

Limbo

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Severus survived Nagini's attack. Barely. Hermione and Harry have a plan to help him.

One-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: This is a contribution to the Potter Place Post DH Prompt Challenge, prompt #31. The prompt in its entirety is included at the bottom. Beta credits withheld until the voting is done.

So. This was what it was like being dead, was it?

It was a strange feeling. Severus wasn't sure what he had expected; he wasn't even sure if he really had expected anything at all. He wasn't a particularly religious person, and the idea of an afterlife wasn't something he had spared much thought.

If he were to think about it, however, he would have imagined that there would have been some sort of actual life involved. It was called the ~~afterlife~~ *afterlife*, after all. Perhaps some sort of sensation of being reunited with deceased friends and family. Or maybe something karmic, like rewards for good deeds and punishment for wrongs done in life.

This was just empty. Dark. Sensationless. Nothing but his own thoughts. Dreadfully boring, actually. Even Limbo would have been more interesting than this.

It would appear that there really wasn't any afterlife as such. So why was he still sentient?

Severus was pretty certain that he had actually died. Nagini was a big snake; she would have had a lot of venom. It had certainly been painful enough, and he did appear to have lost his body also. If that wasn't fool-proof evidence of death, then Severus honestly didn't know what it would take.

Perhaps he really weren't supposed to be sentient still. Perhaps his soul had somehow been forgotten when he died. If he could have rolled his eyes, if he had still had any eyes to roll, he would have. He would admit that there were several things in his life that he had royally messed up. His relationship with Lily, for example. Or the failing to control his fascination with the Dark Arts, subsequently joining Voldemort's Death Eaters, which in turn led to all sorts of stupid things. He would, however, have imagined that he was more than capable of *dying* properly. He would have thought that even Longbottom would have been capable of dying properly, and his ineptitude in almost everything else was legendary.

At least it was relatively comfortable. No pains and aches, no duties, no annoying children, just peace and quiet.

Or almost peace and quiet.

It was as if there always was a strange chattering noise going on. It sounded like it was coming from very far away, and it was so low that it was only just within his hearing range. Or sensing-range, perhaps, seeing as he no longer had ears to listen with. It made him wonder what sort of shape he was now that he didn't have a body. Since he was sentient, he had to be made up of something or other, or there wouldn't be anything to be sentient with.

Perhaps he was a part of this darkness. Perhaps he was this darkness.

The afterlife was a boring place. If he hadn't had philosophy to entertain him, Severus expected he would probably have gone mad.

They were back again, Healer Pye noticed with some displeasure. Miss Granger and Mr Potter. He didn't know why those two were so keen on visiting the unresponsive body of Severus Snape. The man was hardly known to have been a great friend to either of them. Quite the opposite, actually. He knew that Snape's name had been partially cleared of charges after the end of the war and that he had been said to have had an important role in the outcome, but Pye wasn't sure how much of it was actually true. Perhaps Dumbledore's people had just been unwilling to admit that they had been duped by Snape, and his supposed heroic deeds in the final stages of the war was nothing more than propaganda.

It didn't matter whether or not Snape was guilty, though. To Pye he was little more than just another patient, who required the same help and care as any other patient. Snape had spent the last several years in a deep coma, and Pye found it extremely unlikely that he would ever wake up or even get slightly better. His body and all internal organs appeared to be functioning as they should, except for his brain. Being interested in Muggle medicine, Pye was familiar with the term 'brain death', and he was fairly certain that it would cover Snape's current condition quite nicely.

It was only a shame he couldn't get a Muggle doctor's opinion on it. Snape didn't have any known relatives to claim him; he would have made a perfect test subject for this organ transplant thing that Pye had read about. He had nearly lost his job last year when he had inadvertently voiced the interest to try that on wizarding patients. He had only just barely managed to keep the skin on his nose and had instead been transferred to the Janus Thickey ward, where they had mockingly told him to keep an eye on the patients' collective organs and make sure nobody started trading.

Pye was all for experimenting with new methods, but he didn't particularly like where Potter and Granger were headed in their attempts to bring Snape back to awareness. Even the most stubborn person had to give up some time, and there were limits to both magical healing and Muggle science. Potter and Granger were stretching both. He had tried to explain to them that even if they did manage to get some sort of semi-aware state out of Snape, he would almost certainly not display any sort of brain function, but they still pressed on in grim determination.

It wasn't just the question of whether or not they were doing Snape a serious disfavoured and the ethical questions involved therein; they were also disrupting the peace on the entire ward with their chanting and dancing and things that suddenly and unexpectedly went poof. Why couldn't they rely on spells and wands like normal people? At one point Pye had spent the better part of an afternoon scrambling around the ward with smoke repellent charms after Granger and Potter had set off some modified dungbombs, causing the entire ward to be filled with thick purple smoke. He had tried to figure out what that was supposedly good for, but they had just told him to mind his own business.

