and Hermione could give him. Did they begrudge him? No! They let him be and he had been a complete oaf with his obstinacy. It was not so bad, if one considered all the other things, he thought. He had become quite accustomed to existing as he was. He rather enjoyed not having to rest or eat. He did not have to waste valuable time on any such mortal activity. Nonetheless, he had imposed on Dumbledore and Hermione. Very likely, he would continue to be on the receiving end of their kindness. What happened when they left or died? Would he end up like Professor Binns? Would he be banished? What if Hermione felt the imposition keenly? At the thought of Hermione, he froze, tracing his fingers on his lips. Her hand, though cool by normal human standards, felt reassuringly warm to him. Her fingers were significantly warmer than his, but in another metaphysical sense, they had been icy. Her fingers had burnt him like ice. Damn that simple gesture of holding out her hand to him! Damn those burning fingers of hers! Then it dawned on him that he must have had the same effect on her and everyone else when he lived. Lucius had once joked that every hand was startled when touching his. Dumbledore added that it was precisely for that reason some thought he glowed. It was a disquieting thought.

"Quare tristis incedo," he repeated, revolted by his sentiments. He traced his lips in thought. "Quare tristis es anima mea, et quare conturbas me? Damn Professor Granger and her supercilious methods! But if she didn't show me the body...if she *hadn't* shown me my body why did she have to resort to that? Why couldn't she have told me in some other way a gentle way a kind way not induce me to stare at my own body! NO! NO! She could not have found another method! Why was I so headstrong! Mea culpa. Why was she so stubborn? Why? Why? More importantly, why am I here? Why am I *still* on this mortal plane?"

Severus could not explain it when he was alive, he longed for his too solid flesh to melt and now that he was dead, he wanted to live. There were no real differences between the living and the dead, at least, not while they both co-existed on the mortal plane. He still felt emotions, his basic senses still functioned he could hear, touch, see and smell. His death, however, would explain why he had no desire for food. No wonder he could not rest no wonder he had *no need* for rest. But he still had the gnawing need to reflect. He summoned the music box from the library and listened to Wagner's *Meistersinger* whilst tracing his lips and nibbling on his finger. Good, he was still capable of feeling physical pain at least, as far as his ethereal form would permit.

"Magnificent," he murmured listening to the overcharged music. "It's a replica of Professor Granger strange, tart, capricious and just as pompous." Strange how he felt consoled in her unobtrusive company. "No," he shook his head firmly. "She's too young," he mumbled, "Far too young just a passing fancy a school boy's desire for the impossible." The rising crescendo caught him in a tumult of sensations; it was not infrequently saucy. "Exactly like Professor Granger it has fire and courage and at the same time, she is like a fruit that had ripened too late. She is expressive and full and... NO MORE!" he spat, shattering a glass into the fireplace. "NO MORE!"

* * *

It was six when Hermione finally returned to the dungeons; she had only recently completed her grading for the day. Having spoken to Dumbledore on Severus's present state of mind, she had been permitted to dine in her chambers that evening. Wearily, she hung up her robe and made her way to the fireplace, which had been dimly lit.

"Where were you? You're late," a deceptively lilting voice purred from the shadows.

"I've been busy," she said sinking onto the length of the sofa.

"Your soup's cold," chided Severus, emerging from the shadows to sit opposite her. "Is that all you're having? Soup?"

"Yes," she replied, propping herself up and looking askance at him. "You're not attentive out of kindness, Professor Snape; what is at the heart of *your misery*?"

"I shan't tell you you will think it preposterous," he snarled before casting a spell to heat the soup. "Eat."

"If you don't ask, you will never know. You have adjusted well to many things I think you will adapt well to the present," said Hermione, waving her spoon before him.

"Eat properly, foolish woman! You will dribble it all over the carpet!" he grumbled testily through his teeth.

"And I thought you can't take anything with you when you die," she shot back, sliding down to the carpet.

Severus smirked in pleasure when he saw her spread her skirt neatly around her into a fan before picking up her spoon it reminded him of his mother. He shook his head; this woman was not his mother, she was annoying whereas his mother wasn't. "Tell me, Miss...Professor Granger, has my passing been...shall we say, well received?"

"Depends who you talk to. Have you sorted out why you're here yet?" asked she gently, blowing against the spoon to cool the soup.

He glared in disdain. How dare she harass and dismiss him in such an impertinent manner! "My questions first, Professor Granger."

She narrowed her eyes at him as if she had anticipated him to sidestep her questions. "Egotistical swine!"

He bowed affectedly as an eighteenth century chevalier would to a monarch. "One of my many soubriquets. It seems belated you should notice it now."

She matched his arch look with one of her own. "Was that an attempt at humour*ŕ*?"

"Certainly not!" he growled indignantly. "I do not indulge in such worthless enterprises."

"Do you really want to know?" she asked looking at his impassive face blankly.

"Yes," he finally said with some hesitation.

"What can I tell you that others cannot? Accio magazine rack!" she called out, summoning the object to her. After checking that everything was in order, she cast another spell to float it to her companion.

"And what is *this*?" he sneered, looking into the jumble of newspapers with distaste.

She gesticulated with her spoon at his general direction, hoping to infuriate him enough so that he would devote his energy to the newspapers. "Read them, Professor Snape. They are far more eloquent than I can ever be."

"I will do so if you get this cat away from me!" he hissed, waving his hand dismissively in a sharp flick at Crookshanks.

"He likes you," chuckled Hermione as Crookshanks tried unsuccessfully to rub his cheek on Severus's leg.

Severus glared down his hooked nose. "It seems he is marking his territory. Away, cat!"

"Come here, Crookshanks, leave the Professor alone."

Severus picked up the first of the newspapers and scowled at the headline, *Severus Snape Rehabilitated Death Eater*. Hermione picked Crookshanks up asking him in if he had eaten. "Of course, he can't reply!" said he sharply as he opened the Daily Prophet, "I've taken the liberty of feeding him already."

"Ah, so that's why he likes you! Thank you, sir," Hermione muttered, finishing her soup.

"It was the least I could do, considering how you've *condescended* to regard me," he answered in between half amused snorts of derision and disbelief before picking up another paper with the headline, *Posthumous Award for War Heroes, Severus Snape Among Their Number*.

"They're not very good with headlines," said Hermione quietly as if she could read his mind. She unbuttoned the top button of her basque and continued, "And they don't do you any justice."

He smirked momentarily at her before returning to his reading. Two hours passed in companionable silence after which Severus spoke in a thoughtful voice, "It would appear the wizarding world enjoys glorifying the dead."

"But they really meant it. You *are* a hero, as much as Professor Dumbledore, Harry or Ron! The Order felt your loss keenly," she offered, braiding her hair into a pigtail for the night.

He laughed empty. "Spare me your histrionics, Professor Granger. I am still hated by the students and my colleagues."

"Severus Snape! You must cease this wallowing. You are not so unworthy as you think!" responded Hermione with tremendous pique. He grimaced and furrowed his brow, rubbing his forehead uneasily with one hand and tracing his lips with another. "Don't give me that look, Professor Snape!" She paused and added in an acerbic tone, "It hurts to see you so forlorn." She placed a hand on his knee briefly.

"What about my students? What do they think on me? Do not think me ignorant of that! The Slytherins could not care less for me; they are only concerned with themselves," he spat with great force, as he bristled with violent energy.

"I do not know whether that is true. Have you ever considered that the rest of us care? There was a general outpouring of grief..."

He interposed huskily in a falsely modulated voice, "Do you think I will believe that I have returned to this pathetic existence for this?"

"What is your business then, if not affirmation?" she quizzed, her arms at her hips.

"I only want two things," he paused, removing himself from the armchair. Drifting to the window and looking out into the dark he continued, "But I will not speak on it!"

She sighed in frustrated exasperation. "Once again, I put it to you. Will not or cannot?"

"What does it signify?" he hissed, wringing his hands behind his back.

"I promise not to laugh."

"Even if you want to?" he questioned lowly, his indifferent voice masking his uncertainty.

"If I laugh, it is with you and not at you," she said, approaching the window and standing beside him without looking at him.

"Acceptance for what I am and what I was. Accept me as an ill-tempered, ill-mannered and solitary fiend. Cannot people tell me that they will take me as I am and recognise me for it? There. I've said it: recognition and acceptance! How can anyone..." His voice faltered.

Hermione could not speak, but her silent tears on her cheeks told Severus everything he needed to know on the issue.

Footnotes:

My Latin is a little rusty. I hope the glossary provides accurate translations.

Judica me is "judge me".

Merlin, Judica me. Quare me repulisti, et quare tristis incedo, dum affligit me inimicus can be taken to mean "Merlin, judge me. Why have you cast me off, and why do I go sorrowful while the enemy afflicts me?"

Quare tristis incedo...Quare tristis es anima mea, et quare conturbas me can mean "why are you sorrowful...oh, my sad soul, why do you trouble me?"

Mea culpa can be understood as "I am guilty" or "It's my fault".

Chapter 10 - Cognitive Contemplation

Chapter 10 of 20

Upset by the revelation of his death, Severus wanders around the castle at night and learns some rather interesting things.

A/N: For simplicity's sake, titles of books, journals etc are underlined and emphasises are italicised.

Beyond Time and Space

Chapter 10 Cognitive Contemplation

The opportunity for Severus to reflect on the Daily Prophet's reports as well as Hermione's knowing silence and quiet unobtrusive ways presented itself after midnight. Oh, if he could only blind himself to what she was her habits, her tastes, her teaching methods she was a fine figure of a woman in every possible way. His eyes glittered with pride as he watched her mark the idiots' parchments. She had succeeded in getting past his logician's puzzle in her first year, and look at her now she had indeed come a long way since then. Despite the fact that she was still lacking in terms of analytical political philosophy, Severus was delighted with the development of her mind. While she was not as thorough a Potions Professor as he had been, there was nothing a few intensive weeks under his tutelage would not improve. He made up his mind to impart all his alchemical knowledge to her; after all, what would happen if he were to one day fade into nothingness? Yes, he would begin the intensive training conditions after they finished The Republic.

Such a woman *a woman*, he reminded himself, concerned with only the ultimate virtue of knowledge such a woman was truly beautiful. Hermione Granger had it all, according to Severus's mind as he mentally ticked off his list. She had developed good taste; she was sensible; she possessed a keen mind and a seemingly frail porcelain body belying her tenacious spirit. She had such fire, such life, and such passion for her work. Yet yet if only a basilisk would look at him and put him out of his misery! He needed to clear his mind of Hermione, his death and his mother he required a walk. Yes, he would walk; then he would go sit in his office and work. He would feel better after that.

"Professor Granger," he began softly as he materialised in his library, "I shall be patrolling the castle; you *should be able* to sleep this morning."

"It's two-fifteen, the students are already abed," she yawned, stretching languidly, unaware that it revealed her figure to the best advantage. Severus averted his eyes and heard her shut a heavy book before she continued, "Shall I wait up for you?"

"It will not be necessary, I want to *be alone*."

"Later in the day then?" she proposed, shuffling to the chaise lounge.

He gave his assent. "I *must* away. Good night, Professor Granger."

"Night, Professor Snape," she yawned again.

He bowed; hesitating as to whether it would more appropriate if he waited till she was asleep no it would be better if had left, and with a last look of regret, he left his chambers.

Hermione had been correct in her assessment; there were indeed no students loitering about. This was certainly a remarkable improvement vis-à-vis the years when he endured the Golden Trio. Severus twitched his lips into a half sneer as he recalled the days when he read Potter's thoughts while the boy was under his invisibility cloak. Foolish boy! Did he think he could evade a Legilimens? "Potter is nothing like Professor Granger," he thought, drifting in the direction of the staff room. "She conceals nothing yet reveals nothing." The overture of the *Meistersinger* resounded in his mind as he pondered on the enigma that was Hermione. She resembled the tune in so many ways magnificent and overcharged with such flavours and forces that have yet to be described. The overture was her writ small not infrequently saucy, strange, tart and *too young*. Damn her! Why did she haunt him? Why did she have to resemble that which he loved? Why did she have to be almost like that solemn flurry of erudite preciousness and lace that was his mother? Why was he obsessing about her when he hid himself beneath the *refinements of decay*?

Putting aside these unsettling thoughts, Severus sought to reflect on his death. It was always easier to rationalise something that concerned oneself, Minerva McGonagall once told him. It was certainly true in his current situation. Try as he might, however, Severus was unable to see why the wizarding world changed their opinion of him in such a dramatic manner overnight. When Fudge was still Minister of Magic, he had been running what Remus Lupin called a 'smear campaign' against Dumbledore's Order. He had wanted Severus to be permanently incarcerated in Azkaban for showing him the mark. In fact, anyone who failed to prescribe to the Ministry's guidelines was a suspected Death Eater. The Ministry proscribed all civil wizarding organisations at that time too! Stupid! Severus smirked wryly. Fudge had intended to imprison the members of the Order and Dumbledore's so-called Army in Azkaban at one time or another. The wretched arse! Not even the Headmaster was spared from the lunacy. And now, Severus was effectively dead because he had been foolish enough to have had a direct hand in bring down one of the darkest dark wizards of their time and the sheer irony of it he was viewed as a hero! Absurd! He was not cut from the same cloth as Moody or even Potter. He was a greasy git with uneven teeth and a foul temper. Other than his mother, Dumbledore and Minerva were the only ones who really cared for him. They would always care for him whenever he returned worse for wear from Death Eater meetings.

"Hmm, he muttered, nearing the staff room, "Very strange." Why the sudden change in perception? There had been other deaths; why were they not similarly honoured with scholarships and posthumous awards? Surely, they were more deserving than he was!

"Severus!" exclaimed a deep baritone voice, cutting short his reverie. "I don't see you at the common room anymore." He turned to find himself face to face with the Bloody Baron.

"Ah, Baron," muttered the younger spectre sotto voce, "If you only knew how I frighten my children as well."

The silver spluttered figure harrumphed with annoyance, "Still self-deprecating, lad? You don't know what they say about you. You have amassed quite a following among our young Slytherin ladies." The Baron ignored Severus's snort of disbelief. "I don't understand it! I am certainly more handsome and goodness knows in my day, I had more amours than Dumbledore has had sweets."

"Don't be ridiculous, Baron!" Severus snarled through his teeth.

The Baron gave him a look of utter boredom. "Phineas did say you were a paradox! You're a Slytherin, lad; one of the best! You've succeeded in your ambition. You have come into your own. Why are not you happy? If not happy, content. You are now acknowledged for your rôle as spy most our young ladies find it attractive and mysterious, or so I hear."

"They will forget me by the end of the week; I'm just another dead wizard."

"A wizard whose former students remember with respect," corrected the Bloody Baron matter-of-factly.

Severus's mood darkened slightly. "That's the Slytherin viewpoint, I've spoilt them."

The Baron snarled in response. "But you don't love them. We must have something to love just as we have something to hate and fear."

"How is this relevant to my children?"

The Baron was beginning to lose his patience. "The Herbology apprentice, a Miss Weasley, a pretty sort, speaks highly of you. Old man Dumbledore thinks you more than decent and some of your students deliver black tulips en masse to your office."

"Professor Granger's responsible for that!"

"The staff has long known that it is your favourite bloom."

"And who divined the truth?" Severus hissed dangerously, "The old man?"

"Your apprentice something about your dreams as you lay dying," replied the Baron carelessly.

"WHAT!" the Potions Master shrieked.

"You'll wake the castle up, lad! Think on it, Severus. When you want to move on, seek me out and I'll tell you the theory behind it. It's infinitely better than being bound to this place! But I have not the courage. Remember, lad, I'll tell you how. Regret nothing!" And with that, the Bloody Baron faded into another part of the castle.

Severus was fuming. Hermione had probed his mind! How dare she! Impossible! Severus turned ashen as he slumped on an armchair in the staff room. It could only have meant that his mind had been vulnerable to attack as he lay dying. His mind, which he kept sealed from everyone and *she* had trespassed upon it! What else had she gleaned? He paused in mid rant when he realised that she had been discrete. She must have started the floral tributes, which the staff soon adopted. The students, it was likely, followed suit. Only Minerva and Dumbledore had been privy to the information, for the Deputy Headmistress placed a yearly order on Severus's behalf for a single stalk of black tulip. Only they knew that it was for his mother's death anniversary. Only they knew the reason the staff, Severus recalled had speculated that it might have something to do with an old flame. But now, Severus was certain that Hermione knew as well.

"I thought nothing haunted the dead!" he spat feverishly, rubbing his temple gently. "Oh, coward conscience how dost thou afflict me?" He rose abruptly and loped to the staff notice board. "Perhaps reading the latest gossip would silence the sleeping demons raging to escape," he mumbled.

There was nothing of import there save the sudden appointments of Remus Lupin and Hermione Granger to teaching chairs halfway into the school year. He was about to return to his usual seat when he caught sight of a cream-coloured parchment. Examining it closely, Severus discovered that it was the minutes of the last staff meeting, which was dated a day before his death. He did not know why they called them 'staff meetings' when it was often just Dumbledore's monologues. Smirking a little, he turned his attention to the loops and curls of Minerva's heavy Elizabethan hand, which read:

Poppy and Hermione have not been able to save Severus. In view of his long service to the school, it is proposed that a scholarship be named for him. Severus has contributed far more than any of us. He has worked to improve Hogwarts' protective wards. He put himself at risk for our sakes due to a sense of pride that many of us are hard pressed to find within ourselves. He had also never betrayed me, Albus Dumbledore. You must be aware of the late Mr Riddle's desire to eliminate me. Severus had been my secret keeper; he had been the secret keeper of the Order and despite countless attempts by Mr Riddle to unearth the truth, Severus never revealed a thing. It was not until the end that Mr Riddle saw Severus for what he truly was, a man with the nobility of the ancients. The noble type of man, as Severus is, experiences itself as determining values, it does not do anything but judge. It knows itself to be that which first accords honour to things. It is value creating. The noble human being or wizard, in this case, honours himself as one who has power over himself, who knows how to speak and to be silent, who delights in being severe and hard with himself and respects all severity and hardness. He understood how to honour; his profound reverence for the truth makes him worthy of our remembrance. Therefore, let us give Severus an eternal display of our affection; let him inspire future students; let his memory live in those who further their education under his name. This is the only thing we can give him that will enable him to truly rest in peace. Severus has a heart, which though it will shortly stop, is a heart nonetheless. He has always demanded love to be loved and nothing else, with hardness, with insanity, with terrible eruptions, against those who denied him love. His is a story of a poor fellow unsated in love, who had to invent hell in order to send it to those who did not want to love him; and who finally, having gained knowledge about human love, had to re-invent himself. Anyone who feels so utterly wretched, who knows this about love seeks death. Since Severus is headed in that direction, why do not we give him the love that he always sought by naming a scholarship after him. The funds shall come from the school's board of governors. Shall we vote on the matter? Excellent! No 'nays'; the 'ayes' have it. The Severus Snape Alchemy Scholarship it is.

Severus staggered backwards on rereading it the Hogwarts staff had voted for him; it was a display of solidarity and affection for him, even Remus and Hermione had agreed to it. They accepted him for what he was without question, without doubt they declared the scholarship to him on that ground. He fell back into the chair and buried his face in his hands with a soft sigh. "The maudlin old goat had been reading Nietzsche prior to the speech," he muttered, curling his lips into a self-deprecating half-tortured smirk.

