

From the Blood of the Gorgon

by Lady Strange

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The first chapter opens with Hermione having a nightmare about Severus Snape's "death". Disquieted, she resolves to delve into the past so as to understand why she is haunted by the mental visions of his "death".

Chapter 1: Nightmare from the Past

Chapter 1 of 11

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Author's Note: Story depicted may be unpalatable to sensitive readers for its portrayal of Hermione's and Ron's relationship. Hermione may also not be likeable to readers. Some readers might consider the characters a little OOC. Some organisations and Ministry of Magic departments are made-up.

It would help readers following the story to view it as a 'cinematic' experience whereby there are shifts in perspectives, as well as shifts between flashbacks, the past, the present, dreams and reality within the space of one chapter.

Extensive footnotes follows chapter.

This is a response to the Potter Place Post-Deathly-Hallows Prompt Challenge using prompt 3. The prompt has been "adjusted" whereby Snape "survives" Nagini's venomous bite due to consumption of some kind of a potion/antidote, yet he manages to seemingly drop off the face of the earth.

Emphasises are italicised. Newspaper titles and book titles are underlined.

We are such stuff

As dreams are made on; and our little life

Is rounded with a sleep.

Shakespeare, *Tempest*, IV, I, 156-158

From the Blood of the Gorgon

Chapter 1 Nightmare from the Past

It was cold. Every step forward that she took emphasised the cold and heavy aura of death. Undoubtedly, it had been a mistake for her to wander out of doors and into a dilapidated house barefooted with only a thin nightgown for protection. Pushing aside the observation that there was a nary speck of dust in sight, she continued her solitary trek forward into the house. She did not know why she was drawn to the house. The hut seemed to be in the middle of nowhere overlooking a lake. She had never seen it before despite her frequent travels throughout the British Isles. Yet, she knew almost instinctively that it was there. Was it instinct or did something else drawing her there?

She had been working at her desk that night, as was customary for her, when an insistent gust of wind blew into her study and rifled her notes on her client's *jour*, an alleged war criminal from Bulgaria. It was a natural enough occurrence if one should leave the window open. But there was something about the wind blowing through her study and upsetting her notes that caught her attention. While it did remove the papers from her desk and scatter them onto the floor, the wind had not thrown their order into disarray. As soon as she placed a sturdy paperweight over her notes, she believed she heard a faint whisper in the wind calling out to her. Thinking it was perhaps her husband, she went outdoors only to find that the wind had driven her away from her residence, forcefully compelling her to move forward until she reached the house. She did not allow herself to dwell on the power that led her to the house. She only knew that she had to go through it because there was something in it she wanted. While she was certain she had never been to this house before, she entered its premises matter-of-factly and was struck by the familiar surroundings. She had seen the interior somewhere before, but she could not pinpoint any particular place.

Finding no reason for the sensation of déjà vu, she shivered in her thin nightgown and took another step forward. It was more of a one room hut than a house. Its only furniture was a table surrounded by oddly shaped shadows. The wooden panelling of the floors creaked as much from the chill as it did from age. Perhaps the floors were protesting against the abuse to which they had been so lately put to, or perhaps they were simply old. Whatever the reason for their sudden speech, they succeeded in drawing her attention to the house proper. She stopped in her tracks and thought she heard the faint sounds of laboured whimpering. She strained her ears and heard the whimpers again. Knowing that she was not alone, her bare feet shuffled forward again.

Clutching the front of her nightgown in an admixture of fear and apprehension, she gingerly made her way to the source of the whimpers and saw that the darkness of the floorboards she had earlier dismissed as shadows was in actuality a large pool of blood. A figure, vaguely human, was curled up in pain with its back facing her. She approached cautiously, determined to not let the alarm figure. If possible, she wanted to help a fellow human being who was, to her observation, in pain. Ignoring the unpleasant sensation of her bare feet against the viscous scarlet pool, she stepped forward and knelt down beside the figure. Blood was gushing from the neck, where the black clothed person must have been bitten or mauled by some ferocious predator. She looked up to see if there was any animal in sight that was still lurking but could see nothing. Relieved at the relative emptiness of the room, she bent closer to the body. She wanted to move closer to discern the face of this unfortunate human being, but was stopped by the sensation of a cold clammy gnarled hand over her wrist. Looking down at the hand, she immediately recognised it as the very masculine hand of a sinewy male. Focusing her eyes on the victim's hands, she saw the bloodstained tapered fingers of one hand holding on to her wrist, and the other hand fumbling through his pocket. Instead of handing her whatever that was in his pocket as she would have expected, the man tightened his grip on her wrist and pulled her closer.

His voice gurgled harshly as he struggled to speak, "Take....it... Take... it..." As soon as he uttered those words, a nebulous substance of bluish-silver poured forth from his facial orifices. "Take....it... Take... it... It... is... meant... for... you..." The man insisted in his sputtering voice, now much weakened from the excessive blood loss, on watching her bottle the substance.

"You need help, sir," she said, regaining her faculty of speech at last. "Allow me to staunch the bleeding."

He only increased his pressure on her wrist. "Look....at...me..." he said. Though she could not see his face clearly, she knew from the shimmering pools staring at her eyes darker than shadows were boring into hers, tearing at her mind and soul. "It... is... meant... for... you..." he gurgled. Those words must have cost him all that remained of his life, for his grip over her wrist loosened and his hand fell to the floor in a soft thud.

She knew she should first check to see if he was breathing. However, in light of the manner his hand had fallen away from her wrist, she thought that action neatly obviated. She had seen many deaths in her time, and she was certain the unfortunate man had passed on. However, one thing still nagged at the back of her mind. Just who was he? Did he summon her for help? If so, why her and not others? Unable to answer those questions, she then turned her attention to the body. She could not deny she was curious as to the identity of the person who had specifically insisted that his memories were meant for her. So, she tilted his face in the direction of the moonlight streaming from the window. To her horror, she realised she was staring into the face of Severus Snape. She quickly rose and staggered backwards with an ear-piercing scream.

"Mione, love, wake up. I'm here. I don't know what it was that made you scream like that. But if you had screamed like that whenever we were in bed, I would be more willing to do as you told me," a voice called out, shaking her rudely whilst chafing some kind of fabric on her arms.

In responding to the voice, she found the images that had so lately disturbed her fading away. Upon opening her eyes, she found herself in the study of the house she shared with her husband in Chelsea. "Do you ever think with any organ other than the piece of flesh south of your navel? I am not in the mood to humour your weak jokes about sex. Is that all you think about?" she snapped, her eyes flashing as she brushed away the hands from her arms. Remorse, however, bit into her when he thrust out his lower lip in despondency. She sighed inwardly and quietly said, "You should go back to sleep. I have to get my notes in order before court at ten."

Unwilling to leave her, he sat on her desk on top of her notes. "Did you have a bad dream?"

"I think it was pretty obvious that I was having a bad dream!" she hissed impatiently, taking up her propelling pen, clicking it repeatedly. "Why else was I screaming in terror?"

"Just checking, you could be having a dream where you were screaming in ecstasy because I was making love to you," he offered with a sheepish shrug of the shoulders. "Why are you shaking? It was only a dream, and not a good one at that."

"Thank you, Sir Points-out-the obvious-a-lot," she replied, still clicking the pen. "You know what I need now to calm my nerves?"

He threw open his arms and grinned widely. "Sex, of course. There is nothing like vigorous bed exercise to work off bad nerves."

"No, Ron," she said sharply. "No sex, and definitely *not* after a nightmare."

"But Hermione," he protested. "I know you're upset. But there's nothing you want in bed that I can't do."

"Actually, I can think of two things that you won't do for me," she pointed out, clicking at her pen again. "Number one You expect fellatio, yet refuse to perform cunnilingus on the flimsy grounds that it is unhygienic for your mouth to service the vagina. I wonder why you don't think it is unhygienic to service your penis with another's mouth. Number two you expect me to bring you breakfast in bed on weekends and you won't even bring me a cup of tea when I am sick. In fact, you stay far away from our house whenever I'm sick. I want conversation after sex, not someone who pinches my cheek, tells me the experience was wonderful for him and then rolls on to his side of the bed and falls asleep."

"Stop making everything sound so academic! And I don't sleep after sex," declared Ron, his visage almost as red as his hair.

"Then I suppose you make snoring noises so that I will not bore you with my post-coital chatter," riposted his wife. "Look, what kind of a man offers sex after his wife had a nightmare?"

"A manly one. There must be something unnatural about you if you don't want to do it." He glared at her. "So what ~~do~~ you want now if you don't want sex?"

"A hug of comfort from my husband," she promptly said.

He burst out laughing and remained that way until he realised she was in earnest. Upon swallowing the last of his mighty guffaw, he threw his arms up in resignation and

shot her a look of pure irritation. "You don't want sex, and yet you want a cuddle? What kind of a woman are you? Next, you will be telling me you want me to listen to the nonsense you dreamt about while hugging you."

"That would be nice," she confessed, her voice undertaking a steely tone. "However, we both know how that would turn out. I remember the last time I told you about my nightmares."

"Ha!" snorted Ron as he contained a chortle. "To hear you say, 'the last time' like it was so long ago. It was last week, or have you forgotten?"

"Don't be facetious, Ronald Bilius Weasley." She favoured him with a sour look of barely contained disdain. "The last time I told you about my nightmares, you laughed and told me that they were manifestations of my subconscious desires of having sex with you. Desires that you posited I suppressed from over-working myself. If I want to hear about things like that, I will read Freud, thank you very much."

"My mum said so!" announced the redhead insistently. "She said women who work too hard at their jobs have more nightmares than other women, and that these women's nightmares are all about the desires that they do not get fulfilled because they spend all their time working. If you spent more time at home where you should be, you would not be having nightmares."

"I'm not your mother, and I am not going to be a bloody wizarding housewife."

"I'm not asking you to be like mum; maybe learn a little from her but not be like her. Hey, wait... Who's Freud?"

She rolled her eyes. "Never mind, Ron. Unless you want to watch me work, I suggest you either go back to bed or make yourself useful. You should know what I need after a nightmare, and before you say it again, let me make it clear. I *absolutely* do not want sex after a nightmare."

"Ginny says it is what works for her. Harry does that for her and you don't hear her complaining about it. Since you and her are built the same inside, what goes for her will go for you. It is a given, isn't it?" argued the wizard of little grey matter.

Hermione rubbed her arms, mildly put off by the mental image of Ginny updating her brother on worthiness of the good penis Potter. "Women does not to equate to woman. Furthermore, Harry takes an active interest in her life *and* her work. He is a husband who listens to her fears and aspirations without comparing her to her mother, unlike someone else in my intimate acquaintance."

"So what is it that you want after a nightmare if it isn't anything/ give you?" barked Weasley.

"Unless you want to be nominated as bullfrog of the year, stop puffing your cheeks petulantly. It doesn't suit you. If you can manage it and can stop thinking with your raging libido for just a moment, I would very much like a cup of hot cocoa please. I have to get through my brief if I am going to explain why my client is not making a straightforward plea in the morning."

"I don't know how to perform magic in the kitchen! I am not a witch! I am a manly wizard!" Ronald Weasley's arms fell to his sides and he shuffled out the room. "Oh, okay then. You had...umm... better not stay up so late. I'm going back to bed. Get yourself a chocolate. G'night, love."

"Yes, yes," she muttered with a dismissive flick of her wrist as she made a show of going back to her papers. It would be pointless to get angry with him over the trifle matter of a cup of hot cocoa. Of course he was not going to make her a cup of any kind of beverage. It would only mean handling powders and liquids, and Ron was extremely clumsy with those articles. Besides, even if he could differentiate between condensed milk, evaporated milk, and fresh milk, he did not even know how much milk she liked in her cocoa. She contained her seething at his woeful ignorance as to her tastes and preferences despite their many years of marriage. Thus, the moment her door clicked shut, she heaved a sigh of relief. On closing the file on her client, she sank back into her seat and steepled her fingers at her lips in thought. She was well prepared for the case already, and the odds were in her favour. Everything was going her way, and yet she was disquieted.

Hermione Granger sighed and wondered why her nightmares on Severus Snape's death were becoming increasingly vivid. How many years had it been since his death? Twenty-two? Yes, that was right. Twenty-two years since the fall of Voldemort and she was getting nightmares. She curled her lips disdainfully at herself at the thought. So it was true then the psychological scars of war never fully healed. While the wounds would be covered up by other happy events in life, the scabs of one who underwent war firsthand never fall off. Those who suffered were the ones who always remembered; those were the ones who would always mourn; only they would never forget what it was like, what it could have been, and what would have happened otherwise. Not for the first time in her life, Hermione felt tired.

She had come a long way since the defeat of Voldemort. She had wasted no time once the threat was over. She plunged back into the academic mode and completed her education without any undue mourning. Following which, she had spent three years in the Department for the Regulation and Control for Magical Beasts before enrolling in Queen's College, Oxford to read both Muggle and wizarding law. After which time, she had worked at the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Along the way, she found time between her academic endeavours and her career to get married and have two children. Nineteen years after the Voldemort threat, she saw her first child off to Hogwarts. Twenty years after the fall of Voldemort, she left the Ministry of Magic's Department of Magical Law Enforcement to set up her own legal Chambers. It took her two years to build up Chiswell Square Chambers, and now, twenty-two years after Voldemort, she was one of the most recognised barristers in both Wizarding and Muggle Britain, and, oh yes, her second child was spending his first year at Hogwarts. Hermione snorted in faint amusement in the manner in which she recounted the events of past twenty-two years. She had counted them as 'X years after Voldemort'. She smiled wryly because she was not the only one who thought of time in that way. Several of her contemporaries who had fought against the Death Eaters beginning in 1997 had the same conception of their spatial time. Perhaps the Wizarding World in Britain should have a new mode of referring to the post-Voldemort regime. Forget *Anno Domini*, it ought to be *After Voldemort*, she mused.

To all appearances, Hermione Granger was a successful woman. However, her private life did not reflect her public success. She was often called to task by older members of the Wizarding community for not taking her husband's surname. Her mother-in-law often hinted in that smiling, affable way of hers that she should spend more time at home as it was where she, as a married witch, 'truly belonged'. And lately, she had been haunted by dreams of events that happened twenty-two years ago. She sighed lightly and furrowed her brow in thought. For the past year and a half, she had been having nightmares of the war. At first, she only dreamt of snatches of the aftermath of war where Harry Potter told her of the memories he acquired from Severus Snape. He had told her how he was intended to sacrifice himself for the greater good, and that Snape was privy to the plan originally conceptualised by Dumbledore and so on. Then the dreams started to take her back to the time of the war where she would see Snape die.

Every time, it would be same she would find him in a hut in the middle of nowhere, and he would press his memories unto her. Initially, she dismissed the dreams as instances of post-traumatic stress syndrome. However, as the dreams grew more intense, she had further cause for worry. The dreams had changed their form where she was previously an indifferent spectator forced to play a role in a very badly written play, she was now an active player in the event as if it were actually unfolding before her. For the past six months the nightmares had only intensified. They always involved her finding Severus Snape on the brink of death, her inability to save him, and his insistence that the memories were meant for her. His eyes would always bore into hers. She shuddered at that memory. What was he trying to say? Was Severus Snape's restless spirit trying to tell her something? Did he have some unfinished business?

"No," Hermione muttered, shaking her head. If he had any unfinished business, he would have returned as a ghost. "Likely it is a kind of survivor's guilt for being unable to do anything for him," she whispered to herself, as she was wont to do when working out her briefs and closing statements. Talking to herself always enabled her to better rationalise things as she would have several sides of the argument at her fingertips and several more hypotheses as to the outcome of her cases. "Is it really guilt? Harry saw him die by Nagini's bite. I could have done something to staunch the bleeding. Why didn't I? Why did I only transfigure a bottle for Harry to store the memory? Could I not have attempted to help Professor Snape while Harry was busy trying to collect himself and deal with the fact that the man he hated barely less than Voldemort was not as horrible as he seemed? What is it about this death that is so disturbing? Fred's death, while upsetting, did not bother me quite as much. I obviously don't have any nightmares of my unfortunate brother-in-law's death, much less nightmares of being unable to save him. What is it about Professor Snape's death then that intrigues me? Am I intrigued, or is it some morbid fascination?" Sweeping up her hair with her hands, she shook her head firmly. It would appear that talking to herself did not dispel the residual doubt in her mind. "Why always a miserable hut in the middle of nowhere? Why does that hut look so familiar? There is something dodgy about this dream. What is it? Think, Granger, think..." She paused, and snapped her fingers, while rising suddenly from her chair. "That's it! Professor Snape's body was never found. Harry and Ron and I saw his body when we left the Shrieking Shack, but when we went back after the fighting was over, his body was gone. Could someone who hated him have

disposed of his body? Perhaps this is what it's about! We never found Severus Snape's body. No wonder I was so disturbed! We should have looked for his body and given him a decent burial."

Excited in her belief that she had hit on the very thing that had been the cause of her nightmares, she resolved to gather as much as information as she could on the issue of Severus Snape's death and his missing corpse. The first opportunity to do so presented itself the very next day.

She had just had a successful first day at the Inner London Crown Court (Wizarding division). Being able to practice 'above ground', as the saying goes, amongst Wizarding solicitors and advocates, was one of the chief benefits of having an independent practice, and it was something Hermione particularly relished. She felt it was a wonderfully refreshing change to walk about with other barristers at near Old Bailey and meet up with the Muggle friends she made whilst at Queen's College, and instead of going into the tenth circle of hell (as the Wizarding legal community dubbed it) within the Ministry of Magic. Certainly, her case for the day was ridiculous enough, but she wanted to take the case because it appealed strongly to her sensibilities. Having spent a productive morning defending her client, whose aged crup was accused of 'worrying' the complainant's flock of diricawls and causing one of the said birds to 'miscarry' a week previously by laying a bad egg, she was about to head back to her office at Chiswell Square Chambers when she remembered her resolution to look deeper into the matter of Snape's missing body. It was just the sort of intellectual exercise and respite from legal matters she needed.

While practicing law on behalf of the Ministry of Magic was valuable legal experience, she much preferred being an independent barrister. It was more in line with her innate sense of justice. She could serve the community at large without being perceived as a lapdog of the Ministry and could establish herself as a thoughtful and independent barrister. Her senior clerk at Chambers had objected to her taking up the case of the Crup versus the Diricawls, but she had wanted to on the grounds that it would be amusing. Considering that she had just defended one of the newer Aurors from a possible case of discriminating against alleged offenders of Wizarding law based on their penchant for the Dark Arts (on grounds that he had been ironically using false discrimination charges to expose the real discrimination within the Auror Department), she needed a case with enough levity to blow away the clouds of discomfiture her previous case had brought. Indeed, other than her husband, one of the foremost leaders of the post-Voldemort Auror Department (with the rank of Superintendent), no one else of the Greater London Circuit had come to points with her over her accusation of the existence of discrimination against former Death Eaters and researchers of the Dark Arts within the Auror department and the Ministry of Magic proper. She, being a witch of considerable spirit, stuck to her guns and maintained that there was discrimination. He, on the other hand, claimed she ought to know the dangers accompanying the study of the Dark Arts, having experienced the horrors of the Voldemort regime. He had refused to countenance her reasonable arguments that the Dark Arts were a valuable part of the Wizarding curriculum in educating magic users as to their possible abuses, and that the Voldemort regime was more about 'Blood Purity' than the official sanction of the Dark Arts. He responded to her quiet manner of pointing out all the relevant facts by failing to return home for a week. That, of course, bothered Hermione slightly because she did not know where he might have gone. But as he came back contrite with his tail between his legs, she chose not to question him, believing that he had gone to stay with his parents for a bit.

The Crup versus the Diricawls case provided a point where both husband and wife could laugh together as to its absurdity, and did a little, Hermione believed, to mend the rift that had opened between them in the case involving the Auror department. In any event, her latest victory in the Crup versus the Diricawls case meant that she was in a celebratory mood, and was keen to take up private research as well as look in at her husband in his office. It was with these two thoughts in mind that she made a pit-stop at the Ministry of Magic.

After saying hello to Ron and Harry, briefly watching them struggle frantically with paperwork they had left to the last minute, stealing a tomato-and-cheese sandwich from them, and informing them that she would be at level nine for some research for a case, Hermione departed level two of the Ministry and took the lift to the Department of Mysteries. Once there, she followed the newly enforced procedure and signed in with the young, rather voluble guard thus

Name: *Hermione Granger*

Division Visiting: *Hall of Prophecies*

Division with Ministry/Occupation: *Barrister-at-law, Chiswell Square Chambers*

Reason for visit: *Research for defence of client at International Wizarding War Crimes Tribunal*

Stack: *Voldemort War Archives*

Call number: *HPTR 91*

Statement: *I hereby declare that any information gathered from the archives of the Hall of Prophecies and its Archives are for private research only.*

After the guard looked her over and handed her a special pass in between his very garrulous praise of the Golden Trio during the Voldemort years, she willed herself not to roll her eyes and entered the Hall of Mysteries. It was just as she had remembered when she had entered that place so many years ago with one difference. While the ceilings and its many arches reminded her of Westminster Abbey as it did in 1995, the shelves and the orbs were now all carefully labelled. It had certainly come a long way from the time when it was merely a repository for prophecies. Now, it held memories as well, and served as an archive of sorts for researchers, lawmakers, students of history and Wizarding politics, and barristers. She smiled silently to herself, on recalling that it was Harry who had called for the assignation of labels and call numbers to the orbs for easier reference, and suggested the inclusion of memories as archival material for the use of theoretical training against future Dark Lords by the Auror Department. Harry had been so keen on the scheme that he volunteered to extract his memories of the war against Voldemort for the posterity of Wizarding Britain. It would provide valuable insight to future Aurors and leaders as to what could be done in the face of another threat to the Wizarding World. His scheme was taken seriously by the Ministry, as were most utterances by Harry Potter now, for it was loath to appear ungrateful to the saviour of their world. Moreover, the Ministry was still attempting to redeem itself in the eyes of Harry Potter for the way in which it and its then representative, one Dolores Umbridge, had regarded him. Unwilling to repeat its performance of dismissing every word from Harry Potter's mouth as rubbish, the Ministry now took his words very gravely so gravely that it sometimes attempted to pass off one of his jokes as public policy. Fortunately, Shackbolt knew how to differentiate between a Potter joke-initiative and a Potter policy recommendation. So, for the moment, Wizarding Britain was still safe from the policymakers' habit of taking all things Potter too seriously.

Hermione acknowledged that Harry had been right in deciding to save his memories for all posterity. She did not share his lofty view that his memories would be referred to in times of crisis or during the emergence of another Dark Lord. She knew that all Dark Lords were different in their ways, and most had the sense to steer clear from the mistakes of their predecessors and not make the unacceptable gaffe of repeating their mistakes. Rather, she saw the benefits it would have on Auror training. It would teach them to think on their feet and to feel what it was like on the battlefield, and what had to be done in various situations. "Furthermore," she reasoned with another faint smile to herself, "It provides the historian and barrister with a way of seeing Harry just as a man with foibles and inconsistencies, *and not* the Great War Hero."

With those thoughts running through her mind, she headed directly to the relevant stack amongst the row upon row of long towering shelves in rows upon rows of stacks. She soon found the small, dusty, glass orb with the call number she wanted. "Yes," she said to herself upon reviewing a part of the memory. "This is the one."

As she made a copy of the memory and stored it in a bottle, she congratulated herself for having the foresight of asking the senior clerk at Chambers to look up the call number for her. It had certainly saved her a great deal of time in looking amongst the shelves for the right memory.

She realised, of course, that her actions were not entirely rational. There was nothing in her nightmare to indicate that Severus Snape wanted her to look for his body, much less delve into Harry Potter's memory of his death in an attempt to discern what actually happened to him. "*What you're doing is unethical,*" sneered a particularly indignant portion of her brain. "*Not so upright now, eh, Hermione?*"

"Oh, shut up. I need to review what happened at Professor's Snape death. I need to know why I keep having these nightmares. I need to know whether my hypothesis is true. I need to review the events of what happened then if I am to make any sense of my recurring dreams. At least, that way, I won't have Ron hanging around me with silly questions every time I wake up from a bloody nightmare," she silently argued with the recalcitrant part of her mind, whilst pocketing the bottle of the copied memory.

Upon signing out from the Hall of Mysteries, she came to a split-second decision. She rationalised to herself as she stepped out of the Department of Mysteries and took

the lift up to ground floor where she could exit and take the tube to her office, "What better way of confirming the exact going-ons of Professor Snape's passing *and* comparing them to my nightmares! That's what the Ministry of Magic is for!"

Indeed, Kingsley Shacklebolt had garnered a reputation for doing away with the draconian style of the other administrations, and giving the Ministry a modern appeal by being open and consultative. The Ministry ought to rightfully serve the public, and it would be doing her a great deal of good if she could clear up the reason why she was so prone to her vivid nightmares.

Though she would not admit it, Hermione was not so much keen on reliving the memory of Snape's death than she was of going through it several times as a neutral observer. She had always privately held that the benefits of the reviews of memories for the WIZARDING legal system were numerous. Through a thorough review of any given memory via a Pensieve, the observer may immerse herself into the memories. She knew full well that the reviewed memory would not allow the observer to experience any of the characters' feelings, but the value of being able to see things from the third person perspective was especially enlightening. Because the memory retained things beyond that which a person would normally recall, it acted like a video camera, taping everything that the eye saw with meticulous detail. Much may be gleaned from careful observation of the surroundings and the subtle nuances of the characters' behaviour and mannerisms that would otherwise be lost in a verbal narration of the events that had passed.

Heartily glad that she did not tell either Ron or Harry of the details behind her nightmares, for she knew they would say she was obsessing over nothing, Hermione further convinced herself that making a copy of Harry's old memory was just the thing she needed to confirm her thoughts. "What was the worst that could happen?" she asked herself as she entered the doors of Chiswell Square Chambers with a pointed nod for everyone who greeted her. "The worst is that my theory will be disproved, and should that be the case, I can keep the whole issue of the nightmares and the things I see in it entirely private without the naggings of those two."

Thus fortified with that thought, Hermione requested that she not be disturbed and retreated into her office so that she could review the memory of Severus Snape's death carefully without any interruption.

FOOTNOTES:

The Gorgon in the title refers to Nagini. I know she is not a 'real' Gorgon. However, I believe her role in the books position her as a kind of symbolic Gorgon. There is another reason for dubbing Nagini the Gorgon, and that will be more apparent in subsequent chapters. It should also be noted that she does not appear in the story. I am using her as a literary thematic device.

There are double entendres in the title (of the literary kind *not* the sexual kind as my prelim reader thought). Make what you will of them.

All references to characters are from Rowling's Harry Potter universe unless otherwise stated.

Facts about WIZARDING Law and WIZARDING Politics are made up.

Facts about the improvements of any WIZARDING and/or Muggle object, governing body, and facility are made up.

Facts about other Harry Potter universe characters in the post-Voldemort years are also made up.

Facts about Hermione's legal studies at Oxford etc are made up. I know Rowling has stated that there are no WIZARDING Universities. However, she did not state there were WIZARDING departments within individual universities. I have exploited this fact to come up with the idea that wizarding departments existed within well-established universities.

Legal references are to British Law. American readers, please bear with me. My beta also made the suggestion that readers unaccustomed to the legal jargon herein pretend you are watching "Rumpole of the Bailey" or "Sherlock Holmes".

Chambers refers to the rooms used by a **barrister** or group of barristers, especially in the Inns of Court. Barristers are not employed in a law firm but associate fraternally with each other, sharing out the burden of costs, in a set of chambers. They are each legally considered self-employed. Chambers are administered by **law clerks**, who receive cases from **Solicitors**, agreeing on behalf of their barristers on fees and suchlike. Barristers are then given details of their cases by the Clerks. Because they are self-employed, Barristers may either base themselves in chambers or otherwise

The **Head of Chambers**, usually a King's Counsel or Queen's Counsel or a 'senior junior', may exercise a powerful influence on the members (and the Head Clerk who finds all the work) of Chambers. In Chambers, all members will offer informal help and guidance to each other. However they are not liable for each other's business (as partners are), and members of the same set of chambers may indeed appear on opposite sides in the same case. Each barrister remains an independent practitioner, being solely responsible for the conduct of their own practice and keeping what they earn rather than drawing a salary. A barrister in independent practice will be instructed by a number of different solicitors (professional clients) to act for various different individuals, agencies or companies (lay clients).

Prior to having her own Chambers, Hermione was an **'employed' barrister**, meaning a barrister who works as an employee within a larger organisation either in the public or private sector such as government departments or ministries like the Ministry of Magic. 'Employed' barristers will typically be paid a salary, and in most circumstances may only do work on behalf of their employer, rather than accepting instructions on behalf of third parties (such as their employers' customers).

A **barrister** is the lawyer who represents litigants as their advocate before the courts of that jurisdiction. A barrister will usually have rights of audience in the higher courts, whereas other legal professionals will have more limited access, or will need to take additional qualifications to do so. In this regard, the profession of barrister corresponds to that part of the role of legal professionals found in the civil law jurisdictions relating to appearing in trials or pleading cases before the courts.

A **solicitor** is a lawyer who has more direct contact with the clients, whereas barristers often only become involved in a case in order to provide any advocacy needed by the client. Barristers are also engaged by solicitors to provide specialist advice on points of law. Barristers are rarely, if ever, instructed by clients directly. Instead, the client's solicitors will instruct a barrister on behalf of the client when appropriate.

A **propelling pen** is the click-click pen (as it is called in Southeast Asia) or as my beta calls it, the clicker style ballpoint pen. It is a pen where you push a clicker on the top of the pen to "propel" the nib forward and push the clicker again to sheath the nib. It is so-called in the UK because when you click the top of the pen, the nib propels forward from the case. In simple terms, a propelling pen is a ballpoint pen where one presses the clicker to "propel" the nib forward.

Evaporated milk is a shelf-stable canned milk product with about 60% of the water removed from fresh milk. It is unsweetened (unless you are in Singapore, Malaysia or Indonesia, where it is sweetened with palm sugar). To use as milk mix equal parts water and evaporated milk. To substitute for cream use as is.

Condensed milk is cow's milk from which water has been removed, and to which sugar has been added. It comes in a can. My beta informs me that it is used in America to make fudge and various kinds of sweets

A **Crup**, according to Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them, resembles a Jack Russell terrier with a forked tail. It is a wizard-created dog that is loyal to wizards and ferocious towards humans. Crup licences must be obtained from the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures.

Diricawl is a proper WIZARDING name for the flightless bird originating from Mauritius. Yes, it is the same thing as a dodo. For more information on it, please refer to Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them.

Chapter 2: Weighing the Past as the Present

Chapter 2 of 11

The second chapter covers the beginning of Hermione's attempt to make sense of things in between glimpses of a day in her life.

Author's Note: Story depicted may be unpalatable to sensitive readers for its portrayal of Hermione and Ron's relationship. Hermione may also not be likeable to readers. Some readers might consider the characters a little OOC. Some organisations and Ministry of Magic departments are made-up.

It would help readers following the story to view it as a 'cinematic' experience whereby there are shifts in perspectives, as well as shifts between flashbacks, the past, the present, dreams and reality within the space of one chapter.

Footnotes follow chapter.

Emphasises are italicised and book titles are underlined.

From the Blood of the Gorgon

Chapter 2 Weighing the Past as the Present

Hermione's office at Chiswell Chambers was a comfortable place. As with most corner rooms of refurbished old-fashioned houses, her office was a largish and homely (if somewhat untidy) place with shelves of books, a fireplace, a tea table in the corner near the door with stacks of books piled haphazardly next to it, and thick curtains framing the windows. An enormous desk sat in the centre of the room and sagged a little at the weight of the books, papers, notes and other paraphernalia. She opened a cabinet by the wall and added her Pensieve to the pile on the desk, causing it to creak, as if groaning under the additional weight. "*Et tu?*" she said quietly with a tiny smile at her desk. "You're not the only thing with tons weighing down on you."

Well, she had better get it over and done with, she thought, lightly running her finger along the rim of the Pensieve. However, on reaching for the bottle, she hesitated. It was not due to a lack of courage on her part. Hermione Granger was the sort of woman who was cognisant enough of the causes of her fear to talk herself out of them. No, she was uncertain of the after-effects of that which she was about to do. A quick mental calculation of the Arithmantic probability of the memory yielding any new information told her that she would not likely uncover anything of worth. But (she reasoned with herself) if she went through the memory, she would at least know whether it was a viable means of unravelling her nightmares. While mentally debating the merits of reviewing Harry's memory, her fingers stretched out for the bottle again. Deciding at last that she would go through with the plan, she covered the neck of the bottle with her fingers and poured it into the Pensieve. She told herself it was better to know than not to do; it was better to find out something than to live in ignorance; it was better to act and repent than not to act and regret. After all, she did have much to fear. She feared that her mind would potentially go unhinged from the nightmares. Since her mind was her best asset (or so she considered), it was only just that she did everything she could do to preserve it in a functioning state. Very well then, she decided as she looked into the swirling silver-grey cloud of Harry's memory. She would go ahead and delve into it. Thus, pursing her lips in grim determination, she fell headfirst into the pool of images.

She landed, remarkably enough, feet first on the ground as she watched younger versions of Harry, Ron and herself wriggle through the tunnel under the Whomping Willow until they came to an underground hatch directly below the Shrieking Shack. Harry, who was as impulsive then as he was now as head of the Auror department, would have gone out of the tunnel had her younger self not reminded him that it would behave him to don the Invisibility Cloak. She watched in amusement as the Trio crouched behind several large old crates with their backs to the wall and their faces only centimetres away from dusty crates. Harry, being Harry (reflected Hermione wryly), always found a way to spy on situations which were none of his business. So it was that on this occasion, Harry managed to have the good fortune to find a gap in the crates where he could survey whatever that lay before him.

The room, panelled with very old and creaky looking wooden boards, was dimly lit. Nagini, the serpent, was coiling and uncoiling herself in a sphere that floated in the air above the table. The long white hand of Voldemort stretched out, playing with a wand in his hand while he conversed with Severus Snape. The former Potions Master insisted on leaving the Shack and finding Harry so as to placate his Lord. He must have badly wanted to escape from Voldemort's presence for he offered to bring Harry to the snake-like creature four times. Each offer was rebuffed with increasing anger as Voldemort rambled on and on about the Elder Wand failing to work for him. Hermione, who was observing everything with rapt attention, rolled her eyes at his vanity. Truly, reflected she, he was merely a more egregious form of Gilderoy Lockhart. Within this memory alone, the former Tom Riddle had called himself extraordinary, spoken as if he possessed infinite wisdom and knowledge.

Bah! From the way he spoke, it was as if he considered his attempts at unifying and cleansing the wizarding world as inferior only to the blessings of his power. A shudder was suppressed when Voldemort, who united these gifts, went on about his intimate acquaintance with the character traits of Harry Potter in a manner that clearly displayed the fact that he was the constant object of his own warmest respect and devotion. No wonder Severus Snape wanted to escape, mused Hermione from her vantage point as omniscient observer. Such a narcissistic affection for himself only resulted in high-handedness and it was a matter of time before Snape felt the brunt of it. True enough, Voldemort soon hissed in what seemed to Hermione to be a carefully modulated voice expressly for the purpose of masking anger. "The Elder Wand cannot serve me properly, Severus, because I am not its true master. The Elder Wand belongs to the wizard who killed its last owner. You killed Albus Dumbledore. While you live, Severus, the Elder Wand cannot truly be mine."

Severus paled momentarily before answering with a raised wand, "My Lord!"

"It cannot be any other way. I must master the wand, Severus. Master the wand, and I master Potter at last," said Voldemort. His last injunction was followed by a hiss. This caused the sphere containing Nagini to move towards Severus. With one bite, Nagini effectively incapacitated the former Potions Master, and he fell sideways to the wooden floor, blood gushing from his jugular.

As soon as Voldemort swept away with his snake, the younger Hermione spoke, bringing Harry back to his senses, and lucid enough to move the crates out of the way so that they could enter the Shack proper. Once there, Hermione, as omniscient observer, saw the dying Severus. At the sight, she let out an almost imperceptible gasp. It was exactly like her nightmare, down to the very detail of him fumbling for something in his pocket, to the very outline of his fist clenched over something in his pocket, and the way in which his memories poured forth from his mouth, nose, ears and eyes. However, as the memories were leaking from his body, Snape struggled to speak, and while doing so, his eyes darted significantly to the younger Hermione. The adult Hermione interpreted the glance at her younger self as a form of thanks, for she had provided Harry with a bottle in which he could store the memory. From his blank expression, it was plain to see that Harry had no idea as to what he should do with the gushing memories, and had she not provided him with a receptacle, they would not have exculpated Severus Snape before the British Wizarding War Crimes Tribunal in the aftermath of the war. But, now that she was observing the scene again, Hermione realised that it was likely Severus was speaking as much to Harry as he was to her.

Indeed, as the mortally wounded Severus gurgled, "Take it... Take it..." His eyes were searching for that of the younger Hermione. Her younger self had looked away at the moment, undoubtedly loath to see her former teacher dying an undignified death. He would not be denied however and spoke again. This time, he insisted, "Look at me..." As he was holding onto Harry's robes, Hermione had thought at the time that it was a mark of forgiveness to Harry. But now that she was witnessing the scene again, she noticed that his words of "Look at me" were possibly directed at her younger self because Severus's eyes were looking in her direction. When the younger Hermione finally managed to look up in his direction, the half-blood wizard had already expired, with his hand still in his pocket. If she stared at the hand in his pocket to which her attention was drawn, she could swear that it was clenched and still faintly trembling. But before she could ascertain whether it was a figment of her over-active imagination or a real movement of the corpse as it gave up on life, everything faded to black.

