

String Quartet No. 4, Opus 63

by expected aberrance

During a typical potions class, Snape ruminates on the power of death.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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String Quartet No. 4 Opus 83

Disclaimer: This is basically an adaptation of Chuck Palahnuik's "Lullaby" to suit my needs. If you're into a mix of Anthony Burgess and Stephen King, I highly recommend picking that up after you read this fic. Or before; either will make me happy. Snape doesn't belong to me, but if he did, he'd be getting many more hugs. The title comes from a Shostakovich piece that helped mold this story. I recommend that as well.

Review please!

Two words. Six syllables.

I slam the door to signal the beginning of my sixth-year Gryffindor-Slytherin Potions class, a childish act I know but a necessity in the existence I have hollowed out for myself. Every little bit of unease or trepidation on their faces counts.

Counting one, counting two...

Two of the first words I ever learned; the first spell I remember.

"Today, you will attempt to make Ira Anguis. Although it is a poison, no credit will be given to the noxious mass of mistakes the majority of you will undoubtedly concoct. Can anyone tell me the necessary effects of this potion, aside from death?"

Granger's hand is in the air, as always, though no longer waving frantically.

Counting twenty, counting twenty-one...

"Anyone?"

She knows I almost never call on her. This is more a bored ritual than anything else.

Counting twenty-five, counting twenty-six...

"Mr. Malfoy?"

Smirking little bastard.

Counting twenty-eight, counting twenty-nine...

"Once ingested, the potion sets the drinker aflame. The fire itself is green and cannot be extinguished, except by the antidote."

"Excellent. Ten points to Slytherin."

That was a waste of points, an answer that could have been guessed by any imbecile with half a brain. I doubt this class collectively possesses more than that, aside from Granger and Malfoy perhaps.

Counting thirty-eight, counting thirty-nine...

"Open your books to page four-hundred twenty-six. You know where the ingredients are by now. Begin."

Stopper death. What utter shite. Despite what my students may think, my fascination with my field lies not in the opportunity to hover over a cauldron for hours, rubbing my hands together with manic glee in anticipation of adding to a large collection of death in many flavors. No, I have no need of it.

"Ten points from Gryffindor. Do mind your own potion, Ms. Granger."

That idiot boy should not be needing help already. The first step only requires boiling water.

Counting fifty-nine, counting sixty...

My father killed my mother when I was three. A lesson in the consequences of disobedience for me, or so he said.

I admire poisons because they can be set safely on a shelf.

When I was old enough to understand the significance of my memory, the curse became an obsession. Though I was not yet old enough to have a wand, I pretended to use it on insects. Every ant and fly I killed was my father, and I imagined watching the flash of green light take the life from his hated eyes the same way it had robbed the warmth from my mother's embrace.

Granger is helping Longbottom again. I see it; she knows I notice, I know she knows that I know; our intricate little dance goes on.

Counting one hundred-twenty, counting one hundred twenty-one...

"Mr. Potter, I would appreciate your not killing us all by adding the powdered root in your hand. Twenty points from Gryffindor."

Exactly like his bloody father.

Counting one hundred thirty-two, counting one hundred thirty-three...

A year before I was to start at Hogwarts, my father acquired a wand for me, intent on teaching me himself. I learned much from him, all Dark magic, but he never saw fit to show me that particular curse. Perhaps he had some idea of how I might use it.

Goyle is adding the scales four steps too soon; he might actually surpass Longbottom in incompetence by making the only harmless poison in the entire room.

Counting one hundred forty-nine, counting one hundred fifty...

I killed my father the summer after my first year at Hogwarts.

He was in the middle of administering what had been until then the worst beating of my life. I had had the misfortune of ruining a complex and delicate potion by entering his laboratory at the wrong moment. When I tried to defend myself, he snapped my wand in half. He then proceeded to attempt the same with me. I remember his initial blow and utterance of "crucio" before blacking out.

I awoke to glass. Everywhere. Clawing its way through my hands and knees and back. Long, slashing shards of pain mixed with almost powder-fine splinters digging into my skin. Glass scraping against my teeth and gums, piercing my tongue, from when he placed a flask in my mouth and kicked my jaw to break it. I began whispering the curse around the needle-edges in my mouth, raising myself on my hands and knees, away from the slick and glittering floor. I spat out blood and broken teeth and bits of glass with each word, the chant getting louder in my mind if not my ruined vocal chords. The moment when pain exploded at my right side, something in my mind broke free. I saw him freeze, reflected in the red glass, stumble, twice, before falling heavily forward without the aid of wand or sickly green light. He was dead before he hit the ground, I'm sure. Just to be certain, I crawled across his still body, leaving bloody tracks in my wake, to stare at his lifeless eyes, permanently frozen in shock. I shut them, cutting them a bit with the glass embedded in my fingers, before succumbing to the abyss of sleep.