He was still wrapped in such thoughts when he became aware of the unwarranted glare of the sun and the bustling shuffling footsteps outside the staff room. It was still early yet he noted as he looked to the clock on the mantelpiece. It was only a little past nine in the morning. He might as well make his way back to the Potions classroom lest Hermione tired herself out again. Students still stared at him as he passed, but the screaming and fainting had mercifully stopped. They had learned to treat the ethereal Severus Snape as they had the corporeal one. Outside the stairs to the dungeons, he caught sight of a group of young Ravenclaws and Gryffindors playing exploding snap and eating chocolate frogs. He was about to tell them off when he overheard one of them say, "Blimey, I've got Dumbledore again. I wanted Snape."

"The Snape chocolate frog cards are out?" asked a girl with pigtails and freckles.

"Yes, my brother says he's seen one. He's one of the most powerful wizards, you know," replied the first boy who had spoken.

"I've got Agrippa!" exclaimed the boy next to him.

"And I've got a Snape!" announced a third with decided pride.

"Where?" the rest cried in unison, clamouring to see it. Severus momentarily caught his scowling profile on a card of blue as the boy who found it held it atop his head possessively.

"You'll wrinkle him," insisted the boy before succumbing to his friends' persuasions to pass it around.

"Wicked," said a girl with big teeth. "He's even rarer than Agrippa!" She turned over the card and read, "Severus Snape, late Potions Master at Hogwarts, considered by many to be one of the shrewdest wizards of modern times. Professor Snape is particularly famous for his recent defeat of the dark wizard, Lord Voldemort, for improving the shelf lives of potions, his research on wolfsbane and his discovery of thirty alchemical by-products of hellebore. Associates of Professor Snape disclosed that he enjoyed political philosophy, poetry and Russian opera."

"Cool!" said the first boy who had spoken that morning. The information was so riveting to him that he dropped his jaw in what could be assumed to be awe.

"Well, well, a meeting at this hour?" Severus said at last, regaining his composure. "What is this assembly for?"

"Nothing, sir," they mumbled, uncomfortably shifting their feet.

"What are five young Gryffindors and Ravenclaws such as yourselves doing indoors, so far from the Great Hall at this time of day?" he questioned in a slow deliberate manner, watching them squirm under his obsidian gaze. "Ten points from each of you! Now, be off with you!" When the students remained rooted, he continued, "If you must spoil your appetites, do so with something vaguely nutritional!"

As they hastened to scamper off, they failed to notice the Potions Master's contemptuously curling his lips into a half amused and self-satisfied smirk.

Footnotes:

The quote "O, coward conscience how dost thou afflict me?" is adapted from Shakespeare's Richard III.

Dumbledore's speech in the staff meeting minutes was inspired by the following, Nietzsche's Twilight of the Idols, Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy and Plato's Theaetetus.

Chapter 11 - Detente

Chapter 11 of 20

While Severus and Hermione converse, he makes an altogether not unexpected request.

A/N: For simplicity's sake, titles of books, journals etc are underlined and emphasises are italicised.

Beyond Time and Space

Chapter 11 Détente

Everybody in and about Hogwarts who had ever heard of Severus Snape was disposed to pay him attention on his return from the grave. Dinner parties and card parties were specially thrown for him and the invitations from the staff members flowed in so rapidly that he had soon the displeasure of apprehending he was never to have a disengaged day. Every invitation for tea and conversation with the various Hogwarts Professors came amiss to him, despite the fact he could not longer physically partake of the food. His reticent and solitary habits made evening parties awkward for him, and his youthful experiences had given him a poor taste for dinner parties at the Great Hall. He was a little shocked at the want of proper manners of his old students, for the more daring of the older dunderheads returned his scowling incivility by timidly asking for his autograph in their copies of *Arsenius Jigger's Magical Drafts and Potions* and *Moste Potente Potions*. The nerve of them! How dare they ask him to desecrate a book through such means! He made notes in his books, not useless scratching! He was glad; in the meantime that Hermione had not succumbed to the fashions of the day. She had, in fact, done more than the others. Although she was exposed to the odious suspicions and impertinent remarks of the students for not throwing him a dinner party, Severus was of the opinion that these sentiments were nothing more than pitiful resentment at sensible good taste. Soon enough, as human interest waned, he was once again left to his own devices when it was conclusively proven that death had *not* improved his civility.

Thus, by the end of a hectic fortnight of teaching, endless dinner invitations and evening parties in his honour at the Great Hall and the individual lecturers' chambers, Severus was glad to be able to rest his mind. Death, evidently, did not bring peace for one's mind. As he slumped back in his sofa by the hearth, he closed his eyes wearily. He had enjoyed the attentions he could not deny that yet he was distinctly uneasy. Did the rest of the teaching staff really care for him as a person, an individual or were they following Dumbledore and Minerva's leads? Remus Lupin had sought his forgiveness for not restraining his friends from bullying him in their youth; he was astounded that Sophia Sinistra had played the coquette with him; Pomona Sprout clucked about him like he was a favourite son. Were they all kind because he was dead? Remus had cried when Severus arrived for his dinner appointment at the Defence Against the Dark Arts office; the werewolf had actually been pleased that the spectre had some inkling of backhanded warmth towards him. Severus rubbed his forehead gently as if soothing a headache. Then, without warning, he banged his fist at the armrest. He had allowed his vanity to get the better of him; no more he would get his body back he would be resurrected and none of these false shows of kindness would remain. At least the general student population was still terrified of him. He smirked; he had not lost in touch in that field.

He looked to the clock when he realised it was dark. Hermione was late; she would starve herself to death if she persisted in this manner. She had chosen to absent herself from all the dinner parties. His ire rose when he realised that no one save Dumbledore, Minerva and himself noted the young lady's conspicuous absence. "They do not know what a gem they are neglecting," he muttered. Frowning at what he perceived was his colleagues' slight on Hermione and the young witch's self-effacement. "Silly creature! Stupid woman! Hiding in *my* library!"

As soon as those words left his lips, the very person of his speculations returned, lighting the sitting room with both her effervescent presence and neatly kindled ambers. "Where were you?" he demanded lowly, waving a ghostly hand and lighting the rest of the chambers dimly.

"Is it of any concern to you?" she retaliated softly, sinking into the sofa opposite him. She met his penetrating obsidian gaze without flinching so as to give him full access to her mind.

He snorted indignantly at what he saw. "Why were you at the arithmancy office? These rooms are yours as much as mine."

"Aren't you a being who guards his privacy jealously?" she rejoined, her hands a steeple at her lips.

"The visiting rounds are over if you do not know, Professor Granger," he said, thoughtfully tracing his lips. "You have had nothing but tea all day; eat," he continued commandingly, eyes still glazed in reflection.

"I've had biscuits," she said.

"Biscuits indeed!" he snorted derisively as he summoned a tray before him.

"What? A fat pigeon!" she exclaimed incredulously as she lifted the cover.

"No, stupid woman! It's a chicken. Eat before you faint," he icily instructed, picking up the Daily Prophet from the magazine rack.

She rolled her eyes and scowled at him with a snarl, "Male chauvinist swine."

"I most certainly am not!" he answered coolly, reading the newspapers. "Lupin told me you nearly fainted. Hogwarts does not require a staff of ghosts. Eat, you silly insufferable creature!"

"I *did not* almost faint; I merely lost my footing," she protested, glowering hotly.

He tossed the newspaper aside carelessly and proceeded to casually fence her in her sofa. "Impertinent woman! The description I received was ~~not~~ one of a tripping person."

She rolled her eyes and pointed out, "I can walk right through you if I want."

"But you will not," he said in a clipped tone. "Now, eat before..."

"Before what?" she challenged.

"You don't want to know, Professor Granger," he said, quietly retreating to his sofa. Pleased that she begrudgingly took a nibble at the chicken, he continued, "I want you to bring me back."

Hermione studied him playing with his fingers before cautiously answering, "You are back!"

"Not like this! Back to life!" he hissed vehemently. "I want to live again there are some things that I must do."

"Can't you do them now?" she asked, swallowing another mouthful, her eyes focused on his wringing hands. "You've done very well these last few weeks. It is almost as if you are still among us."

He laughed empty in a frightening way. "I have been more adept than Binns but that is no consolation. I need my body, not this...this..." he declared with almost vociferous desperation as he gestured at his present form.

She sighed and stared at her chicken. "Why do you want your life? Why do you want to return? You want my help? I deserve to know."

"No, you DO NOT!" he hissed, holding tightly onto the armrests. "I have my reasons. I cannot be like this...when I know there will...that is...there is bound to be high insurmountable obstacles to what I wish to accomplish!"

Hermione was intrigued to see the rigidly self controlled Potions Master stammering whilst nervously tracing his lips and tapping his foot. What was it that he needed a physical form to accomplish?

"Obstacles or opposition, sir? Are they not details as well? Who would dare oppose you? Who would dare inveigle you for anything?" she mocked though her eyes remained cold and unblinking.

He narrowed his eyes and curled his upper lip. "I would rather you not know."

"What if I do accede to your request?" At the sounds of her offer, he started imperceptibly but regained his composure when she continued, "What if I helped you? What if I failed in my attempt? What then? Would you trust me to carry out your task for you?"

He laughed almost wildly at that juncture; the woman had raised his hopes and simultaneously dashed it. "And how could you when you do not know what it will encompass?"

"Because I would like to know what I'm getting myself into before committing myself to it. So tell me..."

He interrupted her, not wanting to hear more. "I will only decide what to do if you fail," he snapped irritably. "So, will you help me or no?" He mentally chided himself for sinking so low that he had to ask for help. That he actually supplicated in this case when he wanted to beg for something else was not lost on him.

After a long silence, in which both Hermione and Severus were weighing their options and mentally assessing each other, she finally spoke. "You trust me to do so?"

He scowled. "I trusted you with my library, didn't I?"

"Why?"

"So that I can have my apartments back," he lied, turning towards the window so as to avoid her gaze.

"It is a remarkable coincidence," she commented, moving to the window and looking intently outside at the darkness. "I anticipated this," she continued and he arched a brow. "While you were at your soirees, I have been trying to improve on this piece of nature," she sniggered slightly.

"And what have you surmised?" he asked following her into the library.

"I must bring nature's preserver back," she answered with a mischievous smirk.

"How altruistic of you, Professor Granger," he silkily purred with a look of supreme irony on his face.

She laughed hollowly. "Altruism is a philosophical impossibility. I have my own reasons."

"Which are?" he questioned more out of curiosity than politeness.

"I conceal nothing you're the logician, you figure it out." Her tart reply earned her a snarl from Severus. When she saw that he was amenable to hearing more, she continued, "From the books on the matter, I've learnt that the soul is the only thing immortal."

Severus waved his hand dismissively; he looked decidedly bored. "Have you read Dr John Dee?" he purred lightly in a falsely casual air when he caught her nonplussed look. "The black volume, it should be on the top shelf; the rightmost book, next to Potions and Poisons. To your left, Professor Granger!"

She followed his directions and found herself in front a bookcase that she rarely consulted. "It's all dark magic," she cried in slight alarm.

"The dark arts are my passion," he hissed slowly. "Don't stare at the books, ridiculous woman! Take Dee's Necromancy down!"

Hermione flipped through the book. "For a volume written by John Dee and Michael Kelly; it's extremely comprehensive." She tapped a page lightly before meeting his eyes. "So, you wish to be a resuscitated cadaver. Surely not, you'll lose your looks."

He leaned forward on the desk so that he was only centimetres from her face. Was she trying to be coy with him? Or was she being sarcastic? "What difference does it make?" he answered, undecided as to whether he should test the waters.

"I've grown accustomed to your face," she said plainly, her eyes flickering for a moment in a soft glowing warmth.

"Page one hundred and fifty-eight, Professor Granger," he whispered slowly, suddenly overwhelmed, yet unwilling to break their eye contact.

"How original!" she exclaimed with a derisive snort and read aloud, "The trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised." She paled when she saw his faraway look and a devilish grin as he traced his lips with his long finger. He looked almost rakishly charming but disconcertingly so. "You've successfully attempted this before, haven't you?" she asked with sudden realisation.

He merely smirked and sat by the armrest of her chair, leaning so as to gain access to her ear, he purred in a dangerous hiss, "What do you think?"

"If it's dark magic, I won't do it!" she declared, pushing the book away.

However, he stayed her hand by seizing it firmly. "Good, you self-righteous prude! The cold should wake you!" he snarled. "There is no such thing as dark magic; only its application and the ends to which it tends can be considered. Unsophisticated philistines call it *dark* because people such as myself engage in it. They believe that we do so for personal gain, and I," he lowered his voice, "Do not deny it. The research value of such attempts is most *enterprising*. Have you considered that these forms of magic are merely controversial and as such, cannot be categorised neatly into a single discipline. The great potential of these arts can be deployed for life preservation *among other things*."

She took in his words with a frown and protested, "But it uses the omega!"

"So?" he replied carelessly, still perched on her chair, leaning somewhat on her arm.

She whispered hoarsely, "It is the sign of the last judgement and the end of the world!"

He narrowed his eyes at himself; it would be up to him to re-educate her then. "The Greeks were not put off by that little fact. Besides *my dear Professor Granger*, you fail to notice that the incantation of 'aba bachabe abracadabra'; it cannot be all that devious."

"Abracadabra!" she exclaimed in nervous disbelief. Scanning the subsequent pages, she saw that Severus had been right. She was dumbfounded. "Do you know muggles use abracadabra as a magical word. Muggle illusionists use it..."

He cut her off swiftly. "I know, I was made to do a semester of Muggle Studies, if you must know."

"How can you be so blasé about it?" she asked, sounding almost hysterical.

"Because muggles don't know that the incantation is worthless on its own. It has to be combined with another incantation and potions to be truly effective. Bloody muggle showmen! Ignorant dunderheads!" he impatiently explained.

She continued staring at him in shock, uncertain as to the veracity of his report. She did not know how best she should react.

Ignoring her blank and dazed expression, Severus continued, "It has worked for me in the past when I tried it. You might want to take note of the chapter in its entirety. And these books." He snapped his fingers in the direction of his left and summoned two tomes.

Hermione caught them as soon as they floated towards her. "Amulets for Souls and what's this? Epistemological Alchemy," she read off their spines. She paled and looked at Severus who pretended to engage Crookshanks in a staring contest.

She blinked and saw that her eyes were not deceiving her. She quickly opened the second book and found the title page staring at her. It read:

Epistemological Alchemy:

An Enquiry into Restoratives for the Departed.

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Magical Arts,

St John's College, University of Cambridge,

In partial fulfilment of the Degree of Doctor Magicorum Artium

by

Severus X. Snape.

1981.

Hermione was amazed and fascinated. Severus had a D.Mag.A. and no one knew! Truly amazing! She trained her eyes on him as he left her chair and gracefully picked out a volume from one of the shelves.

"Well, Professor Granger, I shall leave you to your reading. When you've found a plausible method, you know where I shall be. And, Professor Granger, kindly remove my corpse from the crypt," he said silkily as if nothing had happened. Hermione could do nothing but nod dumbly at him; her mind was still reeling with what she had just learnt. Her wretchedness increased when he swept out of the library without so much as a backward glance.

Footnotes:

In this story, D. Mag. A. stands for Doctor Magicorum Artium. It's a wizarding PhD.

Chapter 12 - Being in Logos

Chapter 12 of 20

After seeing Harry and Ron in their present states, Severus indirectly gains a new perspective on things.

Beyond Time and Space

Chapter 12 Being in Logos

Human nature is so well disposed towards those who are in interesting situations that a person, who either suffers great trauma or death is sure of being kindly spoken of. A month had not passed since Harry Potter and Ronald Weasley's names were at Hogwarts, before they were, by some means or other, discovered to have lost nearly every recommendation of person and mind that they could lay claims to in their early youth. It was not another month, in June, when Severus finally came face to face with his most hated students.

The caregivers at St Mungo's believed that a brief sojourn to a familiar place would improve their spirits. St Mungo's, therefore, applied to the Headmaster at Hogwarts, who immediately acceded to the hospital's modest request. Because the invitation was issued with such alacrity, Harry Potter, Ronald Weasley and Luna Lovegood found themselves at Hogwarts at the end of the school year. Severus had the good fortune to receive them alongside Poppy Pomfrey, Albus Dumbledore and Hermione Granger. He had been more than stunned by the vivid alteration in Potter and young Weasley. Potter, at least, still had his wits about him, even if he was a worse stuttering idiot than Quirrell. Young Weasley, on the other hand, could scarcely care for himself. And that nurse with them, undoubtedly a Potter devotee, looked so completely ineffectual that Severus wondered as to her capabilities.

"Really," sneered Severus disdainfully at the sight before him. "Am I needed at the reunion of the Trio?"

"My boy, I have no doubt that Harry will improve on seeing you," said Dumbledore quietly, instructing Hagrid to take their guests' things to the infirmary.

"It does nothing to improve *my* mood, Headmaster. I shall be in my rooms if you should require me; Professor Granger can welcome them herself."

Noticing Harry making towards them, Dumbledore made no attempt to stay Severus. As the Potions Master moved to flee from the guests, Harry sputtered, "Pro...Prof...Profess...Professor...Sn...Snape - I...thought...you're d...dead!"

Before any reply could be made, a loud banging sound elicited a piercing scream from the annoying boy-who-lived-again who proceeded to curl up into a ball on the ground with his hands on his head. Stunned, Severus watched silently as Luna Lovegood coaxed the cowering and desperately quivering figure.

"It's all right, love," she cooed, her overly wide eyes glistening moistly.

"W...What w...was th...that?" Harry asked shakily without removing his hands from the back of his head.

Luna stroked his back. "Someone's playing exploding snap the students. We used to play it, remember?"

Harry quivered. "L...Loud, don...don't l...let it c...come n...near m...me, L...Luna. D...Don't l...leave me, L...Luna. D...Don't l...let th...them g...get me!"

"Dear, dear, I'm here. Look at me, be a good boy, Harry," Luna pleaded. "Look away from the floor. That's a good boy; look at me see, I'm here. I'll take care of you, all right?" she soothed, embracing the trembling figure while helping him to rise.

Severus had not anticipated this; Potter looked thinner than he had ever done in all his years of antagonising him this was not the young Potter he despised with a vengeance. This was not the Potter that resembled his miserable father and Sirius Black in arrogance. In fact, Severus was completely unacquainted with this young man. Just as he was about to enquire after Potter, Ron crept up behind him and put a hand through him. Realising that, Severus turned sharply at the redhead and started to rebuke him, "Bloody fool! What were you trying to do?"

Ron only laughed wildly, clapping his hands with the delight of a four year old and tried to repeat his experiment. His second endeavour proved to be a failure as Severus summoned his powers to render himself impenetrable.

"A veritable fortress," commented Hermione snidely, as she pulled Ron away. She had to struggle to restrain her delirious friend as he wailed loudly at his failure. "I've a present for you. It's a wizard's chess set; you'll like that."