When Hermione came to, she found that she had fallen back into her chair in her office. She rubbed her arms as if suddenly chilled by what she had so lately seen. In a way, the review of the memory had been a success, for she had uncovered the link to her nightmares. On the other hand, it perturbed her to find that she had been dreaming of Severus Snape's death in vivid detail, glorious Technicolor and surround sound, right down to the details of the little hut in the middle of nowhere. No wonder the hut in her dreams looked so familiar! It was a replica of the Shrieking Shack. Everything in that miserable hut was exactly like it was in the Shrieking Shack, down to the creaking floorboards. Was the reproduction of the hut in her nightmare a figment of her imagination? If it was, how could have reproduced Severus's death in such detail? She did not witness the events leading up to the death. It was Harry who had seen everything, and even though he later told her about it, it was not in such detail as her nightmare. What was the significance of the Shrieking Shack then? Did it mean something? Did Severus Snape leave some kind of clue there hinting as to where his body was dragged away to? Even if he did indeed leave something in the Shrieking Shack, why did her nightmares feature the Shack in a desolate wasteland in the middle of nowhere? Did that landscape mean anything? Hermione sighed and rubbed her brow in thought. She enjoyed a good puzzle, for its benefits in exercising her mind. But this particular puzzle was infuriating. Instead of shedding light on her nightmares, it was raising more questions to which she did not have the answer.

"Was Professor Snape really trying to tell me something?" she asked herself. "What does it all mean? Or am I simply reading too much into it? If so, how do I know the details of his death when Harry had only told me the barest details? This is most perplexing." She spun her chair around to face the window and sighed, "Why am I harping on a man long dead? Even if he wasn't dead, the fact that he has been missing for all these years would mean the courts would declare he is presumed dead. That ought to be the end of it. Why am I having nightmares of his death? And just what in the world was Shrieking Shack in the middle of nowhere? Every time I get that dream, I try to save him, and all he tells me is to look at him and that the memories were meant for me. Those memories are Harry's exclusive property. I do not have right to ask him to hand them over to me." She paused with a hollow laugh as she imagined herself asking her long-time friend for the memories of Severus Snape. "I can see it now 'Harry, would you be a dear and loan me the memories Professor Snape passed you shortly before he died? I dreamt he said they were for me.' I can picture that going *swimmingly* well! Was it the memories he was referring to or was it something else? What could he mean by telling me that 'it' was meant for me? What does this 'it' refer to? Was he really trying to tell me something, or is it my wishful thinking in hoping that I could have changed his fate?"

Hermione laughed bitterly at herself at the thought. Who was she that she dared to think of herself as playing God? Changing another's fate indeed! The only fate she should be changing is her own. Perhaps she needed distraction from her humdrum life, she mused. Perhaps she was bored of life with Ron. Perhaps a part of her felt that she could have done better.

She and Ron did not meet on any level, but she opted to marry him because he was the only one who had seen her as a desirable female and not just a walking repository of information. While Viktor Krum had certainly seen her as a female, his attentions towards her stemmed from mere brotherly affection. Oh yes, Hermione knew that she had thrown herself into marriage for a stupid reason. Her father was right marriage with an unequal partner was most trying. Perhaps this need to discover the causes of her nightmares has its roots in her desire to change her fate, or at least, have a respite from the fate she had chosen for herself. Hermione was not one to shirk off her responsibilities, and since she had already chosen marriage to Ron, she would stick with it. However, she acknowledged that a part of her wished she had kept her options open. In that respect, she reflected dryly, she and Severus Snape were alike. They both wanted to change their fates after experiencing the attendant pains of their past choices he from joining the Death Eater camp, and she from marrying Ronald Weasley. However, they both felt it was their responsibility to stick by their original decisions while doing everything they could to alleviate the weight of that responsibility. He had done so by turning to Dumbledore and serving the Order of the Phoenix; she did so by immersing herself in her career.

Curling her lips into a smirk of self-deprecation at that realisation, she wondered about the concept of changing one's fate. Indeed, most people assume human beings can change their fate. This view is very apparent in the works of the Renaissance and even in the world today. Why is it this well attested? Look at the world today; everything that has benefited us exists by virtue of modern science and technology, and of course the prevalence of magic in the Wizarding world. In Muggle Britain, there was great emphasis on people looking to do research in the life sciences and biotechnology, in the hope that the principles of the new sciences will ultimately overcome human mortality. The Wizarding World was no different. Where people in the Muggle world sought to replace body parts to live longer, Wizards sought to render themselves invincible through magical spells, life-lengthening elixirs, the philosopher's stone, and of course, horcruxes.

The neat irony of it all, as Hermione saw it, was that science fiction and fantasy fiction had become very real. In the Muggle world, human beings learnt of the benefits of biotechnology. They believed that if biology and technology were successfully merged, then maybe human beings would not require physical bodies anymore. The so-called benefits envisioned by Muggles were based on the belief that once they did not have bodies, they would not degenerate; and because they would not degenerate, they could potentially live forever. The Wizarding community was similar in that the existence of potions, spells, charms and horcruxes would obviate the need for a body and would, in theory, bring everlasting life. Regardless as to whether one was a Muggle or a Wizard, it is believed that once the ability to live forever is acquired, one can do so in a happy and blissful state without the hassle of a human body. All this desire to live forever is just a manifestation of controlling fate, and a belief that in changing oneself, one can change the world. But can we change the world when we cannot even can our own fate? Science, technology and magic claim that they will help us to change our fate, but is not the modern understanding of the man's ability to change his fate predicated on science and technology for Muggles and the ability to manipulate magic for Wizards? In turn, is the understanding on science, technology, and magic not predicated on the presupposition that humans are independently able to understand, master and control nature? How can Muggles claim to be able to understand, master and control nature when all they do is destroy it in their search for technological progress? How can Wizards claim to be able to understand, master and control nature if all they do is use magic to distort nature's true qualities?

"Are we wrong then, in wanting to change our fates?" mused Hermione with a final sigh. Before she could dwell any further on the issue, her senior clerk walked in and informed her that her husband had arrived.

Without waiting for his wife's invitation to enter, he burst into her office. "Hello, love," he greeted and pulled her into an embrace. "Are you ready to go?"

She placed a perfunctory peck on his cheek and raised a brow. "Go where?"

"You came to see me at work today! So I have something special. Dinner tonight with me. ... Unless you don't want to," he replied despondently. "We have reservations at the Moroccan restaurant in Diagon Alley. You did say you wanted Moroccan food two months ago."

She pursed her lips thinly at herself and stifled a sigh. It was typical of her husband to make these sorts of decisions without telling her. She had once mentioned in passing she wanted to try Malaysian cuisine. How he could mix up Malaysian for Moroccan, she had no idea. Despite her mild annoyance, she managed to keep herself in check and took up her coat and handbag. It would be no use to waste a perfectly good dinner reservation, and coming to points with him would only lead to a pointless quarrel where everything she said would fly over his head again. So it was with an artificial smile pasted on her lips that she answered, "In that case, let's go."

"So how was your day?" Ron ventured at last once they Apparated to the Charing Cross Road.

"I told you in the afternoon," Hermione said with a forced smile when they entered the Leakey Cauldron and proceeded to make their way into Diagon Alley proper. "My crup got off. It will not be put to sleep. You know what's strange?"

"What?"

"I do not see why Cho Chang took up the case. What joy is there in prosecuting? It's as if Cho gets off while going against me in court. It's been the seventh case since I faced her at Inner London Crown Court for Wizards. I mean, she and I are equal in all respects we have had the same career paths. She's even head of her Chambers at Graftonleigh Circle."

"Uh-huh," nodded Ron absently, as they walked past the thoroughfare past several used bookshops. "So, what happened to your crup? Did it get put to sleep?"

Hermione stopped in tracks and stared disbelievingly at her husband. Was he even paying attention to her? She had just told him that the outcome of her case and here he was posing a question that would not have been asked if he had listened to her. "No," she said in a deceptively smooth voice so as to mask her desire to thwack him severely or worse. "It would be good publicity for Chambers though. It demonstrates that the barristers at Chiswell Square care about the common wizard and takes all sorts of cases. What I don't get is why Cho is always taking up the same cases as me. I lay it on the fact that we share the same solicitor. I have a theory. Maybe she's feeling competitive because we're both up for..." She paused and did not finish her sentence because she was staring at the windows of a used bookshop. "Oh!" she squealed with her hands on her cheeks in joy, stopping dead in her tracks before Tamsiq Books. "The new edition of International Wizarding Laws! Look Dear, it takes into account the latest changes in Muggle Laws and how it has affected Wizarding Laws and how it will affect interpretation of Wizarding Common Law."

"No, not more books, 'Mione!" groaned Ron in protest, watching his wife stand so close to the window display of the Tamsiq second hand bookshop that her nose was almost pressed to it. "Books won't fill the stomach and certain cannot make you feel the way I can in bed..."

"I'll just pick up a few books," she explained ignoring his last words. Then as another set of books caught her eye, she continued, "Look, Dear, books on the industrial revolution's impact on the Wizarding world and European Wizarding history! The children would love those."

"Books, books, books. They won't make *me* happy or put food on the table," grumbled the Auror. "Why do you keep buying so many?"

His wife however did not hear him as she had entered the bookshop to purchase the books. On her part, Hermione was less concerned with food than with finding hidden gems in old, musty bookshops. Diagon Alley had improved a vast deal since her time as a student at Hogwarts. The district had undergone much development over the years and was now a viable commercial hub for Wizarding London. Businesses of all kinds flourished and everything one could possibly imagine from the far-flung corners of the world could be found in the modern Diagon Alley.

Hermione was animatedly considering these improvements to the development of infrastructure and economic policies in Wizarding London whilst happily bustling between the shelves near the glass display of the shop when she giggled to herself. Her husband had apparently slouched over in disappointment and was leaning on the glass, waiting for her in resignation.

"Now, there's a good boy," she thought with another mirthful laugh as she added the three volumes of a set of books simply entitled Curses by Cotefredus Agilolfing to the growing stack of tomes she wished to purchase that day. Poor Ron, always left to wait for his wife whilst she made her book purchases.

She stood by the glass watching him until her attention was arrested by two men (who looked much younger than her, possibly in their early twenties) across the street. They appeared to have just emerged from Rotten Row Books, another second hand bookshop. One appeared to be lanky dark-haired chap with a neat crop side-parting on the left, an unremarkable complexion and a hooked, aquiline nose. The other, in sharp contrast to his companion, had long dirty blond hair in a ponytail, a ruddy appearance, and was cheerfully rotund. He seemed to be talking with much verve, as evinced by his wide hand gestures. In particular, it was the dark-haired fellow clutching several books to his chest who caught Hermione's attention. There was something about him she found vaguely familiar and unsettling.

Was she drawn by the way in which he looked askance at his friend, who was pointing at something on her side of the street? Or was she drawn by the way he seemed to move so elegantly? Hermione did not know because her attention was immediately captured by the object of his plump friend's animation. Only her sister-in-law, Fleur Delacour-Weasley, could excite such a reaction from heterosexual males, she shook her head sympathetically as Fleur and her husband, Bill, walked past the bookshop and exchanged greetings with Ron. Sensing trouble as the plump man dashed across the street in an attempt to chat up the beauty, Hermione quickly paid for her books and went outside.

The moment she stepped out on the cobblestones she heard the dark-haired man of her observations shout out in German, "Heinrich, do not be a fool! She is a Veela!"

Undeterred by his friend's cautionary remark, the unfortunate Heinrich raced over to their end of the street and stammered foolishly upon offering Fleur the carnation from his buttonhole. His dark-haired companion quickly dashed across the street and tried to pull him away only to knock both Hermione and himself down, thereby strewn his and Hermione's books all over the pavement.

Thankfully, Fleur and Bill were much amused by the reaction of the man, and Fleur even graciously accepted the flower. Ron, on the other hand, was gaping like a fish wondering what he ought to do. When it finally struck him that he should help his wife pick up her books, he stooped down only to realise he could not tell which books were hers and which were the other gentleman's. In any case, it was Hermione and Bill who had put things to right by sorting out the books and helping the two fallen people up. At that moment, when Hermione returned the books to the dark-haired wizard, their eyes met. Curiously enough, as they did so, they both inexplicably started a little.

"*Tut es hier weh?*" she asked the gentleman in German, indicating the elbow that he had come into contact with her stack of books. As she did so, she could not help noticing the faint curling of his lips in disdain at his friend.

"Yes, quite," he replied in heavily German accented English. Then turning to Fleur and Bill whom he immediately recognised as a married couple, he apologised profusely on behalf of his friend who had so lately made a fool of himself. "Excuse my friend, Herr und Frau. In Bavaria, we do not have women as beautiful as you. It was not my friend's intention to outrage the beautiful Frau's modesty."

Bill only laughed. "It happens all the time, no harm done. The important thing is that you are all right; you took quite a fall there, bumping into my sister-in-law and her books."

"*Oui*, you must take more care of yourself and not only of your friend," chimed in Fleur with a smile. Then addressing the very smitten Heinrich, she continued *Merci, monsieur* for zee flower."

"Now if you will excuse me, my wife and I have to meet our friends. Night, Ron, Hermione!" said Bill as he and Fleur walked off, leaving a gaping Ron and Heinrich in their wake.

Hermione only shook her head at her husband and bent down to gather the rest of the dark-haired fellow's books. On handing him his books, their fingers touched lightly, causing both party's eyes to fly up in shock as they levelled their gazes at one another.

"*Danke sehr schön*," he muttered lowly, his eyes still locked on hers.

She swallowed hard. She could see steely intellect in those eyes as well as acute sense of self-understanding. Just who was he? Why did she find him so familiar? She knew no one from Germany and was certainly not acquainted with anyone who resembled him. Why then did she find herself drawn to this stranger? Apparently, he must have felt something familiar about her too; otherwise, he would not be maintaining eye contact with her. Good Merlin! They had been holding each other's gaze for more than was commonly polite. At last, she cleared her throat and replied, "*Keine Ursache*."

"*Nein. Vielen Dank für Ihre Bemühungen*," he insisted in a light purr.

She smiled at him and released her grip on his books. In response, he clutched them closer to his chest as if they could protect him against the external forces of someone running into him again. "*Bitte sehr*," she answered, still maintaining eye contact with him.

As Hermione and this young man were trying to uncover a reason as to why they were alternatively shocked and drawn to the sight of each other, Ron was slowly recovering from his rapt admiration of Fleur. Once he returned to the land of the semi-lucid, he realised that *his* wife was staring at a young man, who was staring back at her. Wondering what was going on, he looked to his wife and then to the young man, and back at his wife again. When it finally occurred to him that staring at strangers was not the thing in society, Ron was very displeased. He would have spoken out against the young man had not his wife requested that he pick her stack of books for her.

This allowed her the opportunity to slap off some dust from the young man's suit. "*Alles Gute und Gute Nacht*," she said by way of parting and took her husband's arm, leaving the dark-haired wizard and his companion staring after her.

"I didn't know you speak Russian," commented Ron when they had moved a few steps forward. "Learnt it from Krum, eh?"

"I don't speak Russian. It was German," she explained. "And Viktor is Bulgarian."

"Okay then. I didn't know you speak German."

"You never asked."

"My wife is truly the smartest witch in our time, knowing things that I don't even know she knows," Ron spat with a hint of a sour note in his voice. "Why were you staring at him like that? Do you know him?"

"He struck me as familiar; that's all," Hermione equivocated. She could not confide in Ron that she had an odd sense of déjà vu on coming into contact with the young wizard. He would only accuse her of taking an interest in men other than his worthy self. It was, truth be told, one of Ron's failings. His insecurity always meant that he immediately jumped to the wrong conclusion whenever Hermione expressed admiration for any male other than his fine self. She had learnt to work around it now, by keeping her thoughts on other specimens of manhood to herself. It was too much to hope that her husband would understand that her appreciation of another male's looks and qualities did not extend to any desire on her part to sample their wares. But Ron had always been an insecure sort and nothing she did could change that. Instead, she smiled reassuringly at him and continued, "I thought I recognised him as one of the solicitors at Strauss and Leibniz. I was mistaken. He's much too young to be with Gottfried and Johann's Chambers. You must own that he does bear more than a passing resemblance to Johann Leibniz."

"I don't know any of these people, 'Mione," sighed Ron. "I wish you wouldn't talk to me about work all the time. Even when I ask you a simple question like whether you knew that bloke, you had to bring in work and other lawyers. Wait till we sit down! I will tell you *again* about what happened to me at the Auror field training division!"

Though she was inwardly seething at his failure to appreciate her sharing of her friends and her workday when he was so ebulliently wanted share his, she contained herself. Losing her temper would not resolve anything. She chose instead to smile and lean her head on his shoulder in a bid to placate him. "Are you jealous that the poor boy was staring at me?"

"Yes," he confessed with a faint blush, evidently displeased with himself for not trusting his wife.

She tossed her head back in a laugh and snuggled closer to comfort him. "Don't worry, Ron. He was just struck down by the impact of running into me, that's all. The chances of any of us meeting him again are so slim that they are negligible."

FOOTNOTES:

The Gorgon in the title refers to Nagini. I know she is not a 'real' Gorgon'. However, I believe her role in the books position her as a kind of symbolic Gorgon. There is another reason for dubbing Nagini the Gorgon, and that will be more apparent in subsequent chapters.

There are double entendres in the title (of the literary kind *not* the sexual kind as my prelim reader thought). Make what you will of them.

All references to characters are from Rowling's Harry Potter universe unless otherwise stated.

Facts about Wizarding Law and Wizarding Politics are made up.

Facts about the improvements of any Wizarding and/or Muggle object, governing body, and facility are made up.

Facts about other Harry Potter universe characters in the post-Voldemort years are also made up.

My beta alerted me to the fact that my use of "Enquire" as opposed to "Inquiry" may throw some readers off. In the way I was taught:

"Inquiry" is to investigate something. Example: The auditors launched an inquiry into the state of the company's financial situation.

"Enquire" is to ask (a question). Example: May I enquire whether room 17 is available?

Legal references are to British Law. American readers, please bear with me. My beta also made the suggestion that readers unaccustomed to the legal jargon herein pretend you are watching "Rumpole of the Bailey" or "Sherlock Holmes".

Chambers refers to the rooms used by a **barrister** or group of barristers, especially in the Inns of Court. Barristers are not employed in a law firm but associate fraternally with each other, sharing out the burden of costs, in a set of chambers. They are each legally considered self-employed. Chambers are administered by **law clerks**, who receive cases from **Solicitors**, agreeing on behalf of their barristers on fees and suchlike. Barristers are then given details of their cases by the Clerks. Because they are self-employed, Barristers may either base themselves in chambers or otherwise

The **Head of Chambers**, usually a King's Counsel or Queen's Counsel or a 'senior junior', may exercise a powerful influence on the members (and the Head Clerk who finds all the work) of Chambers. In Chambers, all members will offer informal help and guidance to each other. However they are not liable for each other's business (as partners are), and members of the same set of chambers may indeed appear on opposite sides in the same case. Each barrister remains an independent practitioner, being solely responsible for the conduct of their own practice and keeping what they earn rather than drawing a salary. A barrister in independent practice will be instructed by a number of different solicitors (professional clients) to act for various different individuals, agencies or companies (lay clients).

Prior to having her own Chambers, Hermione was an **'employed' barrister**, meaning a barrister who works as an employee within a larger organisation either in the public or private sector such as government departments or ministries like the Ministry of Magic. 'Employed' barristers will typically be paid a salary, and in most circumstances may only do work on behalf of their employer, rather than accepting instructions on behalf of third parties (such as their employers' customers).

A **barrister** is the lawyer who represents litigants as their advocate before the courts of that jurisdiction. A barrister will usually have rights of audience in the higher courts, whereas other legal professionals will have more limited access, or will need to take additional qualifications to do so. In this regard, the profession of barrister corresponds to that part of the role of legal professionals found in the civil law jurisdictions relating to appearing in trials or pleading cases before the courts.

A **solicitor** is a lawyer who has more direct contact with the clients, whereas barristers often only become involved in a case in order to provide any advocacy needed by the client. Barristers are also engaged by solicitors to provide specialist advice on points of law. Barristers are rarely, if ever, instructed by clients directly. Instead, the client's solicitors will instruct a barrister on behalf of the client when appropriate.

Tamsiq is **qismat** spelt backwards. Qismat is the English transliteration of the Persian word for fate or destiny, frequently romanised as Kismet. I have opted to keep as true to the original word as possible and so transliterated it as Qismat.

Cotefredus Agilolfing, the author of the fictional Curses series is the Latinised version of Gottfried (died 709AD), one of the Merovingian Dukes of Alamannia. The Agilolfings were a family of Frankish or Bavarian nobility that ruled the historical territory of Bavaria on behalf of their Frankish overlords ca. 550-788AD.

'*Tut es hier weh*' is German for 'Does it hurt here?'

'*Danke sehr schön*' is German for 'Thank you very much'.

'*Keine Ursache*' is German for 'Don't mention it' (as in a response to 'thank you').

'*Nein. Vielen Dank für Ihre Bemühungen!*' is German for 'No. Thank you very much for all your trouble'.

In this context, '*Bitte sehr*' is German for 'You're welcome'.

'*Alles Gute und Gute Nacht*' is German for 'All the best and good night'.

I know that Fleur is not 100% Veela, but she still has enough Veela blood in her to have *that* effect on men. The unnamed dark-haired chap who warned his friend belatedly that Fleur is a Veela can feel *that* power she exudes over men to make such a pronouncement on her heritage.

A **Crup**, according to Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them, resembles a Jack Russell terrier with a forked tail. It is a wizard-created dog that is loyal to wizards and ferocious towards humans. Crup licences must be obtained from the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures.

Chapter 3: Suspicious Minds & Open Spirits

Chapter 3 of 11

The third chapter covers a little about Hermione's job and her marriage to Ron. At work, she meets the new pupil at Chambers and finds him oddly familiar. At home, it seems that things are falling apart.

Author's Note: Story depicted may be unpalatable to sensitive readers for its portrayal of Hermione and Ron's relationship. Hermione may also not be likeable to readers. Some readers might consider the characters a little OOC. Some organisations and Ministry of Magic departments are made-up.

It would help readers following the story to view it as a 'cinematic' experience whereby there are shifts in perspectives, as well as shifts between flashbacks, the past, the present, dreams and reality within the space of one chapter.

Footnotes follow chapter.

Emphases are italicised and book titles are underlined.

From the Blood of the Gorgon

Chapter 3 Suspicious Minds & Open Spirits

Fate, being a fickle woman, always endeavoured to prove probability wrong. By the very next day, Fate had moved to crush Hermione's prognosis. Doubtlessly, Fate was colluding with her sister, Fortune to confound logic, Arithmancy and probability. Why else would they choose that very moment to bring Hermione's attention to that which she had stated on the very previous evening was highly improbable? Blind Fortune would not see the justice in Hermione's plans where her personal life was concerned. Similarly, deaf Fortune would not listen to her when she tried to avert the trouble she knew would be approaching. And what if they could hear her? They are wilfully mad north, northwest. They would not pity her. Indeed, Fortune and Fate had chosen the very next day to make sport of Hermione from the first moment she stepped into Chambers.

She had just walked in and had only this minute retrieved a brief from her pigeonhole when she overheard a remarkable conversation. It was a conversation that reinforced her opinion that Fate could not be controlled or manipulated. Her senior clerk, Melvin Summerby, had apparently just come down the side passage, which faced away from the corner with the pigeonholes. He had evidently made his way downstairs with someone as he was in earnest conversation with another person, who was making the most laconic of commonplace remarks. In the monosyllabic answers, she discerned that the person's patience was wearing thin as there was the slightest suggestion of exasperation in his smooth but biting tone. Hermione realised with a faint chuckle that the unfortunate newcomer was desirous of escaping from the company of the senior clerk when he ventured a, "*Danke* for the tour, Herr Summerby. May I ask where my pupil-master is?"

At which point, Hermione recognised the voice as the young man she had quite literally collided into the previous evening. She rolled her eyes at the thought of Fate playing a trick on her by defying the laws of probability. Her curiosity to learn more about the new pupil however made her remain well-hidden.

"Pupil-master!" gasped Summerby in disbelief, and Hermione could almost see the senior clerk's large moustache quivering in suspended shock.

"Ja, my pupil-master, this Herr H. Granger," the young man replied smoothly. "Is he in court? Will he be back sometime in the afternoon."

The slight squeaking sounds from feet in highly polished shoes shifting their weight uncertainly from one foot to another informed Hermione that the poor senior clerk was trying very hard to contain himself by tugging at his lustroously pomaded moustache. "As it is your first day in Chambers, even if it is your *second six*, I think it best you get to know all the partners and barristers first," he stated a little pompously. "We are a small close-knit group. We have eight barristers here. Of these, the more prominent ones are Mr Anthony Goldstein, Miss Padma Patil, Mr Lee Jordan, Miss Daphne Greengrass, and our Head of Chambers, who is the person you call your pupil-master."

"Do you call all the ladies 'Miss' even though they may not be of that status?" enquired the dark-haired German.

Hermione could almost hear Summerby nodding furiously in his response. "Yes, it's something that we do here. Part of the culture at Chiswell Square."

"What is the Head of Chambers like?" asked the newcomer rather suddenly as if eager to change the topic.

"A fine figure of a woman petite, handsome, and sharp," came the ready reply, and a slight sound of a cough that Hermione took to be part of Summerby's attempt to wiggle his eyebrows suggestively.

"*Nein!*" His voice rang out in self-annoyance. "My mistake for not realising it is a 'She'. What is she like as a barrister?"

"Very knowledgeable on all points of law, specialises in criminal law, does intellectual property as well, handles the international cases for the Wizarding War Crimes Tribunal at the Hague herself, very strong-willed, intelligent, capable, and not afraid to tell you off if you've done something wrong. You must know all this already. She's famous in the UK for being part of the Golden Trio with Harry Potter and her husband, Ronald Weasley."

"She was in a band before becoming a lawyer?" asked the pupil with genuine curiosity. "What kind? Rock or Pop?"

"You mean you really don't know," gasped the senior clerk, apparently aghast at this young man's ignorance of his illustrious Head of Chambers' role in the war against Voldemort.

"Of course I don't know any British popular culture, I'm German!" exclaimed he indignantly.

Realising the new pupil had been tortured long enough, Hermione emerged from her hiding place behind the pigeonholes and sauntered before the conversing men. Fortunately for her, she had had sufficient time to school her features into a mask of indifference, and she pretended not to recognise the younger wizard. "Good morning, Melvin," she greeted as if she had just come in and had just picked up her briefs.

"Speak of the devil. There she is! Miss, this is the new pupil from Wittenberg under the Schengen Wizarding Law scheme," announced Summerby as Hermione bestowed a curt nod to the stranger. "And this, young man, is our Head of Chambers."

"Hermione Jean Granger," stated the dark-haired wizard clearly.

"Good job, Melvin," said Hermione with a laugh. "You told him my full name!"

"No, I didn't," objected Summerby warily. I did not mention your name at all, and he could not have seen it from the listings on the wall either."

Hermione, who knew it to be true as she was listed simply as 'H. Granger' took it all in her stride and bade the pupil follow her into her office. "You have done your research well, Mr..."

"von Bastiae, Perseuss von Bastiae," he replied with a bow. "I didn't do any research before coming here. It just came to me."

An indulgent smile was cast upon him. "If you do not want to admit your sources, that is fine by me."

"But I really didn't... Nevermind," he sighed in resignation.

Although she had wanted to say something with regard to his time as a pupil in her Chambers, she found herself unable to speak. Bereft of the power of speech, she could only look at him with mild uncertainty. He looked perfectly serious when he said he had not conducted research on Chiswell Square and its inhabitants before arriving. He looked like an upright young man, and she felt in her soul and mind that he had been speaking the truth. The more she analysed the facts as she saw them, the more she realised he was speaking the truth. After all, had she not been privy to the conversation between him and Melvin Summerby? Did she not overhear him saying he had no idea of the Golden Trio or of their role in the war against Voldemort? If he had known about her as part of the Golden Trio then he would have known her full name and her affiliation to Chiswell Square. However, since he professed genuine ignorance and Hermione was a keen advocate of giving someone reasonable doubt, she was obliged to believe him. Furthermore, all the existing evidence indicated that he *really* did not know who she was. Yet, she was disturbed. Just who was he that he knew her full name? She had never bothered to use her name except in official forms for the Ministry of Magic, so how did the young man before know what he did? He certainly did not use Legilimency otherwise she would have felt the pressure of his mind boring into hers. So, how *did* he know?

Given her present circumstances, she did not have the luxury to dwell on her speculations. She had to give the obligatory preparatory talk to all new pupils. Thus, she called on her mind to remind calm and focused, and dismissed any further nonsensical thought. Quickly masking her silence by grabbing his file from the papers on her desk, she glanced through it. He had studied Wizarding law in Wittenberg, and because he wished to practice in the International Wizarding Courts of Justice (IWCJ), he had to have the requisite training in a British legal institution. Under the Wizarding Agreement for Schengen Countries (WASC), law students from non-British countries expressing a desire to practice international law would be despatched to either the legal department within Ministry of Magic in the UK or one of the UK's top legal Chambers, or both, to spend some time learning the ropes.

There had been nothing to blush for in his file. His academic records at the Faculty of Wizarding Law in Wittenberg University were excellent; his pupil-master of the Bavarian firm of Erodolbmud and Ardnok had written a glowing recommendation letter, and his first six at the Department of Magical Law Enforcement where he was but lately granted permission to shadow a pupil-master from Hermione's Chambers.

To her amusement, when she closed his file and looked up again, she found him sitting in a defensive position with his legs firmly crossed, his posture rigidly erect, the fingers of hands laced tightly together on his knee, and a face looking straight at her.

"Nervous?" She asked with a knowing smile. "Don't be. There's always a first time for everything. I am going to ask you a few questions. This is not an interview so you do not have to worry about screwing up."

Perseuss nodded stiffly.

Taking that as indication she should continue, Hermione ran through the list of what pupils were expected to do in her Chambers, and reminded him repeatedly that she did not like it if he were to go cutthroat on another barrister's client, especially if the barrister was from the same Chambers. She advocated winning cases quietly with style than losing spectacularly with a lot of noise. He apparently shared her sense of work ethics as he added his own examples as to what constituted cutthroat behaviour.

Very pleased with his general manners, Hermione went on, "So we handle cases for presentation in the Old Bailey and the Crown Courts; occasionally, our solicitors from Strauss and Leibniz bring us cases for the IWCJ. Because of that knowledge in Latin would be useful. I know you are already proficient in Muggle Law from your records. But what I want to know is whether you fluent in Latin, Herr von Bastiae?"

He answered in the negative by shaking his head. "Other than German and English, I don't know any other languages. But I can learn;*will* learn."

"I'm sure you will," said Hermione with an encouraging smile. "It's not quite my thing either, but the old fogies in the Hague who head the IWCJ keeps all its minutes, notes and documents in Latin even though the trials and hearings are always held in English. If you are fluent in Latin, at least with reading knowledge of it, you will progress far in International Wizarding Law. It saves you the time of having to find someone to translate the documents for you. You do understand that when you are given cases of your own, they will deal essentially with Wizarding company law or Wizarding trade law. They will give you the grounding you need. When you do not have your own cases, you are to help your pupil-master, and take your lead from her. Any questions?"

Once again, he shook his head.

"You're an intelligent young man, Herr von Bastiae, you will do well," she suddenly felt compelled to say. "Work hard, work smart, and who knows? Our Chambers may welcome you as a valued barrister when your pupillage lapses. You may return to Anthony Goldstein's and Lee Jordan's office, the junior clerks will have set up a desk for you there. If you have any questions do not hesitate to ask me or one of the barristers, or if you cannot find any of us, feel free to ask Melvin Summerby. Our senior clerk may be very talkative, but he knows all the twists and turns of the law."

He rose, bowed and was prepared to take his leave when he stopped at the archway of the door. Placing his hand firmly on the door knob, Hermione thought she heard him sigh. As he did not turn around, she did not know whether she had imagined it. She chose to remain and observe him. "Are you ill? Do you need help?"

"I am just a little giddy that's all," he replied curtly in a near hiss with his back still facing her. "Please call me Perseuss, I would prefer it."

"Very well, Perseuss," obliged Hermione as she opened the brief she had collected from the pigeonhole earlier that morning. "Perhaps you can tell me whether we have met before? You seem very familiar to me."

At which comment, he turned around sharply on his heels. *Nein*," he answered thoughtfully, watching her take notes as she read. "Other than yesterday in front of Rotten Row Books and Tamsiq Books, we have never met." He paused, and Hermione felt his eyes staring at her as if hesitating as to whether he should probe her mind. She smirked in between her writing with the knowledge that he was a Legilimens an ethical one, thank goodness. "But, I think you should know, *Miss* Granger, I also feel that you are very familiar and I do not know why."

"Ah yes, thank you for sharing. I think Tony Goldstein should be back by now and Lee would be lounging around playing his vintage 'Game Boy', you will want to pay your formal respects to them," she said by way of dismissal.

"*Danke* for talking to me," he muttered.

She then felt him nod and leave her office, shutting the door quietly behind him. Alone again, Hermione steepled her fingers in thought and stared at the closed door

with a furrowed brow. Was it fate that led her to meet Perseus von Bastiae? Or was fate trying to tell her something with this vague sense of déjà vu? Given that it had overturned her calculations as to the probability of seeing him again after the previous day's accidental meeting, she was beginning to think human beings could not fully control fate. Here she was, a product of the Voldemort era, and she had experienced the horrors of his administration over Wizarding Britain because he had wanted to control his fate.

Coincidentally, Muggle Britain had been also undergoing great political upheaval at the time. The government's emphasis on biotechnology and biomedical research at the cost of other infrastructural projects had invited widespread criticism, and when the research did not yield any tangible benefits for humanity, the project was condemned. Muggles began to doubt the validity and relevance of science and technology and so on. It was similar in the Wizarding world where magic, which was previously seen as a convenient way of extending one's life and ability to improve wizarding lives, came to be seen as a way of proscribing certain ways of life for the so-called good of the many. However these things that were supposed for the good of the many led many within the wizarding community to question the validity and relevance of magic in every aspect of their lives. Even in all this talk about stem cell research amongst Muggles, and using Magic to defy the aging process amongst wizards, people are having debates whether it is "right" for man (be he Muggle or Wizard) to interfere in nature and whether man is going against the plan of Nature.

Hermione smirked to herself again. Like it or not, these sorts of issues facing the Wizarding and Muggle worlds today always elicited political responses. The delicious irony is that in spite of their mutual fear and mistrust of each other, Muggles (at least those aware of their magical brethren) and Wizards now have something in common, viz., they now share certain doubts as to whether human beings can have absolute control/rights over nature. "Strange, isn't it?" she mumbled, resting her head back in the chair. "Muggles and Wizards are alike, yet the Ministry likes to paint them as different. What about those of us straddling both worlds? What are we then?"

The irony of it all was not lost on Hermione as she conversed with her solicitor, Charles Warrington on a case he wanted her Chambers to take. Their conversation found that regardless as to whether one was Muggle or Wizard, the modern predilection was doubting the things that bring each society progress in the case of the Muggles, science and technology, and in the case of the wizards, magic. Regardless as to whether one was Muggle or Wizard, it remains that one's values of the world are formed by some kind of tradition, be it belief in God, or belief in the power of Nature. An understanding of this tradition states that man cannot be the master on his own. That is of course the biblical account and the traditional druidic pro-nature wizarding account. The ancient Greek wizards had a similar account where they melded Muggle learning and beliefs with their own belief system in nature. They too had their doubts as to whether human beings had the wisdom or the knowledge to be able to control the outside world. Why couldn't they see it then? Why couldn't they see that both the Muggle biblical account and that of the ancient Greek wizarding accounts had already stated that human beings were unable to resolve their political and social problems by themselves? Hermione shuddered, as she thought on the matter for here she was considering whether she could change her fate and that of her late Potions Master while ostensibly trying to the worm the truth of Warrington's motivation in coming to her.

She was so absorbed in discussing matters through with Warrington that neither party heard the floo chime in her office. Instead, she continued to ponder as to that which lay at the heart of the prospective client's desire to change his fate. So what if he had sought to combine science and magic? How could that be deemed illegal by the Ministry of Magic? Those two subjects were more closely aligned than the older generation of wizards thought. Science and Magic had that impetus to overcome natural limitations *and mortality is a natural limitation*. Live forever and be happy that's the principle that science and magic aim to achieve. But what we don't want to see is that before we get to the real world of science, life and reality, war and nature will destroy us. Yet science and magic are the very causes of our unhappiness and the gnawing sensation of dispossession within our souls. She would not take the case, but she knew Anthony Goldstein would.

In her long conference with the solicitor, she realised that the assumptions wizards had about magic and Muggles had about science were problematic. Perhaps that is why the past haunted her. She knew too well the very questionable nature of things in modern life. So perhaps she wanted to go back into her past and render the present less questionable. That could be why she was having these nightmares of Severus Snape's death.

When Warrington finally left her, she flopped back into her seat in mental exhaustion with a sigh. It was then that she noticed that the sun had already set. Quickly consulting her watch, she saw that it was already half-past seven. She slapped a hand to her forehead at her forgetfulness. Good heavens! She was supposed to meet Ron before heading over to Harry and Ginny's for dinner. How could she have forgotten! Well, she could have very easily forgotten the existence of everything else once she was faced with work, but the boys (as she still thought of them) would not be able to understand it. They were nothing like her, she knew. They would seek out every available opportunity to put off the execution of work until faced with a looming deadline. "Never trust men who skive to understand women who are workaholics," she mumbled sotto voce as she hastily packed her briefcase.

As it was already lost past the appointed meeting time of 5.30pm with her husband and long past dinner at the Potters' place, she sent an owled apology to the Potters. She then decided to go to Boots, grab a sandwich and then head out to a shop selling Quidditch Robes for fans at Diagon Alley. It was the only way in which she thought she could possibly placate her husband buy him a Quidditch Robe of his favourite team, listen to him rattle on about it for an hour or two, and she would be absolved from guilt until he started remembering that she had forgotten their dinner appointment again. It was never a big deal to Harry and Ginny that she missed their dinners. They knew how busy she was, or at least Ginny did. Ginny once tried explaining to her brother that Hermione was like a horse with blinkers were work was concerned; she would only have eyes for whatever task was before her and plough through it until she was finished. Ron, who never believed anyone was actually willing to do any work unless it was (a) last minute, or (b) through the coercion of a mean-spirited supervisor, could not quite understand the appeal of working at assignments as and when they came in over doing something else that he found more pleasurable. So it was that she purchased for him the ridiculously coloured Quidditch Robes every rabid Chudley Cannon fan swore was a 'must have'.