He watched them discreetly from the doorway, as Miss Granger unpacked a number of items from her bottomless beaded purse. Their attempts had been increasingly more ludicrous, and Pye found himself taken by curiosity. What on earth were they up to now?

Granger pulled a large rolled up mat out of her purse. She struggled with the weight of it for a moment before unrolling it on the floor in front of Snape's bed. It was big and round and had a drawing of a large wheel on it. Pye thought it looked shamanistic in nature and shook his head. It would probably be best if he stuck around for this. He had tried to get through to Snape's awareness through Legilimency with the help of experts in the field, but the man appeared to have developed his Occlumency skills to the point where they were employed by pure reflex, effectively blocking out any attempts to get inside his mind. Pye knew that shamanistic rituals dealt with trance-like states and mind journeys. It wasn't nearly the same as Legilimency and Occlumency, but it was similar enough that Snape's Occlumency shields might still keep them out. Pye wasn't entirely certain that it wouldn't be harmful to those trying to get in should that happen.

Perhaps he ought to try and stop them. The last thing he needed in his ward were two more brain dead occupants. Mustering up as much of an authoritative air as he could, he went inside the room.

"Excuse me, what are you doing here?" he asked sternly.

Potter turned to look at him, but Granger ignored him completely, continuing to hang a dream catcher on the wall above Snape's head.

"What are we usually doing here?" Potter retorted.

Pye frowned at the cheeky tone, but he wasn't surprised. Potter and Granger had quickly discovered that Pye wasn't as keen on their project as they had thought, and it seemed that they couldn't quite forgive his unwillingness to help. He wasn't even certain why they had thought he would help them, but he suspected they might have remembered his experiments with stitches when their friend's father had been bitten by Voldemort's large snake.

"I must ask you to stop this at once," he continued. It wasn't the first time they had this discussion, but they ignored all his attempts of throwing them out. At one point he had tried to forbid them to enter the ward at all, but that had only resulted in Granger complaining to the hospital management and writing several sharp-tongued readers' letters to a number of wizarding newspapers. Rumour had it that she had even tried owling the Minister of Magic himself. All Pye knew was that the hospital administration had come down hard on him, forcing him to give it up and let her do as she pleased.

"Ask all you want," Granger said, digging deep in her beaded purse and pulled out a small drum and a set of rattles. "You know what the answer is going to be, so I honestly don't understand why you keep asking."

"What I don't understand," Pye said irritably, "is why you are doing this? He wasn't exactly popular. In fact," Pye turned to glare at Potter, "I've heard that his enmity with your own father was fairly legendary."

"Yes, it was," Potter said calmly, "but he loved my mum."

Potter turned his attention back to his friend, as if his answer explained everything. Pye didn't really think he had become that much wiser, but it was obvious that it was all he was going to get out of them.

"Look, if staying will make you feel better, by all means stay," Granger said, pushing him backwards, away from her mat. "Just stay out from under foot and don't interfere."

Sullenly, Pye retreated to a corner from which he could watch the proceedings and be ready to stop Granger and Potter if the situation called for it. No matter what Granger might think of his so-called interference, he was still a Healer at this hospital and as such, supposedly an authority figure.

He watched in silence as Potter set up candle holders around the mat on the floor and around Snape's bed, lighting each candle in what looked like a deliberately random order. At the same time he tried very hard to avoid looking at Miss Granger, who was in the process of taking her robes off. At first Pye had thought it was just her outer robes, but before he knew what was going on, she was unhooking her bra. His face heated up as Potter also started undressing.

"Now, see here," he said weakly, shielding his eyes with his hand, "I really shouldn't think nudity would be necessary..."

"Of course it's necessary," Granger snapped. "Don't you think I've done my research? And stop hiding your face with your hands like that. You look like an idiot."

He should really stop this now. Make them put some clothes on and leave immediately. He was only glad that Snape didn't appear to have any immediate family to complain about this highly unusual treatment of their kinsman.

Granger and Potter ignored him completely as they continued with their activities, now completely naked. It was difficult to know where he could look in order to keep at least a semi-firm grip on common decency while still keeping an eye on what they were doing. At least Potter's privates were covered from view when he sat down on the floor with the drum in his lap.

Granger was much more of a problem. For one thing she was a girl and therefore had a lot more areas that he wasn't supposed to be staring at. For another thing she had picked up the rattles. To begin with she had just been shaking them along with the rhythm Potter was producing on the drum, but then Potter started picking up the pace and Granger went from shaking the rattles over Snape's bed to dancing wildly around the room, rattling at various objects and at Snape's unresponsive body seemingly at random.

This was Pye's biggest problem and the reason his face was impossibly flushed. Not the rattling or the mad, trance-like dancing, but the way it made all sorts of things wobble and quiver in the most fascinating way. For a moment he quite forgot all his qualms about this weird ritual, his every brain cell preoccupied with the sight of Granger's full breasts jiggling with her every bounce. It wasn't until she shook her rattles right in his face, close enough for them to tap his nose a couple of times, that he managed to pull himself back to the present. If it hadn't been for the totally empty look in her eyes, he would have thought she had done it on purpose.