Hearing Ron's cries of joy, Harry screamed and pointed his shaky finger at Severus, "Y...You're de...dead! W...Why? Why are... y...you ba...back? Why...you an...and n...not Sirius?"

Severus bowed and curled his lips contemptuously. "How kind of you to notice, Potter."

Madam Pomfrey, looking increasingly flustered, quickly ushered everyone into the infirmary.

Dumbledore only shook his head as he warded the infirmary's doors. "This is a very merry party," sighed Dumbledore.

Watching Hermione soothe Ron whilst Luna cooed softly to Harry, Severus turned to the Headmaster. "Can nothing be done for Weasley?"

Dumbledore sighed, "Hermione has tried your formula the one you had used for the Longbottoms, but to no avail. She believes it must have been combination of the half-hit killing curse and Nagini's venom that made him resistant to it."

Severus almost slapped himself for his inobservant stupidity. Of course, Ron was unable to recover the Order had saved him from the avada kedavra. Instead of killing him, it irrevocably damaged the nerve centres of his brain. Moreover, the Dark Lord had tampered with Nagini's venom. Severus himself made the adjustments to the snake's venom centres. Together, the partial killing curse and the venom would incapacitate anyone permanently. It was only natural that his counter formula had failed; they were not dealing with a simple cruciatus curse. Young Weasley's memories and cognitive abilities were not lying dormant, as was the case with the Longbottoms; they had been completely obliterated. There would be no hope for him. Severus recalled the arrant stupidity of Potter and Weasley who had stumbled into Nagini's chamber. How like Weasley to exhibit the loyalty he was so famed for by throwing himself before the snake as it sought to lunge at Potter! How typical it was of Potter to attempt to save his friend from Bellatrix's killing curse! How typical of Potter to insist that the eldest Weasley son remove his brother to safety! And to what end? It would have turned out better had young Weasley actually died. At least, he would not be a burden on anyone, as he clearly was in his present state. He reflected on the onerous burden that was his ghost for a few minutes, his features darkening with every thought.

Whilst engaged in such thoughts, Severus neglected to hear Hermione calling for him. "Severus!" she shouted, catching his attention and shattering his speculations. In so doing, she only succeeded in making the invalids shriek and laugh once more.

"What designation did you just employ?" he snarled, his lips curling in rampant anger.

She defended herself with a scowl. "I had to get your attention!" Her arms akimbo and her eyes burning with annoyance, she continued, "Now that I've claimed it, go talk to Harry! He wants to speak to you."

"But I am disinclined to do so," he hissed dangerously, earning glares from Dumbledore and Hermione.

"Do you want to help yourself? If so, speak to Harry!" she commanded, moving to help Madam Pomfrey. "NOW!"

"If only you would stop," muttered Severus, sotto voce.

"If only *you* would stop," Hermione responded crossly, directly meeting his eyes.

"Very well." He drifted to Harry still glowering at Hermione. "If it will make *you* stop!"

Dumbledore shook his head with a light smile and followed Severus to Harry's bed.

"Y...You're l...lucky, Sn...Snape," stammered the quivering young man. "Wh...Why c...could...couldn't it ha...have b...been S...Sirius?"

Severus scowled at hearing his old adversary's name. "I don't know, Potter, and it's *still* Professor Snape to you!"

"B...But y...you're h...here! Wh...What h...have y...you d...done to 'Mi...Mione? Sh...She's be..become y...you." Harry demanded unevenly, tightening his grip on Luna's hand.

"Nothing!" grunted the Potions Master. Giving the lad a disparaging look, he continued, "Yet you two are infinitely more enviable than Mr Weasley!"

"N...No!" said Harry firmly. "He d...does...doesn't kn...know an...any...anything anymore. He l...looks ha...happy th...that w...way. He is...isn't l...like us. He's the...the one wh...who ha...has it g...good."

"There now, Harry, do not tire yourself unnecessarily," chirped Dumbledore quickly, offering his bag of sweets to the lad. "Oh, my boy," shrugged the crestfallen older wizard, re-pocketing his sweets. "You mustn't waste all your energy at once."

"Wh...Why am I l...like th...this wh...when ev...every...everyone s...seems the...the s...same? Wh...Why am I af...afraid of ev...every...everything? I d...don't l...like it," stuttered the-boy-who-lived-again petulantly.

"Some circumstances are beyond anyone's control," ventured Severus sagely.

"He's right, my boy be thankful that you're alive. You have everything awaiting you in the future. Miss Lovegood will accept you for what you are, regardless of how self-conscious you are about yourself. Hermione has treated you and Mr Weasley as she always has. She is still cantankerous, I concede; as you are, might I add. But she has learnt to grieve. You too must to grieve. Severus is grieving too."

"I am doing no such thing!" protested the Potions Master vociferously.

"Whatever it is," chuckled the old man sadly. "You must accept, Harry, that anger is a part of the process, so is grief. There is no shame in either. You shall always be one of us."

"H...How ca...can y...you s...say th...that wh...when y...you l...look, fe...feel and s...sound ex...exactly th...the s...same!" bellowed the sputtering invalid. "You d...don't kn...know wh...what it's l...like to s...suffer l...like we d...do. L...Look at 'Mi...Mione be...being ex...exactly l...like Sn...Snape! You th...think th...that's gri...grieving? L...look at Ron, h...he's a ha...happy id...idiot, is th...that wh...what a...awaits us wh...when we l...live? L...look at m...me, I ha...have al...almost s...single-ha...handedly de...fe...defeated Vol...de...mort and ev...every s...sound gr...grates in my ears and mi...mind. If I'm g...going to end up like Ron, ca...can't I be over and d...done w...with it? Wh...Why m...must I be as I am? Pro...Professor Sn...Snape's d...dead, b...but he's back and not...nothing's ch...changed for h...him, ex...except for his app...appearance. You d...don't understand, Pro...Professor Dum...Dumbledore! You just d...don't! Not you, not Her...mione, not Pro...Professor Sn...Snape, not Mrs Weas...Weasley no one understands!"

"Qualify yourself, Potter," hissed Severus indignantly, "Your lady seems to understand. Quit your snivelling and do not insult the Headmaster or Professor Granger. They possess wisdom with intelligence. She is far more adept than you are in coping with your war wounds, physical or otherwise. If you had any sense, you would have realised since your eleventh year that Professor Granger is effectual in her ways. She possesses a strength of character, understanding and coolness of judgement, which you cannot hope to aspire to."

"Severus, behave," warned Dumbledore.

Ignoring the buzzing from the Headmaster's direction, the Potions Master narrowed his eyes at Potter and went on, "She, though young, is qualified to be your counsellor and you constantly did not heed her! Arrant knave! Do you presume to know what she thinks and how she feels?"

"Severus," cautioned Dumbledore again.

"Not now, Headmaster," the spectre continued in his low vein. "She could have counteracted, to the advantage of the three of you, that eagerness of mind in you and young Weasley, which has led to destructive impudence! She has an excellent heart! Her disposition, if you were not so blinded by the selfsame arrogance of your father, you would see, as affectionate."

"B...But Her...mi...Hermione d...doesn't fe...feel!" retorted Harry, flinging off Luna's hand.

Dumbledore sought to mitigate matters by consulting his astrologer's watch. He quickly reminded them as he made an attempt to depart, "Time, gentlemen, please."

"Not now, Headmaster," snapped Severus testily. "Potter! You are blind! Even Weasley can see Professor Granger for what she is in his current state. Look at her! Damn it, craven knave! Look at her! Her heart is excellent, her disposition affectionate and her feelings are strong. They are every bit as strong as yours. However, unlike you," he sneered triumphantly. "*She knows* how to govern them. You, on the other hand, have no moderation!"

Severus's voice echoed as he stormed out of the infirmary. "The gall of Potter to presume the worst of a woman whom he considers his friend! The nerve of him!" Severus fumed as he threw himself lightly into his sofa in the relative safety of his chambers. So this was what the Golden Trio had devolved into only the formidable Hermione Granger remained. Excellent! The much loved Potter reduced to a nervous wreck, a shadow of his former arrogant self and the lively Quidditch captain reduced to a blabbering idiot. How very apt! The hero of the wizarding world twice over was now an insecure pup! Ha! A delicious irony worthy of Sophocles! He congratulated himself; for although he was an ethereal being, he was in better physical and mental shape than either Potter or Weasley.

On deeper reflection, Severus came to realise that he was in fact much better off than Harry and Ron. He had something to look forward to. He had grown accustomed to the concept of sharing on his better acquaintance with Hermione. He certainly was not scarred by the events as Harry was and he had his precious mind intact. If anything, this meeting with Harry and Ron taught Severus the value of life. He came to know the value of another. Having Hermione around felt comforting and in a way, he was no longer lonely. Damn his neediness! He would have to return to life soon if he wished to make his intentions known. If they were rejected, he could live with it he had been a solitary creature for most of his life, he could easily resume it. Damn! Damn this infernal hope! Thus, cursing himself between bouts of self-congratulation, he waited for Hermione's return.

Chapter 13 - Half an Admission

Chapter 13 of 20

Hermione seeks Remus Lupin's assistance in a matter, as a last resort. There will also be more on the mysterious pythia.

A/N: For simplicity's sake, titles of books, journals etc are underlined and emphases are italicised.

Beyond Time and Space

Chapter 13 Half an Admission

The appearance of the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom was tranquillity itself. The same could be said for the rest of the castle, for it was the summer holidays. Harry and Ron's week long visit had improved their spirits and rallied them a little but had not any lasting effects on either young man. This quiet peace was broken by the entrance of a positively wild looking Hermione Granger into the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom.

"Remus, you must help me!" she exclaimed, paler than usual and quite out of breath. She tightly held onto the open door frame for a minute, waiting for the said Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher to invite her in. However, as she stepped forward, she collapsed into a dead faint at the door.

When she recovered, she found herself lying on the settee in the werewolf's office.

"Sleeping beauty has decided to reward me at last," teased Remus as he continued rubbing her temples with ointment.

"Not bloody likely," she growled, examining her surroundings and waving his hands away. She sat up and thrust an old fashioned locket she had extracted from her pocket into Remus's hand.

The fact that the metal locket tingled in his hand startled him. On closer examination, he divined its purpose. "It's an heirloom designed to protect the wearer. It's Severus's if I am not mistaken."

She nodded brusquely and held her breath at what she was about to say. "Remus, listen very carefully; I want you to cast an anima hominem spell over it so that it becomes embedded in the amulet.

He said nothing as he handed her a piece of chocolate and thoughtfully watched her eat it. He was puzzled but he did not show it. "This is highly irregular."

"I know," she answered, her eyes studying the werewolf's as if determining whether he would indeed oblige her.

Remus frowned in disapproval. "Couldn't you have asked Flitwick? The charm is more his area of expertise."

Hermione blushed momentarily. "He..." she faltered, her eyes still fixed on her colleague's. "He refused to; he said it's too much to ask; something about it being dark magic, or some such hogwash."

"For all intents, it could be seen as true," explained the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher as patiently as he could, slowly re-examining the amulet. "It is used to summon and contain a soul. If done with the right intent, it can bind a soul to it so that whosoever possesses it controls the soul there."

"Yes, I know," replied she calmly, regaining her normal colour and folding her hands neatly on her lap.

He eyed her suspiciously. "Why do you want me to it?"

"Because you do not have that intention," she answered simply.

"Why can't you do it yourself?" he challenged warily, crossing his legs with nervous energy and uncertainty.

"You don't want to know the truth," she spat, curling her legs to her side on the settee while she glowered testily at her colleague and friend.

"Try me," the werewolf offered with a smile and a gentle pat on her hands.

"I want to keep him with me," she said quickly in one breath. "I'm afraid that if I help him; I'll lose him. Irrational, I know, but I've become used to having him around. Silly, isn't it?"

He smiled lopsidedly. "No, it's only natural. He's gotten used to having a familiar like you around too."

She snorted contemptuously, popping another piece of chocolate into her mouth. She chewed slowly, uncertain as to how she ought to reply. After all, she lived with the ghost of Severus Snape, she should know him better than Remus. "How can it be? He cannot abide by me."

"He is rather fond of you. He always orders dinner for you," Remus pointed out.

"I don't pay attention to such gestures. You feed me too, plying me with chocolates," she giggled, swatting his leg lightly with her riding crop.

"Watch that thing, Hermione; use it on Severus, not me!" he chuckled. "Seriously, he does care; it's the little things that show it."

"Perhaps," she answered coolly. "So will you help me charm the amulet?"

"What for?" Remus asked.

Hermione glared; she hoped he was not being deliberately obtuse. She rolled her eyes in exasperation. "To resurrect him, what else? To bring him back among the living!"

Realising that he has just aggravated her volatile temper, he quickly smiled. "All right, all right," he said soothingly. "Leave it with me, you can pick it up tomorrow. Just because you're pretty, I'll give you a money back guarantee."

"Thank you, Remus," she said, rising to leave.

"Not so fast, Hermione," he detained her by grasping her hand. "What exactly will you do with it?"

She sat down, deliberating whether she ought to tell him her plan. "I'll have to brew the anima returnum draught first before I can do anything else. The anima returnum is tricky to brew because it seems to be merely a more potent version of the draught of the living death. It's more difficult to resurrect him because he already has an ethereal form. As far as I am concerned, this is quite unprecedented in the literature. I'm also worried about the state of his atrophic body. The process, however, is relatively simple. I'm following Dr John Dee's Necromancy."

The Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher started. "Where did you get that book?"

She gave him a look of utter surprise. Couldn't he put two and two together? She was housed in the dungeons where she had access to almost all manner of books. Wasn't Severus's love for the dark arts an open secret? Give these then, it appeared obvious to her how she had acquired the book. Still, she was determined to maintain her good humour, it was pointless being fractious towards a friend who could help. Thus, she said with a forced smile, "It's in Professor Snape's private collection"

Remus laughed at the formal yet glowing tone in which Hermione had addressed Severus. He wondered if any of Severus's other students practised such manners in private. Unable to contain his general amusement, he chuckled, "Still calling him 'Professor'?"

She gave the werewolf a scathingly disapproving look, hoping that his words had stumbled out by accident. She disliked premeditated questions on her private life. She always went about her business openly; anyone could see that, why should anyone question her when they could see for themselves? Pushing this unpleasant thought from her head as she had no desire to offend Remus, she replied, "It is a proper mode of address for him. I must be professional with him if I am to help him."

"Where does the amulet come in?" asked he thoughtfully as he recalled Dee's procedure for resurrection.

"After a little anima returnum in his throat," she explained slowly to him while mentally recounting it as a means to review her own work. She formed her hands into a steeple at her lips, her eyes brightening considerably as she catalogued her work progress. "The amulet will be placed in his hands; I will summon his soul back to his body and Professor Dumbledore would help detain his soul or ghost, call it what you like, in his body. Then, I will perform the ritual, with your help of course. It will be the usual draw of pentagonal circles and the incantation. With any luck, the potion should work to bind his soul to his body again and the incantation would hopefully bring him back."

Despite the fact that Remus was impressed, he frowned at a reservation, which he voiced, "And the preservative that Poppy used with the body won't interfere with your resurrection attempt?"

"Far from it," she insisted, her ire rising at the doubts against her credibility, "The preparation of his body will enhance the transition of his soul from this physical plane to his body."

"Prudence, as always dictates a contingency plan. What is your contingency plan if you fail?" he questioned gently.

She glowered and rose from the settee, one arm firmly on her hip and the other shaking angrily at Remus. "I do not fail! *will not* fail!"

"Hermione!" he pleaded apologetically. "I didn't mean it..."

"Oh? You didn't?" she shrieked. "I've never failed a test yet. My calculations have proven that it will succeed! This interview is ended," she announced in a huff. "I'll be back tomorrow for the amulet." She took one last look at the contrite werewolf who was unassumingly shaking his head with a sigh. Then she strode off to the dungeons.

On the way down the stairs, she paused, seized by a sharp pain in her head. The voice of the woman in the black toga returned to haunt her. "Temperance, my dear, exercise temperance. You lack a virtue still. You have *dikaiosynē*. Yes, *andreia* you have in plenty. You have intelligence, yes, but that does not mean you have *phronēsis*. Nor do you have a legitimate sense of *sōphrosynē*. There must be moderation, dear child. For him, young lady, acquire true *phronēsis*. Your *phronēsis* is sorely lacking. Do not forsake *phronēsis*."

Hermione immediately sank down at the stairs instead of proceeding to her chambers. She was momentarily stunned and mentally fatigued. In spite of the fact that she would only need to walk half a kilometre to her dungeons, she found herself unable to move. Thinking for a moment, it became apparent why the woman had been familiar. Hermione had seen her in her dreams when she was little, before she ever stepped into Hogwarts. What was her message? Could she invade her mind at any moment? Was she a legilimens or a seer or both? Just who was she? The woman or Oracle or whatever she was, warned Hermione about her *phronēsis*. *Phronēsis* referred to wisdom tempered with good sense, judgement and above all, prudence. Remus had just spoken to her on the same. Why was she lacking in it? Did she not double-check all her calculations to ensure that the potion, amulet and incantation would work in tandem with one another in restoring Severus to life? Why was this woman haunting both her dreams and waking hours? Was she just a figment of Hermione's imagination? Was she dead? Was she alive? If so, where was she? Why was she so decidedly insistent on Hermione, of all people, to help Severus? Did she have any links to Severus?

Hermione smiled wanly at herself. If the woman was linked to Severus, it would explain his penchant for Greek political philosophy. What struck Hermione as odd was the fact that she had seen the woman constantly in her dreams when she was a girl. Hermione started, as she grew horrified with a thought. What if the woman and Remus were right? Was this so-called Oracle something within her sub-consciousness that somehow invaded the sinews of her mind and divined that she had miscalculated something? Hermione mentally reviewed her calculations. She felt that she had explored every factor in the viability of the amulet, potion and spell. She laughed; of course she had. She had even taken into consideration how long he had been dead. For simplicity's sake, Dumbledore had agreed to have Severus's body moved to a private room in the infirmary. When she was ready to resurrect him, they were to attempt it in the dungeons away from prying eyes. Dumbledore had kindly released the news to the press that a long lost cousin had claimed Severus's body. She had made provisions for his soul to be released from the amulet should the procedure be too much for him. That thought, however, implied a chance at failure. She shook her head firmly.

"I will not fail!" she exclaimed, drawing herself up to her full height, not noticing a figure clad in black descending the stairs.

"Of course you wouldn't, Professor Granger," purred the object of her speculations. "Shall we return to our rooms?" asked Severus, as he arrived at the step where she rested. She smiled at his tacit encouragement and signalled her assent by suppressing a shiver and taking his proffered ethereal arm.

Footnotes:

My classical Greek is still very shaky, so forgive me if this glossary is lacking:

Dikaiosynē can be taken to mean justice.

Andreia can be taken to mean courage.

Phronēsis can be taken to mean wisdom tempered with prudence.

Sōphrosynē can be taken to mean self-control.

Chapter 14 - Necessitation

Chapter 14 of 20

Conversations abound in this chapter. Hermione and Severus Severus say more with their eloquent silence than their words. Severus learns something new from Peeves and receives a proposition from the poltergeist. He also has a talk with Dumbledore on the resurrection attempt.