Being of an efficient turn of mind, Hermione soon completed her self-imposed errands, and went home armed with a Chudley Cannon fan's robes for her husband. Her husband, however, did not share her belief in her own powers of being able to distract him. She found him as he would be whenever he felt his wife had 'spurned him and/or his advances' for her work sitting in the living room, sulking with a bottle of firewhiskey. From the darkened brow sitting on Ron's head, she gathered that he was angrier than usual. Biting back a long suffering sigh, she strode before him and dumped him the bag containing the robes.

"I got you something," she announced blithely, while gesturing for him to look in the bag.

Ron shot her a poisonous look and dragged out the Chudley Cannon robes from the bag with his thumb and index finger as if it were something dirty. "What is this for then?"

"Do I need an excuse to give you something?" challenged Hermione, her eyes flashing in contained irritation. "You have always wanted one; I got one for you."

He glared at her menacingly as she sat down next to him. "Is this supposed to make up for not meeting me and not going to dinner with me at Harry and Ginny's? Do you know how you made me look in front of my best friend and my sister?"

"Bugger it, Ron. I was in a 'con' with Warrington. It ended late. Besides, I apologised and sent the Potters an owl. They must have read it aloud to you when it arrived," she snapped in response, wrinkling her nose at the sour smell of alcohol under his breath. "Work was frustrating enough. I don't need your childish temper tantrums on top of it. Ginny understands my private working mode. Let's not have this conversation about you losing face in front of others?"

"How dare I? How dare I?" screeched Ron, turning as red as his hair. "You blow me off for dinner and sex time and time again. Yesterday, you had to buy books and I said nothing! Every time I need you to attend something with me, you have *work*. It seems that *your work* always crops up whenever anything I ask you to do with me and for me. What is *your work*, Hermione? Do you think *this*..." He held up the Chudley Cannons robes in his angrily balled, shaky fist. *This* is enough pay me back for what I have suffered all the times you blew me off for *your work*? You miss dinner with me for work; you won't even have sex with me because you want to work in your study. I flooded you and saw you talking to a man in your office. You didn't even notice me. Were you too wrapped up in him? What is he? A new lover? You don't expect me to believe that you were in a deep conversation with your solicitor! You are having an affair, aren't you? That's why you bought me the robes! Have you finally become guilty?"

"Sorry," she yawned deliberately. "The word is not in my vocabulary." She glowered at him. "What about you? You expect me to drop everything for you! I have never asked you to drop anything you were doing for me! I let you do your work in peace whenever you abroad on your Auror training. I don't ask you to drop cases where you have to follow criminals and keep tabs on them for days on end because I need you on my arm for some function or the other! The last two times I asked you to attend the Wizarding Law Society dinner with me, you told me you had season tickets to Quidditch matches and that it would be a waste of money if you did not see the matches. You even kicked up a fuss because I asked Ginny to attend the dinners with me. You said she had taken your place by my side, and who was it who declined to attend the

event by my side? And there was the time when I asked you where you went after you disappeared for a fortnight. You told me it was none of my business. So, fine! My business is none of your concern too! You will not blow off watching Quidditch matches for my functions that's fine. In turn, you must understand that I will not blow off my clients to attend Quidditch matches with you. You have always known that and yet you kick up a fuss. When I so much as ask you to miss one Quidditch game to meet my parents for tea, you don't show up; or if you do, all you can say is that the game went into overtime. But have you noticed that I take the time to meet your parents? Have you noticed that if I make us arrive so much as five minutes late at the Burrow, you berate me for thinking that my parents are more important than yours? So you wish me to remain quiet and let you pursue your recreational interests? Very well, I can do that. But you are never satisfied with that. You then complain about my work! What about your work? You expect me to follow you around like a Ministry wife attending functions and whatnot? I attend the biannual major functions with you, and you can't even make the time for my annual Law Society dinner, and then you kick up a fuss because I asked Ginny to go with me! I have accommodated you long enough!"

"Women should follow their husbands! It is their place!"

She controlled her breathing and quietly intoned, "Your hissy fit, while amusing, is unmoving. Just accept your present like a good boy and I'll have a spot of tea with you before showering."

"You think you can buy me off with a gift after all the times you stood me up and blown me off? What about us? Out with it, Hermione, who are you having an affair with if you're buying me a gift to cover up for it? Is it that Slytherin solicitor I saw you with when I flooded? Why else were you too 'engaged' to notice me?"

Throughout history, human beings have developed specially honed responses to unmerited accusations. Some prefer to loudly protest their innocence. Others prefer to silently glare at their accusers in the belief that their innate innocence would shine through. These methods were not for Hermione. She, like many progressive members of the race called lawyers, advocated a manner for responding to clearly false allegations that was entirely new. She held that there was no better way of maintaining one's equanimity in such situations than to throw the accuser off his high horse. This feat was achieved by laughing at the accuser. Her husband, whose mind had never been quick, stared in astonishment at her as she burst out into a merry peal of laughter. For the briefest moment, he was stunned by disbelief. However, like most of the male species, his anger made a comeback when he recalled his wife was laughing at an accusation *he made* of her having an affair.

"Are you laughing at me?" he asked, stating the obvious with a childish scowl on his face.

Hermione, whose lips were still curled in amusement, looked at pityingly at him. "Only at your ridiculous indictment."

"Most women would be outraged by that kind of thing. You should be denying it if it were true, and quiet if it were not. Why are you laughing?" quizzed Ron.

The barrister-witch rolled her eyes. "Where did you pick that up from? Your colleagues at the Ministry?"

"It said so in Witches Weekly," he said defensively, flexing and unflexing his fingers on the Quidditch robes.

"Hmm, why would you read that publication? Didn't you say it was emasculating for wizards to be seen reading something like that?" riposted Hermione teasingly.

He snorted indignantly in remonstrance. "I never said anything like that. Besides, the magazine has changed since Lavender took over as editor. Witches Weekly now provides a guide for wizards on their witches' psyche."

"You must have heard that from the horse's mouth if you're able to say 'pysche' and pronounce it correctly," Hermione purred in a low and dangerous voice. Something in her mind clicked as she recalled her husband's occasional absences from home and the Ministry where he was supposed to be at work. At that time, she had shrugged off his absences and believed Harry when he mentioned Ron was out on the field. However, members of his team were still loitering around the Ministry and had made it a point to greet her. While she had interpreted his previous absences as part of his malingering streak, she was now certain there had to be something more. Hence, she turned to Ron with a sweet smile pasted on her face. Oh yes, everything was very clear now. "That explains why you keep giving me things that are in the monthly giveaways of the magazine a full month in advance. How long has Witches Weekly been enjoying your patronage, Mr Weasley? Or should I ask how long Lavender Brown has been enjoying the service of your penis? You can be honest with me. I won't begrudge her a mere body part of yours. It is only an unremarkable piece of flesh after all."

"My... thingy is more than a piece of flesh!" Ron suddenly went from scarlet to white and sputtered desperately, "There's nothing! Lavender wants a male opinion for the magazine, and sometimes, we meet for drinks and talk about things. Er... yes, that's it, we talk... We just talk... Nothing but talking."

"Talk? The new euphuism for sex doesn't suit you. Your denial is your guilt, as you pointed out earlier. I don't care what you do outside, Ron, as long as you're discreet and it's not in my house." She dismissed him with a flick of her wrist.

He got up from the sofa and would have left her alone had he not recalled that he was the one who had accused her of having an affair, and she had the temerity not to answer him. "You can't do this, Hermione!" he shouted threateningly.

"Guilty now that I've uncovered your secret? Men barking madly always annoy me. Leave me alone before I hex you," she replied calmly, looking at him with something akin to boredom in her eyes.

"No, not *that*! You didn't answer me!" he insisted, throwing back the Chudley Cannons robes at her. "You gave me this to hide your guilt. You don't take my floo-calls because you were chatting up a lover; you make fun of me and you always claim you spend your nights at your workplace. I don't even know whether that's the truth."

"That coming from the wizard who has a bit of fluff on the side?" scoffed Hermione. "Well done, remind me to submit your photograph the next time the OED is redoing itself. Your picture will save them the trouble of defining the term *hypocrisy*."

"How can I believe you that your work is more important than me? Lavender says women need to do things outside of work in order to be truly content!" bellowed Ron. "She said women who do nothing but work become insensitive, unfeminine and uncaring. I see that part of it is true. But you can't be at work all the time. You must have a lover stashed somewhere. That's why you have been so nice to me buying me the robes for my favourite team. You think I don't know that you don't like Quidditch? Instead of coming home and keeping your dates with me as you should, you *work*, as if that's so important! We have everything we need! I am everything to you. I should be everything to you."

"In case you've forgotten, my life makes your life possible. The luxuries in this home come from me."

"I resent that!"

"So do I!" she hissed. "Have you heard yourself? You're being irrational. I work late and you accuse me of having a lover. I had a long 'con' with Warrington and you accuse me of having an affair. I buy you things because I want to and you accuse me of covering up my so-called guilt. Let me ask you a few questions have you noticed that I try to understand your love for Quidditch? Have you ever known me to believe that there are more important things to me than my work? Yes, I am unnatural, insensitive, uncaring and whatever it is that Lavender told you I am like. But I am happy this way. My work keeps me happy."

"You're a wife and a mother, 'Mione!" he spat out. "What can be more satisfying than that? My mother was very happy as a wife and mother, and she never let something as trivial as work worry her."

"How many times must I tell you this I am not your mother. Household work is anything but trivial and I know how she obsesses over that. Get it in your thick skull, I am Rose's and Hugo's mother before I am your wife. Get it in your thick skull, I am my own woman before I am your wife. It doesn't mean that once a woman is a wife and mother, she stops having her own life and own concerns! The same would go for a man, or do you think the same does not apply to you because you have that unremarkable piece of flesh south of your navel? Have you done anything for the children other than telling them they must be true Gryffindors above everything else? What about helping them to develop as people? What about you blowing off our children's day at the library because you will not miss one of your Quidditch matches? Is gambling on Quidditch more important than our children?" she reasoned, inwardly willing her anger not to get the better of her.

"Don't you dare use the children against me!" he bellowed. "I send them money whenever my team wins."

"That is not enough! Do you write to them? Do you send them books or sweets? Do you even know what they like?"

"Why should I write to them when you do? I don't see why you have so much to say to them! What can you possibly tell them that doesn't come from law or some nonsense from books? And for your information, I know our children better than you do."

"Then what do our children like?"

"Hugo takes after me. He likes Quidditch. Rose likes magical creatures."

"Hugo likes flying, not Quidditch even Harry knows that. He prefers building model train sets to Quidditch, hence his interest in Muggle technology of the Industrial Revolution. Rose likes history and Seventeenth century plays. You would know that if you had seen the children put up their own makeshift play with your brothers' children and Harry's last Easter at the Burrow. It was a play our Rose and Hugo wrote for the entertainment of the family. But you *had* to attend your team's away match in Belfast and your bookie was hunting you down for the money you owed him!"

"Don't bring the children into this. You should be the one bringing them up, not me. You know how plays bore me!"

"Oh yes." She narrowed her eyes at him. "Instead of showing your support and affection for our children at their amateur theatrical, you are only interested in gambling on Quidditch matches and anything Quidditch related."

"You can't talk like that to me! Not when you tried to buy me off with these robes!" he pursued. "You gave me Chudley Cannon robes, it only reinforces your guilt that you are hiding something and that you don't love me!"

"This coming from the wizard who has an ongoing extramarital affair! I should be angry with you, but I'm not. You can amuse yourself as you like so long as the children don't find out Daddy's robes smell nothing like Mummy's perfume. I won't divorce you not yet at least. The children are still young, and affairs like yours never last. Very soon, it will be out Lavender, in with a new buxom blonde. I will leave you to your business and you will leave me to mine. Marriage only in name isn't that uncommon for the wizarding community once the wife has produced the obligatory heirs. We will have separate households under one roof, like the kind of marriage enjoyed by Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy."

"How dare you compare us to them! My parents didn't have a marriage in name only! Neither do we!" blustered Ron, shaking in outrage.

"You do realise," began Hermione slowly with a contemptuous smirk, "your irrational and immature statements are deliberately calculated to further amuse me, while doing nothing for your personal image."

"Huh?" Ron's face went blank at his wife's language.

"*Bollocks! I forgot I have to throw out three-quarters of my vocabulary when I speak to you,*" thought Hermione as she cleared her throat. "Think about it, Ron. You like to convey the impression that you are a thoughtful wizard, so exercise your mind. I am married to you, yes? I chose to marry you, yes? So, what does that tell you?"

Puffing up his chest like a ridiculously stuffed robin, he stated his knut's worth. "You just didn't want to be left on the shelf. Witches panic after a certain age if they can't get married, and they snatch whatever they can find. That's what Lavender told me. With you, it was a little different. You didn't have anything to snatch at, even though you were at the panic age. You always looked so envious when one of our friends got married, so I know." He paused to make a face at his wife's indignant snort. "I happened to like you. We got married. Don't think I don't know what was said about you. There were many people who said you were too bookish for your own good and wouldn't know how to treat a wizard right. Lavender herself said..."

She cut him off by shooting off two spells. She immobilised him completely with the Petrificus Totalus and then aimed a jinx at his mouth, which taped his trap shut for good measure. "Leaving aside the sagacity of Lavender's words, I want you to listen to me. Shouting and screaming never accomplish anything. I did love you at one point, or thought I did at one point because you saw me as a female instead of a walking encyclopaedia. But such time has passed. You have constantly seen me as just that a female. I want to be seen as a human being, a person too! I am not in love with you, have never been in love with you, and have never been in love with anything save my work and studies. Loving someone and being in love are not the same thing. I bought the robes for you because I care for you. Any reason you claim was behind the gift is of the creation of your mind. You should know by now what sort of person am I. If you are only learning now, well then, it is a little too late. I must beg of you never to utter Miss Brown's name in front of the children as you were so fond of doing this evening. While she may be a legitimate role model for many young witches now, I have no wish for Rose to see her as *your* paragon of virtue. You know how candid I am. If they so much as ask me, I will tell them the truth. Thank your lucky stars that the children are away at school and not privy to your tantrums. I am going to take a bath, and work in my study. I have a new case involving the Malfoys who would have thought they would have succeeded in making a place for themselves as of one of wizarding Britain's key crime families. I am going to release you from the spells now, and I want you to be quiet. *Finite Incantatem*."

As soon as Ron regained the use of his tongue and feet, he sought to rail at his wife again. "I don't understand you at all."

"It would seem we share this belief," she replied with a rueful sigh.

"Oooh, look at Hermione going, 'No one understands me, I'm such a tragic figure! Boo hoo! Look at me! No one respects me; no one understands me; no one appreciates me.' Bugger it all!" mocked he viciously. "You sound like Severus Snape with that load of shit."

Ignoring his comments with a faint smile, she allowed her hand to rest on her cheek as if suddenly reminded of something. "Speaking of Severus Snape Tomorrow's the 9th of January, there will be a commemoration service for Professor Snape. Who knows? Harry may have persuaded Hogwarts's Board of Directors to install his portrait in the headmaster's office. Are you going for the memorial service at the Hogsmead cemetery or do I have to make your excuses again?"

"You can do what you like if you're so obsessed with Snape!" he spat. "If I didn't know better, I would say you never got over your schoolgirl crush on the greasy git and his 'brilliant mind'. What mind? He's nothing but a ruddy two-headed snake and I want nothing to do with him. You would rather do things in memory of a greasy Slytherin git who did so many bad things, and a black-hearted dark wizard who hated Harry on top of that? I don't understand why you rather commemorate Snape's memory than be with me. Shows just what kind of a wife you are."

Hermione shook her head at Ron's pigheadedness. "It is right to keep the memory of someone good and noble alive. It is the decent thing to do. It is especially fitting to remember him on his birthday. Professor Snape's body was never found, remember? Maybe the Death Eaters destroyed it, who knows? We should give him the respect he deserves in death because we know what he is really like. Didn't Harry tell us about Professor Snape? Yes, I do not deny he appeared antagonistic towards Harry, but he had his reasons. There is a saying in an ancient Greek that translates to, 'It is both noble and just, and pious and pleasant to remember the good things rather than the bad ones.' We should learn from it, especially when we remember Professor Snape. He seems to have managed to live up to that adage in the latter half of his life, why can't you?"

"Since your memory is so good as to recall Snape's birthday and commemoration, can you tell me when my birthday is?"

"First February," she said without thinking. As soon as those words left her lips, she realised she had made a mistake. "First March. A slip of the tongue, Ron."

"You can't even remember my birthday. You don't love me at all, you lying witch!" he harrumphed, and with which parthian shot, he threw the robes back at her and stormed out of the house.

Alone again, Hermione neatly folded the Chudley Cannons robes and floated it to the bedroom. Just her luck to have made an unequal match, she mused wryly. Although she had found it particularly hackneyed when her father had the exact same talk Mr Bennet had with Elizabeth at the end of *Pride and Prejudice*. As much as she hated it,

she had to admit to herself that marriage to Ron was falling apart. He was still the boy that he had been at Hogwarts.

Lately, he had taken to constantly informing her that she was dull for rattling to him about her work, and that she was being a busybody for enquiring after his day at work. No matter how hard she tried to reason with him, he persisted in his belittling of her efforts at understanding Quidditch and scoffing at her attempts to include him in the upbringing of their children. It was not that she had not tried to make her marriage work. Goodness knows she had tried. She had given in to him, contained herself from snapping at him whenever he said something against her tastes. She felt like she had always been giving in and now, she had nothing more to give. Evidently, Ron was also dissatisfied with their marriage too. Why else would he seek solace in the arms of his first paramour, Lavender Brown? Hermione scratched her head in frustration when she realised her father was right she had made an unequal match. Her father had seen it then, so why could not she? It was plain for all to see that she and Ronald Weasley did not meet on any level. They had nothing in common.

Additionally, she owned privately to herself that she had been using her work to escape from him and the humdrum tedium of her life with him. He did not and was unwilling to understand all her quick parts and her abilities. It seemed that he wanted her to be like an amalgamation of Lavender Brown and his mother. While it was true that she had fancied Severus Snape in her school days it was because he had always taken her seriously in her private conversations with him. Although he was waspish to her in class, whenever she consulted him privately, he treated her as a human being, albeit with a great deal of indifference. It was markedly different from the spiteful tone he would use with non-Slytherins in class. At least he had always encouraged her ambitions and the development of her mind. Hermione sighed as she leant back in the sofa, suddenly tired with the evening's events. She had now come to a point in life where she wanted to be regarded as a person, not a woman as Ron apparently saw her, or a man as Chambers saw her because of her penchant for taking up cases the other males eschewed thereby consistently yelling out that she had bigger bollocks than the lads.

She was lost in the reverie in the comparisons between her husband and Severus Snape, until she shook her hair firmly and realised it would be no point to dwell on a dead man, whose merits were entirely lost on her husband. Likewise, it would be pointless to dwell on her husband as he was the cause of her present anger. There was only one thing she could think of that would starve off any human feelings and that was work. Thus resolved, Hermione took a quick shower, packed a small valise of clothes and headed back to Chiswell Square Chambers.

FOOTNOTES:

The Gorgon in the title refers to Nagini. I know she is not a 'real' Gorgon'. However, I believe her role in the books position her as a kind of symbolic Gorgon. There is another reason for dubbing Nagini the Gorgon, and that will be more apparent in subsequent chapters.

There are double entendres in the title (of the literary kind *not* the sexual kind as my prelim reader thought). Make what you will of them.

All references to characters are from Rowling's Harry Potter universe unless otherwise stated. Any character you do not recognise is my own creation.

Blinkers (British English) are blinds consisting of leather eye-patches sewn to the side of the halter that prevents a horse from seeing something on either side. My beta alerted me that American readers would call them "Blinders".

Facts about Wizarding Law and Wizarding Politics are made up.

Facts about the improvements of any Wizarding and/or Muggle object, governing body, and facility are made up.

Facts about other Harry Potter universe characters in the post-Voldemort years are also made up.

Legal references are to British Law. American readers, please bear with me. My beta also made the suggestion that readers unaccustomed to the legal jargon herein pretend you are watching "Rumpole of the Bailey" or "Sherlock Holmes".

The key members of Chiswell Square Chambers (other than Hermione) are from the HP-verse:

Summerby is mentioned as a male Seeker for the Hufflepuff Quidditch team in Book 5 (OoTP). I have given the character the first name Melvin.

Anthony Goldstein is mentioned as a Ravenclaw in the same academic year as Harry, Ron and Hermione in Book 5 (OoTP).

Padma Patil is mentioned as a Ravenclaw in the same academic year as Harry, Ron and Hermione. She is the twin sister of Parvati Patil.

Lee Jordan is mentioned as is a close friend of Fred and George Weasley, and in the same academic year as them.

Daphne Greengrass is mentioned as a Slytherin (likely in the same academic year as Harry, Ron and Hermione) who took the practical portion of the OWLS Potions examination with Hermione.

In the UK and in most Commonwealth countries, in organisations and educational institutes, people often communicate using **pigeonholes**'. Documents and messages are placed in a person's pigeonhole for them to collect; they can reply by putting a response inside the sender's pigeonhole

Perseuss von Bastiae. The name is deliberately spelt with two 's'.

Chambers for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

Head of Chambers for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

'Employed' barrister for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

Barrister for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

Solicitor for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

'Con' - When Hermione says she was in a 'con', she means consultation/conference with someone. It does not mean to cheat in this context.

Pupillage, in the UK and most Commonwealth countries, is the barrister's equivalent of the 'training contract'. It is like an apprenticeship where students build on what they have learnt during the Bar Vocational Course by combining it with practical work experience in a set of barristers' chambers. A pupillage is the final stage of training to be a barrister and usually lasts one year, being made up of **two six-month periods (known as 'sixes')**. The first of these is the non-practising six during which pupils shadow their pupil-master and the second will be a practising six when pupils can undertake to supply legal services and exercise rights of audience. At the end of the first six months a pupil must get their pupil supervisor to sign a certificate confirming satisfactory completion and send it to the Bar Council. The pupil will then receive a Provisional Qualification Certificate. At the end of the second six months a pupil must get their pupil supervisor to sign a certificate confirming satisfactory completion and send it to the Bar Council Education and Training Department. The pupil will then receive a Full Qualification Certificate. Although pupillage is used to describe the training for all barristers, there is little in common between different sorts of pupillages. Pupillage is recognised as a difficult and demanding time. Pupils must attempt to impress as many members of their chambers as is possible. They will also have to impress their clerks by competing as many cases as possible and still impressing solicitors.

The phrase **'first six'** refers to the first six months of the pupillage whereby the pupil observes his/her supervisor at court, in conference and assisting with paperwork.

The phrase **'second six'** refers to the second stage of the pupillage, or the next six months. At this stage, each pupil is responsible for their own case load. This will range from first appearance in the magistrates court and crown court to full trials. Some pupils may undergo jury trials, but this is very rare. The work will be allocated by the clerks at the end of the working day (frequently at 6pm or later) and the pupil will then be expected to prepare the trial for the following morning.

'Brief' or **'Briefs'** (when used in the plural) stems from the Latin 'brevis'. It is a written legal document used in various legal adversary systems that is presented to a court arguing why the party to the case should prevail. In the UK, the phrase refers to the papers given to a barrister when they are given notes to a case from an instructing solicitor to represent a client at trial a day or two before the hearing. The brief or memorandum establishes the legal argument for the party, explaining why the reviewing court should affirm or reverse the lower court's judgement based on legal precedent and citations to the controlling cases or statutory law. When it is a trial or motion brief, the brief argues that the court should rule based on previous decisions of controlling courts. In either case, the brief may also include policy arguments and social statistics when appropriate; for example if the law is vague or broad enough to allow the appellate judge some discretion in his decision making, an exploration of the consequences of the possible decision outside of legal formalism may provide guidance. Such arguments may also support a legal argument when the purpose of the law at issue may be clear, but the particular application of that law in service of that purpose is in dispute.

The **brief** was probably so called from its at first being only a copy of the original writ. Upon a barrister devolves the duty of taking charge of a case when it comes into court, but all the preliminary work, such as the drawing up of the case, serving papers, marshalling evidence, &c., is performed by a solicitor, so that a brief contains a concise summary for the information of counsel of the case which he has to plead, with all material facts in chronological order, and frequently such observations thereon as the solicitor may think fit to make, the names of witnesses, with the 'proofs', that is, the nature of the evidence which each witness is ready to give, if called upon. The brief may also contain suggestions for the use of counsel when cross-examining witnesses called by the other side. Accompanying the brief may be copies of the pleadings, and of all documents material to the case. The brief is always endorsed with the title of the court in which the action is to be tried, with the title of the action, and the names of the counsel and of the solicitor who delivers the brief. Counsel's fee is also marked. The delivery of a brief to counsel gives him authority to act for his client in all matters which the litigation involves. The result of the action is noted on the brief by counsel, or if the action is compromised, the terms of the compromise are endorsed on each brief and signed by the leading counsel on the opposite side. In Scotland a brief is called a memorial.

Schengen refers to the 1985 Schengen Agreement. It is an agreement among some European states which allows for the abolition of systematic border controls between the participating countries. It also includes provisions on common policy on the temporary entry of persons (including the Schengen Visa), the harmonisation of external border controls, and cross-border police cooperation.

OED is the abbreviated form of the "Oxford English Dictionary".

The saying "It is both noble and just, and pious and pleasant to remember the good things rather than the bad ones" comes from Xenophon's Anabasis

Chapter 4: Inexplicability of the 'Now'

Chapter 4 of 11

The fourth chapter covers Hermione's latest case at work involving the crime families of wizarding Britain. After the business discussion, she takes her Chambers' key players to dinner and becomes disquieted when something occurs.

Author's Note: Story depicted may be unpalatable to sensitive readers for its portrayal of Hermione and Ron's relationship. Hermione may also not be likeable to readers. Some readers might consider the characters a little OOC. Some organisations and Ministry of Magic departments are made-up.

It would help readers following the story to view it as a 'cinematic' experience whereby there are shifts in perspectives, as well as shifts between flashbacks, the past, the present, dreams and reality within the space of one chapter.

Footnotes follow chapter.

Emphases are italicised and book titles are underlined.

From the Blood of the Gorgon

Chapter 4 Inexplicability of the 'Now'

A week of hard work at Chambers paid off, for Hermione had cooled down sufficiently to exchange a few words of no consequence with her husband. And Ron, on his part, did not allow any ludicrous accusations to cross his lips even if he smelt increasingly like Lavender's cloying perfume. Moreover, the week of hard work had the added advantage of rendering Hermione well prepared for her case of *Malfoy and Goyle vs the Crown and the Ministry of Magic*

What happens when two crime families clash and a witness could attest to their physical brawl? Both families' mutual solicitor from the firm of Strauss and Leibniz hooked them up with the top barristers of wizarding Britain Hermione Granger and Cho Chang. Who indeed could be better qualified to ensure the continued prosperity of the two wizarding crime families than these two barristers? Hermione Granger and Cho Chang were both nominated for King's Counsel, and were the only two wizarding barristers to be considered for such an honour in a long time. As befitting their stations, the two witches were averse to make the disputes between the Malfoy and Goyle families a court matter. They had decided the matter over tea at a quaint café overlooking Oxford Street a week receiving the cases. Given that both witches were observers of social etiquette, they had arrived right on time within seconds of each other. As they sat down at the table, they began to jump straight to business without preamble.

"Hermione."

"Cho."

"What's the key similarities between our clients?" asked Cho as she waved for a waiter to take their order.

As soon as the garçon left to bring them their tea, Hermione replied nonchalantly, "No one can tell the Malfoys apart and no one can tell the Goyles apart. We have a group of five platinum blonds, inclusive of the senior Malfoy's cousins and a group of heavy-set balding chaps, inclusive of the extended Goyle family."

"This thing about each group looking pretty much the same will work in our mutual advantage," pointed out Cho.

"For Chambers or for our silk applications?" challenged Hermione whilst hooking a loose lock of hair behind her ear.

"Our reputations," said the Head of Graftonleigh Circle Chambers. "This is the new face of the underbelly of wizarding society. Since when do we take care of wizarding crime families?"

"By allowing the crime families to carry on with their business within the limits we set them, they don't get sucked into supporting another Dark Lord. I love it when you pose those sorts of statements, Cho," smiled Hermione knowingly. "One never knows whether you're making a proper question, or whether it's one of those questions you throw out at witnesses and other wizarding barristers whom you regard as your competitors to make your words sound nice and fierce and to make the person at the receiving

end feel nice and small."

Cho threw back her head and gave in to the impulse to laugh. "I love it when you talk dirty. You've always known how to read my words. Not everyone can do that."

A cough interrupted their conversation as Hermione was about to reply when the waiter brought them each a slice of blueberry cheesecake with their tea.

"We did not order this," said the ladies in unison to the hapless garcon.

The pimply boy shifted his weight on his legs and stammered, "The gentleman over there asked that it be sent to you with his compliments."

The two barristers turned around to the area indicated by the boy and found themselves staring in the direction of Lucius Malfoy who bowed his head graciously at them.

"It would appear he knows we're trying to do something for his family," said Hermione with an artificially bright smile pasted on her lips.

Cho took up her teacup and looked across the table to her former schoolmate, who also did the same. "Only one thing to do in a situation like this."

"Universal sign of hypocrisy?" Hermione curled her lips in faint amusement.

"But of course," smiled her esteemed competitor in response. "On three now one, two, three."

As soon as she counted to three, both ladies turned with their raised teacups in Lucius Malfoy's direction and nodded at him, as if acknowledging and thanking him with a silent toast.

"Wanker," muttered Cho, with her smile still sweetly on her face as she drank from her cup.

"Vain-pot," murmured Hermione, as she did the same. "Back to business now, shall we?"

The other woman nodded her assent.

Hermione continued, "Some months ago, the Malfoy family and the Goyle family cast hexes and other curses at each other in the lobby of the Inner London Crown Court for Wizards. It was a bad day for serious crime in the new Britain, especially since it degenerated to physical beating as well. We are trying to avoid getting one family locked up at the expense of the other. It will go to trial in three days, as it must, but both families must be allowed to be at liberty to run their respective crime empires for which we rely on for so much of our work. To get them both off, we need to give the impression of being relaxed under pressure, and that means no going cutthroat on each other or each other's clients. Realistically, if the Malfoys try to get the Goyles down, and if the Goyles try to get the Malfoys down, the jury will likely say, 'Fuck the lot of them, let's lock them up because they're all as bad as each other.' Like you, I am in favour of a truce."

"I don't know how far you've gotten with your lot, but on my part," explained Cho, taking a bite out of the cake. "I've spoken to Ambrose Goyle, currently the heaviest, most balding one and Head of his family's business since the death of Gregory Goyle's father. He's in favour of an outcome beneficial to both families."

"Which is why we're having this meeting," nodded Hermione in agreement. "Your lot is meeting my lot with us at Saint Paul's in..." She checked her watch. "An hour."

"With any luck, peace will break out to the benefit of us all. You know, I'm amazed how simple it could have been the Goyles bring me a little work, and the Malfoys do the same for you. Damn thing is none of us can afford to let them go away for a few years. I hate your guts."

"I hate yours too," Hermione replied with a teasing smile. "But that's why we're both here. It's to our advantage to talk things through, and it is our job to get Lucius Malfoy and Ambrose Goyle to do the same thing. We have to get everyone to talk like adults. Is our supremely crooked solicitor, Charles Warrington going to be present?"

"He had better be. I told him I'll hex off his bollocks if he didn't."

"Good one," said Hermione with a low whistle, wishing that she had threatened something similar to her husband.

"Shall we go then, to Saint Paul's?" enquired Cho, as she rose.

"Aren't you meeting with the rest of your team?"

"Blaise, Stanley, Melza and Kirke will be heading there on their own. Blaise is leading Melza is a murder today, so Chambers is a mess with drafts of his closing," sighed Cho in mock exasperation, as they made their way to the Apparation point.

On their arrival at Saint Paul's Cathedral, they found most of their barristers and the members of Goyle and Malfoy crime families seated in the stalls facing each other. Their solicitor, Warrington, was pacing with his hands clasped behind his back, with a worried look on his brow.

"Playing the sheepdog, Charles?" asked Cho as she patted his cheek affectionately as they stepped into the church.

Automatically jerking away from her touch, he grabbed onto her hand and hissed in relief at her. "The Goyles have been waiting for more than three minutes! What kept the two of you?"

"Tea, darling," replied Hermione mock coquettishly as she took her seat. "We're English, we need fortification whenever something big like this happens."

Warrington could do nothing but roll his eyes at the two witches. Truth be told, he could not abide by either of them (though he had a certain private fondness for Cho). However, they were the top in their profession and up for King's Counsel. He was a shrewd wizard who demanded the best. As a solicitor, he had the same principle, and it was clear from the way his eyes flicked over the two crime families that he wanted the best for his clients as well. It was with this in mind that he cleared his throat and addressed his Slytherin brethren on both sides of the divide. "On behalf of Chiswell Square and Graftonleigh Circle Chambers, I thank both the Malfoy and Goyle families for your maturity in setting aside your not inconsiderable differences and calling this temporary truce. In a nutshell, both Miss Chang and Miss Granger have pointed out that collectively there are twenty legs, twenty arms, ten wands and ten heads five with blond tresses and five with thinning black hair. Collectively, you are a frightening lot in your black robes."

"What is in your favour is that no witness can say whose wand was pointed where, and whose arm was in whose face or why," stated Hermione, breaking into Warrington's carefully prepared speech, much to his chagrin. "This means the prosecution is in trouble. You are all individuals in your own right. They have to prove against each one of you that you did what you allegedly did. But they can't, provided you don't start screaming hexes, curses, jinxes and fist-shaking at each other in Court Number Five."

Cho looked across the stalls to Hermione and nodded, indicating both her agreement with her colleague in law and her desire to speak. "Exactly, even though the Court Aurors and special Wizarding Constables at the courts will have taken away your wands, you still possess the ability to perform wandless magic. I advise you not to do any such thing because screaming hexes, curses, jinxes and fist-shaking at each other is counted as evidence. They will be counted as evidence *against you*. The jury and the judge will watch you doing such deeds against at each other. Once that happens, the prosecution won't have to do a single thing. They can sit back and watch you send each other down for three to five years. Not in your interest at all to pull any such stunts."

The sound of a fist coming into contact with the top of a wooden pew came to be heard, and all eyes turned in the direction of Draco Malfoy, who was sitting between his father and Hermione. "Bollocks!" he declared in an even and carefully quiet voice. "You know you hit me first, Gregory Goyle, and I know you hit me first. I feel a bit innocent."

"Look," interjected Hermione in barely concealed irritation, standing up and pointing to the representation of Christ on the stained glass. "He's the enemy, not each other."

Her voice sounded odd as it echoed across the church.

"Him?" sneered Lucius suppressing a laugh of incredulity.

"Yes, him the King, the Crown, the titular head of Wizarding Britain. So long as you keep your mouths firmly shut in front of him, we can all go home."

"Technically, that's Jesus," pointed out Blaise Zabini snidely upon raising his hand in fair imitation of Hermione's younger self.

Ignoring his attempt to make fun of her, she continued, "There are some men, Mr Zabini, who are so far above the rest that it means one and same thing." She jerked her head in the direction of Christ on the stained glassed window. "Him, C. R. Three, Sir Ian McKellen, and maybe Albus Dumbledore now that's a bundle where they were all men and wizards above the rest."

"C. R. Three?" murmured Gregory Goyle to his barrister.

Cho rolled her eyes and graciously allowed Hermione to cast her a sympathetic look. "She means Charles Rex III, the King. Or should that be Carolus Rex III, Hermione, since we're doing it in proper Latin?"

The assembled party chuckled softly to themselves and echoed eerily in the Church.

"As Hermione and I were saying," Cho said, bringing the conversation back to the matter at hand. "The prosecution has one witness whom they claim stands a little better than the rest. But we believe he stands alone. It is not beyond our collective ken to chop him up."

"Who's Ken?" enquired Gregory Goyle with a look of genuine curiosity on his face. The Malfoys sniggered and the barristers of both Chambers shook their heads.

"Ken' as in the noun," answered Blaise, trying hard not to laugh. "Perception, understanding. Not Ken Brannagh or Towler or Hastings."

As the explanation seemed lost on the young Goyle, Cho went on, "If we all stick together, it is up to the prosecution to make the best of what is in effect, a pretty weak case. By playing on their witnesses' inability to be specific, we don't think they can prove the case, and we don't think they will."

"Which means, acquittal times ten," explained Hermione, lest some members of the Goyle family should find the barrage of legal jargon too much to bear.

"Excellent," announced Lucius as he stood up. "I trust this will keep everyone happy. Are you happy with this outcome, Ambrose?"

"Deliriously," deadpanned the head of the Goyle of the family, as they shook hands on the agreement.

Satisfied with the day's outcome and the civilised nature in which the discussion took place, everyone streamed out of the cathedral, the barristers huddled together and talking normally for once. Although Hermione knew her staff were not pleased to do business with Cho's mainly Slytherin staff (as was evident from the way her lot squeezed together), she acknowledged Cho had guts in helping those dagger-drawing snakes together to work for her. In all likelihood, Cho had more guts than her, she reflected as the two Heads of Chambers and their solicitor walked out together and exchanged a few words.

"Joining forces makes sense, Hermione," confessed Warrington.

"Of course it does. You know what I like about this whole business?" asked Cho

"The sense of unease hanging over our clients?" ventured the chocolate-eyed witch.

"Exactly," laughed Cho with a backwards glance at her staff as she took Warrington's arm. "Better than sex."

"Too right," acceded Hermione.

"That is why I bring all my business to the two most perverse witches in law!" acknowledged Warrington, offering the use of his other arm to Hermione.

Before she could accept the gesture, one of her staff, Daphne Greengrass, hollered after her. "Oi, 'Mione, dinner tonight, remember? We have to feed the new puppy!"

"Puppy?" asked Warrington.

"New pupil. I'm obliged to take Chambers to dinner," came the reply in a slight groan. "I'll see you in Court?"

"Court would be easy when one has to feed a hungry mob," laughed Cho. "See you!"

The three of them parted way and Hermione hastened to rejoin the company of her lawyers. After Apparating to the Inner London Crown Court to pick up Perseuss von Bastiae and their senior clerk, she allowed her staff to haggle over where they would dine before firmly overruling their various suggestions with the decision that they were having Malaysian cuisine.