Pye resolved to keep his eyes on Snape instead. If they were trying to wake him up, it definitely wasn't working. Snape looked exactly as unresponsive as ever, and only the slow rise and fall of his chest kept him from looking like a corpse. Not even when Granger added a shrill, ululating chanting to her act did Snape show the slightest reaction.

After what felt like hours, Potter's frantic drumming stopped as the young man curled up in an exhausted, naked ball on the floor, and shortly after Granger too fell silent, collapsing in a heap where she stood, giving one of the rattles a last half-hearted shake before she was taken by the deep sleep of exhaustion.

Pye stood quietly in his corner for a few minutes, watching them sleep. For some reason he felt very reluctant to go near either of them and eventually ended up using his wand to summon a couple of blankets to cover them with. Then he moved the two piles of discarded clothes to lie next to their respective owners, hoping that when they woke up, they would get the hint and get dressed right away. When all private bits were properly covered, he finally moved out of the corner.

Checking on Snape was quickly done. Nothing appeared to have changed in his condition at all. At least they hadn't made things worse. Pye wasn't keen on moving Potter and Granger about in all their nakedness, so he decided to let them stay where they had fallen. They were both healthy and fit young people, so a night on the floor shouldn't bring them any more discomfort than perhaps a crick in the neck.

Shaking his head, he went towards the door, but just as he was about to leave the room, he heard just the hint of a groan. It was probably just Granger or Potter, but there was still something about it that made him turn back to look at Snape.

His eyes widened. Something was different. Snape was still deeply unconscious, but he looked different. There was an expression of supreme annoyance on his otherwise expressionless face. Pulling his wand out, Pye did a closer examination of the patient. Snape was sleeping. Not comatose, just sleeping.

"Merlin! They've annoyed him back to life..." he whispered to himself in astonishment.

He glanced down at Granger and Potter on the floor. It probably wasn't even possible to wake those two up for several hours, but with a little bit of luck, they would have left by the time Pye came back to check up on Snape in the morning.

"Alright, that's enough," Healer Pye announced as he entered the room and gently led Potter and Granger outside. "Please remember that Mr Snape only just woke up. Contrary to what you might think, he needs all the rest he can get at this point."

Severus wasn't sure he particularly liked being made to be a weak old man like that, but he had to admit the Healer was right. He was bone-weary, and Potter and Granger's incessant chatter, insistent on bringing him up to date on current events, was wearing on his nerves.

He leaned back in his bed after they left, letting out a sigh of relief. The room was quiet now, but even when he closed his eyes, it wasn't the same peaceful albeit dull silence that he had been used to. Even in the quiet room, there were still sounds. A bird chirping outside the window. People walking by in the hallway. His own breathing. They were all such small sounds, but they sounded so loud to him.

Severus had only just got used to being dead. Now he had to get used to being alive again. It was a strange thought that he couldn't quite seem to wrap his mind around. That he hadn't been dead at all. It was unreal. He had been so certain that he was really dead. Logically, he could see that he should be able to grasp the concept given that he had been sentient all along and that he remembered what it had been like to be lost in the voids of his own mind.

It was like he had been given a brand new chance at life. As if someone or something had assessed the hardships he had suffered before and during the war and decided he should be compensated by another shot at happiness. Only Severus couldn't imagine that happiness would be very forthcoming for him. It didn't matter that while he had been unconscious his name had been cleared to an extent, testimonials given to the fact that he had done only what he had been forced to do in the last few years. The stupidities and crimes of his youth still stood. Buying his pardon after the first war with having turned spy was common knowledge. And it didn't matter which way anybody twisted and turned it, he had *still* been the man to murder Albus Dumbledore and to lead Hogwarts towards downfall and disaster. He couldn't imagine the common wizarding population would have forgiven him for that. He couldn't imagine how they possibly could.

For a long moment he sat, staring out of the window and considering all this. He just didn't know what to make of it. What did one do when given a new chance at life, when said chance had to be built on the ruins of an older, misled one? He supposed he could try his hand at some of the research he had never managed to find the time for before. Or he could leave Britain behind and go somewhere where people didn't know him and hope his past would never catch up with him.

Most of all, though, Severus just wished he could go back to the peaceful state of coma. It might not have been as good as being dead, but it had been rather nice. All this hustle and bustle of conscious life... It was unnerving.

Severus just wasn't sure that he hadn't been better off if they had left him to die in peace in the Shrieking Shack to begin with.

FIN

31. Snape is alive only he doesn't believe it. He lays in a deep coma at St. Mungo's, his mind locked in an afterlife of his own making. Occlumency shields prevented the best mind healers from intervening. He's considered a hopeless case but there's this irritating know-it-all with a crazy shaman trance plan and a boy-who-just-won't-bugger-off.