Thomas might have made a halfway decent potion if Brown hadn't chucked that note into his cauldron just now.

"Ms. Brown, Mr. Thomas, my classroom is not owlery. Twenty points from Gryffindor each."

Counting two hundred twenty, counting two hundred twenty-one...

The Aurors investigating my father's sudden demise could find no cause of death. They questioned me as a suspect, but had to dismiss all charges for lack of evidence. Nothing in either wand nor the body itself held any explanation. Even if they had charged me, the case for self-defense in light of my injuries would have negated any sentence in Azkaban. According to the Ministry of Magic, my father died of natural causes. I, however, could not dismiss it so easily. Not that I have much regret for that particular murder; that stain rests light on my soul compared to others.

I could not on my life sheath the weapon of his destruction.

That fully-functional paper aircraft thrown at Nott by Finnegan is admirable in creativity, but will cost him dearly for the demonstration in my class. The fact that it was in retaliation for the bat wings hurled in his direction by one of my House will have to go unnoticed by me.

"Thirty points from Gryffindor, Mr. Finnegan, for disrupting class, and detention tonight with Filch. The next infraction by your House will be fifty points and a month's detention."

Counting two-hundred seventy-four, counting two hundred seventy-five...

Whatever demon I had appealed to became the glass that crawled down my throat, shredding my lungs with each breath, piercing behind my eyes, binding my muscles in fire. My agony builds until I give in and murder another to sate it. The reward for taking life is a release sweeter than any orgasm or drug I have experienced. Pain, both physical and emotional, feeds it marginally, but the dissipating magic of a full-grown witch or wizard is bliss itself.

I kill anything that will not be missed. Flowers wilt with my passing, birds grow silent, flies cease their buzzing. A daylight vampire, a breathing Dementor, I suck the life from everything in my wake if my need requires it. You didn't really think that house-elves were responsible for the startling lack of rodent activity in a castle as large as this? Whenever Hagrid needs fodder for his menagerie, I offer my services. I take long walks in the Forbidden Forest, especially after classes such as this one, to relieve the pressure, the path cold and lifeless in my steps. The various creatures that inhabit it have learned to avoid me, much like most of the wizarding world, if they have a choice.

This ability has ironically given me a greater awareness of and appreciation for the gift of life. I can sense anything living in my vicinity, especially that infused with magic. Detecting invisibility charms is not difficult for me, but cloaks like Potter's give me some trouble.

Malfoy's little prick is far too interested in completing the dolls he's made of Potter and flicking them at him afire to mind his own potion. Again.

"Mr. Malfoy, can you perhaps tell us the step in the potion the class should have reached by now?"

Counting three-hundred eleven, counting three-hundred twelve...

I have spent over two decades at Hogwarts, and my greatest accomplishment has been not killing one of its staff or students on its grounds. That is not to say I haven't been sorely tempted, compelled even. Counting patiently has a limit in effectiveness. During my years of as a student, there were frequent bouts of plague among familiars. Potter, junior has no idea how close he came to simply not existing. The night at the Whomping Willow, my desire to kill Potter, Lupin, and Black was second only to that which drove me to slay my father. I remember feeling the beginning of the curse, the power build, but then shut off as soon as it began. I do not know what stayed me, for it was no conscience of my own. Strong magic of that sort has a purpose altogether separate from the wizard that fancies himself directing it. If Dumbledore had been unaware of my talent then, he certainly suspected something when I killed his phoenix after being informed that none of his perfect Gryffindors would be punished for attempted murder. The blasted thing came back to life of course, but he could not have attributed its death to the normal life cycle of those birds. He said nothing, however, and the hell that was my life at Hogwarts continued as normal.

In my seventh year, I was invited to Malfoy Manor along with several others of my House. I knew Lucius Malfoy by reputation only, as he had little use for those so far beneath him in age and rank. The meeting was, unsurprisingly, recruitment for prospective Death Eaters. As was my nature, I stayed on the fringes of the gathering, largely unnoticed until I caught the attention of an older associate of Malfoy's. Apparently, he was accustomed to having the younger ranks of Death Eaters gratefully service him at wand point. I, widely known as "Snivellus," was chosen from among the weak and easy for the privilege of giving him fellatio. I politely refused until he dragged me into a back room with the threat of Cruciatus. A smile was his only warning, and he died standing with his tiny dick hanging out of his robes. Malfoy, the pragmatist that he is, did not immediately kill me. Instead, I was brought before the Dark Lord unarmed to answer for killing one of his own. Another Death Eater came forward wanting vengeance for the death of his friend. I slew him before he drew his wand on me. This earned me a cold smile and the place of assassin at the side of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.