The Malaysian restaurant in Diagon Alley was everything that Hermione hoped it would be. It was, fortunately, not crowded, and the ambience was excellent. From the reviews she had heard from Minerva McGonagall, the place served authentic Malaysian food, and was as spicy as it would have been in Malaysia. It was the perfect thing she needed after a hard day's work, and a brief repose before she went home and faced that idiot of a husband. Still, Hermione was not one to allow her personal problems to get the better of her, and as far as she could manage to keep her private life separate from her professional one, no one need know of the matrimonial fracas that had broken out in her household.

These were the thoughts tripping through her head when she sat down and bade everyone order what they liked. Perseuss, who had seated opposite Hermione stared at the menu briefly before looking up and catching the eyes of his Head of Chambers. It appeared that he had been observing her for some time. She could sense a haunted look in his eyes, and before she could venture to ask him about it, he hunched over curling his lips disdainfully at something. Hermione thought he looked worn out, as if tired from carrying too many burdens. There was something about him that made him look as if he was older than twenty-five years.

The more she observed him, the more she found him familiar from the way he tapped his long, pale fingers on the table, to the way he traced his lips in thought, to the way he would twitch his mouth contemptuously at behaviour and events he found distasteful she had an odd, creeping sense of déjà vu. Sometimes, she felt it was as if she was watching the only available snippets of a silent film, and left the viewer wondering as to the rest of the plot. She levelled her gaze to the new pupil again, and he licked his lips, a gesture she knew indicated that he was about to speak. Instead of speaking as she thought he would, he mumbled something about using the bathroom and harried off.

His momentary departure led the senior clerk to say something while he jabbed at items on the menu he wanted to the waiter. "Have you guys ever noticed there's something odd about the new pupil?"

"Look, the boy's German, he's bound to be funny in the head," reasoned the ever politically incorrect Lee Jordan, as he placed an order *foyam masak merah*

"Not that!" objected Summerby, as Daphne Greengrass ordered *sambal udang* and fried chilli kangkong. "Every time he locks eyes with Miss Granger, he goes all strange and seems all uncomfortable and has to excuse himself to the loo."

"Nerves maybe. Our Hermione's a force to be reckoned with," suggested Anthony Goldstein as he watched the waiter disappear to the back with their orders.

"Nah," insisted Summerby, "there's something more than that. He always comes back from the loo with his face wet, like he's just washed his face. Why would he do that?"

Unless it were to clear his head of thoughts that...."

"In case you haven't noticed," said Hermione blithely interrupting his conjecture. "I'm still here. I will not tolerate idle gossip in my presence."

It was just as well that she made that announcement for Perseuss chose that time to return to his seat. The restaurant also chose that time to deliver the dishes. No doubt they used magic to cook the dishes, thought Hermione as dishes upon dishes of piping hot rice and bowls of spicy dishes were laid in front of them. Very pleased with the aromatic smells wafting from the steaming clay dishes, Hermione bade everyone help themselves. All the assembled were scooping up the food and eating with great gusto save Perseuss. Instead of helping himself to whatever that was laid out before him, he was cradling his head, gently rubbing his brow. True to the observations of her senior clerk, Perseuss had indeed splashed cold water on his face, and his eyes were strangely glittering. Those eyes of his met hers across the table, and once again, she felt a jolt of an indeterminate sensation in her soul.

The sensation was broken when eye contact was lost at Summerby's comment to Perseuss.

"You should really get something to eat before Mr Jordan finishes everything," joked Melvin Summerby as he placed a handful of chicken in his mouth.

Perseuss only twitched his lips weakly in half hearted attempt of a smile.

Hermione hid her smile behind her napkin. She found it particularly amusing that his smirking sneer bore a passing resemblance to that of Severus Snape when he was annoyed with Neville's potion brewing efforts. Repeatedly telling herself that it was nothing but a figment of her imagination, she quickly took up a bowl proffered by Summerby and was about to scoop some of its contents onto her plate when she felt the strong sinewy fingers of Perseuss around her wrist.

"You shouldn't eat that," he stated plainly, eyeing her with concern.

"Perhaps you should release my wrist and give me a good reason why I shouldn't partake of this dish of..." Hermione cautioned lowly with a glare.

"The curry base in Ayam Masak Merah contains belachan as they call it in Malaysia," explained Perseuss knowledgably as he relinquished his grip. "Belachan is better known as fermented prawn paste. You're allergic to shellfish. I suggest you not eat it unless you want your throat to close up. I haven't anything to use to treat you in my bag if that happens, and I suspect neither do you."

At which exposition, Hermione started almost imperceptibly. Though she looked curiously at him, she was inwardly affrighted as to how he came by this knowledge. Beyond her parents, her Muggle family doctor, Madam Pomfrey, Professors McGonagall, Dumbledore, and Snape, and her mediwitch at St Mungo's, no one knew else knew of her allergy, not even Ron. But Ron's ignorance was nor surprising, he hardly paid attention to anything that was not played out right before his eyes. So how in the world the new Pupil from Germany know about her allergy? As part of the natural way in which her brain was wired, Hermione tightly grabbed on to his hand and immediately asked the question which was foremost on her mind. "How did you know?"

Perseuss stared at her and quickly swept his eyes around the table at everyone staring at them. He struggled free from her grasp and dropped the bowl he was then receiving from Lee Jordan. "Please forgive me, I spoke out of turn. Excuse me."

"There *is* something wrong with that boy," stated Summerby with great conviction as the young pupil stalked off to the loo again.

"Indeed." Lee nodded as he swallowed another mouthful. "It seems his bladder is defective."

However, Hermione was not attending to his words. Her concentration was entirely focused on Perseuss von Bastiae. It was not lost on her that as he wound his way to the water closet, his hands were clenched into angry fists that were quivering slightly. That gesture reminded her of something she had once seen a long time ago as a teacher strode past the rows of desk in a classroom as he dismissed cauldron after cauldron of poorly brewed potions. Shaking her head to dismiss the notion that was running through her mind, she attributed his trembling fists as a sign of his numerous private troubles and pushed Perseuss's habitual resemblance to Severus Snape out of her mind.

FOOTNOTES:

The Gorgon in the title refers to Nagini. I know she is not a 'real' Gorgon'. However, I believe her role in the books position her as a kind of symbolic Gorgon. There is another reason for dubbing Nagini the Gorgon, and that will be more apparent in subsequent chapters.

There are double entendres in the title (of the literary kind *not* the sexual kind as my prelim reader thought). Make what you will of them.

All references to characters are from Rowling's Harry Potter universe unless otherwise stated. Any character you do not recognise is my own creation.

Facts about Wizarding Law and Wizarding Politics are made up.

Facts about the improvements of any Wizarding and/or Muggle object, governing body, and facility are made up.

Facts about other Harry Potter universe characters in the post-Voldemort years are also made up.

Legal references are to British Law. American readers, please bear with me. My beta also made the suggestion that readers unaccustomed to the legal jargon herein pretend you are watching Rumpole of the Bailey or Sherlock Holmes.

The **C. R. III** reference

In this chapter, I have assumed that 22 years after the defeat of Voldemort, Charles, currently Prince of Wales, will be King of Great Britain. I have also assumed in this fic that he will use Charles instead of George as his name as King. My beta pointed out that this would make His Royal Highness some seventy years old, which is awfully long for male members of the Mountbatten/Windsor families. But given the long lives of the late Queen Mother and the Queen, I think it would be possible for Prince Charles to reign as king for a few years.

Silk is British legal slang for King's/Queen's Counsel because the gown for the KC/QC is made of silk.

The key members of Graftonleigh Circle Chambers (other than Cho Chang) are from the HP-verse:

Blaise Zabini (referred to as 'Blaise' in this chapter) is mentioned as a Slytherin in the same academic year as Harry, Ron and Hermione.

Stanley Urquhart (referred to as 'Stanley' in this chapter) appears as 'Urquhart' and is mentioned as Slytherin's new Quidditch captain in Harry, Ron and Hermione's sixth year.

Demelza Robins (referred to as 'Melza' in this chapter) appears in Book 6 (HBP) as a new chaser in the Gryffindor Quidditch team.

Andrew Kirke (referred to as 'Kirke' in this chapter) is mentioned in Book 5 (OoTP) as replacing one of the Weasley twins in as a Gryffindor Beater after Dolores Umbridge bans them from playing.

The key members of Chiswell Square Chambers (other than Hermione) are from the HP-verse:

Summerby is mentioned as a male Seeker for the Hufflepuff Quidditch team in Book 5 (OoTP). I have given the character the first name Melvin.

Anthony Goldstein is mentioned as a Ravenclaw in the same academic year as Harry, Ron and Hermione in Book 5 (OoTP).

Padma Patil is mentioned as a Ravenclaw in the same academic year as Harry, Ron and Hermione. She is the twin sister of Parvati Patil.

Lee Jordan is mentioned as is a close friend of Fred and George Weasley, and in the same academic year as them.

Daphne Greengrass is mentioned as a Slytherin (likely in the same academic year as Harry, Ron and Hermione) who took the practical portion of the OWLS Potions examination with Hermione.

The solicitor, Warrington appears as 'C. Warrington' in the HP books Slytherin Quidditch Chaser, in Book 4 (GoF), he attempted unsuccessfully to enter the Triwizard Tournament. He was also mentioned in Book 5 (OoTP).

Chambers for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

Head of Chambers for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

'Employed' barrister for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

Barrister for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

Solicitor for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

Ayam Masak Merah is a Malay styled chicken dish cooked thick red-curry. Literally translated it means 'chicken cooked in red'.

Sambal Udang is a Malay styled prawn dish where the prawns are cooked in a chilli paste mixture

Kangkong (sometimes spelt as Kangkung depending on whether you speak Indonesian Malay or Malaysian Malay) refers to the water spinach.

Chapter 5: On Riddles & Lies

Chapter 5 of 11

The fifth chapter delves into Hermione's investigation of her dreams at the wizarding section of the British Library.

Author's Note: Story depicted may be unpalatable to sensitive readers for its portrayal of Hermione and Ron's relationship. Hermione may also not be likeable to readers. Some readers might consider the characters a little OOC. Some organisations and Ministry of Magic departments are made-up.

It would help readers following the story to view it as a 'cinematic' experience whereby there are shifts in perspectives, as well as shifts between flashbacks, the past, the present, dreams and reality within the space of one chapter.

Footnotes, translations & ca follow chapter.

Emphasises are italicised and book titles are underlined. The only exception to this is correspondence, where emphases will be underlined.

From the Blood of the Gorgon

Chapter 5 On Riddles & Lies

In order not to dwell on the issue of the similarities she thought she saw between Perseuss and her late potions' master, she took a sleeping draught after her bath and went to bed. While the draught did help her to go into slumber, it only brought a fitful sleep. Like most instances of fitful sleep, hers was wrought with the same recurring nightmare that had so long plagued her. Indeed, it had become so realistic to her that it appeared that she was reliving the incident sans Harry and sans Ron, witnessing everything like the sole spectator of a very badly written farce. It appeared so realistic to her that she awoke with tears streaming down her face at the passing of a wizard who should have otherwise been saved. For the briefest moment upon opening her eyes, she was uncertain whether she was in the dream world or back in reality. It was not until she sprang up, bolt upright in bed and wiped the tears from her eyes that she realised she had been dreaming. She was still in her safe bed, alone.

"Alone?" her mind wondered, as she climbed out of bed and drew the curtains aside. The gentle light of a sun that only just risen from slumber greeted her with its greyish-orange blush. Squinting a little, she turned back to her bedroom to find that she was indeed alone. Come to think on it, she had been alone all night too since she got home from the Malaysian restaurant. "Oh, so that's it," she realised with a knowing smirk, "my husband must have spent the night with the very feminine Lavender Brown again. No matter, he can seek solace where he chooses."

Pushing aside any further thought of her errant husband, she drifted to her study and took notes on her nightmare so as to better analyse it. Once again, she had been in a hut with a dying Severus and where she had attempted to save him. There were key differences in this nightmare vis-à-vis the previous ones, however. First of all, instead of being in the middle of nowhere, she could distinctively see the village of Hogsmead in the distance, and for once, she knew that the hut was definitely the Shrieking Shack, and she knew that she was unable to save Severus. Despite knowing all that, the nightmare still inexplicably terrified her. Why? What was it about his death that was out of place?

It struck her that her attention in this version of the nightmare was specifically focused on the fact that Severus had fumbled for something in his pockets before he expired. Come to think on it, he had the same indication of going through his pocket for something in Harry's memory as well. Why did Severus Snape insist that the memories were for her? Why did Severus Snape ask her to look at him while he was searching for something in his pocket?

"Is that significant?" she asked herself aloud. "What could have been in his pocket? Could it have been a portkey? Was that why his body was never found? Did he portkey away? Or was there a potion or salve that would mitigate Nagini's venomous bite? Could it have been both? If such were the case, he must have it talked it over with Dumbledore and conceptualised some kind of a contingency plan. Dash it, why does Dumbledore have to be bloody dead? It makes everything doubly complicated because that old man had a finger in so many bloody pies! It makes everything so infuriatingly oblique!"

The more she thought on it, the more she felt there was some special meaning behind Severus's fumbling in his pockets. After all, there had to be a reason why her attention was so markedly drawn to it. She was acquainted with Severus Snape's character and his contributions to the Order. Furthermore, Albus Dumbledore had left many papers behind with Minerva McGonagall and he had taken the precaution of taking out his memories of his conversations with Severus shortly before he and Harry took off to find the locket in the cave by the sea. Hermione herself had looked through some of these documents when she was reading law, for Minerva had generously

donated them to the wizarding section of the British Library when the war ended. If her brief look into a few of the Dumbledore papers had yielded much about the Order of the Phoenix's legal deals with the Fudge administration, then who is to say that much remained to be uncovered about Albus Dumbledore and his relationship to Severus Snape in his private correspondence and memories? If the few papers she had gone through while she was at Oxford had yielded so much insight on his character, it was entirely likely she would discover more about Severus Snape's private plans with Dumbledore. "Yes, that's the only plausible option left to me if I am to clear up the mystery of this nightmare," she murmured.

A brief consultation with her diary later, she saw that she had no other case for which to prepare, and her case of 'Malfoy and Goyle versus the Crown and Ministry of Magic' was not due for presentation for another two days. She had a full day to do as she liked. Upon hastily scribbling a note to the senior clerk of Chambers informing him that she would not be going into work that day, she whistled for the family owl and requested that it take the note to Chiswell Square. Her duty once executed, she made preparations to head for the British Library.

She arrived at the British Library in good time, freshly showered, powdered and pressed. Following procedure, she flashed her reader's pass at the librarian's counter before heading for Disused Books Office Collections, pulling out books with such titles as Cleaning with tea-leaves, Making your Crystals shine brighter than White, and How to be a Successful Despot with a Smile, and tapping the book on the vernacular used by Officer Crabtree on the '*Allo 'Allo* television show, and uttering a special incantation. The effects of these actions opened a discreet door into the wizarding section of the British Library. As soon as she stepped through the passageway, the door closed behind her. No stranger to this part of the library, Hermione was not the least surprised when the librarian smiled her welcome and pointed the law section to her. Nodding her greeting to the librarian, she made sure that she was unobserved before making her way to the relevant section, and consulted the index, specifically the part which read:

GUIDE TO ALBUS DUMBLEDORE COLLECTION

ca. 1899-1997

Descriptive Summary

Title: Dumbledore, Albus Percival Wulfric Brian. Collection

Dates: ca. 1899-1997

Size: 59.8 linear feet (89 boxes)

Repository:

Wizarding Collection,

Special Collections Research Centre,

British Library,

Saint Pancras,

96 Euston Road,

London,

NW1 2DB,

United Kingdom.

Abstract:

Albus Dumbledore (1881-1996), former headmaster of Hogwarts. Considered by many the greatest wizard of modern times, Dumbledore remains famous for his defeat of the dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945, for the discovery of the twelve uses of dragon's blood, and his work on alchemy with his partner, the late Nicolas Flamel.

The Collection includes correspondence, manuscripts, research notes, notebooks, publications and memory recordings. The collection document Dumbledore's career as an educator, headmaster, Wizengamot member, and leader of the Order of the Phoenix.

Information on Use

Access:

Permission must be obtained before access will be granted. Immediate access restricted to members of the Order of the Phoenix. Series XIII, Subseries 12 is restricted indefinitely. Series XIII, Subseries 13 includes specific reproduction and citation requirements. Contact the Special Collections Wizarding Research Centre for more information.

Citation:

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Dumbledore, Albus. Collection, [Series #, Subseries #, Box #, file #], Special Collections Wizarding Research Centre, British Library.

INVENTORY

Series I: Correspondence

Series II: Alchemical research

Series III: Dragon blood papers

Series IV: Flamel papers

Series V: Teaching

Series VI: Wizengamot papers

Series VII Order of the Phoenix papers

Series VIII: Memory recordings

Series IX: Personal files

Series X: Publications

Series XI: Reviews

Series XII: Manuscripts

Series XIII: Restricted

Running her finger through the series numbers, she summoned the Flamel papers, the Order of the Phoenix papers, the memory recordings index, the personal files, and the Restricted index to the private study room (which had its own Pensieve) that she usually used when patronising the library and began the long task of sifting through the various volumes. She was not certain why she took down the Flamel papers. Perhaps it had been her long standing interest in the work of Dumbledore and Flamel; perhaps she wanted an insight on Dumbledore from the perspective of someone who was both an intimate friend and scholarly collaborator. She did not know the real reason for her taking that selection. To her, it seemed as if the series had been calling out to her to be read. Yet, whenever her hand wandered to the series on the table, her mind reproached her saying, "Not yet. Save that for later." She did not know why she did it, but she heeded the advice of her brain and ploughed through the other files she had taken down first. After three hours, she was of the opinion that most of the material before her thus far was irrelevant to her cause, and she needed a brief escape from reading. Randomly picking up a bottled memory recording and pouring it into the Pensieve, she plunged headlong into without checking the label.

As soon as the swirling vortex around her abated, she found herself back at Hogwarts, in the headmaster's office. Severus Snape was busily pacing the floor before Dumbledore's desk while the older wizard stroked his withered hand with his good one.

"I am only asking you to consider the possibility of it," said Dumbledore, turning a sweet over in his mouth.

"And what happens if I do?" snapped Severus, stopping in his tracks and leaning over the desk, glaring menacingly at his employer and sometime manipulator.

"You will have a second chance at life, away from all this." Dumbledore made a wide gesture with his hands and smiled benignly at his potion's master and spy. "I specially made a portkey for you to use in cases of emergency unregistered, of course. It will take you to my distant cousins on the Continent," he continued, pushing a package wrapped in a white handkerchief towards Severus. "It will only be activated on a command that you will set by yourself."

"What about the ramifications of it if the Dark Lord finds out?" snarled Severus, inching closer to the old man who was sagely stroking his beard. Though he made a great show of general reluctance to humour the gift giver, he pocketed the proffered object.

"Well, by then, you will be long gone, won't you?" chuckled Dumbledore. "You would always require additional potions, I believe. From your last report, I gathered that Riddle's serpent has been imbued with certain powers. There is no telling what the fellow might do, you know. He's a bit of a wastrel, not one to conserve his best men. He might put an end to you when he thinks you've outlived your purpose."

"Do you think I am unaware of that?" hissed Severus, clenching his fists in an unsuccessful attempt at mastering the anger that was making his hands quake. "That blasted snake's blasted venom has been the very thing that has been keeping the Dark Lord nourished." He paused to violently flick aside the hair that had fallen into his eye. "My research notes on that wretched reptile have already been put to use for a restorative against its poison. Its counter-poison should be ready in another seven hours. I will test it at the first available opportunity."

"Do you expect some problems?"

"I wouldn't be testing it otherwise."

"What did you use in it? You are usually more confident in your ability than this."

"The key ingredient is Sopophorous Beans stewed in Knotwood juice," confessed Severus with some reluctance.

Dumbledore glanced up from his half-moon glasses with a frown. "That could reverse some of the effects of..."

"Yes, it would, but my notes indicate that there may be a high cost to pay for it. In potions of this stamp, there is always something the drinker has to give up. It is akin *tail* between us; there has to be some form of equivalent trade." He snorted all too knowingly. "I have to give something up if the effects are to be reversed. It is like shaking hands with the devil and calling it justice. I will have to wait to see what happens when I test it. At the rate the Dark Lord kills off Wizards and Muggles left, right, and centre with that snake, I will have an opportunity fairly soon."

Dumbledore nodded grimly with a sigh. "Apprise me of the results when you do." He sighed again and pushed his spectacles up his nose. "I wish I could protect you further, my boy."

Signalling his disgust at the older wizard's term of endearment, Severus snorted, "Don't give me the 'my boy' nonsense. You know bloody well you've done more than enough to me, making me want to kill you every time we speak."

"I shall take that as a compliment!" laughed the most respected wizard in Britain. "By the way, other than always carrying the portkey and the counter-poison, I would like you to carry something else."

"What? Sweets?"

"No, but that would be a good idea," chuckled Dumbledore, opening a drawer and placing a bottle on his desk. "I meant it would be a capital notion for you to carry this."

"The Elixir of Life," purred Severus with interest, turning the bottle in his hand and examining it. "I thought you did not have anymore of it."

Dumbledore waved his good hand in the air dismissively and adopted a casual air. "I happened to make a few bottles when the Philosopher's Stone came under Hogwarts' protection. Nicolas and I improved the formula while searching for the tenth practical use of dragon's blood."

"Where are the rest of *these few bottles*?" asked Severus with a raised brow that bespoke both his scepticism and his admiration for the old man's cunning.

"In the cabinet under Dippet's portrait," hummed the headmaster tunelessly. "It doesn't last as long as it does with the Stone, but for your purposes, I think, it will buy you time to concoct whatever potion you need to undo any curse Riddle might throw at you when he decides to remove you from his favour."

Hermione noted with interest that Severus sputtered on seeing the cabinet filled to the brim with the bottles upon bottles of the Elixir of Life.

"And what am I to do with this whole cabinet?" asked Severus quietly with a dangerous glint in his eyes. "Surely, you don't mean for me to carry the whole bloody cabinet with me wherever I go?"

"Of course not!" chuckled Dumbledore, stroking his bad hand again and counting off his fingers. "On your person, you will carry one bottle of elixir, one counter-poison against his serpent's venom, one portkey. Everything in the cupboard will be sent ahead to my cousins as a precautionary measure in anticipation of your arrival."

Severus shot metaphorical daggers at his companion and at the other so-called sleeping portraits. "You seem bloody certain that I will use the portkey."

"Let's just say I have the gift of foresight," laughed Dumbledore.

Hermione would have liked to stay and see more but the swirls of the memory soon enfolded her and brought her back to reality so much so that she found herself back in the private research room of the wizarding section of the British Library. Rubbing her brow in consternation, she sought to calm her mind and reflect upon that which she had seen so far. First point in hand so there was a portkey Severus could have used to escape from the Shrieking Shack. The question was whether he had carried it with

him and used it that fateful day. Both alchemists intimated that it would take him to the European continent. Where would it have taken him if indeed he had used it? Second point in hand so Dumbledore had created more of the Elixir of Life. Given that he had worked closely with Flamel in the improvement of the elixir for the Philosopher's Stone, it was no surprise that he should make more of the concoction. The purposes of the elixir were already familiar to Hermione.

The residual question in her mind was the meaning of Dumbledore's words. What did he mean by the elixir buying time for Severus? Lastly, it astounded Hermione to learn there was some kind of potion that could have mitigated the effects of Nagini's venomous bite. The question was whether it was effective. The conversationalists in the memory hinted that there could be some side-effects upon consummation. Just what were these side-effects? Were they inimical to the human body? More importantly, Dumbledore had strongly advised Severus to always carry the counter-poison to Nagini's venom, a vial of the Elixir of Life and the portkey. Did Severus carry them all with him on that fateful day?

"Too many questions," muttered Hermione, lightly banging her head on the table in frustration. "Stupid old bugger! Why did you have to weave so many webs? Can you ever state anything explicitly for once, Albus Dumbledore!"

Turning her head to the side, she saw that the bottle of memory she had just revisited was labelled 'Hogwarts' Musings 1996 (no. 77)'. She groaned in realisation that the labels on the memory recordings would prove no help to her in determining which information she would find useful. While the Dumbledore collection had been useful in her search for unravelling her nightmare, she was no closer to uncovering the reasons for her dreams and why Severus always seemed to insist that his memories were for intended for her. She needed to find the formula on his counter-poison to see if she could figure out the exact nature of the side-effects the two wizards touched on.

Seizing upon that idea, Hermione took up the subseries on Flamel and searched desperately for any hint as to formula of the counter-poison. "Why couldn't there be a Snape collection? It would make things so much easier if there were one," she muttered, flipping a page savagely. As she flipped page after page, she wondered whether she would gain any new leads as to the constituents of counter-poison. After three subseries in the Flamel series, she only managed to barely discern the ingredients and methodology of making the Elixir of Life rather than any hint of Severus's probable counter-poison.

Pushing aside the volumes, she thought of a new method to uncover the nature of the counter-poison. While she had no idea whether it had worked; she felt that researching into it would prove invaluable. Perhaps it would help if she broke down the constituents of Nagini's venom, she pondered. After all, she was a skilled alchemist and adept in potions brewing. Perhaps she would be able to break down the whole process of concocting the counter-poison, if it indeed served the purpose of countering the poison. "Yes, that would be the most sensible way of approaching things," she mumbled. If she recalled the snake's appearance correctly, it had all the markings of a spectacled cobra. The effects of a cobra venom invariably resulted in death if left untreated. Death would be by respiratory failure through the complete paralysis of the diaphragm. What would be an effective way of slowing down or reversing the paralysis of that valuable organ?

At the top of her list was the Sopophorous Beans stewed in Knotwood juice as it was mentioned by Severus. The Sopophorous Bean helped with slowing down the metabolic breakdown of poisons in the body, and the Knotwood juice was supposed to have emetic qualities if properly stewed. Mandrake extract could also be deployed to strengthen the body's natural lymphocytes in the event of poisoning. But what ingredient had to be added for the potion to stew for over seven hours? And what were the side-effects that made Dumbledore so wary? The only way about it was to list all the ingredients of the counter-poison (or probable ingredients) and individually determine their dangers if used in conjunction with another. There had to be some more effective use of her time than going through the trial-and-error process herself. There had to be a hint of the counter-poison somewhere, like Dumbledore's correspondence perhaps. Armed with the hope stirred up this idea, Hermione combed through the index in Series I of the Dumbledore Collection until coming upon 'subseries 2: correspondence to A.P.W.B. Dumbledore'. Further inspection of subseries 2 yielded this piece of information:

Box 8, file 37 Correspondence, Severus Snape to Albus Dumbledore. Compilation

A similar inspection of subseries 1 of Series I revealed that correspondence of the former Hogwarts headmaster fell under Box 3, file 17. Taking out those relevant sections, Hermione began her desperate perusal of their letters for clues as to the counter-poison. After spending several hours in this worthy endeavour, she could not find that which she was seeking. The whole Dumbledore-Snape correspondence consisted of a series of undated epistles written with obscure references to equally unintelligible objects, places and people. Most notably, Hermione found several instances of allusions to Greek mythology. After reading through their correspondence, she managed to discern the rough order in which they must have been sent. Taking those she supposed were written with regard to Severus's work on some brew or the other, she was left with the following that she arranged thus:

~ ~ One ~ ~

Albus,

DL's Naja Naja has had far more magic than we expected. Her rancorous spit is pure dark prima materia. Countering her spit is now impossible. A reversal is the only alternative. The sands of time however only inhibit the inevitable until the object of Naja's scorn falls or if her scorn falls to another.

S. Snape

~ ~ Two ~ ~

Severus, my boy,

Contain Naja's scorn for as long as possible, the Aab-e-Hayaat will serve to alleviate the symptoms and buy you time.

The Merovingians are working on prima materia suppressant.

Conserve your strength & effort,

A.D.

~ ~ Three ~ ~

Albus,

Do not speak to me of conserving strength and effort when I know time runs short for us both. Your days on the mortal realm may be numbered as the curse in your hand courses through your veins. My days on this plane of shadows will soon end as well. I must continue to devise a means of dealing with Naja. However, I am constantly reminded that Persephone is not always kind. She has already chosen to thwart me in life; she may yet again doom me in death.

S. Snape

~ ~ Four ~ ~

Severus, my boy,

It matters not whether Persephone is kind. The most important thing is not to lose sight of ἀλήθεια once you have seen it. You must have seen it as I have. That which is good and just is naturally expedient. Do not say your soul is not worth saving. Would you rather be a wraith? If you make that choice, you have not seen the possibility of the soul and truth being one. As an old wizarding philosopher once wrote, 'Before one can love wisdom and recognise what it lays hold of and with what sort of things it longs to keep company on the grounds that it is akin to the divine and immortal and what is always, and what it would be like if it were to give itself entirely to this longing and were brought by this impulse out of the deep ocean in which it now is, and the rocks and shells were hammered off those which, because it feasts on earth, have

grown around it in a wild, earthy, and rocky profusion as a result of those feasts that are called happy. And then one would see its true nature.'

Follow this advice and persevere always,

A.D.

~ ~ Five ~ ~

Albus,

You speak of oceans without knowing that I am looking over a stagnant pool. While the waters of ἀλήθεια have the corrosive effect of rending one's heart from one's soul, I dare not condescend to use it. While it prevents the stubborn setting of one's imprint on stone, the waters twist, corrupt and cause the whole to fall into inner turmoil. As the river's water is an offshoot of Ἐρις whose head stretches to Olympus in unrelenting wrath, all her tributaries would only serve to hurl bitterness to the heaviness of man's pain. Would you have me use the waters from a plain barren of trees and all that naturally grows on earth? How can a river flow through an empty landscape? How can two rivers cut through such a land? Logic dictates that unifying both waters would render this care quit. But I was unable to collect aught from the second river, and cannot therefore temper the corrosiveness of her sister.

S. Snape

~ ~ Six ~ ~

Severus, my boy,

The journey to self-knowledge is a pilgrimage into one's soul. The rivers running through that inhospitable plain in Βοιωτία where the heat stifles everything and anyone render the waters of ἀλήθεια all the sweeter. To count the oblivion of Ἐρις, it is a necessity for all to drink a measure of the waters of ἀλήθεια. The key is to be guided by prudence and not drink more than the necessary measure. Do not on any account attempt to retrieve a sample from the rivers of Carelessness, for its waters cannot be contained by any vessel. Look instead for the blindfold behind ἀλήθεια if you are to choose between the better from among those that are possible.

Stagnant pools at this end have their uses too, and have since materialised in Merovingian Alamannia where all is ready.

I have faith in your work. Do not despair,

A.D.

~ ~ Seven ~ ~

Albus,

The priests at the shrine in the desolate plain confirmed the existence of the river of Μνημοσύνη, but it corrodes even the beneficial properties of the waters of ἀλήθεια. I have concluded that not more than five drops can be added to the whole if sight is to be recovered before one can awaken on the unlit pyre. However on awakening, it is likely the translation to the body will empty the mind. Should that occur, death is preferable.

S. Snape

~ ~ Eight ~ ~

Severus, my boy,

An erosion of the mind and a translation of the body touch not the soul. The soul remains immortal and remains capable of bearing all evils and all goods. Having kept to the upper road, I trust you enough to know you will keep to that road and practice justice with prudence. So make a good crossing of the river of ἀλήθεια, for I know your soul will not be defiled. It matters not what the river makes you, those who would remove you from the pyre have been apprised of the possible inner recesses of the shooting star likely to fall in their hands.

A.D.

Hermione sighed upon rereading these missives. Commonsense told her that cobra venom blocked the acetylcholine receptor within the body, however, it would seem that Nagini's venom did more than shut down one's diaphragm and impede one's breathing. Does it mean that Severus Snape was well and truly dead or did it mean there were other modes of going about the curse of Nagini's venomous dark *prima materia*? More puzzling were all the references to non-existent rivers, kingdoms and empires long extinct, and Dumbledore's penchant for quoting Greek philosophers. Lightly banging her head on the table in an attempt to stimulate her brain to work faster, Hermione pondered as to the constant reference to 'Ἀλήθεια'.

"Ale-theia," she read aloud while desperately clicking and unclicking her propelling pen in frustration, "Ah-le-the-ia, Ah-lethe-ia." She paused with a frown as she came to a sudden realisation, and she began cancelling letters from the word. A gasp escaped from her when she realised she was left with λήθη or Lethe. "That's it!" she exclaimed, "the removal of the blindfold of *Aletheia* leads to Lethe. But even forgetfulness is a form of blindness in itself. That is why it is a sister to forgetfulness. The only way to really remove the form of blindness plaguing both Aletheia and Lethe was to expose them to the human condition of life. That is, one has to truly live, and that meant infusing into the waters of Lethe a few drops from the river Mnemosyne!"

Lethe may be one of the rivers of the Greek underworld and the river of forgetfulness as well as the chief river running through wizarding Greece, but Lethe was also the name of the daughter of Eris, Goddess of Strife. No wonder Severus was so reluctant to use it. Although it was known to be the most soluble liquid in potions brewing, it had certain corroding powers of rendering the potion's consumer no longer himself or so it had been written in a number of alchemical texts. These same texts also prescribed two ways of dealing with the corrosive effect of Lethe's waters. Of these, only one was truly viable and that was to mix in the waters of Mnemosyne. The other method of adding the waters of the river of Carelessness could not be done mainly because there was no vessel capable of holding the water. Dumbledore himself had made it quite clear that the plain of Lethe passed by near the river of Carelessness in wizarding Boeotia. However, beyond being in a better possession of some facts, she was still no further in her quest to uncover the truth behind Severus Snape's missing body, or what truly happened to him on the night he was supposedly killed, or why she was haunted by nightmares of his so-called death.

"At least," she silently comforted herself, "I now know why he was desperately fumbling in his pockets, and I know that I had not imagined the trembling of the hand in his pocket when we left his body behind in the Shrieking Shack."

Hermione rolled her eyes at herself as she furiously clicked her propelling pen when she realised she was already presuming Severus Snape had not been killed. There was no evidence to suggest otherwise, so why was she of that mindset? There were all indications that the counter-poison did not work or would not work as planned. What did she know? All she knew was that part of the potion to starve off the effects of Nagini's venomous bite of pure dark magic contained Sopophorous Beans stewed in Knotwood juice, time turner sand, water from Lethe and a few drops from the river Mnemosyne. She had yet to decipher what else Dumbledore and Severus could have meant by their references to the Merovingians and Alamannia on top of all the talk of Greek myths.

As much as she would have liked to continue her analysis of these unresolved mysteries, she was informed by the librarian that the library was closing. Upon gathering up her papers, she went to do the only thing that would get her mind off puzzles she could not solve, namely work. So it was that she bade the librarian goodnight and headed

to Chambers.

Footnotes:

The Gorgon in the title refers to Nagini. I know she is not a 'real' Gorgon'. However, I believe her role in the books position her as a kind of symbolic Gorgon. There is another reason for dubbing Nagini the Gorgon, and I enjoin the readers to devise that for yourselves. This chapter, I believe provides a hint of that. My beta assures me that those cognisant of Greek mythology (especially that surrounding the Gorgon) will know what I mean.

There are double entendres in the title (of the literary kind~~not~~ the sexual kind as my prelim reader thought). Make what you will of them.

All references to characters are from Rowling's Harry Potter universe unless otherwise stated. Any character you do not recognise is my own creation.

Facts about Wizarding Law and Wizarding Politics are made up.

Facts about the improvements of any Wizarding and/or Muggle object, governing body, and facility are made up.

Facts about other Harry Potter universe characters in the post-Voldemort years are also made up.

The wizarding section of the British Library, and the books used to get there are entirely made up. I, for one, wish books with such titles existed, especially the one on Crabtree's "French" in 'Allo 'Allo

Propelling pen for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

On the **Dumbledore-Snape correspondence**:

The basis of most of the Dumbledore-Snape correspondence is drawn from my reading of Plato's Republic Book X and Meno 80a-81e, especially the Myth of Er, talk of the underworld, death, and what happens in between life and death. The significance of these references will be revealed in the plot some time later, so I will not expound on them here.

In Plato's Meno, Persephone is said to arbitrarily decide what to do with you when you die. You never know whether she might punish you or reward you because her decision does not take into account as to whether you were a good or bad person in life.

The **Myth of Er** appears in RepublicBook X. It's basically (and this is over-simplifying things) about a man named Er and his journey and experiences in the Underworld. In it the river of Carelessness and Lethe are mentioned. Basically, the myth of Er introduces the concept that moral people should be rewarded, and immoral people punished, after death. These rewards and punishments result directly from the individual's conduct, rather than being administered by an external deity. It is not, however, a straightforward description of heaven and hell, but more of a story of the journey between one life and the next, the intermission between death and rebirth. Within the dialogue, we are told by Socrates that the soul must be immortal. Socrates' argument for this is that the mind cannot be damaged or destroyed by immorality, despite the fact that immorality is the defect of the mind. The mind will not perish simply because it possesses a defect, unlike food, for example, which will perish should it become mouldy. Therefore, the mind cannot be destroyed by its defect, immorality, but neither can it be destroyed by any other subject's defect; in other words the mind cannot be destroyed by an illness that affects the stomach for instance. In order to explain his theory that morally good people are rewarded after death, and that the opposite is true of immoral people. I read this as a figurative experience. Since my interpretation is likely to be long, I shall refrain from boring my readers.

Ἀλήθεια is Greek for truth. It is pronounced '*altheia*' and more literally means 'non-forgetfulness' or 'non-concealment'. Both the Greek form and its transliteration will be used interchangeably in this story. I use the Greek form in the correspondence because I believe Severus and Dumbledore would have used the original Greek in their letters.

Βοιωτία is Greek for Boeotia. It was most famous for being the home of the legendary Greek centre of Thebes. I believe the Greek form would have been used within the Dumbledore-Snape correspondence and have reproduced it in the text. I use the Greek form in the correspondence because I believe Severus and Dumbledore would have used the original Greek in their letters.

Ἔρις is Greek for strife. Pronounced as 'Eris', she is allegedly the mother of Lethe, and a daughter of Zeus. I believe the Greek form would have been used within the Dumbledore-Snape correspondence and have reproduced it in the text. I use the Greek form in the correspondence because I believe Severus and Dumbledore would have used the original Greek in their letters.