A/N: For simplicity's sake, titles of books, journals etc are underlined and emphases are italicised.

Beyond Time and Space

Chapter 14 Necessitation

That small gallant gesture with Severus gave Hermione considerable pleasure. It was one of the agreeable resolutions of the day, which she walked about the castle the next morning to enjoy. She was extremely glad that they had come to so good an understanding over the procedure. The impertinence of Remus Lupin's doubts as well as the woman's injunctions, which for a few moments threatened to ruin the rest of her day, had been the occasion of some of its highest satisfactions; and she looked forward to another successful result the restoration of Severus Snape to life. On the spectre's part, he too was pleased with the progression of their state of affairs; he only wanted her to return from her walk before breaking the news to the headmaster. As if summoned, the lady in question fortuitously returned, her riding crop neatly tucked under her arm, her hair still neat in its chignon and her cheeks flushed with exercise. She was truly a beautiful sight to behold.

"Don't change," he said suddenly, as she sat down for breakfast.

"Sorry?" she asked with a slight smirk at the figure opposite her. She inclined her head to one side unsure whether she had indeed misheard him.

"Stay the way you are," he muttered, filling Crookshanks' bowl. "I like your hair this way," he continued lamely.

"Feeling guilty that you'll have to throw me out when it's over?" she teased, buttering her toast carefully.

He grunted in a non-committal manner so as to mute a chuckle. "Are you jeering me?"

"It's normal to feel guilty, did not you teach me that *responsibility* leads to responsibility?" she said seriously, putting down her toast and staring into his disinterested gaze. "Besides, I have already made the necessary arrangements, you needn't worry."

He turned to stare at Crookshanks who rubbed against his chair. "You are free to use the library here," he murmured. "I can set the wards to recognise you."

"You'll rescind your offer," she charged quietly with an arch look before she nibbled on her toast.

"No," he answered firmly with a self-assured smirk.

After a long pause, she put down her toast and withdrew her other hand from the table just as Severus opened his right palm on the arm rest of chair. The importance of that unlikely gesture not lost on her, she decided to change the topic. "You've gone through my notes, Professor Snape, do you think them plausible?"

He traced a long tapered finger on his lips. "They are *acceptable*."

She nibbled on her toast. "Only that?"

"It is the only way," he acknowledged, his voice bitter and his tone, scathing.

Harrumphing indignantly, Hermione detailed the process and her research findings to him once again.

In response, Severus violently closed his eyes as if hurt by the onslaught of information. "Enough!" he hissed with a scowl, "Shut that mouth before I fill it for you!"

Her eyes twinkled mischievously despite her impassive expression. "How will the redoubtable Severus Xenophon Snape do that?"

He strode over to her and pressed his icy ethereal lips to hers, his icy tongue teasing them open. When the shock left her and he felt her responding in kind, he pulled back, suddenly frightened. What had he done! It had almost felt as if he was alive again; he had felt warm and safe just by touching her lips. It was irrational! Blasted neediness, he thought as he avoided her disappointed look. "Like that, Professor Granger," he whispered in a low purr.

She shivered silently and lowered her eyes while gingerly rubbing her arms. Who would have thought that ghostly Potions Master was capable of extemporaneous displays like that? She rearranged her face and hoped she was not blushing. "You are formidable, aren't you?" she laughed nervously in a shaky voice. "Professor Snape, that wasn't necessary."

He repeated his previous action, drawing it out for a few seconds longer before scowling at her, "Ah, but I wanted to. It's Severus." He then returned nonchalantly to his seat.

Hermione tried to sip her tea but only succeeded on choking. "What?" she finally gasped, looking at him quizzically, uncertain that she had indeed heard him.

"I was christened Severus, use it sparingly," he hissed, hiding behind the Daily Prophet that he was ostensibly reading.

"What am I to make of it?" she asked, completely bewildered.

"Whatever you choose," he said with exasperation at her beleaguered look and her lack of subtlety. "I'm off to see the Headmaster," he announced, folding the newspaper and putting it aside. "I'll place an order with the house elves for your dinner."

Drifting out of their quarters to the dungeons proper, he heard her mutter something to the effect of 'silly overbearing man'. Those words stung his ego as they resounded in his mind and he leisurely made his way to Dumbledore's office in a temper. Perhaps he was a little too high-handed. He had not even consulted her as to her preferences what if she did not feel like eating Moroccan today? He wondered in horror. No, he was acquainted with her enough to know she had no compulsion in abusing him to her face. She had fought with him and quarrelled with him on everything else. She had never made her displeasure at his choice of cuisine felt. He believed it would be a nice surprise for her considering how he caught her reading the Moroccan recipe book her mother had sent.

"Ooh! Dead Potions Masters from zero to hero!" cackled an ectoplasmic entity blocking his path.

"Move aside, Peeves, I am not in a mood to humour anyone!" snarled Severus, folding his arms stiffly.

The poltergeist merely stuck out his tongue. "Nasty Potions Master doesn't know I am not anyone! Why the hurry, hurry? Time has stopped for you."

Severus's lips twitched into a knowingly intelligible smirk; a smirk that ought to strike fear in Peeves if he had a heart, for students and colleagues knew that Severus's intelligible smirks only connoted his condescension at knowing something that one did not. Peeves, however, traditionally unaware of anyone's changes in looks continued to jeer at the Potions Master by sticking out his tongue once again.

"Tell me, Peeves," said Severus disinterestedly, as he caught the latter's tongue between his thumb and index finger. "Do you know anything of human nature at all?" He narrowed his eyes maliciously, pulling Peeves' tongue sharply without releasing it.

Peeves flailed his appendages frantically, uttering a muffled apology.

"See that you remember that," sneered Severus with feigned boredom, as he released the poltergeist's tongue.

Peeves shot him a long hard stare, massaging his sore tongue. "The old man's been happily scheming. If you need me to get back at him, hunt me down, ickle Snape," cackled the poltergeist as he merrily bounced away.

Putting down Peeves' words to utter lunacy, Severus made his way to the Headmaster's office. As he had correctly surmised, Dumbledore was already waiting for him.

"You have good news to report, I presume?" chuckled the older wizard.

"Almost, Headmaster," replied the spectre, pacing up and down the office.

"Is the most rapacious and most violent of my staff expressing reservation?" laughed Dumbledore, his eyes twinkling.

Severus was morally indignant and affronted by the description of his character. "If you must know - Professor Granger may have very well found a method to restore me to what is mine," he said sharply

"Ah yes, I heard from Remus," nodded the Headmaster, gesturing for his prodigal son to sit.

Severus declined by pointedly persisting in his nervous pacing. "What has Lupin told you?" he snarled, his voice low and dangerously silkily.

Dumbledore quickly assembled his face in mild indulgence, his eyes still twinkling knowingly.

"You will do well to disregard his delusions," the spectre in black began, as Dumbledore carefully examined the contents of his bag of sweets. "He wrongfully prides himself for his non-existent observational powers. He has agreed to aid her in charming the amulet, has he not?"

Still shaking the open bag of sweets as if searching for the last of a favourite confection, the Headmaster raised his head feigning alarm, "What?" He stared at the bleary image above his half moon spectacles. "You look more than a little unfocused."

Severus responded by muttering an incantation that pushed the Headmaster's spectacles up his crooked nose bridge, earning him a brilliant smile from the latter.

Dumbledore cocked his head to one side, slowly appraising the spectre. "You still looked unfocused, flustered almost. No matter, I must be in need of new glasses," the Headmaster said with a laugh before turning gravely to Severus. "What do you hope to achieve by returning, my boy?"

"Fulfil the terms of my contract, naturally," answered Severus, keeping his temper firmly in check. He silently cursed the older wizard's occlumency abilities that prevented him from uncovering the truth behind his remarks. The old fool was truly a wheel within a wheel. Unable to penetrate his employer's mind, he settled for an upsetting well-placed glare and furrowed brow look.

"Nothing more?" asked Dumbledore, chewing lightly on a sweet.

"Be plain with me, Headmaster!" The spectre raised his voice an octave, folding his arms defensively on his chest.

Dumbledore sighed disapprovingly, "You should learn to have time to rest; you have too much rigidity in your habits."

"Habits that will continue," he replied icily, drumming his fingers impatiently on his arms. "Socrates claimed that his self-control ensured his freedom from unnecessary obligation to others. I find that it is worthily applied to my existence."

"True, my boy, but the wise old wizard also said that the greatest profit would be the gain of a good friend," reminded Dumbledore, shaking his long finger at Severus.

"None of those friends changed their beliefs in themselves. Socrates died for the preservation of political philosophy within the city," said Severus lowly in a carefully modulated voice as he finally seated himself. "And that is how I will end my days drinking hemlock and sacrificing myself to my art."

"If that's the case, why ask Hermione to restore you to life?"

He answered carelessly, "She seems keen to help; I think it would be cruel to deprive her of more unnecessary extra-curricular work."

Dumbledore rolled his eyes in exasperation. When will the Potions Master see himself for what he really was a man of great feeling and deep thought! "She wants to attempt the resurrection on Saturday or so I've heard," said Dumbledore changing the subject, as he was uncertain as to how to broach the issue of Hermione to the spectre.

"Indeed, she claims the stars will be aligned," he snorted, masking his pride at his protégé's exact calculations.

Dumbledore chuckled at Severus's glittering eyes. "They are not essential to the process," reminded the Headmaster, leaning back into his chair.

"I know, but she feels certain that *it will enhance* the procedure," he stated.

The older wizard sighed, "What will happen to Hermione at the end of it?"

"What do you mean? The insufferable woman will remain as she is. I do not converse with all who seek the benefit of my conversation!" declared the Potions Master in a mock drawl, tracing his lips.

"Severus, Severus," sighed Dumbledore, rising to pat his companion's shoulders. "You and Hermione have been at cross purposes for the past year and a half since her graduation. Can't you see that the lady and you work well together?"

"She is an acceptable assistant," he begrudgingly confessed. He knew that Hermione worked so effectively and methodologically that he was able to spend more time on his personal research. However, Severus would rather sit through detention with a room full of Harry Potters than admit to the efficacy of having her around. He added, "I will make amends to her if that's what you mean. I will be civil to her."

"Only civil? You're barely even civil to me sometimes, my boy," chuckled Dumbledore firmly grasping Severus's shoulders.

The spectre scowled. He did not enjoy being interrogated nor did he enjoy justifying his actions to anyone but himself. "It does not imply I do not care."

"Exactly!" exclaimed Dumbledore, clapping his hands once. "One acquires good friends by conversing about virtue and encouraging the desire for it."

"I have tried to emulate Socrates in this respect without success. My notion of virtue differs from others'. Knowledge is the only virtue worth seeking," Severus drawled quietly, still tracing his lips.

"If you speak to Hermione concisely," cried the exasperated Headmaster. "You'll see that she shares your singular pursuit of virtue *as you see it*. You must see that just as the discipline of the body is necessary to the care of the soul, good friends are similarly necessary as *partners* in the quest for virtue. That being the case, the care of the soul, you soul, would require the cultivation of friendship and partnership. If you were not obsessed in your misplaced righteousness, you would see, for all your admiration of Socrates, that those of his companions who accepted what he himself approved would always be good friends both to him and to one another. The wizard is your ancestor, Severus you should know his teachings better than I do! You would have seen, if you shared his perspicacity, that Hermione accepts and shares the things you approve of!"

"You of all people, Headmaster would know that my love for the beautiful and noble creations have resulted in my mistakes! *will not* make another!" Severus lashed out.

"Speak to her before you decide; she deserves to know. Why begrudge yourself happiness?" reasoned the older wizard.

The spectre spat vehemently, "The love of one's own causes destruction!"

Dumbledore sighed. "She is not your own she is your intellectual partner in virtue! You're a sensible sort, my boy for your own sake, speak to her before Saturday and get rid of your sobering fears!"

"Have you heard of *ten en twi panti phronēsīn*?" questioned Severus archly.

"Which instructs you to use your soul to liberate your mind from any anxiety over the future!"

"Why are you doing this to me?" snarled Severus, as dark clouds gathered at his brow.

"All suitors need encouragement!" chuckled Dumbledore.

"In you bid to feel...*involved*...you have overstepped your bounds, Headmaster!" cautioned Severus in a clipped tone as he clenched his fists into tight white balls of controlled annoyance at the latter's twinkling eyes. "Till, Saturday then, Professor Dumbledore."

He bowed and departed still fuming with his employer's presumption. Smirking quietly to himself, he decided to look up an old thorn in his flesh. He had a promise to reclaim. "Oh yes, *vengeance* will be sweet!" Severus sneered as he drifted into the shadows.

Footnotes:

The gallant gesture referred to at the beginning of the chapter recalls what Severus did at the end of the previous chapter, viz., he offered Hermione his arm. He willingly did so, without her asking. That is gallantry, at least, in my books.

Eros, in this context, is the pursuit of beautiful things such as virtue and honour. Eros has at least 5 definitions. I have settled for the Platonic definition as seen in the Symposium

My classical Greek is still very shaky, so forgive me if this glossary is lacking:

"*Ten en twi panti phronēsin*" can be taken to mean "prudence in all things".

Ideas from Severus's conversation with Dumbledore are based on Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and *Cyropaedia*. Some snatches are also from Plato's *Republic* and *The Laws*.

In response to some emails, permit me to say something here:

My writing draws from various literary and artistic traditions. There are many implied meanings in my characters' speeches. Take Dumbledore's comment on Severus being unfocused. It is a double entendre.

Those familiar with art history and paintings of the aristocracy in the 18th century will be aware of the implied meaning of an open palm facing outwards towards the viewer. It should denote an open temperament and a welcoming personality. Severus, however, is anything but that. I leave it to you to decide why I made him display his right hand in that manner.

Chapter 15 - Sleight of Hand

Chapter 15 of 20

Severus and Peeves plan to get back at Dumbledore for his meddling. What will happen? How will the Headmaster react?

This chapter is for "Ms Piggie" for her inspiring challenge

Many readers have been berating me (in emails) for the kiss in the previous chapter being "sudden". Others have told me that I was careless to omit Hermione's reaction. So, let me clarify: The kiss was not all that sudden. It was a calculated impulse on our hero's part. But I concede that our heroine was initially taken aback by it. Notice, I said, *initially*. If you read carefully, you will notice that it says, "When the shock left her *and she felt her responding in kind* he pulled back, suddenly frightened" Make what you will of that.

A/N: For simplicity's sake, titles of books, journals etc are underlined and emphases are italicised.

Beyond Time and Space

Chapter 15 Sleight of Hand

An opportunity for launching his so-called 'revenge' could not fail to occur. Severus had been in the company of Peeves, Hermione, Dumbledore and Minerva individually often enough to have an opinion as to his plan. It was soon decided that the arrangements with Peeves would be sprung on Friday, a day before the resurrection attempt. Friday morning came all too soon and Severus was unusually fraught with trepidation. He had been at the meeting place since dawn and was still unable to steady his nerves. This was the first time that he was undertaking a role different from that which he was accustomed to. The satisfaction that his 'vengeance' would be exacted, however, was too tempting not to ignore and he soon overcame his fears for a while. He recalled the conversation with Dumbledore with disdain. "I'm not a suitor! As if I need encouragement! I take what I want if I deem it worth my interest! He wants to give me encouragement? Bah! Encouragement, eh?" he muttered to himself, his bravado running high.

He was so excitable in his fervent pacing that Mrs Norris scampered away in fright at his rapidly moving figure. "I'll show him encouragement!" He rubbed his hands together briskly in anticipation at the deed, as he ranted lowly, "So, Dumbledore wants to feel *involved*? He'll be involved! That will teach him a lesson! How dare he patronise me? What am I a child? Bloody nosy parker, can't he keep his blasted nose out of my private affairs! I don't care two sickles for his private business and he prods in mine! I know too much of his personal matters because he talks so. And what do I do? The decent thing! I remain silent. The things that I know about him are worthy of scandal sheets worse than the Daily Prophet! I don't act on my desires to set some of his nonsense right! Why does he want to meddle in mine? Why cannot he stay out of my affairs! If I need advise or help, I will turn to him and McGonagall! I have done so in the past! Until I ask for help, do not offer it! Arrogance! Sheer arrogance! So he thinks he's all knowing! Ha! But he's not omniscient!"

Severus was so far from being weary of reflecting upon Dumbledore's intrusive ways that he gave full vent to his railing in solitude. He was grateful, of course, to Dumbledore's attention, but he would not alter his design; and Peeves' concurrence had been readily gained, everything relative to this scheme was arranged as far as could be. He speculated that Dumbledore's actions could likely be attributed to obligation and comforted himself by relating these deeds to his mother's teachings. He scowled in distaste for he did not approve of 'obligations' and 'favours'. He saw them as things resulting in his slavery. "So, the headmaster thinks he can do me a paltry favour and I will be in his debt! Unlikely! He will not catch me in such a trap! He is mistaken if he thinks he can extend me more alleged favours and kindness so as render me further beholden unto him. But what is he trying to give me?"

He pondered on the matter, cursing the fact that he had been unsuccessfully trying to teach Hermione the same. She had laughed when he told her that gift giving was purely an exchange for the sake of mutual benefit. He had told her, "All human relationships are reciprocal and that is why we are all made use of and using others." She had conceded that it could be true in certain circumstances but had refused to see it in the educational context. Severus sighed bitterly when would Hermione see that such experiences only feed the mind and body with an unhealthy occupation with the self, thereby impoverishing one's experience?

These thoughts did not engage him for long as Peeves soon found him in the Great Hall at the appointed hour, looking paler than usual, still pacing nervously and wringing his hands.

"What's wrong, Snapey-poo?" razzed Peeves in a high-pitched squeal.

"Don't call me that again!" he snarled in warning.

The poltergeist chortled, clapping his hands. "Would you be nervous, Snivellus?"

Severus's upper lip curled in disdain. "Don't call me that either!"

"All right, Potions Master," Peeves cackled, tossing his head as he spun round in circles wildly. "Everything is fine. There is *nothing* to worry about, *absolutely* nothing!"

"Are you not worried?" asked Severus, frowning deeply as if considering the imprudence of their plan.

"Petrified!" laughed Peeves.

"Really!" warned the spectre, narrowing his eyes suspiciously in disbelief at the maddeningly irreverent poltergeist.

Peeves stopped spinning and grinned. "Worried? Frightened? Of what?" he laughed, dodging the Potions Master's waving hand.

"What? What?" snapped Severus lowly, "Of being expelled! Of being exorcised"

"Dumbledore has never tried to expel or exorcise me. He wouldn't expel or exorcise you! Stop overreacting, worrywart!" said Peeves matter-of-factly, imitating his companion's dismissive flick of the wrist.

Severus stopped pacing and stared at the perfectly earnest poltergeist. "You presume too much!" he growled, turning abruptly to face his temporary ally.

"You know what your problem is, Potions Master?" began the poltergeist flatly with great vexation.

His eyes narrowed dangerously as he folded his arms and wrapped his ethereal robe about himself. "What? Shock me; Surprise me; tell me something about myself that I *do not already know*? I have heard all the possible epithets my students, ex-students and colleagues have christened me behind my back. I have long been acquainted with all the insults levelled at me! I have heard things about in such words and tones that even you and Mundungus Fletcher would blush to use!"