My threat seems to have settled the Gryffindors down a bit, but my Slytherins have become too obvious in their gloating. If Parkinson manages to levitate those lacewings into Granger's cauldron, I will not be held responsible for my actions.

"Ms. Parkinson, your potion should not still be boiling at this point."

Counting four-hundred thirty-six, counting four-hundred thirty-seven...

The Dark Lord generally prefers messy, painful ends for those that oppose him. His ideal setting would be blood running nearly black beneath the Dark Mark, body parts flung everywhere, scorch marks and gaping holes littering the ground and sides of the edifices that formerly housed his enemies. Occasionally, He likes to leave a single survivor, gibbering madly about the awesome unstoppable power of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named-Though-No-One-Really-Remembers-Why, just to make sure everyone knows exactly who to blame for the remodeling and genocide. I was used in cases where a quiet disappearance was needed, for a target heavily guarded or in a public setting. MacNair has nothing on me in the art of execution.

I killed Muggles, Mudbloods, halfbloods, blood traitors, Ministry employees, politicians, Aurors, Unspeakables, protestors, rebels, tradesmen, scholars, artists, witches, hags, wizards, warlocks, and children, far too many children. I hear the Minister of Magic before Fudge died of natural causes.

I could not sleep from the day I left Hogwarts and entered His service full time. By day, I apprenticed to a Potions master employed by the Dark Lord. At night, I felled hundreds, some assignments, others as rewards. By the time He sent me to kill my former Headmaster, only a shell of my former self remained. My life consisted of bouts of murderous euphoria and the pits of misery in between. I became wraith-like, for I was never hungry and unable to consume food. Dumbledore was my first failure. I'm sure he considers me to be one of his. I had just finished my apprenticeship and went to Hogwarts under the pretense of applying for the open DADA position. Clearly, I was rather unsuccessful in that regard. But I digress. More importantly, I could not kill the sweet-toothed old fool.

Longbottom's potion has begun to smoke; fortunately, he is rivaling Goyle in creating a completely useless poison. Perhaps if one were to drink enough of the pink monstrosity of a product he made, one could die from electrolyte imbalance. I'll let him continue until the end of class, just out of scientific curiosity. And then reward him with a suitable reduction of points.

Counting four-hundred ninety-seven, counting four-hundred ninety-eight...

I looked into those thrice-be-damned twinkling eyes, and the small part of me still capable of caring fought its way to the surface of my consciousness. I waged what seemed an eternal battle against the bloodlust rising within me, fought it and won for the first time in years. I poured my soul out to him in confession, naming every victim I remembered and numbering the ones I could not. I do not know how long I clutched his robes in supplication, kneeling before him, and my face ground into the carpet fast becoming soaked in tears. It felt like blood to me; I was drowning in it. When I was done, I begged to be taken to Azkaban or killed for what I had done. My life was now his; I had no more use for it. He denied me that justice, forcing on me instead a detoxification of the soul. I was locked away deep in the castle, far from any living thing. With nothing to feed on, nothing to kill, the madness truly took hold. I do not remember much from the over two months I spent down there, only pain. Afterwards, however, I could finally sleep again.

After recovering somewhat, I returned to the Dark Lord, armed with the opportunity for Him to have a spy in Hogwarts, the headquarters of His greatest enemy. It alone spared my life. He didn't completely believe the tale I fed Him, that Dumbledore somehow crippled my power. Torture was my reward for failure. I still had that affliction of power, of course, but through the excuse I was able to employ it with far lesser frequency than before. Absolute proof of Dumbledore's complete insanity is his decision to entrust me with children. His faith would be heartening if it weren't asinine.

We have survived another Longbottom potion-brewing through the interplay of Granger's much needed interference and my active blindness to it. I dismiss my class with as many cruel remarks and punishments as possible; it will tide me over until I am able to resume my role as a Hogwarts sanctioned angel of death. Granger lingers, and I wonder if she will speak to me. I must not look forbidding enough. Ah, now she has decided to flee.

Before the Triwizard Tournament, I had not killed a human being in fourteen years.

Despite this, I am a greater danger to the safety of these children than Lupin could ever be. Hypocrisy is another of my admirable traits, alongside a great respect for my fellow wizard, and patience for those not as blessed with intellectual capabilities as I am. I dread the day when counting will not be enough, when I cannot confine the demon to Voldemort's lovely revels, and I take the life of one of the unfortunate little souls in my care. Dumbledore's Flooing me again, just as I feel my Mark burn into my skin.

Counting one, counting two...

Thanks for reading!