Μνημοσύνη is Greek for Mnemosyne. There are two accounts of Mnemosyne. One is that she is the mother of the Muses. The other is that the Mnemosyne is a river in Hades that gives you back your memories. I believe the Greek form would have been used within the Dumbledore-Snape correspondence and have reproduced it in the text.

Aab-e-Hayaat is the transliteration of the Arabic word for the 'elixir of life' or more literally, 'the water of life'. I tried using Arabic font here but it did not show up, so I have transliterated it. Just bear in mind that I believe Severus and Dumbledore would have written it in the original Arabic.

The **Merovingians** were a Salian Frankish dynasty that came to rule Swabia/Alamannia (present day Bavaria) in 539-744AD. The significance of this reference will be revealed in the plot some time later, so I will not expound on them here.

Alamannia is the ancient name of the German Duchy of Swabia (known as *Schwaben* or *Schwabenland* in German) up to the 13th century. The significance of this reference will be revealed in the plot some time later, so I will not expound on them here.

Nagini is a **naja naja** (its scientific name) or spectacled cobra (its common name).

Prima Materia or **Materia Prima** (used interchangeably in this story) is the primitive formless base of all matter, according to Aristotle and the Alchemists, given particular manifestation through the influence of forms. According to the latter, lead could be turned to gold by reducing it to prima materia and imposing the form of gold on it. In the broadest terms the concept of the prima materia states that all particular substances are formed out of one and the same original substance. Considered in this way it becomes apparent that, in one form or another, this is a universal concept, possibly of an archetypal nature. The most prevalent notion of the prima materia to be found in modern thought is the atomistic theory which we inherited from the ancient Greeks. In this conception all material structures are composed of tiny building blocks of indestructible 'substance'. This substance is considered to be pure matter, and in an entirely materialistic paradigm this equates naturally to the concept of the prima materia.

Chapter 6: Nightmare of the Present

This relatively short sixth chapter takes us back to Hermione's Chambers where she has an interesting and disconcerting encounter with the new German Pupil.

Author's Note: Story depicted may be unpalatable to sensitive readers for its portrayal of Hermione and Ron's relationship. Hermione may also not be likeable to readers. Some readers might consider the characters a little OOC. Some organisations and Ministry of Magic departments are made-up.

It would help readers following the story to view it as a 'cinematic' experience whereby there are shifts in perspectives, as well as shifts between flashbacks, the past, the present, dreams and reality within the space of one chapter.

Footnotes, translations & ca follow chapter.

Emphasises are italicised and book titles are underlined.

From the Blood of the Gorgon

Chapter 6 Nightmare of the Present

Hermione loved working at night in her office. The quiet of the night was conducive to in-depth thinking, and the darkness which night afforded comforted her. It allowed her to be anonymous, just a single speck working through things overlooked by those who kept to regular schedules. She could come and go as she pleased via the back passage of the building and basically blend into the shadows. She often told her children that it was her way of disappearing like a phantom into the darkness. Little did they know their mother had spoken the truth. She did want to disappear into the darkness, away from Ron who only saw in black and white instead of shades of grey. To him, the survivors who had vanquished Voldemort and his coterie were part of the light and ought to remain there. She however believed that remaining in the light brought undue attention and encouraged much pretence. How many times had she stood with him at Ministry of Magic functions pretending to smile and portray the happy couple for the press and the Ministry bulletins? How many times had she done so when all she wanted to do was chat with the other dignitaries instead of staying by her husband's side? When she told him she did not like being his watchdog, he lectured her on the subject of husband and wife being one entity; and that as one entity, it was her duty to keep to his side and prevent him from doing or saying anything that would besmirch his good name as a war hero. Bah Humberg!

She protested in the time honoured manner of oppressed minorities in third world countries by foot dragging; that is, she remained in the shadows, became a self-imposed wallflower at Ministry functions and refused to circulate. Ron, of course, did not notice that his wife was not performing her wifely duties at these functions, and soon Hermione decided she could take it no more and left the Ministry to set up her own Chambers. While having her own Chambers did allow her to have some degree of her own individual life, she found her husband was still adamant about dragging her back into the limelight. Initially, she had humoured his wishes that she grace his arm with her presence at many social occasions and functions where, as Harry Potter's closest friends and saviours of Wizarding Britain, they were sure to be photographed by the press. Ron relished being at the centre of attention. He had once told his wife that it was now his time to shine after being overshadowed by his family and his friends. Hermione had wanted to tell him off for being insecure, but held her tongue when she realised Ron would most likely see it as another effort to prove that she was better than he. As could be expected, our heroine eventually grew tired of these masquerades and refused to attend any public function with her husband. The press, it would seem, had already sensationalised the story, as she discovered on picking up the Daily Prophet in her office not long after her arrival at nine o'clock in the evening:

It has come to attention of the editor that a matrimonial fracas has broken out in the home of WR and GH. The marriage of two heroes of the last great wizarding war to tear apart our country was the talk on every pair of lips, the bride's strange love for unusual causes beneath the notice of ordinary wizards notwithstanding. But it is clear to this editor that WR had thrown himself away on GH, a witch of uncertain temperament, who has neglected her wifely duties at every opportunity. GH, though a highflier in the legal world has much to learn about being a wizard's wife. She would do well to take a leaf out of the book of the virtuous and beautiful BL who, if this editor's contacts are to be believed, enjoys the almost constant companionship of WR, unbeknownst to his wife. The Daily Prophet can only speculate whether WR will divorce his unusual wife for the more usual BL...

Unable to read anymore, she muttered a spell with her eyes glittering dangerously in fury as she violently incinerated the newspaper. How dare they! How dare the press intrude her private life and publish the disintegration of her marriage with thinly disguised acronyms! How dare they assume she did not know of her husband's infidelity! Rita Skeeter had not written it it was not in her style, so it must be some other person. Who could have written such a scurrilous piece? Her foolish, pigeon-livered, weak-spined husband would not have dared advertise such a fact to anyone. He had a very old-fashioned notion of the value of his 'masculine pride' and would do almost anything to preserve the image the world had of him as a loyal friend of Harry Potter and a devoted husband to Hermione Granger. Furthermore, Ron himself had an altercation with Hermione over the issue of his affair where he had accused her, unjustly, of having her own illicit liaison. The only logical conclusion Hermione could draw was that the 'virtuous and beautiful' Miss Brown had somehow leaked the matter to the Daily Prophet. That would have been perfectly in keeping with the Lavender Brown she remembered who was always eager to point shame at her and whisper behind her back whenever she could. Well, this time, Hermione had noticed Miss Brown's efforts, and she was not pleased. She wondered whether Ron knew of it.

"Well," she said with a careless shrug. That would be something she would have to confront him with when she finally got home. As with most women of considerable spirit when they were displeased, Hermione Granger resolved upon having a strong word (or two, or three) with the object instrumental in causing her irritation as well as her husband. However, before she could do so, she would need irrefutable proof that the 'virtuous and beautiful' Miss Brown had indeed penned that offensive editorial. She scribbled a note to her senior clerk, who was a very discreet and loyal wizard, to give her a list of all the writers and editors for the Daily Prophet while looking into the matter. As the magical office post-it note floated out of her doors and appended itself to Summerby's desk, Hermione turned her attention to the new brief that had evidently been placed on her desk some time during the day while she was at the British Library.

Shaking her head as she undid the string to the folder, she wondered what could have possessed one of the junior clerks to assign a new case to her when she was due in court the two days hence for Malfoy and Goyle versus the Crown and Ministry of Magic. Undoing the string, she realised it was her solicitor who was to blame. Warrington had specifically asked for her to be on this. "Interesting, for the IWJC," she mused, tapping a finger absently on her cheek. "When does it go to trial? Two months. I have time."

Then to intents and purposes, Hermione lost herself in mastering her brief and making sense of it all. When she had finally made all the preliminary notes to her satisfaction, she came to the conclusion that she would have to consult some books on common law, speak to her solicitor, and consume a large fortifying cup of tea, she realised (quite belatedly) that it was already half-past eleven at night. Seeing no point in not having a cup of tea before proceeding to flog her solicitor, she made her way to the pantry where she discovered she was not the only person burning the midnight oil.

"And here I thought, I was all alone," she said, leaning by the doorway, watching a tall youth with dark-hair stir his cup of coffee with one hand, and opening a tin of biscuits with a spell from his wand.

He looked up at her without giving any indication that he had been startled or caught off-guard. "You are never alone, not here at any rate." Taking up a cup from the Formica cabinet tops, he handed it to her. "Tea, black, one sugar."

"How did you know, Herr von Bastiae?" she asked, taking the cup, and as she did so, her fingers lightly grazed his.

Instantly, his eyes flickered up and met hers unflinchingly. "I make it a point to know who's a big player in Chambers, and show suitable deference to them. That's how I survived. It is how I live."

"Very clever," Hermione acknowledged with a laugh that did not reach her eyes. "But I am not one of those who are susceptible to blandishments."

"I know. That is why you have my respect." Perseuss raised his coffee mug at her.

"I meant to ask..."

"How did I know you were in?" He ventured, completing the thought she was just about to give voice to. "I saw your light, and I heard you come up from the back door. I was about to bring your tea to you with a few chocolate biscuits to better 'suck up' to you, but you seem to have uncovered my plot."

"Very observant," she complimented. "Another survival trait?"

"You might call it that." He bowed and curled his lips into a smirk. Leaning on the cabinet without breaking eye contact with her, he continued, "May I ask what brought you back to Chambers at this hour? What could a successful silk-to-be be doing back at the office at a time like this?"

Hermione shuddered on hearing those words. She did not know whether it was he said it or whether it was because there was something very familiar in his style of speech. Whatever it was, it had struck something her mind, and brought the sense of déjà vu she had felt on her first meeting with Perseuss von Bastiae back to the fore. The same uncomfortable sensation that had washed over while they were at the Malaysian restaurant came over her again. However, she schooled her features into a mien of casual indifference and replied readily, "I might ask you the same."

"Exchange is no robbery," he offered. "I will tell you, *if* you will tell me."

She nodded her assent. "New work. Beastly case for the IWCJ. You?"

"Research for Mr Goldstein, he requested my assistance after misplacing some papers on his current brief following a... 'con' with Miss Greengrass."

"Neither one of them is leading the other in any.... Ah!" Hermione then hit upon it and raised a brow, nodding knowledgeably. "The papers normally slide behind the desk because of all the movement."

"*Danke*," replied the pupil with something akin to practiced nonchalance. "I checked there sometime ago." He paused, much to Hermione's amusement and stared at her in slight confusion. "You mean, you know of Mr Goldstein and Miss...."

She nodded, a thinly smile playing on her lips. "Oh yes, their 'con' is often of the stress-relieving variety."

"I know that it is said you are a catholic employer, but I did not know..."

"Oh, 'gameboys', dart-throwing, chocolate biscuits, and shagging on desks I run a very progressive set of Chambers." She said with the utmost gravity and a certain Dumbledorean twinkle in her eye.

"I don't mind the games," opined he, "but the other kind of...."

"Oh that!" Hermione flicked a dismissive wrist as she laughed. "I do not mind my barristers' private recreational activities so long as they lock the door, put out the 'con in progress' sign, and so long as they perform consistently well in their work which they have."

"You are very tolerant." He bowed respectfully to her.

"Yes, I rather imagine I am." With that answer, a serious look came into her eyes once more. "If Anthony needs you on his brief, it can only mean you're done with your own load. How did your House Elves Union thing go?"

"Treated it as a trade union dispute. Straightforward across the table settlement," he answered blandly, glad to be talking shop once again. "You mentioned the IWCJ earlier. Do you need help with that?"

"If you think you can help," she generously said, leading him into her office. As she handed him the file, she added warningly, "It's not as easy as it seems. It is rarely straightforward with the IWCJ."

"As to be expected from the International Wizarding Court of Justice. Land reform?" he asked, tugging the file from her grasp when she would not relinquish it.

She shook her head. "Legitimacy for a new wizarding state within Tajikistan. Warrington dumped the Tajik wizarding leader, or should I say, would-be Tajik wizarding Prime Minister onto me."

"Warrington?"

"Our solicitor from Strauss and Leibniz," explained Hermione, kicking off her shoes and sitting in the lotus position in her chair. "The whole thing hinges on foundationalism whether it is possible and/or desirable to ascertain some transcultural standard separate from that of the standards of another state; and whether it is possible and/or desirable to use these separate transcultural standards to decide the questions which animate political life. The Tajiks seem to regard it as necessary. Its neighbouring state of China claims that there is no need for a separate Tajik wizarding state because it denies the very possibility and desirability of foundationalism."

"The political system of Wizarding China is Fabian-Socialist whereas the Tajik leadership favours a certain liberalism," contributed a thoughtful Perseuss.

"Or as I like to call it 'post modernist bourgeois liberalism'. It sounds more accurate," Hermione stated firmly as she strode to the mantelpiece of the fireplace and opened the canister of floo powder.

"You're in danger of making a political case into a philosophical one," cautioned Perseuss as his Head of Chambers threw a handful of powder into the grate and commanded the network to connect her with Charles Warrington, Number 52 Chestnut Grove.

"Foundationalism *is* Platonic," stressed Hermione with a small frown, as the green flames in the fireplace continued burning without connecting her to her solicitor. "We live in a cosmos, not a chaos. There has to be some semblance of order that is intelligible. It does not have to be uniform. The Platonic Ideas are arranged in a hierarchy leading up to the good constitute a bridge between the intelligible order and the corporeal, the contingent world of our experience."

"Metaphysics from you? That is a surprise," said the pupil looking at her with interest.

"Be thankful I'm not going on and on about virtue," joked Hermione, as she turned her attention to the floo again. "Charles Warrington, Number 52 Chestnut Grove," she repeated, waiting for the connection to go through. While waiting, she turned to address Perseuss, "It would help if I knew the wizarding common law of Tajikistan. It would give me some basis on which to work."

Before he could answer, the floo network sounded a loud 'Bong' twice, and a thin voice warbled unevenly as the green flames swirled in undulating circles unable to take the image of the voice, "The floo network is currently experiencing heavy traffic. Please hold, your communication networking is important to us. We will connect you to your desired party shortly."

"At least you're not travelling by floo under these conditions," said Perseuss. "You could be Splinched or caught in the middle of nowhere."

Hermione stared at him as he uttered the last word. Why had he mentioned being caught in the middle of nowhere? Knowing that he would think she was mad if she demanded to know why he had chosen that phrase, she willed herself to think on the matter at hand. "Heavy floo traffic!" she repeated, disbelief ringing in her voice.

"I have never heard such rubbish happening before," snorted the pupil as he rolled his eyes.

"It does happen from time to time," came the apologetic voice from the floo network. "I'm Lucy, your floo operator for the night. The Ministry's floo network is overburdened tonight because the Floo Network Authority shut down the main Fireplace Connections for maintenance. As and when each Fireplace Connection is checked, cleaned and

certified, they will be reset and open for use once again."

"Why are all the floo connections disconnected at the same time?" enquired Hermione with a long suffering sigh at the machinery of the Ministry of Magic.

"More importantly," demanded Perseuss, folding his arms before the image of the plump floo network operator. "Whose brilliant idea was it to shut off all floo connections in one night?"

"May I speak to Millicent Bustrade, the Floo Network Director?" Hermione ventured as politely as she could. "I have no doubt she came under pressure from one of the Ministry's committees."

"As a matter of fact, Miss Bulstrode authorised..." the operator allowed her voice to trail off meaningfully.

The rumoured top barrister of wizarding Britain slapped a hand to her forehead, unable to contain herself any longer. "Of all the bureaucratic blunders that can be made... Doesn't Miss Bulstrode realise that centralised control of the floo means centralised control of the Floo Network by the Ministry and not her? Couldn't you have dispatched notices that the Floo Network Authority would be shutting down the main Fireplace Connections for maintenance?"

"Terribly sorry, Mrs Weasley..."

Hermione cut off the operator curtly. "I did not agree to take my husband's surname, please address me as Miss Granger. This floo connection is registered to Miss Granger of Chiswell Square."

"Sorry, *Miss Granger*," said the operator, who was by now sounding a little peevish. "It is not Departmental policy to send out notices of when maintenance work will be done. The Department of Magical Transportation and Communication believe that giving out notice of maintenance work would allow undesirable elements to cripple the wizarding community when communication links are disabled."

"She sounds like she's reading from a brochure," pointed out Perseuss with a smirk of amusement.

Throwing up her hands in exasperation, Hermione tried offering another suggestion to the operator. "One would think the Department would at least have the sense to have conceptualised a plan whereby some floo connections are still left open to the wizarding public? Perhaps cleaning and maintenance of floo connections on a rotating basis by electoral constituency or rerouting the floo traffic?"

"You would have to take that up with our director, Miss Granger," the operator simply said.

"I'll do more than that!" Hermione muttered under her breath. "Open and consultative wizarding government, my arse!" Coughing into her hand to steady herself, she returned her attention to the floo operator, "When will this oversight be remedied? I have an urgent communiqué requiring the presence of another party."

The operator tilted her head to one-side as if listening to another person (who sounded strangely like Percy Weasley, Director of the Portkey Office) and answered, "I have received authorisation to give you priority and disconnect you from the network in sixty seconds. When that happens, your network will be checked and cleaned. We will then reset your floo settings for this connection. The whole procedure should take no more than three minutes. When we reset your floo settings, you will have to reconnect to the network with two pinches of floo powder and quote your activation code for this connection to verify access. When the activation code is verified, you will be able to use the network again."

"Right, so sit tight on your end!" said the voice of Percy Weasley before she was disconnected.

Perseuss and Hermione exchanged speaking glances of mild annoyance at the bureaucracy. They remained like that for a few seconds until the apparently younger wizard raised a question. "You were saying earlier you wanted to refer to Tajik wizarding common law. I was looking through a book of the wizarding common law of the former Soviet Socialist Republics. It's on my desk. You don't have to go the basement library for it. I'll get it for you."

"No," insisted Hermione firmly, twirling the bunch of keys on a finger. "I'll get it."

"The door's unlocked, just so that you know," replied the pupil as he continued to peruse the documents before him.

"Call me old-fashioned, but I rather walk than Accio." She smiled briefly, then waving a sign that she would be back, she left for Anthony Goldstein's office where Perseuss's desk was set up. She found the thick tome easily enough, but her attention was riveted by the scrawls he had made all over the notes of his House Elves Union case. They were all written in Latin and were complicated sentences like '*anno MCMXCVIII ad gubernacula patriae post intervallum longum accesserunt operariorum partes duce Antonio Blair viro maxime populari*', and more damningly, he had translated large chunks of his brief into Latin.

Taking up both the brief and the book, Hermione stormed back into office and confronted him. Without giving him a chance to speak, she lashed out at him, wanting her interrogation of Perseuss to be over and done with. "*Quidnam tu hominis es? Nunc ludis tu quidem me! Scisne Latine? Vel litteris Latinis operam das? Quanta de spe decide*," she rattled off crossly, glowering at him.

"I don't understand," Perseuss said quietly, looking askance at her.

"*Quid ais? Quid audio?*" cried Hermione in exasperation.

"I really do not understand what you're trying to say," asked Perseuss, examining his Head of Chambers' papers.

"Then what in the world is this?" she hissed reverting back to English and shoving him the brief where he had scrawled in Latin in the margins. "You told me you don't know any Latin. You cannot have picked up perfect Latin in less than a fortnight. You know it well enough to write statements. Why did you hide it from me?"

"I really do not know any Latin!" he retorted, looking up into her eyes.

Hermione rose with a determined glare in her eyes, spun the chair in which the young wizard sat in sharply, fencing Perseuss in his seat by gripping the armrests of his swivel chair tightly. "Then how did you manage such complicated sentences? And why the year 1997? Do you expect me to believe you know nothing of that which descended on wizarding Britain in 1997?"

Perseuss shifted uncomfortably his seat, with a look of confusion and a little fear in his face. "I really do not know any Latin. I am only fluent in German and English, and I don't see the significance of 1997. It is just a year like any other. Was the United Kingdom in recession at the time?"

Frustrated by her perception of his continued equivocation, she grabbed him roughly by the shoulders and shook him as hard as she dared. "How can you expect me to believe you when you wrote all over the margins of your brief? You don't have to lie to me. Why are you still hiding it from me? How did you know I have an allergy to shellfish? No one in this Chambers knows. More importantly, how much of my life do you know?"

"I do not know how I know. I just do," he said quietly, meeting her penetrating gaze with one of his own.

She was about to further rail at him with a string of added invectives when another shock prevented her from speaking. The floo chime sounded and a ball of green flames burst forward in the fireplace and the female floo network operator who had earlier assisted her technical difficulty came into view.

"Miss Granger," greeted the operator, ignoring the fact that Hermione had her hands on Perseuss' shoulder. "Your activation code has been verified. We are now connecting you to Number 52 Chestnut Grove."

Hence, before she could even thank the woman, she found her floo connection up and running and connected to Warrington.

"You wanted something, Miss Granger?" sneered Warrington in the greenish flames as his face came into view.

Continually startled, Hermione released her grip on Perseuss' shoulders and fell back into a chair. With remarkable fortitude, she regained her equanimity and self-control. "Yes, why was I given the Tajik case?" she said on finding her voice.

"Because you're the best, and I want a silk to do it. Enhances my reputation with my clients," he stated as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

"Silk? The outcome for that isn't out yet. What if Cho gets it instead?"

"Let's just say I know a winning mare when I see one!"

"You're not making any sense. You're sleeping with Cho; you're engaged to her. She should be your winning mare. If anything, Russo-Asian politics is more her thing than mine," Hermione said, rubbing her brow at the onslaught of so many revelations in one day.

"Look, I'm tired, you're tired. I'll see you tomorrow and we'll talk," Warrington declared before disconnecting from the floo.

Hermione cradled her head in her hands and closed her eyes in mental exhaustion. First, she had quite a revelation on the Dumbledore-Snape front where her nightmare was concerned, then she had the shock of hearing Charles Warrington's certainty of her getting the King's Counsel appointment, and now, she had to deal with a lying pupil. Would wonders never cease? Why was every event of the day calculated to give her a headache? Suddenly, it dawned on her. She had just spoken to Warrington by floo, which meant that her floo network had been reset. Since her floo connection had been reset, someone must have cited her password to the floo operator. She had been in Anthony Goldstein's office looking for the book Perseuss had taken, which in turn meant that someone must have given her activation code to the operator. Since only Perseuss had been in her office, he must have taken it upon himself to reset the settings.

"How do you know my activation code? It has a spell accompanying it. How did you know? I have not reset the setting in two years? How did you know?" she purred in a dangerously low voice, jabbing her finger at his chest. As she spoke, her voice became increasingly high-pitched, and she was sounding increasingly hysterical. "How did you manage to input my password? Even my husband doesn't know my password."

"Miss Granger," snapped Perseus, rising suddenly and with a deft move, taking hold of her wrist and quickly manoeuvring so that Hermione was now seated, and he was standing over her, fencing her in her chair. "Remember yourself! Remember who are! This is not fitting behaviour for the head of Chiswell Square Chambers. Just who are you to let fly at me? Do you know by being presumptuous, you are only making an arse if yourself?"

It struck Hermione that as he uttered each syllable, his black obsidian eyes were glittering, and he had bared his teeth in a display of self-loathing that she had previously seen Severus Snape only bestow upon Albus Dumbledore in the memory she had viewed in the British Library.

Without realising his every word and action were causing escalating distress in wizarding Britain's top non-Ministry affiliated barrister, he persisted in pressing his point. "I was under the impression that I was providing assistance to you, and you are only unreasonably letting fly at me! I do not know why or how I know the things I do. I just do. I do not understand it. When I see you, I know these things. I did not use *Legilimency* if that is what you are thinking. You are the insufferable know-it-all, Miss Granger, tell me how I know these things, and stop these blasted dreams from haunting me!" He paled as he caught the look of horror passing through Hermione's eyes. "What have I done! *Es tut mir sehr leid, Fraulein Granger!*"

Unable to bear it any longer, he staggered backwards as if revolted with himself for laying a hand on Hermione and stormed out of her office. Stunned, Hermione could only remain in her seat. Why did Perseuss von Bastiae sound so much like Severus Snape just now? What did he mean he was haunted by dreams as well? Just who was he? Just *what* was he? Was he perhaps the reincarnation of Severus? How did this fit into her nightmares and all that she learnt from the Dumbledore-Snape correspondence? She was thinking too much into it. No, she had to talk to Perseuss about it first. He was an intelligent wizard; perhaps he had other ideas. Perhaps it was still not too late to run after him and offer an explanation. With that thought in mind, Hermione collected herself, ran down the stairs and out to front door of Chambers where it was raining.

"Heavens! Perseuss!" she shouted, pulling him back, making him stop in his tracks as he was about to cross the street. It was fortunate that her voice held him back, for a car had just come careering from the corner and would have otherwise knocked him down. Instinctively, he took a step back and spun around, just barely avoiding contact with the vehicle. The car belatedly honked at him before speeding off, and he found himself supported by Hermione in an embrace.

Now, it was Hermione's turn to feel awkward. However, she refused to be cowed and willed herself not to Apparate away. She and Perseuss looked meaningfully at each other before shock fell between them, causing them to mutually pull apart. She found herself unable to tell him about Severus Snape, her nightmares and the various hypotheses she had about him. Instead, she chose to break the wall of uncomfortable silence between them by stubbornly rehashing their previous conversation.

"How do you know my password? Why did you lie about knowing Latin?" she asked quietly in a strained tone.

"I did not lie. I do not know how I know those things," he asserted exhaustedly, refusing to meet her eyes. "There is no talking to you in this vein. I am getting sick of this. I am going home."

With which parting shot, he stalked off, leaving Hermione to watch his figure retreat into the darkness of the London night and ponder on the inherent convoluted nature of the whole situation between herself and the wizarding law pupil, as well as the unresolved matter of her persistent nightmares and the mystery of Severus Snape's death.

FOOTNOTES:

The Gorgon in the title refers to Nagini. I know she is not a 'real' Gorgon'. However, I believe her role in the books position her as a kind of symbolic Gorgon. There is another reason for dubbing Nagini the Gorgon, and that reason will be dependent upon the readers' perceptions.

There are double entendres in the title (of the literary kind *not* the sexual kind as my prelim reader thought). Make what you will of them.

All references to characters are from Rowling's Harry Potter universe unless otherwise stated. Any character you do not recognise is my own creation.

Facts about Wizarding Law and Wizarding Politics are made up.

Facts about the improvements of any Wizarding and/or Muggle object, governing body, and facility are made up.

Facts about other Harry Potter universe characters in the post-Voldemort years are also made up.

Call the Lavender Brown depicted in this story (she is never explicitly seen in this tale) one-dimensional and unrealistic if you like, but she is based on a real person, who has indeed called herself "simple, understanding, pure and virtuous" and who presumed to tell me how I should wash my clothes, clean the flat and catch a man. The character on whom Miss Brown is based who, though significantly younger than I am, has deemed me too educated for my own good, too ambitious for my own good, and much too old to catch a man without her help. Her significant other (aged 25), it should be noted, is like Ron in this story, who frequently quotes her and exhorts the females of his family (regardless of their age) to follow the example of this real-life Lavender and heed her excellent advice so that like him, the females in his family would become as 'simple, pure and virtuous' as her.

Legal references are to British Law. American readers, please bear with me. My beta also made the suggestion that readers unaccustomed to the legal jargon herein pretend you are watching "Rumpole of Old Bailey" or "Sherlock Holmes".

Any reference to "pupil" in this chapter is in the legal sense, viz., a person undergoing pupillage.

Silk is British legal slang for King's/Queen's Counsel because the gown for the KC/QC is made of silk.

Chambers for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

Head of Chambers for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

'Employed' barrister for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

Barrister for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

Solicitor for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

'Brief' or 'Briefs' for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 3.

'Con' When Hermione and Perseus mentions 'con', they mean consultation/conference. It does not mean to cheat in this context.

Pupil for definition and explanation of pupil (in the legal sense of the word), look under pupillage in the footnotes of Chapter 3

'Anno MCMXCVIII ad gubernacula patriae post intervallum longum accesserunt operariorum partes duce Antonio Blair viro maxime popularis Latin for 'In the year 1997, after a long interval (where they were not in power), the government was taken over by the Labour Party under the leadership of Tony Blair who was very popular with the people.'

'Quidnam tu hominis es? is Latin for 'What kind of man are you?'

'Nunc ludis tu quidem me!' is Latin for 'Are you having a joke at my expense!'

'Scisne Latine? is Latin for 'Do you know Latin?'

'Vel litteris Latinis operam das? is Latin for 'How long have you been learning Latin?'

'Quanta de spe decidit' is Latin for 'I am very disappointed (in you)'.

'Quid ais? Quid audio? is Latin for 'What is that? What is that I hear you tell me?'

'Es tut mir sehr leid, Fraulein Granger' is German for 'I am very sorry, Miss Granger'.

Chapter 7: When Dreams and Life Coincide

Chapter 7 of 11

The seventh chapter features the return of the nightmare in a new guise and a further straining of the marital relations between Hermione and Ron.

Author's Note: Story depicted may be unpalatable to sensitive readers for its portrayal of Hermione and Ron's relationship. Hermione may also not be likeable to readers. Some readers might consider the characters a little OOC. Some organisations and Ministry of Magic departments are made-up.

It would help readers following the story to view it as a 'cinematic' experience whereby there are shifts in perspectives, as well as shifts between flashbacks, the past, the present, dreams and reality within the space of one chapter.

Footnotes, translations & ca follow chapter.

Emphases are italicised and book titles are underlined.

From the Blood of the Gorgon

Chapter 7 When Dreams and Life Coincide

Two days later, despite a spectacularly successful day at Court Number 5 where the Malfoy and Goyle crime families were cooperatively keeping their mouths shut thereby earning their acquittal times ten, Hermione returned to her office at Chiswell Square still nursing a headache. It seemed that nearly every aspect of her private life was falling spectacularly to pieces. The whole irony of it was a part of Hermione felt very glad that things were falling apart so much so that she found the entire process highly amusing. Of course things would fall apart in her private life; it had no centre from which it could hold everything down.

Given that almost every facet of her personal life was spiralling out of control, Hermione felt that it was only a matter of time before she too was sucked into the whirlpool where she would slowly degenerate into a madwoman. While madness held some appeal for her as a means of escaping the unpleasant realities currently plaguing her, she did not want to fall into that pleasant prospect just yet. It was not the thing to run away and seek solace in madness when she had her children to think of. Thankfully, they were more hers than his, and did not have their father's lamentable observation skills or emotional quotient. They, of course, as Hermione suspected, had a fair inkling that something was not quite right between mummy and daddy. Rose's latest letter to Hermione, dispatched from Hogwarts to Chiswell Square, confirmed that. The story of the matrimonial fracas in the famous Ron Weasley-Hermione Granger household had already been doing the rounds among the study body at Hogwarts. Hermione was fully aware that her daughter was more likely alerted to it by a schoolmate shoving the Daily Prophet editorial under her nose, and as such, was not the least surprised when the child wrote to her enquiring whether her parents would be getting a divorce because "daddy had done something unforgivably naughty".

Steadying her breathing so as to keep her emotions in check, she mentally applauding her daughter for her perspicuous frankness and set about answering the child in the gentlest way she knew how by informing her that regardless as to what would happen between her parents, they both still loved her and her brother very much. Watching the owl fly off with those few comforting words to her daughter however did not soothe Hermione's spirit. Both her mind and soul were still heavy.

Her discreet enquiries into the author of the offensive Daily Prophet editorial had not yielded any information, though her senior clerk assured her he would do his best to worm out the truth. She was also no closer to solving the mystery of Severus Snape's death and his missing corpse. She knew she should be expending her effort on mastering the brief due for hearing at the International Wizarding Court of Justice in two months but she found herself unable to concentrate. All that she could think on was

the whole business as to whether Severus Snape was dead and whither his body had disappeared.

While a part of her acknowledged that any endeavour into this matter was a waste of her time and resources (and as a barrister, time was her most valuable resource), she felt deep within her soul that her life would be improved if she could unravel the mystery. Not only would she be assured of peaceful sleep at the resolution of this issue, she would also receive the added advantage of knowing the truth as to what happened to Severus Snape at long last. She could not help but smirk deprecatorily at herself at her realisation that she was back to thinking on '*aletheia*' or truth. Her nature was such that it thrived on learning and acquiring knowledge. She was not one to hoard what she knew, for she constantly applied her knowledge and allowed it to evolve according to the situation at hand. Whenever she came across something that eluded her understanding, she would expend all her resources until she finally gained a full acquaintance with it.

Unable to fend off her need to pluck out the heart of this mystery, she picked up her trusty propelling pen and sifted through the welter of papers on her desk for her well-hidden notebook. On finding the book, she irritably flipped the pages to find the folded sheet of paper containing Perseuss's Latin scrawls. There was it again that indeterminable something she found familiar in his handwriting. "One thing at a time, old girl," she chided herself, "one thing at a time."

With her notebook now open, she reviewed all that she had written thus far and unconsciously began clicking the propelling pen in thought. Damn Dumbledore and his habit of writing in riddles! She had already ascertained that he and Severus had been speaking of the Myth of Er when she cracked the façade of 'truth' to reveal 'forgetfulness' or Lethe. Now, she had to figure out the significance of the Myth of Er in the whole schema of Severus's possible escape from the jaws of death. On top of that, she had to consider the effects of the various concoctions Dumbledore bade Severus carry on his person as well as the whole Alamannia connection.

Beginning with that which seemed to her to be the simplest, she considered the matter of Myth of Er. Could it be that Perseuss was the reincarnation of Severus? Like Severus, Chambers' new Pupil knew of her food allergy, seemed to know her well enough to guess at her floo connection activation code, and shared his sneer and defensive mechanisms when pushed into a corner.

She could not deny there were certain similarities between them. However there were marked differences as well. For one, Perseuss seemed to at least have some friends, and he enjoyed taking walks in the park overlooking Chambers. In all her years at Hogwarts, she had never know her former potions master to have true friends beyond Albus Dumbledore (if one could call a manipulative old goat a friend) and did not enjoy taking the air in the sunshine. Indeed the more she thought about, the more convinced she was that Perseuss could not be the reincarnation of Severus Snape. The more she thought on it, the more far-fetched the idea seemed to her. It had been twenty-two years since the fall of Voldemort and yet, Perseuss von Bastiae was, according to his file, no older than twenty-five. The timing did not coincide. "However," she mused, clicking at the pen again. "It could be that he is somehow related to Professor Snape. A son that he fathered before he escaped perhaps? If he did indeed escape that was still a matter of some conjecture. That would at least account for the similar traits they shared. That would also account for the Alamannia connection. Alamannia was one of the ancient pockets of Germany. It is likely that Professor Snape fled there and started a new life with a new name. He could have liaised with Dumbledore's distant cousins who were descended from the Merovingians and began anew."

As she became more enamoured of this mode of thought, she paused with the realisation that she had made a grievous assumption. She had assumed Severus had not died. What if he had? She still knew nothing of the circumstances between the time she, Harry and Ron left the Shrieking Shack all those years ago following his expiry and the time they returned for the body. She could ask Perseuss for the details of his birth, but that would be intrusive, and Hermione did not wish to appear ill-mannered before him again, especially since she had made a royal cake of herself when she confronted him two nights ago. That route was, for now, closed to her. Until she had all the facts surrounding the potions Severus could have used to escape, and the manner of escape (if actually deployed), she could not afford to make hasty conclusions.

So, what did she know? The reincarnation theory did not hold water. That meant she had to return to the figurative meanings of the Myth of Er as well as the significance of the waters of Lethe and Mnemosyne and their effects in slowing down the dark *prima materia* in Nagini's venom. Were these things not just attempts to defy fate? If one must die, one should die. Why bother to defy death? Or is cheating death not considered a form of defiance?

In the Myth of Er, none of the lives chosen by the dead for their next lives bore any links with philosophy. The reason is that since the myths come at the end of the Republic, we have to see that not only is justice to be valued for its own sake in this life, but in any future life as well. The philosopher would perhaps wish to remain outside the cave, uninvolved with the shadow world of ordinary political and economic reality. However, the Republic shows that it is the duty of good people to work to make things better where they live. It is unfortunate, perhaps, that in order to live a good life, one must choose justice even if it meant facing death and defying it. That could be the very reason for Dumbledore's ramblings on it. He wanted Severus to do that which he the great Dumbledore could not. He wanted Severus to defy death by choosing to lead a just life over again. That was why he arranged for his relatives in some deep, dark hole in Germany to await Severus should he decide to flee there. Once there, Severus could live the life he was supposed to have led while in Britain but did not and could not because of his allegiance to Voldemort.

That was all very well, but what about the constituents of the so-called counter-poison? The Soporiferous Beans stewed in Knotwood juice would react to the natural venom of the spectacled cobra by coating the venom molecules with a form of toxin so as to prevent it from completely binding to the acetylcholine receptors, thereby preventing the body from shutting down. Given that Nagini's venom was pure dark *prima materia*, the magical aspect of her bite could not be arrested. It could only be slowed down with the addition of the scale of a black Hungarian Horntail Dragon. That could, in turn, only be dissolved in the waters of Lethe. The waters of Lethe possessed its own danger of corroding the body's internal organs as well as erasing one's memories if not tempered with a few drops of the waters from Mnemosyne.

The addition of time turner sand would reverse the effects of both the toxins and *prima materia* by turning back time for the consumer. There were documents attesting to wizards who had turned back the clock ten or more years upon consuming a time-turner sand solution. However, time turner sand was notoriously difficult to dissolve and could only be completely soluble in the Lethe's waters.

Then, there were bound to be side effects to this, for time turner sand was famous for producing far-reaching effects when deployed in potions. Unfortunately, Hermione did not know what these possible effects entailed as very few potion masters using time turner sand in their concoctions lived to tell what happened after they had consumed the brew, and historical documents on those who did survive were sketchy at best. Hermione did know that, since all its ingredients were brewed in the waters of Lethe from Boeotia, the consumer would likely suffer from some kind of memory loss. As to whether this would be permanent or otherwise, she did not know.

Hermione sighed. There were too many things she did know, and she did not like it. She was still no closer to uncovering the reasons for her nightmares or improving the quality of her sleep. On top of that, her life was in shambles. Clicking the propelling pen irritably, she pushed aside her notebook and took up the Tajik case file.