"Do you want to hear it or not?" challenged Peeves rolling his eyes over and over.

"Pray, see if you can enlighten me," invited Severus with a graceful beau geste.

"You're an insecure bastard! You take yourself, your existence and everything that you do too damn bloody seriously! All that makes Snapey-poo miserable and a painful bore to be around. No smiles, no jokes so sad! Merlin knows you project that image," waved Peeves frantically as he ricocheted throughout the Great Hall, pouting at his inability to fathom Severus's mind. "That's nothing! You have worse things! You..." he lowered his voice in a conspiratorial whisper. "You don't know how to laugh at yourself. And it makes you miserable! Oh, poor Snapey-poo! That makes you hateful. You're nothing like the Weasley twins."

"And their mayhem is condoned why?" Severus spat furiously, flicking a stray lock of hair from his face.

"The twins are not malicious. I am not malicious. Hasn't our experience with the Umbrage woman taught you anything?" cried an annoyed Peeves bouncing before his companion.

"Her name was Umbridge," he corrected.

"It doesn't matter what her name is or was. She's dead and gone," cackled the poltergeist. After receiving another contemptuous look, he added, "Dumbledore knows how and when to laugh at himself. That is one of the reasons why he never got rid of me. You're no different from nasty Filch!"

"I am nothing like that Squib!" declared Severus indignantly as he mulled over Peeves' words. "You cannot hope to understand human things like: What is pious; what is impious? What is noble; what is base? What is just; what is unjust? What is moderation; what is madness? What is courage; what is cowardice? What is a city; what is a statesman? What is rule over human beings; what is a skilled ruler of human beings? Do you know anything of the knowledge that makes men gentlemen? Those, who ignorant of them, as you are, would justly be called slavish."

"Never mind if you don't get it!" shrugged the poltergeist.

"Have we everything we need?" asked the spectre adroitly, bringing their mission to the fore.

"Can we get it done before he gets back?"

"Given your skills in this region, I am confident that we will," said Severus coldly.

"La!" guffawed Peeves. "Goody good good!" He rubbed his hands gleefully as a mad glint appeared in his eyes before his voice took on a serious tone. "How long do we have?"

"One hour," was the calm reply as Severus led the way to Dumbledore's office. "He always walks out with McGonagall on fine days to Greenhouse Seven."

Peeves' interest in this piece of information was marked by a chortle. "How come Minnie Minty's over there all the time? Is she *ihuv* with him?" he laughed as he threw his arms around the stone gargoyle and started kissing it with loud smacks. After the third kiss, he was flung back with tremendous force to a wall as if struck with an impediment jinx. "Ow! What was that!"

Severus snarled, baring his teeth, "You damnable ghoul! Do you want the office to lock itself against us?" He glowered. "Finite incantatem! Hichews."

"Hichews?" giggled Peeves, watching Severus with awe.

"Muggle confection, very sweet, very chewy, disgustingly noisome far too much saccharine," explained the spectre, curling his lips in distaste. "Get to work now, before he returns," he instructed as he proceeded to perform his arranged role in the office proper.

* * *

If his nails were not gnarled to begin with, he would have bitten them into such a condition. Severus was anxiously waiting like a schoolboy for Hogsmead weekends. He hoped that he had not been too rash in his 'revenge plot'. His mind alternated between two thoughts: he hoped that the scheme would come to fruition and that Dumbledore would not be too cross. He had no desire to receive the sack. After all, the great Slytherin Headmaster, Phineas Nigellus had said that Slytherins always valued self-preservation over courage. Severus did not have to dwell long on these thoughts for Dumbledore returned to his gargoyle at precisely ten o'clock.

Peeves and Severus watched from behind a pillar as Dumbledore lightly warbled his password. As the gargoyle slipped aside, a bucket of thickened gillyweed goo poured itself over his head. While the charm Severus put in the bucket caused the Headmaster to spin uncontrollably counter-clockwise into office, the poltergeist and the Potions Master followed him into the said room. The first, struggled to stifle his cackle; the second, suppressed a smirk of satisfaction. The office, however, was in pandemonium. Fawkes, the phoenix, had hidden under the safety of the desk and rightly so. Books were flapping like birds of prey as they swooped down on the old man, who had, by then, wiped the gillyweed concoction from his eyes and spectacles. The second wave of flying books took this as a signal to pelt Dumbledore's secret stash of skittles and

murray mints on him. The sight of a sticky greyish-green Dumbledore with blotches of goo on his robe and colourful sweets adhering to his hair, beard and clothes was too much for Peeves who flew around the choreographed chaos chortling heartily. Severus, on his part, stopped his unnatural lopsided smirk as if suddenly aware that he had bared his imperfect teeth for good reason too. Dumbledore had caught sight of him and there was no indulgent twinkle in his eyes.

"Finite incantatem. Scourgify cubiculum," said Dumbledore, gesturing for Severus to approach, oblivious to Peeves' maniacal laughter. "To what do I owe the pleasure?" questioned the Headmaster sternly.

"Your meddling ways," sniggered Severus quietly between his teeth as he met Dumbledore's hard gaze.

"About Hermione?" He received no reply from the spectre. "I see," he murmured, nodding sagely to himself, as he pulled a murray mint from his beard before popping it in his mouth. "My boy, I have only one thing to say to you!"

"Please do not discharge me," Severus thought frantically, unable to growl the half apology at the tip of his tongue. Instead, he chose to smirk with equanimity.

"In the words of the Mr Weasleys that was bloody brilliant!" Dumbledore laughed, his eyes tearing a little with mirth. "Jolly good, Severus! You're learning to take yourself with a pinch of levity."

Stunned by this admission, Severus stumbled into Dumbledore's chair and tried to smirk weakly at the chortling poltergeist and the laughing mess that was the Headmaster.

Footnotes

The following lines were taken from Xenophon's *Memorabilia*: "What is pious; what is impious? What is noble; what is base? What is just; what is unjust? What is moderation; what is madness? What is courage; what is cowardice? What is a city; what is a statesmen? What is rule over human beings; what is a skilled ruler of human beings? Do you know anything of the knowledge that makes men gentlemen? Those, who ignorant of them, as you are, would justly be called slavish."

The conversation between Severus and Peeves was inspired by my beloved's PhD thesis on *Justice and Friendship in Xenophon's Memorabilia*

I happen to like murray mints, hence, the reference to them.

Chapter 16 - The Trial

Chapter 16 of 20

Severus and Hermione prepare for the resurrection attempt. While doing so, they discuss Shakespeare and other things within their respective psyches.

A/N: For simplicity's sake, titles of books, journals etc are underlined and emphases are italicised.

Beyond Time and Space

Chapter 16 The Trial

Small heart had Hermione for waiting. Only an hour before she attempted to restore Severus to life, her evil stars had led her to a passage of a book that Severus had left open at the desk. Her eyes lighted upon the heavily underlined speech Shakespeare's Macbeth,

"She should have died hereafter;

There would have been a time for such a word.

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,

Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,

To the last syllable of recorded time;

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools

The way to dusty death. Out, out brief candle!

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player

That struts his hour upon the stage,

And then is heard no more; it is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and,

Signifying nothing."

He had evidently underlined '*And is heard no more*' and '*signifying nothing*' thrice. Why? Was he apprehensive about the night's resurrection attempt? Was he certain that she would fail? She closed his well-thumbed Complete Works of William Shakespeare and stared into the dying embers of the hearth. She would follow the Oracle's injunction she would not forsake him. Regardless what happened, she would continue to help him. All of a sudden, possessing his library and living in the quarters allocated to her as Potions Mistress were unimportant. She would help him adjust to normality; she would give him the acceptance and recognition due to him. The Oracle, as Hermione had come to regard the strange woman of her dreams, had continued to nag her incessantly about her lack of prudence. Naturally, the logical half of her brain pooh-poohed the idea; but as the gnawing feeling increased in intensity, she could not help feeling a general sense of foreboding. "Granger, get a grip on yourself," she scolded her mind aloud.

Severus, who had re-entered the room at that point, cast her a quizzical look. "Only beginning to doubt your sanity now, Professor Granger?"

"Audacious thing!" she hissed half-heartedly, still staring at the fireplace, her hands cupping her cheeks despondently.

"Anxious or petrified?" he asked in a gentler tone than he intended.

She watched him school his features into indifference and smirked knowingly. "Will you think more of me if I answered yes?"

"You presume to be aware of my thoughts, insufferable know-it-all?" he retorted as he perched on the armrest of her sofa.

"Severus. May I call you Severus?" she began, closing her eyes to concentrate on her words without the distraction of his mocking eyes. She took his uninterrupted silent drumming of his fingers on her shoulders to be an intelligible assent. "What if I hurt you in the resurrection?"

"As unlikely as it may seem, I have a strong constitution." He leaned closer to her, feeling her shiver at their point of contact. "Shouldn't you be more concerned with your own safety in the task? The incantation can be hazardous to the uninitiated."

She smiled at his sneer. "What happens to me is immaterial; I gave you my word."

"It is *not* immaterial to me!" he hissed violently seizing her shoulders."

"Was that one of your pithy aphorisms, Professor?" she teased, patting his hand.

He harrumphed in white displeasure. "Nobody wants to do harm to himself and in our case, the other as well; therefore all that is bad is done involuntarily, for the bad do harm to themselves. This, they would not do if they knew the bad is bad. Hence, the bad are only bad because of an error. If one removes the error, one necessarily makes them good."

"Are you exonerating yourself from your past or telling me about your Death Eater days?" she asked earnestly.

"Both. Professor Granger..."

"Hermione," she corrected somberly, wagging a finger in his direction.

"Very well then Hermione," he continued in undisguised exasperation, curling his upper lip in displeasure at the interruption. "Most decisions in life fall under the category 'calculated risk'. If you do not seize it and shake it senseless, you will never know."

"You never told me why you want to return. Your posthumous reputation renders you a free spirit," she said quietly.

He spat defensively, "Is this interview due to the cruel inclination of my soul?"

"No. I just want an answer."

"I cannot." He insisted.

"You exaggerate; you mean you will not!" she shot back, watching him rise to stand before her.

"There will be time enough for this when I am well and truly back."

"I can act by proxy on your behalf," she offered.

He nodded cryptically at her sincerity; his throat tightening with an unfamiliar emotion. "You are not Viola incognito!"

"You're speaking in riddles," she muttered, unconsciously fanning the pages of the Complete Works of William Shakespeare.

"Have you been reading too much Necromancy that you forget what's in your hands?" he asked scathingly, smoothly fencing her in her sofa.

"I know you've been reading Shakespeare, no need to advertise the fact..." She allowed her voice to trail as she caught Severus's eyes flirting from her lips to the books. Of course! He had made it so apparent that she was unable to think simply and see it for what it was! "Oh!" she exclaimed, quietly colouring a little.

He shifted to prevent her escape as she straightened her posture in the seat. Hermione rolled her eyes at her stupidity and Severus's protectively possessive gesture.

"Twelfth Night," she whispered, comprehension written on her face. "No wonder you couldn't; no wonder you wouldn't."

"Once again," he sneered triumphantly, rewarding her with a cold peck on the forehead, "I have proven that learning changes us in spite of the untameable and unteachable spiritual *fatum* of premeditated decision and answer to predetermined selected questions. A learner, such as you, cannot relearn, rather, you must finish learning only to discover ultimately how it had all been within you."

"If that is the case, why did we choose this insane task of restoring you to life?" Her voice was thick with weariness.

"That is akin to asking 'why have knowledge at all'. I will tell you something, Prof...Hermione, I honestly *do not know*."

She laughed bitterly and rejoined with a quote from Macbeth,

"If thou speakst false,

Upon the next tree shalt thou hang alive,

Till famine cling thee; if thy speech be sooth,

I care not if thou dost for me as much.

I pull in resolution and begin

To doubt the equivocation of the fiend

That lies like truth."

Flinging the book aside, he resumed his former perch and continued,

"Arm, arm and out!

If this which he avouches does appear,

There is nor flying hence, nor tarrying here.

I 'gin to be aweary of the sun,

And wish the estate o' the world were now undone."

"What if it doesn't work, Severus?" she asked in a frightened voice.

"As Macbeth says, *at least we die with harnesses on our backs*"

"Is that doubt I sense?" she snorted, leaning slightly on him, shivering slightly at the ice in her veins as she did so.

"I thought you were entirely composed of self-righteousness rather than confidence!" he said in a snide aside, which she heard.

"Say what you want, but I've been told to consider *prudence*," she answered in a grave quiet voice. On hearing his owner thus, Crookshanks slinked back into the shadows of the library.

He scowled. "And who dared disabuse Minerva McGonagall's favourite?"

"Remus...and..."

"Confound the werewolf! He is a well-intentioned one, I am aware (Hermione gaped incredulously at this admission). For Merlin's sake, you're not a snake. I can devise a hundred easier ways of suicide; do not kill yourself by dislocating your jaw. It does nothing to enhance the twisted shape of your mouth."

She smirked uneasily at his backhanded compliment.

"Lupin is still a werewolf at the end of the day. He cannot be trusted fully he tends to prevaricate."

"And you don't?" she challenged, while summoning Dr John Dee's Necromancy.

"I," he stressed in an important manner, "Have made it an art form necessary to survival."

"That's bravo!" She smirked at his curling lips. "Now behave, no teeth gnashing. Raising the dead now, transmission of rabies later."

He drummed his fingers on her shoulders with annoyance and scowled. "I could take house points for your cheek."

"Which one?" she asked, being deliberately obtuse, her voice shaking at the section of the book she was rereading. "I have two."

"Four," he corrected coolly, tensing his hands. He remembered the perfect goddess he had seen in the shower and realised too late that he had made a crude and unforgivably rude remark. For the first time in his existence, he had not made such a remark out of spite. Yet, he had intentionally issued it as a slur. It was a slur on Hermione's woeful neglect of herself. At first, when it yielded no response, Severus thought that she had been too engrossed in her reading to notice. However, it soon became apparent that she was digesting his words and cautiously waiting for an opportune time to strike.

"The same can be said of you," she said in a non-committal tone before adding, "Which one?"

Will she not cease the childish pretence? He did not enjoy being egged on. "All of them, Professor Granger," he snarled, folding his arms with curling contemptuous lips.

"How many points?" she goaded, her eyes still scanning the pages of her book.

He watched her flip a page. "Enough for me to punish myself."

Her arch look foretold another one of her I-will-brook-no-nonsense speeches, which was fortunately dispelled by Remus and Dumbledore's heads at the fireplace.

"Give us ten minutes," said the Headmaster, chuckling at the expressions on the faces of his Potions Master and Arithmancy Mistress. "You know," he addressed Hermione, "You might find easier to throttle him *after* we've brought him back to life."

Hermione and Severus both ignored the tasteless second remark and bowed to acknowledge the first.

"They must be cut from the same cloth," laughed Remus at the sight.

"When a couple lives together for a while, they will begin to share some of their characteristics. Am I right, you two?"

"You have a vivid imagination," replied Hermione caustically.

Severus concurred. "It must be a figment of your imagination, Headmaster."

The older wizard's eyes sparkled as he shrugged. "Ten minutes," he reminded and he was gone.

"Impertinent old man!" cried Hermione in a frown as she bit her lower lip.

"He's always been like that one gradually becomes *inured* to it." He sat opposite her, tracing his lips again.

"Just in case we don't succeed, what else can we do?" Hermione asked, her eyes dull with anxiety.

"You're the know-it-all, apprise me of your plans."

"This is my *only* plan," she quietly answered, enunciating each syllable carefully.

"According to your calculations, what is the worst case scenario?" he snapped impatiently.

"You'll disappear," she whispered.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "My soul would dissipate and this pathetic excuse of an existence would be over. You will have the dungeons again."

"Without you?" she whispered in a barely audible voice. Her eyes narrowed unnaturally at him.

"You will become inured to it as well," he casually intoned. "Professor Granger," he continued, pausing only to meet her imperious glare with his own. "Hermione, in the unlikely event that I am permanently banished from this existence, I want you to locate a note in my bedchamber."

"Why?"

"Why? Why?" he scoffed, mimicking her tone. "Because the sky is so high! Do not ask stupid questions!"

"I thought you had faith in my abilities," she muttered, frowning her brows in disappointment.

"Do not put yourself out because of this. It is the mark of an evolved individual to be prepared for every eventuality."

"Wise words indeed," she answered in a clipped tone.

"Sometimes, I think it would be better for me to fade into oblivion."

"Why?"

"Nietzsche wrote that we wear mask upon mask such are men of profound sadness. I will betray myself when happy; I will suffocate and stultify it from jealousy because I *know* it is intransigent; I know it will flee."

"I have not fled," she said hoarsely in small voice.

"You have borne my accusations and lectures as no other woman would have," he said quietly with a tone of such sincere, decided, intelligible tenderness. "My conduct has been wanting, yet you never reproached me. I have nothing to recommend me, yet you understand me."

Hermione laughed uncomfortably, squirming in her seat. "A new idle inclination, Severus? We shall continue this conversation later," she laughed while reaching over to pat his icy hands. "Remus and Professor Dumbledore are here."

Severus took her hand and pressed it earnestly in animation to leave her no doubt of his trust. Upon bearing witness to this conjugal sight, Remus coughed and Dumbledore chuckled, "Shall we begin?"

Footnotes

Fatum is Latin for fate. Its usage is deliberate.

The line with the following, "the untameable and unteachable spiritual *fatum* of premeditated decision and answer to predetermined selected questions" is quoted from Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil.

Chapter 17 - Tete-a-tete

Chapter 17 of 20

Why is Hermione in tears? Why is Dumbledore and Remus Lupin comforting her? And why is Severus taunting her? All these questions and the identity of the pythia will be revealed (or at least intimated).

A/N: For simplicity's sake, titles of books, journals etc are underlined and emphases are italicised.

Beyond Time and Space

Chapter 17 Tête-à-tête

Hermione's pensive meditations as she left her sanctuary of the past two hours, were not interrupted; but on re-entering Severus's library, she found those who must perforce rouse her. Dumbledore and Remus had remained during her retreat and were sitting with Severus. Remus immediately got up and in a graver manner than usual said, "No worries, dear. We'll think of something else."

She rubbed her puffy eyes and sniffed laboriously into a handkerchief trying to find Severus's eyes. He, however, chose to ignore her searching eyes in favour of pacifying Crookshanks. Unbeknownst to her, he had winced at Remus's commonplace affectionate address.

"Quite right, my dear," agreed Dumbledore sagely as he tiredly stroked his beard. "Don't go back to the toilet and cry now," he chided kindly with a weak smile. "Crying is the ruination of pretty ladies."

"Damn your gallantries," muttered Severus, chasing Crookshanks away.

"Look at it this way," began Remus, helping Hermione to her chaise. "Severus is still with us, it cannot be all that bad."

"Don't cheer me up!" she sobbed, her lithe frame shaking violently. "I've failed! I've failed!"

Severus scowled his disapproval as he strode to her seat to comfort her, glad that she did not fling his hands off her shoulders. "Stupid woman! No one is infallible! Let this be a lesson to you!"

Dumbledore and Remus glared at him for his astringent words, but they soon saw that it had the desired effect of calming Hermione.