Fate chose that moment to knock on her door by sending the Perseuss into her office. Fortunately for her, they were both sensible enough not to mention the disquieting events of two nights ago, and to all intents and purposes were behaving as they usually were with each other.

"Herr Summerby wanted me to hand this to you," began the pupil without preamble. "He said it urgently requires your perusal."

Nodding absently at him, she patted a place on the desk with her free hand and continued her abuse of the pen. "Thank you."

"It may not be my place to say this," ventured Perseuss quietly, his gaze riveted at her repeated clicking of the pen. "But that is very annoying. If you are troubled over something, take a walk and clear your head. You must be badly troubled or you would not be trying to drive anyone near you to madness with that noise."

Instantly, Hermione set down the pen and narrowed her eyes at him. "How do you know I'm troubled?"

He curled his lips contemptuously and flashed her a meaningful look. "Because you are fiddling with the pen and clicking it most irksomely, which shows you are annoyed with both the brief and yourself for being unable to master it. Take a walk, it would help. If that is all, good day to you."

Without waiting for her dismiss him, he spun around on his heels and left.

While Perseuss' seemingly extensive knowledge about her disturbed her, she did not allow it to rule her fears. Instead, she chose to concentrate her efforts on the Tajik brief. She was so engrossed in it that when she went home, she was still making notes on it at the dinner table. Her husband, as was customary when he was not the centre of attention, showed his displeasure by eating noisily and complaining about her appalling habit of reading and writing at the dinner table.

"If you don't stop that, I have another excuse with which to divorce you," Hermione said, clicking her pen and frowning at the pages of the law book and sheaves of paper before her. "If I wanted to marry someone with poor table manners, I would have married an ogre, thank you very much."

Dropping his cutlery onto his plate, Ron glared at her. "What about you? We're having dinner and you're working!"

She looked up briefly at him and cracked a smile before returning to her notes. "Just realised it? It's not too late. My felicitations on finally noticing something about me. I also notice that you frequently bring your Auror's briefs to the dinner table. You have never heard me complaining."

"I have always given you attention!" insisted Ron sullenly. "Besides my work concerns national security, which is far more important than what you do."

"And national security forbids me from bringing my work to the dinner table while allowing you do so freely?"

"Yes... No... Er... Yes." He paused, scrounging up his face in thought. "Stop confusing me!"

"Says the man whom Harry revealed Confounded his driving instructor." Her voice came out bored and toneless. "Perhaps our ethics are unsuited. Shall we agree to a separation and thence divorce?"

"What is this about a divorce?"

"Just a thought. An idle inclination if you like. You could say, I'm putting a feeler out and testing the waters."

"I won't hear of it!" declared he stoutly. "I won't disgrace the family with a divorce."

"Even though you've been 'unforgivably naughty' as our darling daughter puts it?" she asked in a sickly sweet voice, circling something on the paper with her pen. "Ron, I am a very catholic person. I do not care if you have your discreet amours outside this house. However, I draw a line at your mistress making an exhibition of herself in the newspapers by shamelessly advertising the deficiencies of our marriage."

"What do you mean?" gasped he with a blank look on his face.

She propped up her head with one hand and rested her chin on her palm, and clicked at the pen thoughtfully as she strove to find an elegant yet simple way of putting things to her husband. "You must have realised there was an editorial in the Daily Prophet two days ago highlighting the disharmony in our marriage to much of the wizarding populace. I would not have thought the article was talking about us until I saw that the writer of the piece very clumsily reversed the initials of all the main players.

It intimated that I was kept in the dark as to your affair when the truth is I don't really give a damn so long as you no longer touch me and continue to keep your *amour* discreet. The writer also seems to think very highly of your paramour, whom the writer dubbed 'virtuous and beautiful'. Such an encomium! I did not know one could call the third party in a marriage 'virtuous', but I shall graciously take it as part of the changing times in which we live."

She paused to take a sip of her cranberry juice and suppressed a tiny laugh at Ron's gaping mouth. "After conducting a small private investigation into the matter, I now know for certain neither you nor I leaked this shameful news to the press. We are not people to wash dirty linen in public, so obviously someone else *intimately* acquainted with the matters of this household must have written that atrocious piece. Imagine my surprise to learn that the editorials in the Daily Prophet are rotated amongst the editors of the various sections, last week, the editorial was written by Pansy Malfoy, editor of the financial section, and the week before that, the editorial was written by Jonathan Figgs, editor of the sports section. Guess who is the editor of the witches' section in the paper? She is also the editor of Witches Weekly. Guess which section head wrote the editorial this week? The women's section editor. I really wish you could rein your mistresses in a little better."

"What did you do to her?" asked Ron, tightening his hold of the stem of his wine glass.

"Beyond a strongly worded owl? Nothing," said she in a nonchalant air. "I told her she was more than welcome to you and your penis so long as she keeps me out of whatever it was that she thinks she's doing in her mission to ensnare you. Harm my children or me in any possible way and I will retaliate with the full force of wizarding law."

"Is that necessary?" Ron wringed his hands nervously, looking very much like a bilious pigeon. "Can't you two get along? The three of us could have much fun..."

"No, ye of little grey matter! This is not ancient China where the first wife has to suffer in silence while you take two other wives and four concubines!" she riposted. "As soon as I can find the time, I'll meet with Hiero McGonagall to discuss the divorce. I suggest you do not contest it."

"How can you do this to me when I have always been attentive to you?" Ron protested.

"Have you now?" Hermione's voice lowered warningly as she flipped a page and clicked the pen. "Do you know why I do this?"

"Do what?" he asked.

She rolled her eyes and clicked at her pen irritably. "This with the pen."

He merely shrugged. "Because you don't use Muggle stationery anymore. You use quills now. Because you can't use the clacky writing stick anymore, you long to use it. You should stop playing with it; people will think you're weird. You're already weird enough in the wizarding world. By Merlin's balls, put the stick away and use a quill like a normal witch."

"Is that what you think?" she said, rising with her books and papers. Then as she made her way to the doorway, she turned around. "Perhaps we really are not suited. Our daughter said as much in her latest letter. Do you know what she wrote? She said if mummy works for the sake of the family and daddy lies on the sofa scratching his balls, mummy and daddy are not suited. I wonder what our Rose must have seen or heard to make that observation."

Seeing Ron's stunned face gave her the courage to leave him where he was, and she promptly returned to her study where she could be left in peace.

Later that night, drifting to sleep in between thoughts of her husband's ill-acquaintance with her habits and ways vis-à-vis Perseuss von Bastiae's apparent understanding of her various facets, Hermione was rudely greeted by the nightmare yet again. This time however, she was no longer in the Shrieking Shack but in the Hogsmead district. It was late and all the shops were closed. Conveniently the gaslights were dimly lit, and she was wandering about the area, thankfully shoed and decently clothed. The structure of the Shack rose up sharply against the landscape. Instead of making her way to the Shrieking Shack as her dreams usually had her do, she took her time to look around. The air was cold and crisp, and the gaslights flickered and she thought she perceived a shadow dark away from the corner of her eyes. Were her eyes playing tricks on her? Most likely they were. Commonsense dictated (and even in her dreams, sense tended to assert itself) that it was nothing. Foolish females who followed shadows likely to be figments of their imagination usually ended up in a bad way butchered, robbed, hexed, *Imperio*-ed or some similar fate.

She was just about to ignore the imagined fleeting shadow when she saw it again. This time, it was pacing a short distance ahead right before the broken gates of the Shrieking Shack. Briefly, she thought it resembled the tall figure of her former potions master. Throwing aside her previous inhibitions, she hastened her footsteps to the rusty gates. Were her eyes deceiving her? Was it really Severus Snape? She tiptoed forward so as to better observe the pacing shadow without giving away her presence. His figure appeared haggard and worn, and from the flickering lights of the lampposts, he looked as though he had aged somewhat since she last saw him. His features were sharper than usual, making his hooked nose more prominent than she had remembered. With a pang somewhere in her chest, she saw that his cheeks had hollowed and his eyes were lustreless.

"By Merlin!" she exclaimed faintly, a hand flying across to cover her mouth. "Is that you, Professor Snape?"

"Were you expecting Merlin himself, ridiculous chit?" he sneered, squinting a little to see her underneath the bad lighting.

"A dashedly odd place for an assignation," commented she in a false jocular manner.

"Remind me to beat the idiot who arranged this over my shinbone, Miss Granger," he hissed, flicking a lock of hair back violently. "Why are we here? Why ~~are~~ you here?"

She did not answer. She could not. Her mouth refused to open, her lips refused to part, and her tongue would not prate. Unable to say aught when it was clear that the older wizard was expecting a reply, she threw herself at him and hugged him.

"Cease molesting me," he commanded without making any real effort to pry her off.

"So, you aren't dead?" she managed to speak at last. On receiving no response, she looked up and immediately released him. Stumbling backwards in as much astonishment and horror, she retreated until she found herself leaning on a lamppost. Still refusing to believe her eyes, she opted for easier choice between the flight or fight instinct always aroused in creatures when they did not know how they ought to deal with a circumstance entirely new to them. She chose the path of exercise by hitching up her skirts and running away.

"No, it cannot be! It went against logic," her brain rattled, attempting to rationalise all she had seen and heard. "How could it be?" Then again, this was a dream no, nightmare and night terrors were not known have much rationality. She had seen Severus Snape, and conversed with him. No! No! How could he have melted away to become Perseuss von Bastiae? That was not possible unless Polyjuice had been brought into play. Hermione racked her brains for an explanation and found it. She was in the dream state, and in the dream state, any damn thing was possible.

"Yes," her brain mocked her, "even the possibility of the path returning you to very place from which you fled." True enough, she found herself back at the gates of the Shrieking Shack where, to her surprise, stood Severus Snape once again.

He looked down disapprovingly at her. "You should stop running off if you want me take you seriously. Now, Miss Granger, explain to me what am I doing here?"

"You've returned," she managed to exhale unsteadily while ignoring the rational nagging in her brain that something was not quite right. "Where were you hiding all these years? You didn't die that day! You must come with me. We must tell Harry. We must alert the Ministry to this and set things right. Come along." As she said so, she took his bony, gnarled hand and tried to drag him with her.

The idea did not seem to gain his approval for he flung off his hand. Dazed, Hermione turned around in a silent imploring gesture. As was customary with Severus when shoved in situations of not his choosing, he addressed Hermione with a string of extremely colourful invectives in a variety of equally colourful languages. Long accustomed to men going on and on in this manner, Hermione nodded and closed her eyes briefly so as to temporarily shut out the involuntary shudder she felt on hearing his voice again.

"Yes, yes, I'm well acquainted with the sentiments with which you regard me, my friends, the Ministry and what-have-you. But it would be proper if we were to give them an explanation," she reasoned, flicking her gaze towards him. However, once again, she found Severus Snape replaced by the figure of Perseuss von Bastiae. Refusing to run away as she did previously, she stood her ground and waited for him to speak.

"Why are you doing this to me?" he demanded in an angry hiss, as he seized her hand convulsively. "I do not even know myself anymore. What are you trying to accomplish?"

Before she could answer, Hermione found the surroundings fading away into nothingness as she was sucked back to consciousness. The reason for this lay with her husband.

He still, unfortunately, lacked enough sense to realise that entering Hermione's study was akin to stepping into a lion's den. This accounted for his self-perceived display of manliness as he told his wife, when he roughly shook her awake, she had been screaming and shouting rather loudly in her sleep, that it was preventing him from sleeping in the next room, and that sex with him would erase her nightmares. When she refused his offer, he added that if she did not shut up or drop all talk of divorce, he would plaster her mouth with a spell and made sure that she would never speak again.

"Then move in with your virtuous and beautiful mistress," she snarled, while casting the necessary charms to shove the useless blackguard out of her study and soundproof her room. Once her sanctuary had been cleansed of his presence, she lay down on the sofa-bed and pondered as to the meaning of the latest twist of her haunting dream. Unable to make head or tail of it, she tried to sleep, but was once again haunted by the images of the nightmare where she tries to save a dying Severus Snape who somehow always seemed to phase into Perseuss von Bastiae and vice versa.

This continued repeatedly until she suddenly started out of the dream state and saw what she thought was Severus peering at her. "What's the matter? Another bad dream? Or are you living it this time?" he enquired, a finger thoughtfully tracing his lips.

At that point, Hermione sat up bolt upright, drenched in cold sweat, fully awake and quite alone.

FOOTNOTES:

Readers and reviewers who have been asking what happened to Snape post-snake bite, please reread the whole British Library experience (Ch 5) carefully, especially the memory of Dumbledore's conversation with Snape as well as the whole Snape-Dumbledore correspondence and Hermione's dissection of it. The clues are mostly there.

All references to characters are from Rowling's Harry Potter universe unless otherwise stated.

Facts about Wizarding Law and Wizarding Politics are made up.

Facts about the improvements of any Wizarding and/or Muggle object, governing body, and facility are made up.

Facts about other Harry Potter universe characters in the post-Voldemort years are also made up.

References to the Republic stem from my interpretation of that Platonic text.

Legal references are to British Law. American readers, please bear with me. My beta also made the suggestion that readers unaccustomed to the legal jargon herein pretend you are watching Rumpole of Old Bailey or Sherlock Holmes.

Lethe - ancient Greek mythological river of forgetfulness. For more details on this, please reread Chapter 5.

A **propelling pen** is the click-click pen (as it is called in Southeast Asia) or as my beta calls it, the clicker style ballpoint pen. It is a pen where you push a clicker on the top of the pen to "propel" the nib forward and push the clicker again to sheath the nib. It is so-called in the UK because when you click the top of the pen, the nib propels forward from the case. In simple terms, a propelling pen is a ballpoint pen where one presses the clicker to "propel" the nib forward.

Silk is British legal slang for King's/Queen's Counsel because the gown for the KC/QC is made of silk.

Chambers for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

Head of Chambers for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

'Employed' barrister for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

Barrister for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

Solicitor for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

'Brief' or 'Briefs' for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 3.

The **"3 wives, 4 concubines"** reference

Hermione's reference to 3 wives and 4 concubines stems from the fact that warlords in ancient China generally had 3 wives and 4 concubines. Sometimes they had more concubines, but 3 wives and 4 concubines is the usual number.

Chapter 8: Looking Back to Look Forward

Chapter 8 of 11

A revelation of sorts at last! The eighth chapter features things coming to a small clearing as Hermione and the Pupil finally talk over matters.

Author's Note: Story depicted may be unpalatable to sensitive readers for its portrayal of Hermione and Ron's relationship. Hermione may also not be likeable to readers. Some readers might consider the characters a little OOC. Some organisations and Ministry of Magic departments are made-up.

It would help readers following the story to view it as a 'cinematic' experience whereby there are shifts in perspectives, as well as shifts between flashbacks, the past, the present, dreams and reality within the space of one chapter.

Footnotes follow chapter.

Emphases are italicised and book titles are underlined.

From the Blood of the Gorgon

Chapter 8 Looking Back to Look Forward

Despite her misgivings as to her sanity, Hermione chose not to voice her fears. By blindly throwing herself into her work, she managed to keep the demons at bay. While she was no closer to uncovering the truth behind Severus Snape's demise and alleged escape or the connection her subconscious told her existed between him and Perseuss, no closer to determining the reasons for her nightmares or the truth hidden between Dumbledore's correspondence to her late potions master, she was now visibly more relaxed. All it took for her to regain her level-headedness was return to the work she loved so well. In so doing, she found a temporary reprieve from the madness that had been hitherto nipping at her heels. For the moment, she no longer sought to question the nature of her nightmares nor did she seek to further unravel them. This was not to say she had given up on them. The truth was far from it. She wanted to temporarily put some distance between herself and all that had occurred so far between herself and her husband, her night terrors, and the mystery hanging about Perseuss von Bastiae and Severus Snape before dealing with them. If she kept obsessing over them, she would likely run mad, and if she did, she would have achieved nothing, and very likely, the nightmares would still be haunting her.

Armed with this unconventional example of positive thinking, Hermione survived four days of legal cases, her children's anxious letters enquiring as to the state of her marriage, and curious stares from her senior clerk. She believed that so long as she kept at doing what she knew best, the world would see that she was managing well, and cease making life such a plaguey nuisance for her. It seemed to have worked, for on the fifth day of inactivity in her private life, an excellent development occurred in her public life. As Charles Warrington had predicted, she was officially conferred the title of King's Counsel and was the toast of wizarding Britain's legal community. As is consistent with her manner of eschewing large-scale celebrations and the intrusion of foreign eyes into what she deemed was a personal achievement, she refused all interviews, choosing instead to hosting an intimate celebratory dinner the following day at her house in Chelsea for the barristers, senior clerk, and pupil of Chiswell Square Chambers.

With her recent elevation, she came to be of the opinion that things were finally looking up for her. Her previous fevered imaginations as to the 'truth' if there was one behind Perseuss' knowing so much about her, and Severus's death were settled in her mind as incidental matters beyond any human understanding. In so doing, she found that she no longer questioned her sanity. She even found herself able to manage a few polite words to husband, even if he persisted in behaving like a self-righteous fool ranting that he had not granted her the permission to outshine him in her career. Fortunately, she had managed to get a word in edgewise and extracted from him the dual promise that he would behave himself when her friends from Chambers were due to dine, and that he would not leave early to head to Lavender's flat in the presence of their guests.

True to his word, Ron was a veritable butler when Hermione's guests arrived. He nodded sheepishly at their incomprehensible legal banter and lawyer jokes, and even smiled when Hermione bade them go about the house as they chose. He followed her example by digging up photograph albums and old Hogwarts' Yearbooks for the guests' viewing pleasure before he deemed his duty done and begged to be excused. The reason he cited did not fool his wife in the slightest. She knew full well that Molly Weasley was in the pink of health and not suffering from a fever. But as the dinner had gone off smoothly and he had not made any disparaging remarks as to her latest achievement as he had done earlier in the day, she let him head to Lavender's flat.

The other members of Chiswell Square Chambers were not the least bothered by his departure, and even though Anthony Goldstein and Daphne Greengrass exchanged speaking glances and raised their brows significantly at Ron's excuse, they were too polite to say aught. Hermione privately wondered when those two were getting married their mannerisms were beginning to mirror each other's. However, she was soon brought back to unpleasant reality when Daphne made a blunt remark as to Ron's quick escape from their company. Hermione was about to reply when she was interrupted by Melvin Summerby's discovery of a games room where they could play Muggle pool, or as he called it snocker. Excited by the prospect of playing a Muggle game where the 'balls would go click in pockets' as Summerby so eloquently put it, all of Chambers save Hermione and Perseuss galloped to the games room.

"Well," said Perseuss, breaking the silence that fell between them as the others disappeared to play with Ronald Weasley's precious balls. "May I look at these books? What are they?"

Sitting opposite him with perfect posture and with her hands neatly folded in her lap, she explained in her best imitation of a school mistress-like voice, "Hogwarts the school where I studied, produced annual volumes informing the students' parents as to the developments of the academic year. If you flip through it, you will see the usual kinds of bulletins, interviews with top students and what have you."

"There are pictures," he stated plainly, opening the first book he grabbed.

"Obligatory photographs of the teaching staff and students." Hermione flicked a wrist dismissively.

"Who are these?" he asked, tilting the book in her direction. "There are no captions."

"Ah," Hermione said in a clipped voice and sat next to him on the sofa. "That's the teaching staff in the Great Hall. A very unusual picture with all of them in it, I must say." Then using a nearby pen, she jabbed at the respective professors and introduced them to her guest. "The late Albus Dumbledore, headmaster during my time there," she prodded at him and he comically twitched his nose and sneezed. "Minerva McGonagall, the deputy headmistress. She used to teach Transfiguration before she retired. That's Filius Flitwick, he teaches Charms a very patient and understanding person." Then tapping the shoulder of a tall figure standing in the back who curled his lips contemptuously at her for daring to push him to the fore, she cleared her throat. "And this is..."

"Severus Tobias Snape," he answered, looking up at her, paling at the words that his just his lips.

She nodded, willing herself to behave as normally as she could. Ignoring the wild pounding of her heart in her ears, she pasted a polite societal smile on her face and continued to play the role of the hospitable hostess. "Yes, he was..."

"The Potions Master," interjected Perseuss quietly, releasing his grip on the book.

Hermione stared at him in the eye in stupefaction. "How did he know that? Severus Snape has been presumed dead these twenty-two years! How do you know who he is? How did you manage to identify him?"

"I do not know," cried Perseuss, as a nerve in the corner of his mouth twitched.

"Strange," thought Hermione, "*I never noticed how long and tapering his fingers were, just like Professor Snape's!*" She turned to him, her eyes flashing somewhat in mild suspicion. "Then how were you able to identify him?" persisted Hermione, shaking his shoulders roughly. "Have you seen his picture before?"

"NO!" he exclaimed hotly, attempting to pry her fingers off.

"Then how did you know?" she demanded, continuing to shake him soundly with all her might until she accidentally tore the worn fabric of the sleeve at his elbow, exposing his left forearm.

"Because I just do!" he retorted, glaring a challenge at her while clamouring to cover a mark of some sort with his right hand.

"What is that?" asked Hermione, still unwilling to back down.

"A birth mark," he hissed, his right hand tightly clapped over his left forearm.

She only raised a brow to signify what she thought of his words. "Did you parents tell you that?"

"They said I have always had it, ever since they found me," he answered, suddenly tired. "Does it really matter what it is? I am what I am now. What I was in the past in Germany is inconsequential. All that matters now is that I am a pupil in your Chambers. That is the most important thing. My past, my history, my whatever it is you want to call it, should be inconsequential to you!"

She narrowed her eyes and peeled the fingers off from their defensive position over his forearm. That which she saw made her reel backwards into the cushions of the sofa. It was a long, fat scar that was of a painfully darker colour than the rest of his pale skin. It looked as if it had been burnt off, the scab peeled off, and then burnt again to encourage the growth of collagen around the wound. "How did you get this hypertrophic scar? Did you try to burn off a mark or a tattoo?"

"No!" protested Perseuss vehemently, inching his face forward to hers. "Why would I? There are easier and non-scaring magical methods of inflicting self-torture than this."

"I will ask you now did you have the Dark Mark on your arm at some point?" she hissed, her eyes flashing daggers at him.

"No! No! No!" he snarled lowly in exasperation as Hermione shook him soundly. "I do not know anything about any dark mark. I already told you I do not know anything about this scar. What does my past in Germany have to do with you?"

"Because I think..." she said between clenched teeth, meeting his penetrating gaze with one of her own. "There is more to you than meets the eye."

"I do not care what you think! You already torment me in my dreams, do not torment me in life as well," he softly uttered under his breath, turning very white in the face. "Enough, I do not have to put up with this. Good night, Miss Granger. I will see myself out."

Watching him as he strode meaningfully out her door and shut it firmly behind him, Hermione hugged a cushion close to her chest and shook her head. What had she done? What had she said? For a moment for a brief fraction of a second, she thought she saw Severus Snape in Perseuss von Bastiae. That was utter hogwash of course! How could they be one and the same? Or were they? Once again, he had stunned her with the things he knew about her whether it be her past, her floo network activation password, her tastes and her allergies. Once again, she had confronted him impulsively without any plan and came away the loser in the resultant altercation. Once again, they had been at an impasse. Once again, he had taken offence at her words, hinted that he could possibly share the same night terrors, and stomped out, leaving her stricken and upset. "What could possibly be happening to me?" she muttered, covering her face with her hands. "I'm going mad."

Whatever else she thought was wrong with her had to wait, for the rest of Chiswell Square Chambers were pounding down the stairs to the living room to rejoin her. "*Nevermind, nevermind,*" she told herself repeatedly as they gathered around her and peered at the photograph album she had fortuitously left open. *Continue to act normally,*" she mentally reminded herself. "How was making the balls go click in the pockets?" she asked with an artificial smile on her face. "Would you like to look at some photo albums from my childhood? My maternal grandparents lived in the Lake District, and the scenery there is particularly lovely."

As her friends and colleagues clamoured to see the fabled Muggle photographs of the Lake District, Hermione steadied her breathing. So long as she could still slip the mask of normalcy on her face, she would be fine. So long her colleagues could discern no change in her behaviour towards them, she would be fine. Before them, she would be the poised and in control of herself.

It then dawned upon her that while she could still check the anxieties within her breast in the presence of her colleagues, she was positively wild before Perseuss. Every time they spoke on non-work related matters, she would be astounded by his knowledge of her. Every time he astounded her in that fashion, she would let fly at him, unable to control herself in his presence. Come to think on it, she had no right to behave so hysterically and so unreasonably before Perseuss. No wonder he had always stormed off after conversing with her. He was in all possibility frightened of her, or worse he could be repulsed by her behaviour. Given her position in the wizarding legal community, Hermione did not want to be known as the most contemptible King's Counsel. She would have to learn how to school her behaviour towards Perseuss. She would have to learn to be composed whenever she spoke to him; should she choose to confront him again over her half-crazed hypothesis as to his identity, past and connection to Severus Snape, she would do so in a calm and composed manner.

The time to test her resolve came on Monday. The weekend had strengthened her resolution to practice calmness whenever conversing with her Chambers' pupil. However, to her astonishment, he did not arrive. Afraid that he was deliberately avoiding her, she casually asked Summerby whether Perseuss had come in. "I need him run down to Andrew Marvell's Chambers on an errand."

Summerby wiggled his eyebrows suggestively on hearing that. "He owled in sick. I will run the errand for you."

When informed that he was absent, Hermione shook her head without any outward display of emotion. "That will not be necessary. I will do it personally. I need you to find me a copy of the 1976 or 1977 Hogwarts Yearbook by this week if possible."

"Of course, Miss. It will be a pleasure to be of service to you, Miss," agreed Summerby in his most affectedly unctuous voice. "Will that be all, Miss?"

"Your oiliness is most refreshing this morning. Don't use it on the others if you don't want them to slip and fall. By the way, where is von Bastiae's personal file?"

"Here it is, Miss," he replied, handing her the topmost folder lying atop a stack of briefs and files on his desk.

Without another word, Hermione briskly stepped outside and Apparated to Canary Wharf. She did not know why she did so, nor did she seek to question herself. She only knew she had to speak to him. Of course, she realised this went against her resolution of stirring up trouble with Perseuss, but she felt compelled to speak to him. Despite this latent desire to sound things out with the wizard, Hermione hesitated on finding herself at the small semi-reputable street where Perseuss lived. From the address listed on the file, she knew perfectly well which flat he lived in. However, for some unknown reason, fear bit into her as her hand poised itself over the door knocker. She had no conception as to what she would say, or how she would be received. He may not wish to speak to her, or he may be really ill though she doubted it.

She exhaled slowly, gripping the knocker tightly in a bid to gather her wits and courage about her. Upon rationalising that it would be much more uncomfortable if she left things unspoken, she opted to go ahead and tell him all and the consequences be damned. With this in mind, she firmly rapped on the door.

A smirk at half cock greeted her as the studiously bored wizard opened the door a crack.

"I have been expecting you."

"We need to talk," she began without preamble.

"Indeed, we do."

"No cutting remark today? No demands for apologies?" she questioned, brushing past him and squeezing her way into the living room.

"No," he said simply with an enigmatic curling of the lips as he leaned on the door. "I know why you're here."

"Do you now?" She raised a brow in challenge.

"Yes." He proceeded to roll up the sleeve of his left arm. "This confirmed it for you, didn't it?"

"Whatever do you mean?" She smiled, tightly folding her arms before her.

"Do not play the innocent, Miss Granger. It doesn't suit you," he purred with the slight undertone of a menacing hiss. "Several times since my arrival at Chambers, you have asked me most pointed questions as to how I know the things I do pertaining to you. I have repeatedly informed you of my ignorance. Undoubtedly, you entertained some doubts as to my claims, and rightly so. From the very first moment I saw you outside that broken down excuse of a second hand bookstore, I felt a certain affinity for you. I dare say you felt it through that jolt in the soul and mind. I have always known the things I do about you because they came to me, like a vision would, into my head. As incidents of this nature have never happened to me while in Bavaria or Wittenberg, I dismissed it as a recessive gene that belatedly sought to bestow with the gift of the Seers. As I do not have a high opinion of Seers and anything to do with prophecies, I dismissed that too. More so since I could only see things pertaining to you. Then there were these confounded dreams of death where you were trying to save me. In most of these dreams, I would give you my memories before expiring. From the look on your face, I surmise you must have similar encounters while asleep."

She shot him a look of supreme look of impatience. "Are you going to tell me something that I do not already know? Tell me why it is that you think you know the things you know about me."

"When I saw the photographs, it more or less became clearer to me," he said, thumping a hand on the door before sliding slowly to the ground. "Surely, you must have suspected..."

"Well, I am waiting for you to confirm it." Hermione surprising herself with the calm she managed to exude just from twisting the edges of her skirt. "Do not expect to say anything until you have confirmed it, Perseuss or should I say Professor Snape."

His lips twitched almost imperceptibly. "The thing is..."

Hermione stretched out a hand to stop him from saying anything further and looked up coldly at him. "There it is."

"What?" snarled wizard curiously.

"Did you have to put it like that? 'The thing is' those three words. Then a pause, then bad news. That's how it always goes whenever someone says 'the thing is' in my experience," she stated knowledgeably.

"Well, Miss Know-it-all, you might as well be claiming you know for certain why things are the way they are. But the truth is neither of us knows enough to claim certain things as facts," he snapped, tracing his lower lip with an index finger in thought. "The thing is, I do not know for certain whether I am indeed Severus Snape. I have vague memories of walking through stone corridors of a castle, sneering quietly at idiot students. I have vague recollections of assisting a bushy haired student when she began gasping for breath in the school gardens from eating some confection one of the girls had given her and starting turning blue from an allergy. The nurse was cross because she was out of lacing anti-allergen. How was I to know I would equate that chit with you?"

"Because," she said simply. "I am *that chit*. It was a cockroach cluster the special Easter edition sweets."

"It contained extract of cockles." He wrinkled his nose to denote his opinion of the bonbon.

"What about the floo password to my office at Chambers? How did you know that?" she pursued, visibly intrigued.

"How?" He tilted his head to the side and laughed bitterly at himself. "It is simple the combination of your O.W.L. results interspersed with the Muggle numerical grade equivalent divided by the Arithmantic constant of 9. I know your O.W.L. grades because I helped tabulate them against the curve, and the 'O' level equivalents are easy to fit in behind them, and I did take Arithmancy lessons. As for the spell appended to it, you used a type of the protective ward that was used on educational buildings the world over. It is all so obvious that no one would think of it. Very ingenious, Miss Granger."

"Then how can you say you don't know if you're Severus Snape?" asked Hermione, steepling her fingers in thought.

"Because I have a theory that I am an aberration. I may just be a repository of this Severus Snape's memories and thoughts that materialised on his death. It just suddenly occurred to me when I saw his photograph," he answered, sweeping his hair back irritably. "Maybe I am not supposed to exist."

"What happened that night when you were supposed to have died?" she questioned, still unwilling to believe that she had uncovered the truth. "Why are you so physically different from what you were when you died? How did you escape? Did you Apparate? Did you use a portkey?"

"I don't know," he cried, lacing his fingers together. "I can only remember snatches of things. I have come... to the point..." He began sputtering and coughing as though something was impeding him from breathing. "The vials... red and silver..." he managed to gurgle in between breaths as he held on to his throat with one hand and gestured to the writing desk in the corner.

Though momentarily affrighted by the sight, Hermione recovered enough to hasten to the desk to locate the requested vials. The way the events unfounded before her, allowing her to take in every subtle nuance startled and fascinated her. She wasn't even sure if she was reliving a memory or dreaming. She had seen people choke before and this was not a case of choking. The area around his throat had become bloody. It looked like he was trying to staunch the blood from his neck. It looked like her night terrors. She soon found what she was looking next to a stack of Potions books. Quickly downing the silver liquid, then the red one down his throat, she watched in

fascinated horror as the area around the throat bubbled and closed over layer by layer first the blood vessels, then the muscles, then the skin. As soon as that procedure completed itself, she noted that he looked somewhat younger, if more worn from the ordeal. When he greedily swallowed a glass of water and indicated he was ready to speak again, she asked, "What was that?"

"Water," he stated matter-of-factly with a certain flash of impatience in his eyes. "You want some? The tap's over there."

"No, no!" She rolled her eyes in exasperation. "What sort of a curse is that?"

He eyed her impatiently but was too tired to argue with her. "Some snake or the other bit me when I was in Bavaria, my adopted father used to tell me the snake was originally a cobra that had been altered by a wizard. Such snake venom has no counter in either Muggle science or Magic, so one has to cope it with it like any chronic ailment. I only have myself to blame for provoking the creature."

"That's not it," she sighed, shaking her head firmly. "I am convinced you are Severus Snape and here's why. Twenty-two years ago, you were supposedly killed by Voldemort's snake, whose venom was pure dark *prima materia*. Dark *prima materia* has no known counter. The only way to go about it is to reverse time. In my research, undertaken to determine the cause of these nightmares we seem to share, I have discovered that you had used Sopophorous Beans stewed in Knotwood juice. The Sopophorous Beans would have slowed down the metabolic breakdown of poisons in the body, and the Knotwood juice had emetic properties. Those two ingredients would be insufficient to aid the body's recovery. Since the dark *prima materia* from the venom cannot be purged, one would have to reverse time. The only way to do so is to include time turner sand in the potion. However, time turner sand can only be dissolved in the highly corrosive waters of Lethe. The waters of Lethe would have erased your memories. That was one reason why you were so keen to give them to Harry Potter at the time."

She licked her lips and continued, "Now, because you did not want to lose all your memories and it is obvious to me that you didn't a few drops of water from the river Mnemosyne were added to serve the purpose of mitigating the corrosive effect of Lethe that would have wiped you clean of every memory and eaten away your innards as well. That was why you were fumbling in your pockets throughout your attempt to give some of your memories to someone. After that, you must have swallowed the elixir of life and portkeyed away to Germany as per your arrangement with Dumbledore. That was why we could not find your body." Catching the frown on his face, she chose to add as an afterthought, "And another thing we all thought at the time, you wanted to give Harry your memories. In the dreams however, you insisted they were for me. There is a logical explanation to this. You knew as well as I did that Harry would not have bothered to uncover the truth as to what happened to you following your supposed death. However, I would have investigated the matter, and I have."

"If that were indeed the case, why didn't my adoptive father tell me?" he challenged.

"Was he a descendant of the cadet branch of the Merovingian wizarding family of Alamannia?"

"Yes, but I don't see how..."

"It has everything to do with it." She nodded to herself in satisfaction. "It makes sense that memories of your past elude you because you transmitted them to Harry. After all, it was either (A) lose your memories, or (B) die miserably on the spot. Everything that happened keeps in line with the theory as to how each ingredient would have worked in your so-called counter-potion to the snake's dark *prima materia* venom. You waited for all of us to disappear back to Hogwarts, then you sloshed some water of Lethe over your Dark Mark that mark on your left forearm was formerly a tattoo of a kind with a snake wiggling out of a skull. You must have wanted it removed, so you corroded it with the waters of Lethe, which must have acted like an acid base reaction. Whatever happened, it corroded the mark. Hence, its present appearance as a hypertrophic scar. Satisfied that you could no longer be traced by any of Voldemort's minions should he actually win the war, you then ingested the counter-potion."

"Yes, but it still doesn't add up," he argued in a low hiss, crossing his legs and tapping a finger on his lips. "The ingredients of the counter-potion you listed would only starve off the effects of the poisonous dark *prima materia*, and even then, its effects are not indefinite. It will still kill me one of these days."

"I was getting to that!" She threw up her hands in exasperation at his audacity to interrupt her train of thought. "It will kill you one of these days unless one of two things happen you find a suitable and willing substitute to die from the dark *prima materia* or you somehow devise a cure for it. Professor Dumbledore gave you a cupboard full of the elixir of life the red liquid you just downed. It would buy you time, and youth. It has already done so. The time turner sand would have already reversed the effects of the venomous bite by turning time back to before you were bitten. But in order to fool your body to keep functioning in spite of the dark *prima materia* in your system, you would have to be younger than the age at which you sustained the bite. That is why you look positively glowing and in your twenties even though you are nineteen years my senior. But it is just as well because Professor Dumbledore wanted you to lead the life you wanted to live if you could have a chance to do it all over again."

"And Bavaria? How did I land up there in your grand schema of things?" he demanded to know, tapping his foot impatiently on the ground.

"My guess is that you used too much time turner sand, and that was how time was turned back for you. You were 'translated' to use the Shakespearean term, as it were into a boy again. It is possible; there are some documents where early 14th century draughts for extending lifespans used time turner sand and the consumers managed to relive much of their lives over again," she patiently explained, hoping that she was not wasting her effort in convincing him of something for which she had no concrete evidence. "I reviewed your letters with Dumbledore and a memory recording where it was explicitly stated he had made arrangements for you to stay with his distant cousins in Alamannia whom he referred to as the Merovingians. You did not take their surname even though they adopted you, did you?"

"They told me something of mine had the name 'Perseuss von Bastiae' printed on it, and that it had been destroyed in a fire," he answered thoughtfully as he took in every word his companion uttered.

"You know," said Hermione suddenly as if a thought had just popped into her head. "It is an anagram for Severus Tobias Snape."

"Coincidence, pure coincidence!" His voice indicated that he was still unconvinced. This neither discouraged nor put out Hermione who had always known Severus Snape to be a bit of a sceptic. "Even if such far-fetched arrangements were made how did I come to be in Germany? You don't expect me to have Apparated there after drinking two vials of strange potions which would have erased my memory and reduced me to the state of a child."

"Alas, it is my fate to constantly have my genius doubted," lamented she in a false sigh. "Recall I never once said I was certain of the exact sequence of the events following your so-called death. However, I believe you had been transported to wherever it was that the Merovingians lived, while there, or while being transported, you took both potions."

"And how did I end up in Germany?"

She rolled her eyes at his impatience. "The instrument of choice was an unlisted portkey. In Dumbledore's memory recording, the portkey was wrapped in Egyptian cheesecloth, which meant it was most likely some kind of a *crux ansata*, which if I remember my ancient Egyptian, the word could either mean 'mirror' or 'life'. But in wizarding terms, it means..."