"I should have listened to the Oracle!" she cried, her screams of frustration muffled in a cushion.

Both Severus and Dumbledore started at the revelation; Remus alone looked distinctively puzzled. Before the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher could pose a question, Dumbledore said, "Would you mind ordering some tea for Hermione?"

"Anything but Prince of Wales, she deplores that," Severus added with a snarl.

"And something that might tempt her; a toffee apple perhaps anything," Dumbledore joined in. "We had better let her have her cry."

Believing that he understood the situation, Remus quickly surrendered the care of Hermione to the Potions Master and his employer. Severus and Dumbledore exchanged half knowing looks; if Hermione's words on the Oracle were true, it would render her conduct intelligible at last. Before any such deduction could be made, however, they had to learn more.

"What is this about the Oracle?" asked Dumbledore, without removing his eyes from Severus's ghostly face.

"That's what I think she is," said Hermione, blowing her nose. "She welcomed me to Delphi."

"Was she a pythia?" questioned Severus, turning paler than was normal for a spectre.

"I've always seen her as far as I could remember. I did not know she was the Oracle then. But lately, she's been lecturing me mercilessly on my lack of *phronēsis* and for good reason too!" she croaked hoarsely through her tears.

Dumbledore drew his chair nearer to Hermione and held her hand. As he sat beside the sobbing black figure, Severus noted that the Headmaster would have patted her head if the chignon was not in the way. Her skirt and petticoat rustled as she moved to accommodate him on the chaise.

"She used to appear in my dreams frequently when I was a girl. She would teach me many things such as bezique." At this juncture, Severus unfolded his arms and looked intently at her. She ignored him and continued, "She stopped coming when I came here to Hogwarts. She told me that she would always take care of me. It wasn't until recently that she reappeared."

"What did she look like?" growled Severus with great urgency.

Hermione sniffed into her handkerchief. "Beautiful. She's always in a silver lined black toga. She has an elegant manner and the thickest, most lustrous raven hair I've ever seen. It's a pity she always wore her hair up. She looked almost aristocratic with her slender limbs, graceful neck and aquiline nose."

Dumbledore watched Severus part his lips as if to speak, and as such, quickly interrupted him with an intelligible look. "Were you also in black?"

"No," she said in an unnatural nasal twang after blowing her nose. "I would always be in white and gold. I actually thought she was a mirror as to what I would become. Look at me now," she sighed, twisting her mouth crookedly. "I'm already her."

"You are not!" insisted Severus indignantly, looking to Dumbledore for affirmation.

"Severus is right, my dear," sighed the Headmaster as he watched Hermione hug a cushion and his Potions Master sitting impossibly erect, tracing his lips. "The pythia speaks in riddles; it is left to the person seeking the Oracle's divination to unravel the cryptic message. You have had more learning from her than you know. This, in turn, could account for your belief that you turning into her." He flashed Severus a meaningful look.

Severus added, "Her teachings revolve around *gnōthi seauton*. She is a philosopher in the classical tradition; she teaches logos, the rational principle that governs the universe. She loved my namesake, Xenophon, and those that studied under Socrates."

"I don't understand," said Hermione, dabbing her tears. "She does like Plato, I know. She told me something about him and a chimaera."

"Mother," Severus whispered, closing his eyes with great emotion.

Dumbledore raised a hand to silence Hermione, but she chose to speak her mind anyway. "I don't believe in divination."

"Stupid woman!" bellowed Severus. "The so-called prophetic utterances of the ancients are expressions of their wisdom! Have you never read Xenophon?" She shook her head and Severus threw his hands up in enagement. "Have I taught you nothing! The ancients couch their wisdom in a practical context. Xenophon informs us that Socrates implicitly declared that the gods send all human beings omens. A prudent attitude must be adopted when facing the prophecies of the pythia. Because the mind, your *nous*, manages your body as it wishes, so does *wisdom in all things* arrange everything as is pleasing to itself. *Phronēsis*, then, is meant to inculcate an element of sobering fear in you."

Dumbledore silenced the spectre with a look before turning to Hermione. "You were born on September nineteenth, were you not?"

"Yes," she answered cautiously, looking at Dumbledore and Severus in confusion.

"You are older than Harry?"

"Yes."

"What time were you born?" demanded Severus feverishly.

"Why is it significant?"

"We will tell you when we find out," said Dumbledore.

Nonplussed, she told them the time of her birth, which left Severus stunned and Dumbledore dumbfounded.

"Mother died then," Severus said flatly to no one in particular.

Hermione shifted nervously in her seat, addressing herself to Dumbledore. "Surely, you don't mean to tell me that she and I are the same."

"No," answered Dumbledore.

"Then why all the questions and what does she have to do with this!" lamented Hermione.

"It's simple. Wizards do not partake in the quaint muggle belief of reincarnation; our souls are able to live on forever. This Oracle, as you call her, is your guardian. Severus's mother was a seer."

"Why couldn't she have looked after him instead? This is illogical!" cried she in disbelief and horror.

"The pythia selects the spirit based on her prophecies," explained Severus testily, annoyed that Hermione was unaware of this simple truth. His tightly clenched white knuckles, however, revealed his jealousy at being deprived of his mother's soothing presence.

As if sensing the heightened tension in the library, Dumbledore pretended to cough on his sweet. "Did she tell you anything about Severus?"

Hermione lowered her eyes in embarrassment. "Only not to forsake him."

"See, my boy, your mother still cares," pointed out Dumbledore to the visibly shaken Potions Master. "My dear," he addressed Hermione, "You have been educated by both the mother and son, you should be able to arrive at a better understanding than I. The pythia must have seen you two as lovers of wisdom, hence, potential allies to the logical philosophical way of life. His inclination towards the tragic view puts him in a serious frame of mind. Your leaning towards empiricism puts you in a logical state of mind. Together, logic and gravity coupled with his love for the beautiful and noble as well as your love for reason and the just; make you ideal vehicles for the transmission of the serious and salutary vision of the philosophical way of wizarding life."

"Oh!" remarked Hermione as realisation swept across her mind. "But I was so stupid! I did not heed her warnings on prudence!" she lamented, convulsively gripping Severus's hand in an unconscious gesture.

"You've finally seen the verisimilitude of your situation!" snapped Severus without shaking off her hand. "Do you see yourself as an excellence?"

Dumbledore chuckled and popped another sweet into his mouth. *'Proatēs, Severus.'*

"I am trying to cultivate it, old fool!" he retorted.

"I hate myself now," she declared, extricating her hand from Severus's and finding it numb. "You burn like ice," she told him.

"You're not the first to engage in self-loathing," he snarled.

"Severus is right, my dear. Failure is no reason to hate yourself. It is a self-indulgent feeling like wallowing in self-pity." The spectre shot the Headmaster a dangerous look that would have withered any student. Dumbledore merely smiled at him and continued, "It may be a poor example, but I am sure you know what I mean."

"But I've failed him and you and everyone else after I gave you all such expectations and hopes," she wailed.

"Professor Granger," said Severus in a modulated voice, masking his dislike at being beside a weeping woman. "Many wise wizards have fallen into the trap as well. Nietzsche did so and he *did not* crumble into a crying mass; he merely opined that the attractions of knowledge would be small if one did not have to overcome so much shame on the way."

"But I was so sure I had everything worked out I don't know why or where I went wrong!" she sniffed into the handkerchief, stemming her tears. "Accio blue file!" she commanded, causing the said article with all her calculations to zoom into her hand.

Dumbledore watched her sink to the floor so as to better examine her papers.

"Could be preservatives in the body that Poppy applied," suggested Severus, looking over her head and placing his hands on her shoulders. She shivered at the contact, choosing to say nothing.

"Could it be meant to be?" offered Dumbledore with a heavy sigh, his eyes twinkling at the two of them.

"They are my mistakes; I'll iron them out," answered Hermione in a cold businesslike manner reminiscent of Minerva McGonagall.

"You two are impossibly serious!" the Headmaster chuckled before adding quietly, "I don't think it is possible to bring Severus back."

His two former students paled.

"You can either make the best of it or be miserable. You two must learn how to laugh."

Hermione and Severus snorted in unison at that comment.

"The more joyous and certain man's spirit becomes, the more he unlearns loud laughter; instead, a more spiritual smile constantly wells up in him," explained Dumbledore slowly.

Hermione was mortified at the Headmaster's words and Severus looked decidedly bored. "I'll leave you two to think about it; you could try reading Rizzo's Summoning Spirits to Flesh." Then, Dumbledore left them with a twinkling smile.

"Do you blame me?" she asked quietly, redoing her calculations.

"No," he answered without malevolence, shuffling a sheaf of her papers. "Even the most well laid plans can go astray."

"Even if my mind and mouth are somewhat askew?"

"Yes," he said indifferently, examining her arithmancy calculations. "I can see nothing egregiously wrong," he continued in his usual sneer. "You are attentive for a presumptuous woman." He returned her the papers without meeting her searching eyes.

Hermione's colour rose, whether by this unjust praise or his earlier backhanded compliment, she did not know nor did she care. Thus, with a smile and shake of her head, which spoke much, she looked at Severus. He regarded her with an earnest glower and she felt tremendously gratified. Then, as if seized by a sudden impulse, he clutched her hand, which she had rested on his knee. He took it, pressed it warmly and seemed to be on the verge of carrying it to his lips. But he suddenly released it with a blank expression. She flushed slightly at the wild trembling of her body and her rapidly beating heart. She was sure that she was suffering from nervous palpitations so intense was this simple gesture. Why did he scruple to change his mind? Why? Regardless of the questions tripping in her brain, she was not offended. The intention of that gesture, however, was indubitable and whether it was that his manners had in general so little gallantry, or however else it happened, she did not care. It was enough for her that she understood his intent. In fact, she believed that the aborted gesture became him. It was a simple yet dignified declaration, if indeed, it was a declaration.

Severus scowled at her silence and quiet smirk which expressed both archness and bashfulness the woman infuriated him and yet, he found her more than companionable. He must have been weak to succumb to the first charms that presented itself as being well disposed towards him. He secluded his countenance into its usual habitual indifference, masking his surprise when she rested her head on his ethereal knee. If his aborted gesture of gallantry resulted in her gesture of perfect amity, imagine the reward he would reap if he had carried his beau geste through. He knew she was undeceived as to the meaning of his words and deeds.

"Forgive me," he whispered emotionlessly, gently pushing her head aside. "Forgive me, *must* go." Immediately after those words, he left and was gone in a moment.

Hermione smiled knowingly to herself. He had always moved with the alertness of a mind which was neither dilatory nor undecided, but now he seemed more sudden than he had ever been in his departure. It was just as well that he had left her to own devices: she would work on another way to bring him back; she would conceptualise contingency plans thus time and they will come to be better acquainted; she could offer him that now. She would heed the Oracle, Severus's mother, whoever it is. She would care for him; she would keep her word and not forsake him. She shook her head, he would return later and she would have the talk she promised him and hopefully, they would no longer be at cross-purposes.

Footnotes

If you follow the classical Greeks, the Pythia was the priestess at Apollo's oracle at Delphi. She is the medium through which Apollo's will to be known to those on earth. A believer would make a sacrifice and present a question to a male priest. The male priest would in turn present the question to the Pythia. Seated on her bronze tripod in the adytum, or inner chamber of Apollo's temple, the spirit of Apollo overcame the Pythia in this sacred chamber and inspired the prophecy. After the prediction has been made, the priest would interpret the Pythia's response for the questioner.

However, I have combined the role of the Pythia and the Priest in my reinterpretation of Apollo's oracle. Hence, the woman in black in Hermione's dream is both the medium and the interpreter of the vision.

Gnothi seauton means known thyself in Greek.

Proatēs refers to gentleness and good temper. It also includes the ability to control one's temper.

Chapter 18 - Chilling Liberation

Chapter 18 of 20

Dumbledore and McGonagall offer some advice to Severus that borders on to the principle of nihilism...

Dear readers,

Whatever happens in this chapter serves the plot. I can only urge you to re-read Chapter 10. You will see that whatever I have planned is intimated there.

Re: Complaints on the so-called "lack of continuity between chs 16-17

Many thanks for all your emails. I have received over 20 emails, mostly vituperative ones, on my structure for BT&S. The story still flows by the way from chapter 16 to chapter 17. And if you fail to see why, I will explain.

Why does everyone assume that the author must tell you everything that happens? "sigh" Chapter 16, RL, AD, HG and SS are preparing to being SS back. Chapter 17, HG fails. It is intentional. Why? It serves the plot? How? Plot structure. What do I mean? What is unsaid is more powerful than what is said. Evidence: Constant reference to Xenophon who was famed for this.

BT&S is written with more structure in mind. We are directly told anything that the author doesn't want you to immediately know. You're supposed to think it through. For those who decry my plot and say that I lead them on with false hope, should refer to chapter 10, the midpoint. In that chapter, I make my intentions known very clearly. And what is one of the central themes? Everything happens for a reason. And when some things happen, there is no turning back the clock to remedy it. Que sera sera

Let us return to chapters 16 and 17. Ch 16, they are preparing to bring SS back; Ch 17, HG fails to bring SS back. Underlining question that is implied but not said - how and why did she fail? Was it the method? Is that why we are not shown the method? Questions like this should be in the readers' mind. The political philosophical message is intentional.

Re: Complaints on the difficulties of the dialectic and didactic plot structure

To the 30 odd readers who complain that the plot and the meaning of the story is too philosophical to understand, let me stress: It is not philosophical; it's political philosophical. I am not a philosopher, BUT a political philosopher. There is a difference. Philosophy is the quest for the truth. Philosophy is necessarily preceded by opinions about the whole. Political philosophy is the quest for knowledge. Political philosophy seeks to replace opinions about the whole by knowledge of whole. The theme of political philosophy is mankind's great objectives, freedom and government or empire objectives which are capable of lifting all men beyond their poor selves.

*Political philosophy is that branch of both politics and philosophy closest to political life, to non-philosophic life, to human life*In short, political philosophy is the attempt to replace opinion about the nature of political things (such as life life is surprisingly political) by knowledge of the nature of political things. Political philosophy is the attempt to truly know the nature of both political things and the right, or the good political order. The school (of thought) that I subscribe to believes that political philosophy was identical with political science, and it was the all-embracing study of human affairs. Today, however, we find it separated into the various fields in the arts and the social sciences literature, language, history, geography, war studies, sociology, anthropology, music, rhetoric, economics, social psychology, political science and philosophy. Political Philosophers belong to political science departments (unless one is in Canada, there, some philosophy departments will be happy to take these individuals on). Political Philosophers do not like to claim that they teach 'political thought' or 'political theory'. We do not teach, we lecture, we discuss and we talk. I cannot stress this other point enough a political thinker is NOT a political philosopher because he is interested in, or attached to a specific order or policy. The political philosopher, in contrast, is primarily interested in the veracity of knowledge. Political thought is NOT political philosophy because it is expressed in laws and codes and tracts and speeches inter alia. Political philosophy expresses itself in poetry and the treatise.

I trust that I have made myself abundantly clear.

This story is meant to engage the reader to think. the other theme is dealing with thymos, or spiritedness. Or in this case, it can be translated to anger. And this fits in with chs 17-19.

I hope this clarifies matters.

Lady Strange

A/N: For simplicity's sake, titles of books, journals etc (fictitious or otherwise) are underlined and emphases are italicised.

Beyond Time and Space

Chapter 18 Chilling Liberation

The next day brought Severus in Dumbledore's office. He went there with Minerva McGonagall, to whom and to Dumbledore, he seemed to take very cordially. His own inherent neediness at his mother's death resulted in his turning to a woman who had never cast him out. Such was Minerva's temper and manners that Severus had nothing disagreeable to say about her. It appeared that he had been sitting with her in her rooms till her usual tea session with her husband. He had wondered at their ability to distinguish between their private and profession lives. Their maintenance of their private apartments proved that even the most affectionate couples needed time by themselves. He had always wondered how two people as different as night and day like Albus Dumbledore and Minerva McGonagall put up with each other. He was a mixture of odd tempers and was extremely meddlesome, a true jack-of-all-trades. He was often sanguine to a fault and had the propensity to see humour in almost every grave situation. Minerva, on the other hand, was stoic and quiet. She was constantly serious and disliked demonstrating her emotions. Yet, despite their differences, Dumbledore and Minerva shared more than companionable amity. He was the only one who could make her laugh at herself. He was the only one able to calm her during her flights of impotent fury. He only need utter a word and she would leave an adverse situation to his discretion. On her part, she was the only person able to silence the boisterous Headmaster with a look. Only she could confiscate his sweets without drawing a complaint from him. Only she had the patience to listen to his ideas and circumlocutions without losing the gist of his thesis. Dumbledore only trusted her to write his important speeches. All in all, it was a good partnership, different though they were.

Severus had been completely astonished when Minerva revealed her marital status to him during one of the evening parties thrown in his honour. Apparently, it was still a secret. Dumbledore was trying to circumvent the rules of the school's governors who feared fraternising faculty members would lead to a conflict of interest. He was somehow touched by her gesture; it meant that she trusted him with her secret. In all his years, Severus never had anyone other than Dumbledore and Minerva trusting him implicitly.

"Will I be imposing on your tea with the Headmaster?" Severus asked again for the fifth time on their stroll to Dumbledore's office.

"You've acquired manners! I'm proud of you," she answered dryly in that thin-lipped way of hers.

"You think she's received an accurate assessment of my interest?" he spoke quietly, turning whiter than white.

"There can be no doubt of your regard," she replied, stopping before the stone gargoyle. "Hicews!" she commanded and it slid away.

"Sweetness!" a voice thick with mirth called out. "You're early!"

Minerva rolled her eyes as her lips thinned in displeasure. "Severus, my boy, help me up the stairs."

He offered his arm to his secondary maternal figure and soon came to Dumbledore's unusually disordered office.

"Ah, my boy!" Dumbledore exclaimed, his eyes twinkling in a mischievous wink as he helped his lady sit down. "I have never been able to return my rooms to normal after your redecoration effort."

"Albus!" Minerva swatted his arm playfully. "Don't tease Severus; it was only a prank."

"You said 'prank' with a straight face. That calls for a reward! You get to pick what sweets I order next month."

Minerva harrumphed indignantly and poured herself two cups of tea and offered one to her husband.

"Hicew?" The Headmaster proffered his confectionary bag. "Sweetness? Severus? No!"

"It sticks to my teeth; it's rather ghastly!" she sniffed as elegantly as a cat.

"It has ninety percent fruit juice or so I've been told."

"I will return later," said Severus curtly, uncomfortable at witnessing the domestic scene without being able to suppress a longing for something similar.

"Stay!" they both insisted, pressing him with such earnest treaty that he grudgingly remained.

"Let me just convey some news to Minerva and you shall have my undivided attention," Dumbledore began, after gesturing him to sit. Then he addressed his wife, "There is nothing about faculty members marrying. The conflict of interest will only occur if one party has links and affiliations to the Ministry and one party is affiliated to another school. Since neither one of us has such links, we are in the clear, as muggles say."

She stared at him in disbelief. "Your place in the Wizengamot..."

Dumbledore interposed her objections with, "Arthur has decided to separate the Wizengamot from the Ministry. I have already given up all my ministry rights, my dearest one."

"You dear man!" she cried and catching herself before she acted rashly out of character, she smiled stiffly and squeezed her husband's hand affectionately.

"No reward for me?" he asked, tapping his left cheek with his long index finger.

"No," she firmly declared, her smile fading from her thin lips.

He shrugged in feigned disappointment. "I've married a prude," he chuckled, earning a silent reproachful look from his wife. "Now, Severus, what can I do for you?"

"It's about Hermione," his wife interjected, picking up a sugared almond and offering it to Fawkes.

"Among other things," Severus hastily added. Dumbledore signalled him to continue. "I am worried about Professor Granger's state of mind."

"She has a proper name, my boy; you cannot call her by her title forever!" chuckled the Headmaster as he absentmindedly offered Severus some biscuits. "I shall address her accordingly so long as we are in public. I know what is due to her."

"And yet, you keep her waiting? That's not chivalrous!" responded Minerva.

"Chivalry indeed!" spat the Potions Masters.

Dumbledore carefully questioned, "Why are you concerned? Her spirits will rally again and she will soon have another scheme to resurrect you. Who knows it might work?"

"You don't seem to have much confidence in her abilities. Perhaps that's the reason for her recent anxiety attack!" hissed Severus quietly, folding his arms in anger.

"Has it occurred to you that you cannot return to life? Your body is dead; how are you able to institute your soul to a body where everything no longer functions!" Dumbledore reasoned softly.

"Allowances have to be made, I presume, my senses are still with me, my brain isn't dead," he said quietly, earning him emphatic smiles from the Headmaster and Deputy Headmistress. "Once my soul is in my body again, I shall be able to animate it."

"Exactly! Animate the corpse, not live again. Your life force no longer lies within your body; yours has fled almost exclusively to your spirit. Dee's Necromancy would have worked if you *did not* return as a ghost. Resurrections are simple procedures. They work because the spirit or soul was slumbering within the psyche. Your psyche has left your body, as has your soul together, you have become almost like a living entity, only one that is without a body."

Severus considered the words of his former mentor, tracing his lips. He furrowed his brow as if weighing the options. "Did not Rizzo write that it is possible to bring the dead back when the soul has separated itself from the corporeal body."

"Nietzsche proved him wrong. He hinted as much when he said, 'The faith *inimmediate certainties* is a moral naïveté that reflects honour on wizards. Apart from morality, this faith is a stupidity that reflects little honour on us.' How can you account for that?"

"He never tried," snarled Severus, incensed.

"Nostradamus jumbled his passages because he knew he could not write consistently and expect muggles to understand. Similarly, Nietzsche scrambled his passages." Dumbledore turned to his wife. "Sweetness, do you recall the independence tirade in Nietzsche?"

Minerva frowned, finished her tea and pondered for a moment. "He says something to the effect of Independence is for the very few. Those who attempt it even with the best right but without inner constraint prove that he is not strong. Instead, it proves him reckless."

"Thank you, dear." Dumbledore winked at his wife, who returned to nibbling on a sandwich. "You and Hermione are like this man Nietzsche describes. He has tried resurrecting something and he failed. He says that such a person who attempts to resurrect a corpse when its ghost is already present 'enters a labyrinth where he loses his way, becomes lonely and is torn piecemeal by the grief of the survivor's conscience.' Do you want that to happen to you or Hermione?"

Severus looked up at the Headmaster, the lines on his face more prominent than usual. His eyes expressed pain and sorrow. "How can I discourage her when she is so happy researching into methods and incantations? You have seen how she cried when she failed. I rather be miserable and dead than see her like this. I have no patience for a woman's tears! She is so attentive in her work I do not think it prudent to take it away from her."

"Then do what you do best," said the portrait of Phineas Nigellus. "You're one of the best we've had. Think of yourself first before making your move."

"That's enough Phineas," warned Dumbledore, as Severus formed a steeple with his fingers. "Just ask yourself these questions: why do you want to return? Is that reason worth it? Will you be able to live with yourself if your plan falls through? Will you be willing to take this second chance at life? If you answer 'yes' to all these..."

Severus laughed in a cruel and frightening manner, startling Minerva.

"For her, Dumbledore! Surely, you've noticed, you like being...*involved*," he spat. "Do you think she'll even consider me like this? Can I teach my classes effectively like this? Can I terrorise my students in my body instead of having some crazed idiots fawn over me when I'm not around? Can I have students fainting at my threats rather than my appearance?"

"I see," said Dumbledore, stroking his phoenix's head and exchanging looks with his wife. "Have you told her?"

With her eyes still riveted on Severus, Minerva whispered to her husband, "He claims he's made himself quite plain."

"Does she care enough for him to warrant his temper?" Dumbledore asked in an aside between surreptitious coughs.

"She does."

"Yes, Remus told me as much too," mumbled the Headmaster thoughtfully. "Severus, perhaps you should ascertain her views on you as you are now."

"How could she?" he sneered, curling his lips in self-contempt. "I know what I am she sees me as an assignment."

"Silly boy! Ask her!" commanded Minerva.

"Have you noticed how she is when you're around?" interjected Dumbledore.

"I have," said Severus silkily with a composure of voice under which was concealed an emotion and distress beyond anything he had ever felt. He was mortified, shocked and confounded. "The most powerful witch of the last century, Emily Dickinson, wrote that the letting go is the most difficult to accomplish. Tell her about the impossibility of resurrecting you. You may stay if you like, but I advise you," Dumbledore's voice faltered at that juncture. He was so overcome that he only found his voice a few minutes later. "I advise you to let go. Your body is dead; your soul can move on let it move on. *Let go.*"

"How can I when I still have my duties here!" protested Severus gruffly, scowling menacingly at his colleagues.

"Death is the next big adventure, Severus. My old friend, Flamel was the same, but even he chose to let go."

"Are you capable of understanding human speech, Headmaster? I want to continue as I am. Professor Granger can continue to hide in my library for all I care, though I do not know how I can endure her insufferable carping!" He scowled, his mood darkening dramatically.

"Selfish! Selfish!" scolded Dumbledore sadly, removing his half-moon glasses in exhaustion. "What happens when she dies? Will you mourn for her for an eternity? She may not return as a ghost; she may not return at all. She has seen death and is no longer afraid of it. I believe she will embrace it. Do you think it's fair for her to watch you remain as you are while she ages? Will it be fair to you after she's gone? Think, Severus, think!"

"And what will talking to her accomplish?" Severus asked in a dangerous tone, his lips curling disdainfully.

"Sound her out before you decide it must be fair to the both of you," insisted Dumbledore tremulously, holding his wife's hand.

"Whatever it is," added Minerva, her eyes glistening strangely though her voice was steady. "You will always have a place in our hearts."

Dumbledore nodded. "Sometimes, it takes more courage to walk away from an enchanting possibility so that the other will be accorded respect."

Severus bowed at the two coldly, betraying nothing. He was still stunned with the knowledge that all of Hermione's experiments to resurrect him would meet with failure. Was there no hope for him at obtaining contentment then? His self-reproach and continued mortification wrecked his mind. Fortunately for him, he had soon reached their rooms. *Their rooms*, he thought, frowning. To think that he had been once possessive of it! He would gladly surrender his apartments to her if it would resurrect him. However, he knows he was asking for the impossible. At the doors and stone gargoyle to their chambers, his internal struggle could cease and be continued no further. He sighed heavily before rearranging his features to his best disdainful Potions Master smirk and entered the rooms.

Footnotes:

The conversation here is based on Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy and Beyond Good and Evil*.

Chapter 19 - Neediness

Chapter 19 of 20

Severus comes to a decision and Hermione reacts to it.

A/N: For simplicity's sake, titles of books, journals etc (fictitious or otherwise) are underlined and emphases are italicised.

Dear readers,

Whatever happens in this chapter serves the plot. Please do not pelt me with foodstuff or pebbles. I have my reasons for writing things as they are here. Believe me, it is not my desire to disappoint. I just had to write it this way. You will understand my train of thought when the story wraps up in the next chapter. It is not my desire to alienate my readers or to offend.

Re: Explanation of nihilism

This is a response to the many who are confused about my references to nihilism, Nietzsche and Shakespeare's Macbeth. I like it to you to interpret it. Bear in mind that there are many interpretations for many things and one is supposed to discover them by oneself.

Nihilism is the belief that all values are baseless and that nothing can be known or communicated. It is often associated with extreme pessimism and a radical scepticism that condemns existence. A true nihilist would believe in nothing, have no loyalties, and no purpose other than, perhaps, an impulse to destroy. While few philosophers would claim to be nihilists, nihilism is most often associated with Friedrich Nietzsche who argued that its corrosive effects would eventually destroy all moral, religious, and metaphysical convictions and precipitate the greatest crisis in human history. In the 20th century, nihilistic themes—epistemological failure, value destruction, and cosmic purposelessness—have preoccupied artists, social critics, and philosophers. In the mid 20th century, for example, the existentialists helped popularise tenets of nihilism in their attempts to blunt its destructive potential. By the end of the century, existential despair as a response to nihilism gave way to an attitude of indifference, often associated with anti-foundationalism.

Nietzschean nihilism is seen in *Will to Power*. For Nietzsche, there is no objective order or structure in the world except what we give it. Penetrating the façades buttressing convictions, the nihilist discovers that all values are baseless and that reason is impotent. "Every belief, every considering something-true," Nietzsche writes, "is necessarily false because there is simply no true world". For him, nihilism requires a radical repudiation of all imposed values and meaning: "Nihilism is . . . not only the belief that everything deserves to perish; but one actually puts one's shoulder to the plough; one destroys."

The caustic strength of nihilism is absolute, Nietzsche argues, and under its withering scrutiny "the highest values devalue themselves. The aim is lacking, and 'Why' finds no answer." Inevitably, nihilism will expose all cherished beliefs and sacrosanct truths as symptoms of a defective Western mythos. This collapse of meaning, relevance, and purpose will be the most destructive force in history, constituting a total assault on reality and nothing less than the greatest crisis of humanity.

Existential Nihilism deals with great scepticism and relativism. It has been associated with the belief that life is meaningless. Existential nihilism begins with the notion that the world is without meaning or purpose. Given this circumstance, existence itself—all action, suffering, and feeling—is ultimately senseless and empty. This is encapsulated in the Macbeth quotes of Chapter 17, especially these lines:

"Out, out, brief candle!

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage

And then is heard no more; it is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,

Signifying nothing."

Best,

Lady Strange

Beyond Time and Space

Chapter 19 Neediness

Nothing occurred during the next nine hours to make Severus regret what he had to tell Hermione, for she did not return until late. He sat by the cold unlit fireplace in the increasingly darkening room in abject desolation. He had never felt more forlorn than he did now. He would be calm, inscrutable and masterful as was his custom. It would behove him to play the situation extemporaneously. He nodded, assured that this was the right course of action. He hardened his mind against Hermione entering into his admission with any compassion, when the object of his reflection entered the chambers. He remained silent as she reset the wards, hang her robe and lit the few candles in the sitting room.

"Where were you?" he asked flatly, still staring at the empty grate.

"Researching with Remus at Cambridge," she answered, stretching on the sofa, examining Severus as if suddenly struck by his goodwill.

"Have you ever considered failure in this futile endeavour as a *real distinct* possibility?"

"I will preserve until I succeed," said she firmly.

"Why?" he asked, moving purposefully to her sofa and resting his head on her lap, feeling strangely comforted when she removed a lock of his ethereal hair out of his face. "Too cold?" he asked when she shivered.

"I'm used to it," she replied in an affected laugh.

"Why will you persevere?" he repeated more insistently.

"I'm tired of clinging to cold ghostly arm. It does nothing for my circulation if I get numb so easily," she said tiredly.

"What if you don't succeed? What if you *never* succeed?" he asked with urgency.

Her eyes narrowed in apprehension. "What ifs' is a game for scholars. I'm too tired to humour you now."

She tried to make her way to the library but was immediately pinned down to the sofa by Severus's violent pounce.

He was taken aback when she did not struggle against his icy grip on her wrists and the weightlessness of his ethereal body. "What if you *ever* succeed?" he repeated with a snarl that bared his uneven teeth.

"Thank you for the endorsement. I'll have to face your wrath, I suppose," she quietly retorted with venom in her voice.

He increased his pressure on her wrists, as he realised she was not giving him a straight answer. He looked into her angry glare and saw that she refused to struggle because it would be a sign of fear. Hermione Granger was not so stupid as to display fear when she was cornered. He was impressed by her mettle but he did not show it.

"Will we continue as we are *if you fail*?" he snarled.

"Yes."

"Why?" he demanded, narrowing his eyes with suspicion. "I feel looked after. I like it." She blushed becomingly.

"Why?"

"Because you infuriate me; because you're sartorial, who cares? I adore your mind!" Hermione snapped in a reactionary tone. "Your knowledge bewitches me. Now, laugh if you dare!"

"What have I done to elicit such a comment, Professor Granger?" he sneered.

"With backhanded compliments." She scowled. "I made a promise not to forsake you. You can fling me off, but I'll leech on again."

"I'm dead," he protested, finally admitting what he was to himself.

"In the words of the immortal Severus Snape, '*details mere details*': Get it in that translucent head of yours that I will not leave you. I will care for you and continue to fight with you until such time when we kill each other!"

"Wizard's oath?"

She rolled her eyes. "Yes!"

"From one intellectual to another, have you patience?"

"What if one already possesses the virtue?"

"Such bravado!" he purred lowly, releasing her wrists. He returned to his chair, pondering her amiable certainty.

"And will you dismiss me from your company?" she asked spitefully.

"You annoy me with your prattle! You know very well what my answer is!"

"I do not, Severus," she replied quietly.

He arched his brow. "Your presence is acceptable." Crookshanks purred. "As is your cat's. You can stay if you avail yourself to the spare bedroom."

"Are you so well acquainted with my tastes?" she snapped with irritable exhaustion.

"Can you count, *my dear?*" he mocked in a low purr. After her contemptuous laugh, he continued, "Then you will have noticed that you have been under my roof and protection for an extended period of time, providing me with ample opportunity for observation."

She snorted and rose to make her way to the library.

"Do not leave me yet," he purred in a low casual voice without looking at her. "I am not done."

"Only if you extend me the same. I'll be in my boudoir." She gestured to the library.

He looked at her dourly. He saluted her with a lopsided smirk, his best imitation of a smile, and prepared to leave. "Do not wait up! *Let us reverse the roles this once. Let ME wait for you, for a change.*" After a careful look around and a glance at her, he left to seek out the Bloody Baron.

* * *

Morning did nothing to dispel the sense of foreboding in Hermione's mind. She awoke with the feeling intensified. The woman, the Oracle, Severus's mother, whoever she was, had taken her to Delphi again, where Hermione was offered another cryptic message:

Love but do not Cherish,

Enjoy but take not any Pleasure.

Abandon but do not Bewail,

Leave but take not any Sanctuary.

Mourn but do not Weep,

Cut the heart's scab not Kiss it.

Regret but do not Hate,

Augury needs finesse to Compete.

Blame but do not Accuse,

Sanguinity to all is your Mask.

Destroy but do not Burn,

Understand and take care to Avenge.

Curse but do not Reveal,

Rant and take care to Twist the Blade.

She knew that it was some form of advice and had planned to discuss it with Severus. He could actually be rather thoughtful if he so chose; the onyx mourning brooch on her dressing cabinet evinced it. The attached note was a simple "For you, S.S." She stretched and saw Crookshanks staring at her in an almost meaningful way from the desk. When Hermione finished her toilette, she found Crookshanks frantically pawing at Xenophon's Memorabilia.

"Not now," she muttered, removing the source of her pet's antagonism. Holding the book tightly, she ventured out into the sitting room. "Severus?" she called out. She frowned on receiving no response. She repeated herself louder this time only to have Crookshanks answer in a long meow.

"He must still be gadding with the other ghosts," she muttered, making her way to the Potions office. To her astonishment, breakfast was laid out before her. As she seated herself, she saw a note in Severus's neat curlicue hand, which said, "*Consult the antithesis of Plato.*"

"Very odd," she mumbled with a frown, pouring herself a cup of tea. Perhaps he meant Xenophon, she mused, biting into her toast. Feeling certain that he had indeed been referring to Xenophon, she opened the Memorabilia and read his hand on the title page, '*From Mother, 1975*'.

She smiled it was typical of Severus to note remembrances special to him. Intending to read through the book after breakfast, she was caught unawares when Crookshanks bounded onto the desk with a mighty pounce, knocking the Memorabilia onto the floor. He meowed desperately as if wishing to draw her attention to something. Hermione merely reproached Crookshanks sternly as she bent to retrieve the book, "See what you've done! You've knocked a few pages from it."

Crookshanks helped himself to the cream, which he knew his owner never touched; his eyes still trained intently on her.

"Oh!" she exclaimed on realising that the book was not shedding pages. Rather, it was a folded piece of parchment. She felt the early morning's foreboding sensation return as she carefully unfolded it. It simply read: *Forgive me. I must go. Have patience. Forgive me. Adieu.*

Hermione paled considerably, grabbing the chair for support. It cannot be! How could it? Was everyone in this perverse plan but her? The Oracle, his mother, had warned her. She had effectively described the working relationship she had shared with Severus. Insightful woman, thought Hermione, as her ire grew.

"It's easy to advise sanguinity and insouciance! She's dead!" Hermione spat, throwing the breakfast things at the door. The loud crash of ceramic and metal did nothing to palliate her temper and she paced around the office. "Mourn but do not weep, she said! And how am I to do that? Destroy but do not burn? Ha! Utter nonsense! Curse you, Severus Xenophon Snape!" With that wretched cry, she burst into silent tears.

"He has abandoned me! The bloody blooming bastard!" Hermione ranted, her teary voice choking with despair and anger, recalling the Oracle's words. "Twist the blade, she said! Oh, excellent! I shall twist the blade!" She stormed into the workspace and set up the cauldron. "How does she expect me to regret without hating!" she lamented, her sight obscured by tears and her hands trembling at her violent outburst.

Alternating between Severus's apology and the books strewn around the office, it became apparent to Hermione what she must do. She was so engrossed in her work that she did not discern a pop sound. Dobby cowered at the sight of Hermione furiously scribbling and muttering. As he took in her appearance, he asked meekly, pointing to the mangled mess of breakfast things, "Can Dobby clean Miss Hermy's things?"

"Leave me alone, Dobby," she said quietly without looking up from her writing.

"Dobby should, Miss, if Miss wants some more..."

She glared at him, her eyes looking positively wild. If her hair was not neatly in a chignon, he would have supposed her quite mad.

"LEAVE ME NOW!" she shrieked.

He fled. This was not the Miss Hermy who made him clothes and freed his kind. He must speak to Dumbledore.

As soon as the house elf disappeared, Hermione changed the ward pattern of the classroom and Potions office so that she would get no interruptions. Unbeknownst to her, her unusual temper outbreak had already made the rounds in the castle. Even if she had been aware of it, she did not care. She only wanted to concentrate on her work and soon enough the office resembled a sea of leather bound books. Before her on the workspace stood several vials of various colours, she fingered them unconsciously whilst she read, their coolness soothing her somewhat. Thus, she remained occupied till the late evening. She proceeded to pound the wormwood while muttering, "We'll see who leaves whom!"