His eyes, which were previously shaded and narrowed at her in uncertain speculation at her sanity now widened. "The mirror of life," he burst out, and in so doing, Hermione was much taken aback. She could see it in his face that his earlier disbelief had been replaced with astonishment.

"Very apt for you, I must say," commented Hermione agreeably. "Please feel free to astonish me by informing me you have such an object in your possession."

He flashed her a defensive look, which she took to be his tacit acknowledgement of the fact.

"Well then, I put it to the court that there is clear evidence that this is unequivocal proof of your true identity," she declared in her Oxford debating voice with a cheeky self-righteous grin.

"I remember being with annoyed you for your blasted over-enthusiasm as much as I hated a bespectacled boy's ability to inspire blind trust from his contemporaries, and

your husband's arrant presumption and cupidity," he muttered sotto voce behind clenched teeth.

"Live with it. I am still your Head of Chambers, and you are my pupil!" she snapped, rising from her seat.

Deciding not to dignify her with an answer, he settled for looking up imploringly at his ceiling and twitching his lips into a smirk of dissatisfaction.

"Speaking of which," continued Hermione, ignoring the remarkable elasticity of his facial expression. "As your pupil-mistress, I would like you to request that you 'officially' loan me the benefit of your non-British presence in the IWCJ Tajik case. It would be easier for us to think of a way to restore you to what you were sans the attendant anxiety of dark venomous *prima materia* eating at your soul and body, dependency on the elixir of life and whatnot."

"You do realise," he cautioned with a frown, "I still do not completely believe you."

"That is regrettable but understandable," she acknowledged graciously.

"I will attempt to get hold of my adoptive parents tonight either by owl or through the secure floo at the office to seek confirmation for the facts you were so kind as to share. In the meantime, there is no need for you to put yourself out over my matter. I have lived with this 'ailment' for a long time."

"Until it kills you, of course," she pointed out brusquely. "I will devise some method of alleviating your suffering. I will not have the dream repeat itself in reality."

"You do realise, Miss Granger." He looked up, his eyes glinting strangely with some kind of emotion Hermione could not place. "There may not be any effective treatment against the *prima materia*."

"I know." She met his grim expression with a fierce look of determination.

"I hope you know what you're doing," he mumbled.

"That's the beauty of it," she said, making her way out of his flat. "I'm improvising as we go along, and with such an inscrutable look on my face, no one but you will know of the desperate calculations that go on behind the scenes."

A low rumble of laughter came forth from him, surprising her with the pleasant sound. "You're almost as impossible as that ridiculous old man with the long unkempt beard, when he requested oh-so-politely that I be the one to kill him instead of that skinny blond boy."

"Am I?" She turned around with a backwards glance and half smile at him. "That old man was Albus Dumbledore, and the young blond is Draco Malfoy. Well, rest and think on it for a bit, I shall expect you back at Chambers tomorrow. And fear not, I will tell no one."

FOOTNOTES:

Legal references are to British Law. American readers, please bear with me. My beta also made the suggestion that readers unaccustomed to the legal jargon herein pretend you are watching "Rumpole of Old Bailey" or "Sherlock Holmes".

Silk is British legal slang for King's/Queen's Counsel because the gown for the KC/QC is made of silk.

Chambers for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

Head of Chambers for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

'Employed' barrister for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

Barrister for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

Solicitor for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

'Brief' or 'Briefs' for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 3.

Crux ansata is the Latin term for Ankh, literally meaning 'cross with a handle'.

Ankh was the Egyptian hieroglyphic character that originally stood for the Egyptian word for 'mirror' or 'image', but gradually became used to represent the word 'life'. Egyptian Deities are often portrayed carrying it by its loop, or bearing one in each hand, arms crossed over their chest. It is also known as the Egyptian Cross or the key of life. The ankh appears frequently in Egyptian tomb paintings and other art, often at the fingertips of a god/goddess in images that represent the deities of the afterlife conferring the gift of life on the dead person's mummy; this is thought to symbolize the act of conception. Additionally, an ankh was often carried by Egyptians as an amulet, either alone, or in connection with two other hieroglyphs that mean 'strength' and 'health'. Mirrors of beaten metal were also often made in the shape of an ankh, either for decorative reasons or to symbolize a perceived view into another world.

Prima Materia or **Materia Prima** is the primitive formless base of all matter, according to Aristotle and the Alchemists, given particular manifestation through the influence of forms. According to the latter, lead could be turned to gold by reducing it to *prima materia* and imposing the form of gold on it. In the broadest terms the concept of the *prima materia* states that all particular substances are formed out of one and the same original substance. Considered in this way it becomes apparent that, in one form or another, this is a universal concept, possibly of an archetypal nature. The most prevalent notion of the *prima materia* to be found in modern thought is the atomistic theory which we inherited from the ancient Greeks. In this conception all material structures are composed of tiny building blocks of indestructible 'substance'. This substance is considered to be pure matter, and in an entirely materialistic paradigm this equates naturally to the concept of the *prima materia*.

'O' Levels or **Ordinary Level** was a General Certificate of Education qualification in the UK. It is still used in many Commonwealth countries. It is a level lower than the GCE A levels, which are still available in Further Education colleges. It was introduced in the 1950s alongside the 'A' level as a reform of the British education system at the time. The OWL in the HP-verse correspond to the 'O' level and the NEWTs in the HP-verse correspond to the 'A' levels. In 1988, it was revamped and came to be known in the UK as the GCSE. Since Severus is a product of the 1960s-1970s, he still calls it by the old name of 'O' level rather than GCSE. 'O' level grades from highest to lowest are: A1, A2, B3, B4, C5, C6, D7, E8, F9. Under this scheme, A1-C6 are passes, D7 is a marginal pass, E8-F9 are failures.

My beta alerted me to the fact that my use of "Enquire" as opposed to "Inquiry" may throw some readers off. Just bear this in mind

"Inquiry" is to investigate something. Example: The auditors launched an inquiry into the state of the company's financial situation.

"Enquire" is to ask (a question). Example: May I enquire whether this is recycled paper?

Readers unclear as to all the talk about Lethe, time turner sand etc, please refer to the British Library chapter (either ch 5 or 6) where Hermione reviews the Dumbledore-Snape correspondence and views Dumbledore's memory, and ruminations about the whole business. She also ruminates about the business in the chapter subsequent to that.

Chapter 9: Past in the Present

Chapter 9 of 11

The ninth chapter covers the length and breadth of what Hermione has discovered, and what she plans to do about the whole situation.

Author's Note: Story depicted may be unpalatable to sensitive readers for its portrayal of Hermione and Ron's relationship. Hermione may also not be likeable to readers. Some readers might consider the characters a little OOC. Some organisations and Ministry of Magic departments are made-up.

It would help readers following the story to view it as a 'cinematic' experience whereby there are shifts in perspectives, as well as shifts between flashbacks, the past, the present, dreams and reality within the space of one chapter.

Footnotes, translations & ca follow chapter.

Emphasises are italicised and book titles are underlined.

From the Blood of the Gorgon

Chapter 9 Past in the Present

Now that part of the veil of strangeness hanging over her since the recurring night terrors had been lifted, Hermione felt more ease with herself. She was still the same witch as she ever was, only now it seemed she was marked by an air of purposefulness. Indeed she was of the opinion that her latest discovery had brought her the affirmation she needed, and the confirmation of effectiveness of her methods. It lifted the tremendous weight of her own speculated madness from shoulders, and enabled her to act more decisively in the home front. No longer desirous of staying with a man who treated her so shabbily by openly cavorting with his mistress a mistress who had the temerity to declare herself 'virtuous and beautiful' while advertising their affair to the wizarding community, Hermione decided a clean break was in order. For now she had her career, and if she played her cards right, she would get joint custody of the children. She had already taken the first step forward in this worthy cause by consulting Hiero McGonagall (nephew of the former Hogwarts deputy headmistress) upon departing from the Canary Wharf flat of her pupil and sometime potions master. She had also made the second step forward in this worthy cause by renting a flat in Saint Stephen's Garden in the Hyde Park area after picking up the documents and Hogwarts Yearbooks she had requested from her senior clerk. In fact, she was in the process of packing the last of her things from her marital home when Ron decided to return to their Chelsea residence.

"Where are you going?" he demanded, pointing to the two bags he had earlier stepped over.

"Isn't it obvious?" she said, blowing aside a loose lock of hair from her face, and placing the shrunken pieces of furniture and shelves into her briefcase. "I'm moving out."

"You can't leave me!" he protested feebly. "You won't dare! None of the Weasleys' divorced. You *will not* dare do this!"

"Watch me," she said without a trace of emotion in her voice.

"Why?" he barked, tightening his grip on her arm and raising his other hand at her.

"Not satisfied with having an affair, you are threatening to hit me now? How very gallant," she deadpanned.

"Why are you leaving? If you get along with Lavender, things will be hunky-dory! So why leave?"

"Why? Because we're getting a divorce, I've just filed the petition today. Thankfully, with your infidelity, things should be much easier. Speak to me at Chambers or through Hiero McGonagall if you wish to discuss the matter." She flicked a wrist testily at him to magically pin his arms to his sides, and on giving him one last look of exasperation, Apparated to her new flat.

The first thing she did upon unpacking everything was to look through the Hogwarts Yearbook of 1977 so as to determine whether there were any similarities between the young Severus Snape and the fellow presently calling himself Perseuss von Bastiae. Taking the papers to the chaise lounge where she usually did her hard thinking in her office, Hermione made good progress in taking down the features of the young Severus.

Beyond the fact that his German adoptive parents had straightened his hitherto broken nose to render it more aquiline, made his teeth more even, nourished him, and changed his hair style so that it highlighted his cheekbones and gave him a more imposingly aristocratic aspect, Chiswell Square Chambers' pupil did, in essence, bear a passing resemblance to the young Severus Snape, but only if one was looking for some form of likeness between them. Luckily for Hermione and for him, he had a very natural German accent which led most British wizards to look on him as just another foreigner. Hermione wondered as she naturally would how long would it be before Severus was completely subsumed by the curse of the dark *prima materia* from Nagini's bite. Under what circumstances would he fully regain all his memories? Given that he could recall a great deal as to his tenure as Hogwarts' employee, perhaps it would be a matter of time before he regained his memory in full. Or could it be that chunks of his memory were missing because of the curse of the dark *prima materia* in his blood? She recalled reading somewhere that the curse of pure dark *prima materia* was meant to eat away at one from the inside out, starting from the very centre of life the soul.

"Which book was it?" she muttered to herself, rising abruptly and scanning her shelves. "This constitutes as the Dark Arts, so it should be at the bottom shelf." She squatted down and ran her fingers through the book spines, reading off them as she did so, "Necromancy, Poisons and Potations, Curses I: Reviving Body Magical, Curses II: Living Manageably in the Shadow of Death, ah, here it is Curses III: Dying and Living Painfully by Cotefredus Agilolfing."

"Very interesting," she mumbled to herself, clicking at the pen that she had just removed from her hair as she turned to the cover page. "Good heavens! 'From the Estate of Percival Dumbledore'. How fortunate that the series caught my eye at Tamsiq books the last time I went there! Pity I hadn't read it sooner. I wonder how long this had been lying in there."

Wetting her finger with saliva, she quickly fanned the pages to the section she wanted and leaned into the bookcase. On reading the beginning, she found that the author did not deviate from the view of most experts in the theoretical study of curses, for he wrote of the *near* impossibility of countering a curse of dark *prima materia*, especially if it were somehow injected into one. The person suffering from the curse would not live very long, and even if the victim should by chance find his life extended, the curse would gain in strength until completely eroding the wizard's soul.

Of the two known methods of removing the curse from the victim, one was already known to Hermione. The victim must find a substitute who is willing to take on the curse and die on his behalf. A rite will have to be done to transfer the curse to the replacement. The replacement will die in the manner that the original victim would have, that is, if the original victim was meant to implode, the replacement would implode. However it should be noted that the transference of the curse onto a replacement has certain consequences for the original intended victim. Because the original victim had willingly wished suffering and death upon another person for his own selfish reasons of wanting to continue living, a mark will be branded on his forehead forevermore proclaiming him to all and sundry as a murderer. According to the author, the most famous instance of this was that of Cain of the biblical Cain and Abel fame. Muggles at the time who saw Cain's mark and heard the extremely sanitised and highly edited version of his story, believed that he had the mark because he had murdered his own brother. However, the truth of the matter as circulated according to wizarding tradition stated

that Cain had been cursed by an extremely powerful wizard for farming on his land and ploughing over his melon seeds. As he did not die instantly, he feared a long and lingering death. This was more so given that his blood was by then pulsing with the accursed dark *prima materia*. His brother, the kind hearted Abel could not bear to see his brother in agony and volunteered to take on the curse for him. Cain immediately jumped at the opportunity to free himself from the curse and proceeded to perform the rite for the transference of the curse. As Abel was of a weaker constitution than Cain, he died on completing the ritual. Since then, Cain had to bear the mark of a murderer.

"All very fascinating," said Hermione as she carried the book back with her to the chaise lounge. "But where is the part where he talks about the second known method of handling the curse?" Settling deeper into the cushions, she flipped another page until she saw the magic words 'the second mode is believed by some to be the truest way of getting rid of the curse'.

The second method, however, seemed to Hermione to be steeped in myth. It spoke of using the holy and pure powers of the powdered stone of heaven and mixing it in the Chinese Draught of Soul Cleansing. Whatever this stone of heaven was, it came in many forms. The author spoke of the powder of the blood stone of heaven as the only effective type to be used in countering curses of dark *prima materia*. According to the author:

The ancient Chinese had long been aware of the qualities of the stone of heaven. When worn next to the skin, it gave the wearer spiritual guidance by encouraging the pursuit of wisdom and moral courage. The incorruptibility of the stone renders it especially suited for counter-curse potions. The tomb of the ancient Chinese wizarding Empress Hsi Wang Mu recorded the recipe of the potion and the story behind it. While Muggle Chinese scholars believe Hsi Wang Mu to be an extremely powerful mythical deity controlling the Taoist afterlife; some Muggles even worshipped her as a goddess of immortality. In the ancient Chinese legends of the Warring States period, Hsi Wang Mu was believed to have defeated a barbarian (that is, a person who was non-Han Chinese) king sometime before the period of the Xia Dynasty through diplomacy.

The truth of the matter according to wizarding historians however claims that the barbarian king who wanted to overrun her kingdom had cast a spell to bring a period of drought to China. Unless the Empress would capitulate to his demands, abdicate her throne and swear loyalty to him, he would continue to bring suffering to her subjects. Empress Hsi's ministers tried all forms of charms, spells and wards, but nothing they did would alleviate the impact of the drought. At that time, the ancient state of Annam (modern day Burma) sent its annual tribute to the Empress in acknowledgement of Chinese suzerainty. Instead of the usual bunga emas or flower constructed out of gold, the king of Annam sent two pillars of the stone of heaven as well as a stone of heaven carved pendant.

The Anamese envoy informed the Empress and her court that the pillars had been found in a cave where her likeness was found in one of rock formations therein. As the Empress was supposed to be daughter of heaven, the pillars near her likeness were deemed to be stones of heaven. Though she did not think much of the greenish-grey tinge pillars, she marvelled at the beauty of the carved pendant, which had the colour of blood. When she enquired from the envoy as to the strange colour of the pendant, she was told that it was the blood of the stone of heaven. Moved by the envoy's flattery, the Empress touched the pillars. As she did so, she knew it had great magic power. She decided to chisel part of the pillars and use it to replenish the water supply of China and end the drought. Her attempt was highly successful, and after the drought, she built a Summer Palace called Kun-lun and planted a peach tree on the land abutting the first lake where she attempted to replenish the water supply.

The lake, it was said, turned completely turquoise when it replenished itself. The Summer Palace of Empress Hsi Wang Mu later became the Muggle Taoist temple of Mount Tai. The peaches of the tree overlooking the Turquoise Lake came to be known as the Peaches of Immortality because the Empress was miraculously revived by one of the peaches despite being mortally wounded by a wizard's duel to the death with the barbarian king when attempted to subjugate China yet again. Due to her miraculous revival, the Empress realised the true power of the stone of heaven and concocted her own recipe whereby she would drink the powdered blood coloured stone of heaven with the waters from the Turquoise Lake infused with the nectar of the Peaches of the Immortality. Her recipe, which modified the Draught of Soul Cleansing was believed to have extended the life and lifted a dark curse from her daughter. A translation of the recipe is listed below...

Hermione bit her lower lip as she took down the recipe and tried to separate the myth from the facts. The ancient Chinese Draught for cleansing the soul was relatively straightforward it used the standard Chinese herbs of cordyceps sinensis and the insect attached to it, mulberries, essence of bracket fungus, betel nut sap and the powdered dragonfly wings. All those ingredients were easily obtained from the Covent Garden shop she frequented. More perplexing was the whole 'stone of heaven' nonsense. Just was this 'stone of heaven'? What was the difference between it and the 'blood of the stone of heaven'? Where was she to find one that was naturally shaped in a symbol of immortal mirror? Would she have to make a trip to this Turquoise Lake to collect its waters and sneak away a Peach of Immortality? How was she going to express the nectar from the peach's stone? While pondering these questions, she sank back into the soft comfort of the cushions and lulled into slumber.

This time, as soon as Hermione found herself no longer in her study, she realised she was dreaming again. Out of frustration for her own perceived laziness (for she was supposed to be thinking of a possible cure for Severus and cracking the riddle of the stone of heaven), she threw her hands up in the air in a silent curse at whatever gods were making sport of her. She hated being in the dream state. She detested it more now that she was conscious of being in it. While she had previously allowed herself to be borne by the ebb and flow of the dream, she decided she would make use of her consciousness to manipulate it this time around. That should be relatively easily seeing how her dreams always seemed to involve the same scenario of her futile stab at saving Severus Snape's life after he had been bitten by Nagini.

Unfortunately for her, this dream was not the recurring nightmare where she was unable to save Severus, and as such, threw her into mild confusion. Instead of the Shrieking Shack with a dying Severus in the corner, she found herself back at Hogwarts. Just what was her infuriating sub-consciousness trying to tell her? What made the whole scene even more surreal was that it seemed to her as if she reliving her school years. She was in her school uniform and was hurrying along the corridors en route to Dumbledore's office. She did not know why she was in such hurry, nor did she know why she was devoid of her usual entourage. The only thing of which she was certain was that she had to speak to Dumbledore. After repeated attempts at the password before the gargoyle, she finally managed to get through to the revolving spiral staircase. His office was unusually neat and empty, and it seemed as though he was vacating its premises at long last. She stumbled upon him just as the headmaster was occupied with the mundane task of clearing his desk, and humming snatches of Christmas carols.

"Ah, just the person I wanted to see," beamed Dumbledore as he wrapped a reddish object up in a thin linen fabric.

"Yes, sir, you requested my presence?" she asked as he waved her into a chair

He chuckled and looked at her from the corner of his eyes. "Oh no, I sent for you."

"And not Harry?" she challenged, fixing her suspicious gaze at him.

Clasping his hands together, he sat by the edge of the large and oddly empty desk holding nothing on its surface but the linen wrapped object Hermione had earlier glimpsed. "He does not have as open a mind as you."

"You flatter me, sir." She inclined her head forward in a slight bow.

"I flatter everyone, including myself," he said mildly. "Tell me, has there been any progress thus far?"

She swallowed hard and flopped into a chair. "Not much. There are more puzzles within the puzzles. If I didn't know better, I would say you are torturing me."

"Oh no, everything is your hands." He idly braided a part of his beard. "Or soon will be. How is he after the strange epiphany?"

"Shocked, disbelieving, doubtful the usual reactions you would normally expect from him," Hermione replied, her brow furrowing in confusion. "Hang on a mite, Professor Dumbledore. Just what are we talking about?"

The older wizard pushed his half-moon spectacles up his nose with an infuriating twinkle in his eyes. "You know as well as I do. There is no need to spell things out."

"I hope you realise I think you're a meddlesome and manipulative creature even in death," she sighed, shaking her head. "That is, assuming this is not an ordinary dream and you *really* are trying to tell me something."

"Well, my dear," said Dumbledore thoughtfully tapping a finger by the side of his nose. "The line between dreaming and reality is as thin as the line separating insanity and sanity. Who is to say what is real and what is a dream? Who is to say what is mad and what is sane? In light of recent developments, your notion of these lines has evolved. Look at the fellow who is the subject of our conversation. He is no longer himself, yet he is still himself. Life is very strange mirror. It either shows us the soul that we wish to hide or it shows us the side of us we most despise. Some are more fortunate than us. Have you ever seen that James Bond film starring Sean Connery?"

Hermione could not resist the urge to blink incredulously at him. What sort of a dream was this? Could the characters in her dream make sense for once instead of rambling disjointedly about nonsensical topics? One moment, he was semi-philosophical in speaking about souls and mirrors. The next moment he was asking about a James Bond film. She closed her eyes so that he would not see her roll them, and in so doing, she managed to steady her thoughts. No wonder observers often said Dumbledore was a little 'dotty'. He was not 'dotty'; he was a scatological thinker if there was such a thing. Deciding that she would humour him (or she would hear no end of his opinion of Sean Connery as an actor), she pursed her lips into a smile and politely asked, "Which one, sir?"

"The one where we see Blofeld..." He snapped his fingers as he tried to remember the title. "Ah yes! You only live twice. The song is particularly meaningful, especially in present circumstances. How does it go? '*You only live twice, or so they say -- once for yourself and once for your dreams.*' You and I, my dear, we live for ourselves. Then there are those like your husband and Harry who live for their dreams. Those who are more fortunate live both the life outside the mirror and the life the mirror image shows them. Those fortunate enough to experience both a life for themselves and a life of their dreams should be given a helping hand."

"What if I should be unable to help him?" Hermione asked with fear brimming in her voice.

"He believes you would be able to, otherwise he would not have sought you out," he opined with a supportive hand on her shoulder. "The fates have a very odd way of unwinding the ball of yarn with which they play. They have only just begun to disentangle it. Do not let their efforts go to waste."

A knock in the background made them both jump, and they exchanged a speaking look.

"Well, look at the time," announced Dumbledore. "I must whiz. You will be triumphant in it, I know so."

Before she could answer, she found herself back on the chaise lounge awoken by a protracted banging on her door. As the hammering became more pronounced, she swept out to chase the idiot away from her residence. Before she could offer any cutting remark to the person at the door, Severus Snape or Perseuss von Bastiae however you choose to address him, squeezed his way into her living room.

Hermione narrowed her eyes in what she hoped was a suitably malevolent glint at the unwanted guest. "Do you know what time it is? If this is about the Tajik case, I thought we would discuss this in Chambers!"

"This isn't about work, Miss Granger," he said quickly in a quiet tone. "Congratulations on leaving the Weasley twit by the bye. You deserve better."

Mildly mollified by his mode of speaking, as she had long been accustomed to hearing people tell her that she ought to be glad she managed to marry Ronald Weasley, she closed the door and gestured for him to follow her into the study. "Please be seated," she murmured, swerving to avoid a stack of precariously piled books next to the chaise lounge. "Well, what new developments have you uncovered?"

"Shouldn't I be asking you that question?" he riposted frostily, crossing his legs and folding his arms across his chest.

Hermione rested her head on the cushions and waved a limp hand at him. "Look at us, the contrast is remarkable. You are so tightly wound that you may snap at any moment from your defensive position. I am reclining in an overly relaxed position that leaves me prone to danger. What does that tell you about our characters?"

"I am not here to play charades!" he snapped, his eyes flashing angrily. "My foster father told me certain things when I contacted him earlier."

"Do tell." She flicked her wrist to summon the tea-things from the kitchen.

"Not if you tell me something first. Exchange is no robbery," he insisted, looking down his nose at her.

"I think I can help you if you will trust me," she said simply. "Perseuss... Professor Snape, please, I think I can help. Perhaps your adoptive parents could contribute to our efforts. They may know of some of Professor Dumbledore's plans for you."

"That would not be necessary as I had already spoken to them. It seems you are right," he confessed grudgingly with a look of apparent self-loathing in his eyes. Hermione noted with a satisfaction that his hands had begun to tremble in what she deemed to be a combination of uncertainty and trepidation. "When I laid bare all that you had said to me to Father, he revealed that I wasn't just a foundling. Dumbledore had made arrangements for me to travel to them by portkey."

As Hermione nodded at appropriate intervals to Perseuss/Severus's elucidation as to the facts she already knew, she found herself marvelling at the officious foresight of Dumbledore. If the old goat could foresee that Voldemort was going to move against Severus and order his death, why did he not remove his spy from harm's way? Dumbledore had always stated to his students that choosing to save and protect life was far greater than allowing one to sacrifice oneself. So why did he not choose to protect Severus until it was too late? Furthermore, given his wisdom and his contacts with foreign notable wizards, he could have arranged to have Severus sequestered somewhere away from Voldemort's enactment of the night of the long knives. It would do her no good to delve into the mind of a man long dead. Merlin alone knew what Dumbledore thought!

"Even my adoptive father did not know what Dumbledore intended. He was only told to hide me, and should the potion reduce me to the state of a babbling child, he and his wife were to care for me as if I were their own. Eventually, when parts of my memory returned, they were to apprise me of my history. I suppose he meant for me to live a little while longer before succumbing to the inevitable death via dark *prima materia*! Bloody incorrigible fool! As if there can be any way to purge it from the system?" hissed Severus lividly with clenched fists.

Much amused by his narration of his fate and his colourful description of Dumbledore, Hermione noted with pleasure that she was not the first to privately abuse the late headmaster's character. On his part, Perseuss/Severus was so caught up in hypothesising his anticipated death that he had quite forgot his early reticence.

"If only he had given us the means of resolving this conundrum, I would not be in this situation where I begin to doubt myself and my true nature," he spat a trifle ruefully.

"Then you will doubt yourself no more," declared Hermione decisively. "As an insufferable know-it-all, I may have a possible means of treating the curse of Nagini's venom though as yet, I do not know if it is plausible." She paused deliberately to pour out the tea for she still did not know how to put into words her complete befuddlement over the strange ingredients recommended by the book. After allowing the tea to scald her tongue and her mind into action, she continued to present her guest with an economical version of her discovery. "The brewing instructions are relatively simple. A clay cauldron may be acquired from the Northeast Asian speciality shop in Diagon Alley. I know where we can find most of the potion constituents."

"Why do I sense a 'but' hovering in the air?" he purred, looking up from the rim of his teacup.

"We are barristers. There is always a 'but' hanging on our words."

He raised a quizzical brow. "Are you going to tell me or do I have to pluck it out of you?"

Her only response came in the form of a single gesture. She held out the book she had earlier perused, marked at the page of the recipe.

"What's so difficult about it?" he asked, without looking up from the page.

"Oh, just that fact that we would have to travel to China for the waters of the Turquoise Lake and the Peach of Immortality," said Hermione with an air of false placidity.

"We don't need a visa to go to wizarding China," he pointed out as a frown settled on his brow. "Apparation to and from the place at Mount Tai can be done in a trice. The nectar from the peach's stone can readily be distilled with the right equipment."

She curled her lips into a tight smile to suppress the groan of vexation that would have otherwise escaped her. "There is also the small matter of the powder of the 'blood of the stone of heaven', which before its powdered stated, had to be naturally in the shape of the immortal mirror."

"It is supposed to be a representation of the immortal mirror," he corrected, thoughtfully tapping his lips with a finger, evidently intrigued by her findings.

"Don't you see?" Hermione set down her teacup carefully to mask the smile she could feel was forming on her lips. For all his efforts at looking monstrously annoyed with her, she could tell that Severus had grown to have a certain grudging respect for her

"See what?" he snapped, closing the book dramatically to signal his irritation at his interrupted reverie. "Which part of your work-addled brain is shutting down? You are thinking that there are wheels within wheels to everything. Try thinking simplistically for once."

Twitching her lips in annoyance at his unwarranted but understandably frustrated outburst, she tried to pry the book out of his hands. "Do you expect me to take this as a riddle or a charade?"

"Yes," he hissed back abrasively, slapping away her hand and turning the pages of the book to the relevant section. "What is Burma most famous for?"

"The green and yellow that its people see on telly! The economic sanctions placed over it! What are you getting at, Professor Snape?" she demanded when he continually shook his head mockingly at her, still blocking her attempt to snatch the book.

"I said, think simply," he cautioned with a half smirk. "The tourists go there for the Pagodas and ..."

She caught his drift immediately and gasped, "Jadeite. And where are we to find one that is the natural symbol of mirrored immortality? And even if we do find it, we do not know if it will work."

"You know, Miss Granger," he began in a slow and deliberate tone. "There is much to be said for simplistic thinking. The ancient Chinese revered jade as the stone of heaven. That should be more than apparent to you. Not all jade is green that is something you also should have known. All this talk of immortality does not render the potion drinker of this brew invincible. What does the fact that the brew is essentially constituted of powdered jade? Its only claim to 'immortality' is its cold purity. This quality enables it to purge the contaminated body of the effects of a dark curse."

"We can't just grind up any old piece of jade," said she, resting her chin on an obliging cushion. "There's the nonsense of it mirroring immortality..."

"I may have just..." However, he could not finish his words for someone had yet again decided to pound desperately at Hermione's door. As he caught his Head of Chambers rolling her eyes, he rose and offered his services. "I'll get it. At this hour, it could be young hooligans."

Thanking him with a smile, she lay back on the cushions of her chaise and pondered as to the significance of her meeting again with the professor she respected most after all these years. The faint sounds of raised voices in the living room did not bother her. If it were indeed a young hooligan, he should have no problem dispatching the fellow and that would be the end of it. He had dealt with screaming children and temperamental colleagues at Hogwarts, dealing with a local hooligan who had too much to drink and decided to make trouble was likely as easy as combing as his hair for him.

As the sounds died to something of a harsh whisper, she retreated deeper into her cushions and thoughts. Could it be that she was meant to receive his memories instead of Harry? Would she have interpreted them in a way that would have changed Severus's fate? Did it even matter whether she could change his fate? A part of her thought that it was just as well she became acquainted with him prior to discovering his true identity. As Perseuss von Bastiae, he had become an integral part of Chambers, and proven himself without the scrutiny that would have otherwise accompanied any effort on his part to rehabilitate himself in the wizarding world. He had none of Severus Snape's old cares, and Hermione believed this gave her an insight as to what he would have been like if he had been nurtured and cared for since childhood. If he had been protected and known familial affection as he apparently had with his adoptive parents in Germany, he would not have had an inferiority complex and sought to distinguish himself from the other more popular lads at school as he had evidently done during his boyhood at Hogwarts. If he had received the care at home at Spinner's End as he had with the Merovingian family, he would have had no need to go through the torment of feeling neglected and unwanted, and he would not have turned to Voldemort in his misguided need to belong somewhere.

In a way, she could see the whole situation of his alleged death at Nagini's fangs as instrumental to Dumbledore's final gift to Severus Snape. By making all the necessary preparations for faking his death, reviving him, reversing time and age, facilitating his flight and providing a safe haven where he would be protected, Dumbledore had in effect allowed Severus to live his life again sans Voldemort as he should have done were he given all that he needed to develop as a human being and a wizard.

This Severus Snape in the form of Perseuss von Bastiae possessed self-confidence and friends for whom he had a most pleasing affection (as Hermione clearly recalled the way he tried to save poor Heinrich from making a cake out of himself in front of Fleur). He was less misanthropic, more willing to enable in regular human intercourse, and desirous of shaping the world in which he lived by entering the legal profession. Though he was still cynical and still possessed a caustic tongue, he was well respected by others, and spoken of highly by his colleagues as something of a wit. Hermione also believed that he liked himself better in this life as von Bastiae. He did not struggle to hide the admiration he had of other human beings who were better than him in other fields, and he no longer hid in the shadows as if he were some ghoulish creature with the ability to blight everything he touched. This then, thought Hermione was Severus Snape as he truly was when stripped of all the circumstances that had shaped him into that which he was at Hogwarts.

"Come to think on it," she said aloud, moving to the swivel chair at the desk when she heard the loud sounds of shuffling footsteps re-entering the study. "Perhaps it is just as well you are back in this guise. It has given you a new lease at life, wouldn't you say, Severus?"

Instead of the low purr of the pupil's voice, Ron's disgusted tone fell down upon her ears. "I knew it! You whore! You ~~are~~ having an affair! You ~~left~~my house and I find you cavorting with your new pupil in your new flat! I've always known you had a crush on Snape. So you prefer the greasy git to me, do you? Do you think by calling your new lover 'Severus' he will be like Snape and have his non-existence qualities you used to lecture us about? He was vindictive, petty and a ruddy git, and a *Slytherin* not the haunted and tormented soul at Dumbledore's beck and call you always said he was. You are deluded, sick, idiotic, and deluded if you think that!"

"I think you should know, Mr Weasley," coughed the presently translated Severus delicately in the manner Hermione had heard him do so in wizarding Crown Court number four over his Cambridge University Wizarding Student Union case. "I am still present and privy to your... assessment of my character." He then coughed again and addressed his hostess. "My apologies at being unable to prevent him from barging in, Miss Granger."

"Shut up, you!" bellowed Ron, his eyes bloodshot with rage. "I didn't say you could speak to my wife!"

Pointedly ignoring him, Perseuss/Severus continued his explanation coldly, "Mr Weasley had caught me off guard with a stunning spell when I was attempting to remove him from your premises. Luckily, his inner turmoil rendered his spell fairly weak and I was able to break it. He proceeded to challenge me to a duel for being in your home, but I declined. The altercation you may have heard briefly was the result of my refusal. I have since managed to remove his wand from him."

"I didn't ask you to! I want an explanation, Hermione! You are still my wife, and you are answerable to me!" Ron demanded in a manner reminiscent of a rabid, madly barking dog with spit flying from his mouth.

She curled her lips and mentally applauded Perseuss/Severus's professional manner of responding. Ron's sudden intrusion and unjust accusation did not deserve an answer. Accordingly, Hermione did not dignify to give him one. She chose to spin her chair around and cast a particularly frosty glower at her soon-to-be former husband's new found eloquence.

Taking his wife's silence as an admission of guilt, Ron ignored Perseuss/Severus's presence and barked at her. "So this is what you've been doing every time you claim

you're busy with work! Is frolicking with the new pupil at Chambers now considered work?"

Hermione smiled serenely at him. She had always reminded Ron against transplanting his own follies and guilt on others, and as he had never heeded her advice, it was not surprising that he should relapse into the habit. "I suppose flaunting your mistress openly and allowing her to write about your affair is proper behaviour, my dear hypocrite? I am not the unfaithful party in this relationship. You are! Don't pull the injured party stunt with me because it won't work on me. Not this time. I have had enough of you dumping your guilt on me. I have not had an affair, and as you can see from the books and papers strewn about here on every possible surface, Herr von Bastiae and I were discussing work. But I see there is no talking to you in this vein."

"All I see is your unfaithful smug little face lying to me. Is this what I get after taking the effort to find you? I had to go that Slytherin that snivelling excuse of your solicitor to trace you! What about the children? What did you tell them?" he growled in what he hoped would pass as an intimidating manner. That only made Hermione laugh, which in turn, further incited his wrath. He raised a hand and would have struck her in the time honoured way favoured by budding abusive husbands the world over had Perseus/Severus not caught his arm.

"Tut, tut, Mr Weasley," purred he in a low dangerous voice. "I think the courts would be extremely interested to learn that you are not only an unfaithful husband, but a violent one as well."

Hermione nodded her thanks. "The children have my address and will not have problems reaching me. I told them the truth that their father prefers another witch; they deserve to know."

"How could tell that to our children!" he screeched. "You don't have any compunctions lying do you? You're a blooming lawyer! I don't have to take this!" he asserted, flinging off Perseus/Severus's restraining arm. "I will see myself out."

"And seek solace in the arms of the virtuous and beautiful Lavender Brown," said Hermione curtly. "Please convey my best regards to her."

Those words succeeded in rendering Ron so tongue-tied that he turned redder than his hair. Unable to find any words or a working portion of his brain, he settled for the next course of action, namely, storming off.

"Well, that temper tantrum should keep him away for the time being," said the pupil as soon as he watched Hermione lock the front door and belatedly cast a few protective wards to repel unwanted visitors. "You'll get your divorce, you'll see."

To which bracing words, Hermione jerked her head around with a thin smile on her face. "What about the red jadeite in the symbol that mirrored immortality? Where do we find that?"

"That, my dear Miss Granger," declared he in a low purr, "is something already in my possession."

FOOTNOTES:

Legal references are to British Law. American readers, please bear with me. My beta also made the suggestion that readers unaccustomed to the legal jargon herein pretend you are watching Rumpole of the Bailey or Sherlock Holmes.

Silk is British legal slang for King's/Queen's Counsel because the gown for the KC/QC is made of silk.

Chambers for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

Head of Chambers for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

'Employed' barrister for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

Barrister for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

Solicitor for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

'Brief' or 'Briefs' for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 3.

Tamsiq Books where Hermione bought Cotefredus Agilolfing's Curses series was mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3. It was also where she first met our hero.

Tamsiq is **qismat** spelt backwards. *Qismat* is the English transliteration of the Persian word for fate or destiny, frequently romanised as Kismet.

Cotefredus Agilolfing, the author of the fictional Curses series is the Latinised version of Gottfried (died 709AD), one of the Merovingian Dukes of Alamannia. The Agilolfings were a family of Frankish or Bavarian nobility that ruled the historical territory of Bavaria on behalf of their Frankish overlords ca. 550-788AD. He and his fictional book were mentioned in Chapter 2.

Xia Dynasty (2070-1600 BC) or Autumn dynasty is a legendary dynasty of China, and the first to be described in the Records of the Grand Historian and unofficial Bamboo Annals. According to legends, the Xia dynasty lasted 431 or 471 years, and was preceded by the legendary Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors, and followed by the Shang Dynasty.

The **Warring States (5th Century BC-221BC)** was a time of great political upheaval in China where regional warlords annexed smaller states around them and consolidated their rule.

Jade was particularly valued by the ancient Chinese, Japanese and Koreans, and was considered an imperial gem. The ancient Chinese, Japanese and Koreans associated carved-jade objects as intrinsically valuable, and they metaphorically equated jade with human virtues because of its hardness, durability, and (moral) beauty. The ancient Chinese emperors believed jade was the stone of immortality and drinking a concoction of powdered jade prolonged life and could potentially lead to immortality. They believed certain designs on the jade warded off evil and absorbed all bodily harm of the wearer. It was for them a symbol of purity, holiness, virtue, wisdom, moral courage, and power. Even Confucius waxed lyrical over the supposed properties of jade, calling it the symbol of harmony, humanity, intelligence and justice.