Mixing the wormwood with asphodel, she looked through her list to see if she had left anything out. As she poured the asphodel and wormwood infusion into the softly bubbling cauldron, she was assailed by a barrage of noises. The doors of the classroom and office banged and shook with such force that it made her table vibrate. "Whoever you are STOP IT!" she bellowed. "I'm working! I'm busy! GO AWAY! Leave me alone!"

"Hermione!" an assortment of voices cried out, as they rattled the doors. "Let us in!"

"Didn't you hear me? GO AWAY!" she screamed. Then muttering an incantation, she strengthened the doors to repel unwanted visitors.

Above the din, Remus's voice was audible. "Hermione, please, let us in. You've been in there all day! This is not judicious; you've not had dinner! Whatever it is talk to us!"

"GO AWAY!" she snarled with genuine malevolence, casting a silencing charm on the doors. "Good," she mumbled with a self-satisfied smirk at her reclaimed quiet, as she stirred her cauldron and lowered the flame. "Accio hellebore root, streeler venom and belladonna!"

"You shouldn't be doing this," came a wizened voice from the fireplace. She scowled at her inadequacy she should have sealed the floo network as well. The old wizard had managed to catch hold of all the ingredients she had called for. "Hand them over, Professor Dumbledore," she demanded in an irritable hiss, her left hand firmly outstretched.

"What are you doing?" he asked, taking in the sight before him.

"Can't you see?" she sneered scornfully; her eyes glinting strangely as she steadily stirred the concoction in the cauldron.

"Why?" he asked with resignation.

"What a trite question!" she laughed bitterly. "I doubt I'll fail in this! I've already failed Severus with my inability to resurrect him; ~~cannot~~ fail to produce a simple potion."

"Poison, you mean," he corrected, staying her hand from snatching the streeler venom with a flick of his free wrist.

"Ah," she answered in a clipped tone, which masked both her surprise and unwillingness to admit defeat. "You were an alchemist. Now that you know that this is an adaptation of the draught of the living dead, you can leave me to finish my death draught in peace."

Dumbledore dropped his bag of sweets on the table and looked at her pleadingly. "Selfish, unfeeling witch! You're no different from Severus! I know what you're trying to do. Killing yourself *will not* solve anything."

"It *will* kill my pain and that's all I want to do!"

"Think Hermione, it's not fair to Severus!" he implored, considering for the moment whether grovelling was a good option to soften ladies' hearts.

"Not fair to Severus?" she shrieked and laughed dangerously. "Is it fair to *ME*? He left me without informing me! He's gone and he didn't tell me!" she screeched, dropping the rowan spoon into the cauldron and weeping most piteously.

"There, there, dear," cooed Dumbledore in a fatherly tone, taking her into his arms.

"He didn't tell me!" she lamented petulantly through her tears, clinging to the Headmaster. "He didn't wait for me! He promised he would! He didn't wait for me!"

"Hush, dear, I know," soothed Dumbledore, patting her back gently with a sigh. He thought on Severus who had bid him farewell last night. "Suicide wouldn't bring you to him, neither will he return to you in such a situation," he reasoned.

"I DON'T CARE!" she screamed. "I shall die trying!"

"Hush, dear," murmured Dumbledore. "He wouldn't approve. Severus is a wizard of his word. If he claims he'll return, he will." Afraid that she would continue to brew her experimental poison, he stayed with her till she cried herself to sleep in the wee hours of the morning.

Footnotes:

The so-called prophecy is my poem I apologise if it's ghastly.

The hand referred to in "neat curlicue hand" means handwriting. Hand has 2 meaning: (1) the appendage with fingers and a thumb, (2) handwriting. Here, it is definition (1).

Chapter 20 - The Beyond

Chapter 20 of 20

The final instalment. How will it all end? Will Severus return? When will he return? Read on... We open with a newspaper article...

To the readers who were confused as to why and how Severus 'disappeared', re-read chapter 10. In that chapter, Severus converses with the Bloody Baron. And the Baron told him, "Think on it, Severus. When you want to move on, seek me out and I'll tell you the theory behind it. It's infinitely better than being bound to this place! But I have not the courage. Remember, lad, I'll tell you how. Regret nothing!"

Translation: Severus went to see the Bloody Baron, as mentioned in chapter 19. Why? So that he can learn the method to move on and go to the other side... Or is it? Is he in the other side or on a different plane inhabited by spirits? To find out read this chapter and everything will be wrapped up.

A/N: To prevent confusion, please note that italicised scripts denote emphasis while underlined ones refer to titles of books, journals and so on.

Beyond Time and Space

Chapter 20 The Beyond

Of all the great visionary wizarding thinkers, Hermione Granger is the one who wrote most and studied profoundly the inter-disciplinary characters of alchemy and other magical fields. That Granger, best known in recent years for her cure of werewolves, wrote about both potions and charms with respect to areas she called 'grey' magic and philosophy should be apparent to anyone familiar with her writings. She had already made this interest unequivocally clear in her D.Mag.A. dissertation for St John's College, Cambridge (founded by the famous witch, Margaret Beaufort) fifteen years ago. Unsurprisingly, the controversy she engendered earned her top awards in the Faculty of Magical Arts. However, that there is a connection between her writings on alchemy, philosophy and charms is less apparent; for many of her writings most concerned with the properties of potions' ingredients, such as her latest article in The Journal of Hermetic Alchemy, seem to be altogether non-philosophical, and her best known philosophical alchemy work has next to nothing to say about charms and spells. And yet, there is a connection between Granger's philosophy behind potion brewing and her understanding of charms and spells falling under the umbrella of 'dark magic' (or as she calls it 'grey magic'). Thus, the tripartite connection between potions, charms and philosophy is most apparent in Granger's pseudo-educational treatise Ironic Alchemy, which culminates in the philosophical education (interrupted by the magical education) of its fictitious subject.

In a response to a review in Ars Chemica, Granger, who is incidentally an intimate friend of the great war hero, Harry Potter, the boy-who-lived-yet-again, revealed that she regarded Ironic Alchemy as "the best, as well as most important of [her] writings." The academic wizarding world mostly subscribes to her judgement on this point as correct; and the excellent importance of that seminal work evinces her abilities to incorporate alchemical and philosophical themes. This same work is presently undergoing its third imprint to the delight of advance wizarding students interested in esoteric alchemical theory. Granger's appointment to the Potions and Arithmancy chairs at Hogwarts' School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, 20 years ago, had both fomented her analytical skill and her natural magical abilities. Upon taking up the two said positions, Hogwarts' reputation as school of impeccably high standards was enhanced. A recent survey in Wizarding Institutions, the foremost education guide to the wizarding world, has ranked Hogwarts above Durmstrang in standards. Not only has Granger maintained the paradigm set down by her predecessor and mentor, Severus Snape (whose D.Mag.A. dissertation has been recently published by Estoericae House), she has improved on it. Her exacting presence and teaching methods have been responsible for the 100% pass rate for Potions and Arithmancy at NEWTs level. This, in turn, has boosted Hogwarts' reputation as the world's premier wizarding institution. This same disciplinarian is also, unknown to many, deeply protective of her students. Many have believed this to be the reason behind her promotion to the head of Slytherin House. Albus Dumbledore, however, informs us that this Gryffindor's appointment resulted from the dearth of suitable former Slytherin candidates with the aptitude to keep the young charges in check. He also claims that she is too indifferent to Quidditch rivalries to bother supporting any one particular team. No where was her ability brought to the fore than two days ago, where she single-handedly defended several students when a chance mishap led a crazed griffin (that had escaped from the Game Keeper's compound) to the school. Several students interviewed, including the second year Gryffindor, Ronald Potter revealed, "We had to find Aunt, I mean, Professor Granger; she's the only one always around during wizarding holidays. We tried looking for Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall before we remembered that they were on holiday."

Apparently, a young Slytherin boy by the name of Crito Malfoy had wanted a closer look at the griffin, which had been recently imported for a Care of Magical Creatures lesson. In so doing, he provoked and enraged it to such a state whereby it charged into the castle to avenge itself on the boy. Luckily for him, he had called out to his friends, Ronald Potter and Harold Weasley, to avail themselves to the Head of his House. Harold Weasley, son of the famed dragon researcher, Charles Weasley said, "After we found Auntie, er...Professor Granger, she tried to gather all the remaining students in her office. There were only 30 of us in school due to the Gringotts Bank Holiday Week and she reckoned it would be easy. But she couldn't seal her office. The griffin had smelled Crito and started charging at her because she wouldn't let him near us." "She was bloody brilliant!" described the animated strawberry blonde Malfoy. "She cast a protection charm on us and used so many spells and dodged so many times that the griffin couldn't get at me, er...us. The griffin was so fierce; it nearly bit off her left arm. She had to hex it between its eyes before it would let go. But she didn't show she was scared, not one bit! She gave us an interrupt-me-and-you'll-be-scrubbing-cauldrons-by-hand-for-a-month look when she was done and limped off to get Hagrid to get rid of the griffin!"

If anything, this reporter is of the opinion that Granger shares her professional dedication of caring for students with her predecessor, the late Severus Snape, who tragically died in saving our world from the dark wizard, Lord Voldythingy. Rumours have persisted that Granger and Snape were one-time lovers; however, we have not been able to obtain any confirmation on the matter. Despite that, we do know that Hermione Granger's indifferent health after the griffin attack has made a turn for the worse. It was reported last evening that she was stable though feverish. Since we do not know for sure as the parties involved have declined to comment, I urge the British wizarding community to join me in wishing a speedy recovery to one of the best minds in alchemical scholarship. However, it remains in this reporter's opinion that Professor Granger will not likely live long. Griffin attacks have been known to cause irrevocable damage to all mortals. Recent evidence points to their saliva being highly poisonous, though this is still denied by griffin breeders.

* * *

Minerva McGonagall folded the offensive Daily Prophet that she had been reading aloud and put it neatly aside. Disdain was written all over her face. Thinning her lips, she angrily commented, "How tactless can Skeeter be? Wishing death upon *our* Hermione!" A movement in the bed next to her alerted her attention and she turned towards the pallid figure there. "Yes, dear?"

The figure's expressive chocolate eyes danced at her colleague and friend's as their owner spoke. "She has her reasons. I did keep her in a jar for an entire summer." There was no malice in her voice, only a certain melancholy. "At least, there was a tacit acknowledgement of my achievements."

"Hush, my dear," muttered an old wizard in a faded blue robe, bending down to kiss her forehead. "You must rest."

The figure in the black nightgown wheezed a laugh quietly before coughing. "Your beard tickles, Headmaster!" She coughed again, spitting into a chamber pot offered by Remus Lupin. "How are my children?"

Minerva sighed, removing the offending Daily Prophet out of sight, "Just like *him*." Dumbledore and his wife exchanged poignant smiles.

Remus patted her hand, ignoring the bloody mass in the chamber pot. He replied in a weak smile, "The Malfoys have been watching over them; they'll be fine. Don't worry."

"What about my Potions and Arithmancy students?" she asked, coughing into her duvet.

"Dumbledore's taken your potions classes and I've the Arithmancy classes," Remus answered quietly.

"Why is Ginny with my children? Isn't Draco enough to handle them?" she asked softly, trying to sit up but failing miserably due to her heavily bandaged left arm. "Still festering, I see," she muttered in an aside as she caught sight of her arm.

"You kn...know she ne....never leaves Dra...Draco alone these d...days," said Harry sarcastically. Hermione smiled warmly at him, glad that he had almost returned to his former self. He helped her sit up and she rolled her eyes at his last comment.

"He's even moved in with her next to Greenhouse One," Luna added, trying to make Hermione as comfortable as she could.

"How's our Ron?" Hermione demanded softly, before she spat into the chamber pot again.

"S...Same old, same old," mumbled Harry uneasily. "On the b...bright side, he's gr...great friends with Lock...Lockhart at St Mungo's now; always b...beats him at wizard's ch...chess. C...Come to think on it, he st...still b...beats me at it." He grinned sheepishly.

Hermione tried to laugh and was promptly rewarded with another coughing fit, alarming everyone in her chamber. She glowered weakly at all present. "What are you looking at? This is what an invalid looks like!"

Remus chuckled and tried to feed her some of Poppy's concoctions. She gestured him to keep them away from her. "Stop fussing over me! I'm fine. It was only a griffin, not a komodo dragon!"

"A what?" shot Minerva, tilting her head in disbelief. Her prize ex-student must be absolutely delirious if she's started naming non-existent dragon species.

Catching his former transfiguration teacher's look, Harry quickly interposed, "It's a m...monitor lizard found on the er...Indonesian i...island of Ko...Komodo; its s...saliva is re...reportedly highly poi...poisonous. Its bite, there...therefore, is fatal."

"As if I were incapable of delivering the mini-lecture myself," she muttered under her breath.

Dumbledore sat by her left and revealed brokenly with a heavy heart, "I'm sorry I wasn't around to prevent it... The griffin that attacked you..."

"I'm fine really. No lasting harm done." She coughed more fiercely; this time throwing up large bloody blobs into the chamber pot. She stared at them, fascinated. Before she could examine them, however, Remus removed the chamber pot from her pale trembling hands.

"Hagrid's humanely disposed of the griffin that attacked you. It was very ill; its saliva did indeed contain a virulent bacteria," Dumbledore explained slowly, observing her pale face twist into a smirk.

"Great! A griffin with rabies, just what I need! Give me some time in the potions office and I can find something to restore myself..."

Luna interjected at this point, her large eyes brimming with emotion, "I've worked with Madam Pomfrey to find an antidote but it appears there's nothing to be done."

Hermione laughed fretfully at the five pairs of eyes staring unblinkingly at her. "Is that all? Give me a bezoar and a few hours later poof you'll find..."

A tear ran down Remus's cheek as Minerva turned to hide her sobs on her husband's shoulders. "We did," began Remus hoarsely, playing with her fingers as if uncertain of something. "You've reacted badly to it."

Hermione calmly leaned back into the pillow, allowing it to support her full weight. "*Is that* all? I thought it was something serious!" She closed her eyes lightly and reopened them without a trace of emotion. "Explains the spittoons of blood. We could start a blood bank with them; Luna, as a mediwitch, do you know any takers?" she joked, her voice dry and evenly modulated.

After some opposition, Hermione finally yielded to Remus and Luna's entreaties and consented to lie down for a bit so as to conserve her energy. She expressly conditioned, however, that she would not consume any medication or potion and would do not more than lie down and stare at the ceiling. Gradually, Luna, Harry and Minerva retired for the night when the clock chimed two, leaving her under the watchful eye of the Headmaster and the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher. Hermione flickered her eyes to the former werewolf who was reading Xenophon's *Memorabilia* with great interest. Unexpectedly, Hermione struggled to sit up again. She had caught a familiar scent of herbs, wormwood and hellebore. She raised her head feebly and asked, "Do you smell something?"

Dumbledore turned away from the window and sniffed the air. He sighed quietly, his eyes unusually bright but not twinkling. "Get some rest, my dear. It's probably nothing."

Hermione closed her eyes, stifling a cough; but soon enough, she opened them again. She thought she had heard the woman, the Oracle again. It or rather *she* had instructed her to look up. As she did so, she imagined she could see a strip of roughly torn paper spiralling slowly down, towards her stomach. "There, do you see that?" Hermione whispered as if terrified of being overheard.

Remus dismissed it as a moth without looking up from the book. Dumbledore, however, could distinctively smell the rich scent of hellebore, wormwood and other herbs. Thus, he stepped forward to catch the torn parchment fragment. "Ah yes," he chuckled dolefully, turning pale before wiping something from his eyes. He bent down and whispered in Hermione's ear, "*He* kept his word."

She seized the proffered scrap of paper and held it before her eyes. On it, the unmistakable neat curlicue script read *Venio*". She lightly kissed the paper and tightly held onto it. "I thought he had moved on."

"He had," whispered Dumbledore, glad that Remus was mercifully oblivious to their conversation.

"How then could he return?" she sighed, winding a lock of her bushy hair on her finger.

"Upon their deaths, extremely proficient virtuous wizards head to a plane of spirits. They're more powerful than ghosts. Severus's mother is one such. They exist with us in a parallel cosmos if you like."

She smiled her comprehension. "It said *Venio*," she sighed, tightening her grip on the torn parchment. "He's coming," she mouthed to Dumbledore in a faint smile.

"I know," he murmured, shaking his head in a bid to stem the tears.

Succeeding a tense twenty minutes, Remus excused himself to the bathroom. At that exact moment, the candles and magically charmed lights in her bedchamber flickered out. Dumbledore heard the unmistakeable sounds of Hermione chuckling weakly through her coughs and gasps for air.

"Severus," her feeble and tired voice barely above a whispered lisp. "What kept you? Where have you been?" she continued breathlessly.

A silkily mellow and almost seductive masculine voice hissed in reply, "DO NOT question me, insufferable know-it-all! What kept *you*?"

Dumbledore fell noiselessly into a chair at this intimate conversation, quite overcome.

"I suppose you expect me to express gratitude, Headmaster," sneered the dangerously low voice before it softened in earnest. "You have adequately kept her out of harm, thank you Albus."

Dumbledore removed his half-moon spectacles to better wipe his eyes when he felt a light pressure on his right cheek and a soft feminine whisper of "thank you for everything".

Upon the departure of the orange blossom and hellebore scents, Remus returned. He was astonished to find the bedroom shrouded in darkness. When he finally managed to light a candle, he was unprepared for what greeted him. Dumbledore had shut his eyes tightly and furrowed his forehead as if in pain, his fingers unconsciously drumming Hermione's hand. Alarmed, Remus examined Hermione to find that she had already expired with a silent smile on her lips and a tear streaking from her right eye. The clock by the bed, it seemed, had shattered and stopped at precisely a quarter to three.

~Finis~

Footnotes:

Crito is the name of an interlocutor of Socrates in one of Plato's dialogues. There is a dialogue named after him in the Socratic canon. Ironic, isn't it? *little wink*

Skeeter uses "Lord Voldythingy" because she still cannot bear to use the name Voldemort.

Venio is Latin for "I come".

The last line, "The clock by the bed, it seemed, had shattered and stopped at precisely a quarter to three" draws attention to the fact that Severus, too, died at 2.45am. This was mentioned in Chapter 1.

Dear readers,

Thank you for sticking with me and this story, despite the mad fracas over it. Your forbearance is very much appreciated.

My next tale, *Proestigium* (which also comes with the secondary title *What the Seasons may Bring*), will be my so-called last fic before I slip into temporary sabbatical from non-academic writing. I have many academic engagements and am unable to keep up with the demands of the quill on top of work, studies and my indifferent (some would say 'poor') health. I shall still pop 'round now and then. If all goes well, I may venture to write a Regency romance or something along the HG/SS line by this time next year. *Proestigium* is a novel in letters, 42 to be exact and is a response to the WIKTT Severus Snape as Arsenius Jigger challenge. The story is indeed complete, so, fear not. While the ending is not as 'tragic' as *Beyond Time and Space*, I flatter myself in the belief that it may amuse. However, the style may be off-putting to some readers who are not familiar with the tradition of epistolary literature.