Jadeite, with its bright emerald-green, pink, lavender, orange, red, and brown colours was traditionally imported from Burma to China. Some Asians call the red and/or brown jade 'blood jade'.

* In this story, I use **Jade** and **Jadeite** interchangeably.

The **"green and yellow"** Hermione says is seen on Burmese telly refers to the military officials on inspection tours of the country (green) and Buddhist monks (yellow) whom the junta occasionally use to legitimise their regime.

Hsi Wang Mu, the Queen Mother of the West, was the highest female goddess in the pantheon of the Taoist religion. As the ultimate embodiment of *yin*, Hsi Wang Mu was originally a creator figure. Linked with the embodiment of *yang*, *Dong wang gong*, Hsi Wang Mu engendered heaven and earth and all beings. Most scholars assert that the earliest description of Hsi Wang Mu was recorded somewhere between the third and second centuries B.C.E. in the Mountains and Seas Sutra (*Shan hai jing*). In the *Shan hai jing*, the Queen Mother is portrayed as a humanoid with tiger's teeth and the tail of a leopard; three bluebirds gather her food and carry her messages. Taoists, however, believe that this is a description of an emissary of the Queen Mother, rather than the Queen Mother herself. In later descriptions, Hsi Wang Mu is referred to as a beautiful and stately imperial ruler. She became the Keeper of the **Peaches of Immortality** on Mount Kun-lun in her palace by the **Turquoise Pond**. Hsi Wang Mu served as a model for female Taoist priestesses and adepts, appearing to them in dreams and visions, and protecting them at each stage of their spiritual life. Many popular local

shrines as well as several Taoist monastic temples were dedicated to the Queen Mother; the great Taoist temple of **Mount Tai** has a turquoise pond in front of it, which in 1980 still went by the name of the Queen Mother's Pond. Hsi Wang Mu's great popularity may have been regarded as a threat to the masculine, hierarchic authorities. Interestingly, Hsi Wang Mu was a very popular goddess, particularly in northeast China, where she was attributed with ending a great drought in 3 B.C.E. For purposes of this story, I have played around this timeline.

Ankh was the Egyptian hieroglyphic character that originally stood for the Egyptian word for 'mirror' or 'image', but gradually became used to represent the word 'life'. Egyptian Deities are often portrayed carrying it by its loop, or bearing one in each hand, arms crossed over their chest. It is also known as the Egyptian Cross or the key of life. The ankh appears frequently in Egyptian tomb paintings and other art, often at the fingertips of a god/goddess in images that represent the deities of the afterlife conferring the gift of life on the dead person's mummy; this is thought to symbolize the act of conception. Additionally, an ankh was often carried by Egyptians as an amulet, either alone, or in connection with two other hieroglyphs that mean 'strength' and 'health'. Mirrors of beaten metal were also often made in the shape of an ankh, either for decorative reasons or to symbolize a perceived view into another world.

Prima Materia or **Materia Prima** is the primitive formless base of all matter, according to Aristotle and the Alchemists, given particular manifestation through the influence of forms. According to the latter, lead could be turned to gold by reducing it to prima materia and imposing the form of gold on it. In the broadest terms the concept of the prima materia states that all particular substances are formed out of one and the same original substance. Considered in this way it becomes apparent that, in one form or another, this is a universal concept, possibly of an archetypal nature. The most prevalent notion of the prima materia to be found in modern thought is the atomistic theory which we inherited from the ancient Greeks. In this conception all material structures are composed of tiny building blocks of indestructible 'substance'. This substance is considered to be pure matter, and in an entirely materialistic paradigm this equates naturally to the concept of the prima materia.

Night of the Long Knives was a purge that took place in Nazi Germany between 30 June and 2 July 1934 when Hitler ordered the execution of 85 or more people attached to Sturmabteilung (SA) and other groups within the Nazi Party (or groups that had broken away) for political reasons.

Chapter 10: Living Twice

Chapter 10 of 11

The tenth chapter features a potion, waiting, and a possible vacillation between life and death.

Author's Note: Story depicted may be unpalatable to sensitive readers for its portrayal of Hermione and Ron's relationship. Hermione may also not be likeable to readers. Some readers might consider the characters a little OOC. Some organisations and Ministry of Magic departments are made-up.

It would help readers following this chapter especially to view it as a 'cinematic' experience whereby there are shifts in perspectives, as well as shifts between flashbacks, the past, the present, dreams and reality within the space of one chapter.

Footnotes follow chapter.

Emphases are italicised and book titles are underlined.

From the Blood of the Gorgon

Chapter 10 Living Twice

Two hours. It had been two hours since Severus took the potion and locked the door to his bedroom. It had been two hours since he downed the silvery mauve brew and dropped the glass. It had been two hours since he staggered to his bedroom and locked himself in. Make that two hours and one minute. Hermione mused while pacing in the living room of his Canary Wharf flat. Aside from the fact that she was attempting to set a record for the wearing down of floorboards, Hermione was worried. Would the potion work? As far as she knew, the counter-curse potion was untried and untested. Would the potion have any side-effects? Or would it kill him instead? Would it successfully remove the curse of the dark prima materia in Nagini's venom? Would all the ingredients in the potion work as they ought? Was the Mount Tai in Northeastern China from the waters were procured the right one? Did its waters really have restorative properties? These were the thoughts running through Hermione's mind as she waited for a sign any sign that Severus was still alive, that the potion was taking effect, that they had not royally screwed up. In a bid to calm herself, she sat down and reviewed the events leading up to these two hours of agonising silence.

A fortnight ago, after Ron stormed out of her flat with a string of utterly false accusations, Hermione and Severus initiated their plans to conduct as much research as possible in the potion that the ancient Chinese wizarding historians claimed Empress Hsi used to remove a similar dark curse from her daughter. The herbs, which Hermione easily found in a Chinese wizarding apothecary at Covent Garden were famed for their neuroprotective, anti-inflammatory, anti-tumour, anti-parasitic, life-prolonging qualities, as well their ability to undo the neuronal cell dysfunction and cell deterioration caused by dark magic even in the western wizarding world. Hermione found it striking that in contrast to the western world where Muggles were kept in ignorance of their magical counterparts, Muggles in China, though wary of their wizarding brethren, lived fairly peacefully alongside witches and wizards. As the owner of the Covent Garden apothecary informed her, relations between Muggles and wizards in China had traditionally been harmonious. Many wizards and witches were ancient Chinese emperors and empresses, and they instituted policies of integration whereby both Muggles and wizards would learn each other's ways. As an upshot, wizards in China adopted their Muggle counterparts' habit of doing most of their activities manually instead of magically so as to minimise misuse of magic. Likewise, Chinese Muggles came to adopt wizarding method of brewing potions (which they called medicines) as a form of healing. Indeed, all of the herbs she picked up from the apothecary were introduced to the ancient Chinese Muggles by wizards.

"Perhaps we should be taking a leaf out of the book of the ancient Chinese wizards and Muggles," Hermione reflected as she trained her eyes on the book shelves in Severus's living room.

Two hours and five minutes, and he was still locked in his bedroom. She shook her head and sighed. "If only I had known about the properties of these various herbs earlier, I could have alleviated *his* suffering. After all, I know his symptoms and I know what went into the brew he used to starve off the dark *prima materia* in Nagini's venom. I know what side effects to treat, and it would be a matter of time before I discovered these herbs," she thought with a rueful sigh. If she had known about these, she could have been cognisant as to their uses and their properties, and she would not have had to read the book on curses before coming upon the recipe.

Come to think of it, it was strange that she should have noticed the series on curses at the bookshop when she had never noticed them before. It was also strange, and somewhat eerie that the series had previously been owned by Albus Dumbledore's father. Yet in spite of that, the books had not been inherited by Albus Dumbledore, otherwise they would have been donated to the Dumbledore Collection in the wizarding section of the British Library. Even stranger yet was the fact that the books had been written by one Cotefredus Agilolfing, who was a Merovingian Duke of Alamannia. More startling was the fact that Agilolfing was not just any Merovingian Duke, but one who ruled the historical territory of Bavaria on behalf of his Frankish overlord.

Hermione could not help but wonder Was it a coincidence that the books on curses had been owned by Albus Dumbledore's father, or was it fate? Was it a coincidence

that Albus Dumbledore was distantly related to the Merovingian Dukes of Alamannia, or was it fate? Was it a coincidence that Albus Dumbledore sent Severus Snape to these Agilolfings, or was it fate? Was it coincidence that the Agilolfings of Bavaria, descendants of the Merovingian Dukes of Alamannia, had looked after Severus after his escape from death at Nagini's fangs and the effects of his potion turned him to a child, or was it fate? Was it coincidence that Severus's potion to counter the poison and the dark magic in Nagini's venom turned back time for him and reduced him to a child, or was it fate? Was it a coincidence that Severus had taken up law in this new life to make himself, or was it fate? Was it a coincidence that he had been despatched as a pupil to her legal Chambers, or was it fate? Was it a coincidence that she had been having the dreams of his dodgy death, or was it fate? Was she perhaps fated to uncover the truth behind the disappearance of his body from the Shrieking Shack in the aftermath of the war against Voldemort?

"Perhaps it *is* fate. Perhaps it was *all* fate," she mused wryly, crossing and uncrossing her legs in nervous trepidation.

Two hours and eleven minutes, and he still gave indication of coming out of his room. She took the opportunity to review the various constituents used in the potion recommended by Cotefredus Agilolfing's Curses III to ease the throbbing of her heart in her ears as she waited for some sign from Severus that he was all right. The recipe, which she had remembered by heart, called for cordycep sinesis, mulberries, crushed betel nut sap, essence of bracket fungus, powdered dragonfly wings, the waters from the Turquoise pond of Mount Tai, the nectar of the Peach of Immortality from Mount Tai, and the powdered red jade that was naturally mirrored immortality. She and Severus had spent a week deciphering the notes on the various ingredients, consulting ancient Chinese texts with the aid of translation charms for hints as to what the modern day identity of the more obscure ingredients. It took them a week to gather all the ingredients in between juggling work at Chambers, and the courts. It took them another week to brew three vats of the potion. Hermione looked up at the clock anxiously and thence to his door. He still did not emerge. She hoped the potion would work the way it was supposed to. After all, every single one of the ingredients served to purge the body of both the dark *prima materia* by permanently neutralising its toxic effects.

Cordyceps sinensis, she knew, was an ascomycete fungi highly valued by both Chinese Muggles and wizards alike because of the medicinal properties of its dried mycelium. Better known as the caterpillar fungus or the vegetable worm for its ability to paralyse and kill the said creatures before causing stroma to sprout near their heads, the *cordyceps sinensis* while unremarkable on its own, gains all of its magical biochemical qualities after ingestion by caterpillars of the hepialid moths and vegetable worms. Hermione found it rather illuminating that the *cordycep sinesis* would only be useful after its mycelium had gone through the intestinal tract and overwhelmed the caterpillars' and worms' body cavities, for the digestive enzymes of these larvae would combine with the secretions of the cordycep's mycelium to reduce an anti-toxin biochemical that would suppress the human immune system from fighting the foreign intrusion of magic in the body thereby allowing the healing properties of both the cordyceps and the other ingredients to perform their tasks. That was one of the magical properties of the cordyceps as evidenced by its ability to course through the body of the unfortunate caterpillar or worm, so will it heal the human body by pulsing the magical curative effects of the potion throughout the human body.

As with the examples of the caterpillars and worms that sprout finger-like stroma near their heads when they die from their body's inability to breakdown the resultant magical biochemical anti-toxin, a concoction with cordycep would work to expel the negative effects of any poison in the consumer's bloodstream. Indeed, as Hermione's initial experiments with cordyceps and mulberry demonstrated, the secretions of the fungal mycelium of the cordycep would result in the mulberry's production of resveratrol, which in turn facilitated the production of anti-bacterial, anti-viral and anti-inflammatory and neuro-protective chemicals that would protect the human body from external bacterial and/or viral threats while the potion performed its restorative and curative functions. One of the functions of mulberry resveratrol observed by Hermione was its ability to inhibit the spread of neuronal cell dysfunction and cell death often caused by dark magic. She smiled thinly to herself at the things one always managed to learn when picking up the cauldron again.

Looking up at the clock, she found that two hours and seventeen minutes had passed, and he persisted in remaining in his room. Had she not promised him that she would allow the potion to take its effect in the privacy of his room, she would have sat with him and watched over him. As it was, she was left fretting over his fate in the living room. What if the potion was killing him instead of restoring him to health? No, she would not allow herself to contemplate such bleak thoughts. She had used the bracket fungus, which had been dubbed 'mushroom of immortality' by Tibetan wizards, who wrote of the fungus' ability to restoring the natural balance of the body without any unfavourable side-effects. Its immunomodulatory properties would contribute to the protecting and purging the liver of dark *prima materia* aggregation. She had devoted much of nights by repeatedly simmering and double-boiling it prior to decocting its essence so as to milk it if all its immunotherapeutic qualities.

Furthermore, the alkaloids in the betel nut sap would have worked in tandem with the bracket fungus essence in purging the dark *prima materia* from his body. As an added precaution, she had overridden Severus's initial objection to the inclusion of powdered dragonfly's wings. It may have been optional to the ancient Chinese who brewed this, but where Hermione was concerned, its inclusion could make a difference as to whether he lay in bed and grimaced in pain or writhed about the floor in excruciating agony. Calling up all the innate bossiness that was in her, she insisted on following the potion's recipe in adding powdered dragonfly wings to alleviate the pain that may be induced by the warring expurgatory properties of the counter-potion and the dark magic of Nagini's venom. Hopefully, when the pain of the curative process became too much for Severus, the powdered dragonfly wings in the concoction would imbue him with courage and strength. "Even if it could help him just a little, I would be happy," she told herself as she wearily flopped herself face down into the sofa.

A night of watching the potion softly simmering, and a fortnight of running around Diagon Alley, the wizarding Embassy of China, her solicitor's chambers, Crown Court, constant Apparation to far flung places, research and discussions with Severus had taken a toll on her and she realised belatedly she was weary. She glanced at the clock again and noted two hours and forty-two minutes passed. There was still neither sign of life nor smell of death coming from Severus's room. She turned around on the sofa to lie in a more comfortable position. In her eagerness to concoct a counter to that which was ailing Severus, she had allowed her obsessive workaholic streak to rear its ugly head. It was only now that she stopped fussing about with papers, court cases, law briefs, potions and whatnot that she realised she had pushed herself beyond the limit of her body. Verily, she had forgotten how tired she was. If it was not for the present indeterminate period of waiting on this Saturday afternoon where Severus was locked in bedroom likely hovering between life and death upon consuming an untested potion, she would not have felt so bone-weary.

Inactivity after long bursts of bustling always left her drained, and for the moment, Hermione was physically and mentally exhausted. What would happen if the potion succeeded in carrying out its intended purpose? Would she and Severus still have their working camaraderie they previously had as Head of Chambers and pupil? Would things be awkward between them because she was the only person who knew the truth behind Perseuss von Bastiae and Severus Snape? What if the worst should happen and the potion failed? He would die and that would be the end of it. Yet strangely enough, she did not want him to die. She sighed and closed her eyes. She did not know, and was too worn-out to consider these matters. She only knew she had grown quite attached to him. Somehow, she felt that being in his company was akin to being in the company with a kindred spirit who shared her tastes, beliefs, work ethics, and who understood her well enough to know when she wanted to be left alone and when she needed someone to talk to. She would not think on it, not now when she could not think straight. For the moment, there was nothing she could do but close her mind to idle speculation for a short while and rest.

* * *

"Every constituent in the potion had been tinctured, decocted and tested, save for the problematic components from the Peach of Immortality, the supposedly mystical waters of the Turquoise Lake of Mount Tai, and the powdered blood jade, if you think obtaining those things are simple, then *you* do it. I haven't the time today, I have to lead Lee again in Court Number Three in a murder by wizard's duel in half an hour," Hermione heard herself articulate sharply.

She opened her eyes and found herself staring at Severus who was seated beside her on a bench on the roof gardens above the courts. Wasn't she at his flat a moment ago waiting to see if their potion had worked? No, she must have slipped into a day dream. She was here at work, and there were tens of hundreds of things to do. But first she had to turn to the matter currently demanding all her attention. "Of those three items, we only have the blood jade, and even then, we do if it is naturally in the shape that it is," she said lowly, leaning her head forward. "I know the piece of red jadeite ank is a representation of mirrored immortality, but can we be certain of its properties?"

"Well, Miss Granger," replied the pupil in a considering tone. "I already told you last week. That wretched old goat had given the blood jade to me as a portkey. This portkey, if you recall, is the very same portkey that sent me to Bavaria; my adoptive father has confirmed it. He bought it for the old goat in the old days when he met him on his Grand Tour. That infernal goat always enjoyed collecting magical artefacts steeped in symbolism. Did you think all the contraptions in his office were *objets d'art*?"

Hermione removed the horsehair wig from her head and steepled her hands at her lips. "Very well, seeing that is our only alternative, we shall have one of the jewellers in Diagon Alley appraise its magical value before grinding it."

"I have already done so," he remarked matter-of-factly, producing a slip of paper from his file and handing it to her.

"When did you..."

"I had my friend, Heinrich do so. As a student of advanced charms in the University of London he is the most suited to this task. Besides, he has a part-time job with Moira Stones and Gems Emporium. Full appraisal with none of questions and no charge." He shrugged delicately, curling his lips into a knowing smirk at his prospective employer.

His words drew a raised brow of astonished pleasure from his Head of Chambers as she read the appraisal. "95% magical, ability to ward off evil 78.8%, resistant to corrosion 87.5%, absorption off unguarded spells to wearer 98.8%, absorption of spells already cast on wearer 90%," she read aloud. "This is better than I expected. Now, about the waters from the Turquoise Lake and the Peaches of Immortality I spoke to Warrington who has recommended a Chinese translator from the wizarding embassy of China to accompany me to Mount Tai."

Severus coughed and looked sideways at Hermione.

"What is it?" she asked, mocking his cough by cocking her head to one side.

"Kiss me, hard on the mouth," he deadpanned.

Her eyes flickered up briefly in incredulity. Mastering her first instinct to jinx him, she settled for rolling her eyes at his poor attempt at a joke. "Why should I?"

"The collection of the waters from the Turquoise Lake of Mount Tai may prove to be a simpler task than you anticipated," he began, taking three very large vials from his bag and placing it in the space between them.

"Is that..."

"Yes."

"When did you..."

"Last night. I Apparated to the place after finding a picture book of the place at W. H. Smith. The Taoist priestess at the Temple of the White Cranes and Scarlet Phoenixes was most helpful." He curled his lips into a catlike smile.

"Properities?"

"Soul cleansing, binding reagent and best suited to drawing out the spiritual potency of *Ganoderma lucidum*," he stated quietly, watching her disinterested expression intently.

"You are brilliant and resourceful! I have a good mind to keep you when your pupillage period is up," came Hermione's clipped reply.

"You had better," he muttered with a ghost of a smile playing on his lips. The smile however died as quickly as it had surfaced. "The Peaches of Immortality however..."

"They weren't..."

"Not in season according to the priestess at the temple," he drawled in a deliberately quiet manner, masking his own disappointment. "It is expected to bear fruit in another four hundred and seventy-seven years."

"What?" gasped Hermione as she adjusted her cotton tab collar in disbelief.

"Apparently," he answered dispassionately as he consulted the contents of his file. "The tree puts forth leaves once every thousand years, and only bears fruit once every three thousand years. For best results, the fruit must be cut with a gold scythe."

"Bugger it!" she made a face and curled her lips contemptuously while tightly twisting the fabric of her silk gown in her hands. "How are we to extract the nectar from the stone of the peaches then?"

"That I do not know. I was told however the stones from the peaches are apparently sold in speciality markets."

"Any fool can pass off the stone of any old peach as belonging to the so-called Peaches of Immortality. Why do they even call it peach of immortality? It only purges the system of toxins and allows the subject to live a little longer!" commented Hermione irritably, as she clicked at her propelling pen.

"Exaggeration is part of human nature," he said silkily. "I am going to make a suggestion and you will not like it."

"Which is?" she waved a hand in an invitation for him to speak.

"We kidnap one of the goats from the Temple of the White Cranes and Scarlet Phoenixes; they are known to be notoriously old because the priestess feeds them the peaches," he said, studying the contents of his file with a show of great interest. "Since these goats swallow the peaches whole with the stones, it is likely that the stones may still be in the stomach. If they remain in the stomach, they become what we commonly know as..."

"The bezoars, from which we may extract the nectar of the peaches," she said, with a nod, realisation dawning on her. "Why kidnap the goat? Offer to buy one from the priestess and be done with it."

"I did. My offer was refused," he said smoothly without looking up from his papers.

"Bloody Bollocks!" Hermione tapped a finger on her cheek in thought. The quirk of a brow in interest, she continued, "We are not going to steal a goat. We either go there give the goat an emetic, make it expel a bezoar or two or four or seven, or we try to find the most exotic, most high quality, most potent bezoar on the market in Chinatown."

"Ah well, you know..." he said with an odd twisted smile.

"There it is again." She pointed a finger at him. "Whenever a barrister goes 'Ah well, you know', it invariably means he has been pulling the leg of his learned friend. Please put me out of any further anxiety and tell me you have the blasted bezoar from the goat that is actually the stone from the peach of immortality?"

His thin mouth curled into a slightly mocking smile as he replaced the wig on Hermione's head. "Half an hour has gone by. You're due back downstairs."

Rolling her eyes, she drew herself up to her full height, her gown rippling in the cold breeze. "At least, let me know you have it lest I start bleating before everyone," she said, taking a step away from him.

"I have extracted several peach stones from the goats' intestinal tracts, with permission from the priestess, of course, and will begin the distillation process when I get my chap bail."

"Word of advice, Severus never waste an effort at bail if it has already been denied twice," she said, moving off.

"Ah, but I have a way with messy domestic situations!" There was almost a laughing quality in his voice that Hermione would not have recognised in the potions master she knew at Hogwarts. He was so visibly different as Perseuss von Bastiae that had she not recognised his habits, she would not have known him for Severus Snape. The difference lay not only in his physically youthful looks, but also his outlook. Where he was previous always ready for attack and expecting to be attacked from every corner never relaxing under any environment or circumstance, he was now behaving in a fairly relaxed manner with her. Hermione attributed this to the different upbringing he had this time around with the Merovingian family. Where he once had to insulate himself from his parents violent and unpredictable outbursts by withdrawing inwards and never relaxing his guard, his upbringing with the Merovingians meant that he was now fully able to trust and no longer hypervigilant.

"Yes, yes, suit yourself," Hermione laughed. "Don't come crying to me if your boy's denied bail. See you later then."

"My place tonight? Half past sevenish?" He looked at her with something that could pass for uncertainty in his eyes. "We can run tests on the distilled nectar, and I will be cooking my adoptive mother's recipe for spätzle."

"Right." She nodded, opening the door to stairwell before turning her professional face to him. "We might as well start with decocting the bracket fungus. Later, my young apprentice!"

* * *

She must have fallen down the steps for Hermione could not quite recall what happened next, or who rescued her or whether she had sprained her ankle. All she knew was that she was lying on something soft. Strange, she mused, I thought I was at court.

"*Heus, hues, furcifer, iamdudum irraucesco clamore nec tu tamen expergisceris?*" a voice murmured almost playfully.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Hermione, finally realising where she was and sat up. She was more than a little relieved to see Severus near her. "I was mentally reviewing the brew, then I fell asleep and dreamt... never mind what I dreamt." Her hand flew to cover her mouth, suddenly remembering what she had been doing prior to her fatigue induced slumber. She had been at the Canary Wharf flat of her Chambers' pupil. "The potion! Did it work?" She grasped his chin and inspected his neck. "No wound, that is good, I suppose. Was the dark *prima materia* neutralised and purged?"

"In the spittoon." He indicated with a jerk of his head. "Even I do not know whether it was a success. Only time can tell. Worse comes to worse, we have twenty bottles of the vile brew. I can always take it again. If it does not work, then it's back to the elixir of life and the other concoction."

His expression belied the depressing train of thoughts of his words and she did not like it. So, she brought the conversation back to that which wanted to know. "Your memories, are they..."

"They're all back, unfortunately," he replied quietly with a grimace. "There are some things I rather not remember, but they are all back."

Hermione curled up with her knees tucked close to her chest and looked him in the eyes. "What will you do now? Go back to being Severus Snape? Wizarding Britain would have to know, and given the bureaucratic machinery, I am uncertain whether they will buy into your story of turning back time for yourself to reduce the rate at which the dark *prima materia* in Nagini's venom would have killed you. Then there is the other can of worms of assuaging the fears of the wizarding community that Severus Snape, truculent and acerbic greasy bat extraordinaire of Hogwarts is back. Or you could keep everyone in the dark, Oblivate me or cast a memory altering charm on me, and go back to being the twenty-five year old Perseuss von Bastiae. Which is it to be?"

"Do you know what I think?" A muscle twitched at the corner of his mouth.

"Is that a rhetorical question or a question to which you alone know the answer, in which case, your only purpose would be to make yourself appear nice and fierce while making the other party, say a know-it-all KC, feel nice and small?" Hermione asked, observing him intently.

"As strange as it sounds," he began quietly. "I am content in this life, more content than I was as Severus Snape. I feel freer, with fewer chips on my shoulders."

Hermione nodded in understanding. "I see. Then go ahead and Oblivate me," she said, shutting her eyes tightly. When nothing happened, she opened one eye to find him looking at her with great amusement.

"There isn't any need to. Other than you, and my adoptive parents, no one knows I am Severus Snape," he explained. "You are a witch well known for your discretion, unlike someone I decline to name. I know you will not take out a full page coloured advertisement in the Daily Prophet announcing to all and sundry that I am who I am. I would rather live this life to the fullest. It is not everyday one is literally given a new lease at life. And with the bite of the *naja naja*, and the potion which stoppered death for me, I was able to lead another life completely unlike the one I was used to. No screaming volatile parents whose outbursts fell around my ears, no more fear of being attacked by my parents, rogue Death Eaters, Harry Potter fanatics, Dumbledore fanatics, or students who hated their strict potions master." He sighed and Hermione patted his hand as a form of encouragement, indicating that he should continue. "Well, I have already lived for misguided causes and blind devotion to a Chimera and a Sylphide as Severus Snape. Through the Dark Lord's order for my death, I had been granted a chance to relive my life. It is time I lived for myself and my dreams, and I shall do so as Perseuss von Bastiae."

"Excellent idea," said Hermione bracingly. "Dumbledore must have told you that in a dream."

"As a matter of fact, he did." Severus raised a brow in curiosity. "How did you know?"

"He once told me something similar in a dream. He even cited a James Bond film," recalled she, rolling her eyes. "Now, what time is it? You're blocking the clock."

"Half past four," he replied with a frown. "Why?"

"Damn it!" exclaimed Hermione, jumping up from the sofa and putting on her coat. "There's a vote at Chambers at five to determine whether we keep you or whether we shove you out when you complete your pupillage."

"When will I know the outcome?" he asked, looking up at her.

"I don't know. Come by my place, around eight, meet my children and maybe I'll tell you then," she said with tightly pursed lips and Disapparated with a pop.

FOOTNOTES:

Legal references are to British Law. American readers, please bear with me. My beta also made the suggestion that readers unaccustomed to the legal jargon herein pretend you are watching Rumpole of the Bailey or Sherlock Holmes.

'*Heus, hues, furcifer, iamdudum irraucesco clamore nec tu tamen expergisceris*' is Latin for 'Hey there, sleepyhead, I have been shouting myself hoarse for a while now and you still wouldn't wake up.'

Chambers refers to the rooms used by a barrister or group of barristers, especially in the Inns of Court. Barristers are not employed in a law firm but associate fraternally with each other, sharing out the burden of costs, in a set of chambers. They are each legally considered self-employed. Chambers are administered by law clerks, who receive cases from Solicitors, agreeing on behalf of their barristers, on fees and suchlike. Barristers are then the given details of their cases by the Clerks. Since they are self-employed, Barristers may either base themselves in chambers, like most lawyers, or otherwise

Ankh was the Egyptian hieroglyphic character that originally stood for the Egyptian word for 'mirror' or 'image', but gradually became used to represent the word 'life'. Egyptian Deities are often portrayed carrying it by its loop, or bearing one in each hand, arms crossed over their chest. It is also known as the Egyptian Cross or the key of

life. The ankh appears frequently in Egyptian tomb paintings and other art, often at the fingertips of a god/goddess in images that represent the deities of the afterlife conferring the gift of life on the dead person's mummy; this is thought to symbolize the act of conception. Additionally, an ankh was often carried by Egyptians as an amulet, either alone, or in connection with two other hieroglyphs that mean 'strength' and 'health'. Mirrors of beaten metal were also often made in the shape of an ankh, either for decorative reasons or to symbolize a perceived view into another world.

Jadeite, with its bright emerald-green, pink, lavender, orange, red, and brown colours was traditionally imported from Burma to China. Some Asians call the red and/or brown jade 'blood jade'.

Hsi Wang Mu, the Queen Mother of the West, was the highest female goddess in the pantheon of the Taoist religion. As the ultimate embodiment of *yin*, Hsi Wang Mu was originally a creator figure. Linked with the embodiment of *yang*, *Dong wang gong*, Hsi Wang Mu engendered heaven and earth and all beings. Most scholars assert that the earliest description of Hsi Wang Mu was recorded somewhere between the third and second centuries B.C.E. in the Mountains and Seas Sutra (*Shan hai jing*). In the *Shan hai jing*, the Queen Mother is portrayed as a humanoid with tiger's teeth and the tail of a leopard; three bluebirds gather her food and carry her messages. Taoists, however, believe that this is a description of an emissary of the Queen Mother, rather than the Queen Mother herself. In later descriptions, Hsi Wang Mu is referred to as a beautiful and stately imperial ruler. She became the Keeper of the **Peaches of Immortality** on Mount Kun-lun in her palace by the **Turquoise Pond**. Hsi Wang Mu served as a model for female Taoist priestesses and adepts, appearing to them in dreams and visions, and protecting them at each stage of their spiritual life. Many popular local shrines as well as several Taoist monastic temples were dedicated to the Queen Mother; the great Taoist temple of **Mount Tai** has a turquoise pond in front of it, which in 1980 still went by the name of the Queen Mother's Pond. Hsi Wang Mu's great popularity may have been regarded as a threat to the masculine, hierarchic authorities. Interestingly, Hsi Wang Mu was a very popular goddess, particularly in northeast China, where she was attributed with ending a great drought in 3 B.C.E. For purposes of this story, I have played around this timeline.

Prima Materia or **Materia Prima** is the primitive formless base of all matter, according to Aristotle and the Alchemists, given particular manifestation through the influence of forms. According to the latter, lead could be turned to gold by reducing it to prima materia and imposing the form of gold on it. In the broadest terms the concept of the prima materia states that all particular substances are formed out of one and the same original substance. Considered in this way it becomes apparent that, in one form or another, this is a universal concept, possibly of an archetypal nature. The most prevalent notion of the prima materia to be found in modern thought is the atomistic theory which we inherited from the ancient Greeks. In this conception all material structures are composed of tiny building blocks of indestructible 'substance'. This substance is considered to be pure matter, and in an entirely materialistic paradigm this equates naturally to the concept of the prima materia.

Pupillage, in the UK and most Commonwealth countries, is the barrister's equivalent of the 'training contract'. It is like an apprenticeship where students build on what they have learnt during the Bar Vocational Course by combining it with practical work experience in a set of barristers' chambers. A pupillage is the final stage of training to be a barrister and usually lasts one year, being made up of **two six-month periods (known as 'sixes')**. The first of these is the non-practising six during which pupils shadow their pupil-master and the second will be a practising six when pupils can undertake to supply legal services and exercise rights of audience. At the end of the first six months a pupil must get their pupil supervisor to sign a certificate confirming satisfactory completion and send it to the Bar Council. The pupil will then receive a Provisional Qualification Certificate. At the end of the second six months a pupil must get their pupil supervisor to sign a certificate confirming satisfactory completion and send it to the Bar Council Education and Training Department. The pupil will then receive a Full Qualification Certificate. Although pupillage is used to describe the training for all barristers, there is little in common between different sorts of pupillages. Pupillage is recognised as a difficult and demanding time. Pupils must attempt to impress as many members of their chambers as is possible. They will also have to impress their clerks by competing as many cases as possible and still impressing solicitors.

The phrase **'first six'** refers to the first six months of the pupillage whereby the pupil observes his/her supervisor at court, in conference and assisting with paperwork.

The phrase **'second six'** refers to the second stage of the pupillage, or the next six months. At this stage, each pupil is responsible for their own case load. This will range from first appearance in the magistrates court and crown court to full trials. Some pupils may undergo jury trials, but this is very rare. The work will be allocated by the clerks at the end of the working day (frequently at 6pm or later) and the pupil will then be expected to prepare the trial for the following morning.

Hearings in court

A barrister's appearance in court depends on whether the hearing is 'robed' or not. In England and Wales criminal cases in the Crown Court are almost invariably conducted wearing robes, but there is an increasing tendency in civil cases to dispense with them. The vast majority of County Court hearings are now conducted without robes, although they continue to be worn in High Court proceedings.

At a robed hearing, barristers wear a **horsehair wig**, an open black gown, dark suit and a shirt, with strips of white cotton called 'bands' or 'tabs' worn over a winged collar, instead of a tie. Female barristers wear either the same shirt, or a special collar which includes the bands and tucks inside a suit jacket. KC/QCs wear slightly different silk gowns over short embroidered black jackets and striped trousers. By contrast, solicitors wear a gown, wing collar and bands but no wig.

Hermione's **'my learned friend'** joke has its roots in this fact in court, barristers refer to each other as 'my learned friend'. Historically, this is a sign of mutual respect for the common heritage and position they occupy. It is also a reminder of the time when the Bar was small enough for all practitioners to know each other personally, which to some extent is still true; in an earlier generation, barristers would not shake hands or address each other formally, on the grounds that they were all 'brothers-at-law'. When appearing in court against a solicitor-advocate, even one exercising rights of audience in the higher courts, the barrister typically will refer to his opponent as 'my friend', that is to say without the 'learned' honorific.

A **Sylphide** is a beautiful nymph who mesmerises men who see her but who evades their love. Men who pursue the sylphide end up dying with a broken heart. The sylphide is often used to symbolise unrequited love, a love that is unattainable because of her illusory presence.

Nagini is a **naja naja** (scientific name) or spectacled cobra (common name).

Chapter 11: Nightmare left Behind

Chapter 11 of 11

Severus Snape survives Nagini's venomous bite (or does he?) and yet seemingly drops off the face of the earth. The story opens twenty-two years after the defeat of Voldemort and covers the quest of Hermione Granger as she struggles to uncover the truth behind her recurring nightmares of Snape's "death".

The first chapter opens with Hermione having a nightmare about Severus Snape's "death". Disquieted, she resolves to delve into the past so as to understand why she is haunted by the mental visions of his "death".

Author's Note: Story depicted may be unpalatable to sensitive readers for its portrayal of Hermione and Ron's relationship. Hermione may also not be likeable to readers. Some readers might consider the characters a little OOC. Some organisations and Ministry of Magic departments are made-up.

It would help readers following the story to view it as a 'cinematic' experience whereby there are shifts in perspectives, as well as shifts between flashbacks, the past, the present, dreams and reality within the space of one chapter.

Footnotes follow chapter.

Emphases are italicised and book/newspaper titles are underlined.

From the Blood of the Gorgon

Chapter 11 Nightmare left Behind

It was warm. Sunlight streamed in through the windows and fell upon the empty rows of seats. The light somehow seemed inclined to blind for it fell on the floor and bounced off so brightly on the white walls that it made her squint. Where was everybody? She hated the courts when they were empty. Everything seemed so white so clinical so silent.

There was something unnatural about the courts being silent. Silence always unnerved her because it would be accompanied the unpleasant sensation of ringing in one's ears. There was something disconcerting about silence. She never understood why or how most human beings thought of silence as a period of complete quiet? How did human beings arrive at this gross misconception? Silence was not really a state of quiet. It was not even a state of rest. Why do human beings call it 'silence' when it is almost inevitably accompanied by a very disquieting ringing sound between the ears? This was silence to her.

Silence pure unbroken silence always made her uneasy. It made her think all the more; and when she was in thought, her mind always came up with all the worst possible scenarios. The irony of her discomfort with silence was that she liked being alone. While there was a lot to be said for being by herself and completing all the duties that were expected of, there would always be noise when she worked alone. When she worked, she would be able to hear the gentle scratching of her quill on paper, the clicking of her propelling pen, and the debates her brain's two halves would have with her. But the silence that accompanied perceived long periods of waiting for something to happen always put her out because with she would hear ringing sounds in her ears until she was unable to hear herself think any longer. But silence had its uses.

She found it particularly ironic that silence was sometimes the most effective means of proceeding in court. Perhaps the silence she presently faced in the empty court building was a reminder of that. She knew full well spending time waiting for someone not to answer one's question never failed to flabbergast the other party. Being silent was difficult very difficult. People always said so much that sometimes it takes more courage to shut up and say nothing than to open one's mouth and speak. *Video et taceo*, she reflected wryly, readjusting the tabbed and winged collar at her throat which denoted her status as a barrister to all and sundry. Silence was a principle often neglected by most barristers precisely because it was so difficult to shut up. The younger barristers often could not shut up because they were often deeply unprepared. The older, more experienced barristers often could not shut up because they often over-prepared. It was breathtaking the whole mad inner workings of the minds of barristers. The under-prepared ones always said too much because they wanted to cover up how much they did not know; the over-prepared ones always said too much because they wanted to cover up how much they did know.

As if specially designed to sooth her ruffled feathers, the sounds of shuffling footsteps assailed her ears and a tall, thin wizard with a long and broken nose, settled into the seat next to her. Other than smoothening his sweeping robes of Prussian blue, adorned twinkling stars, and gently stroking his long silver hair and beard, the newcomer remained silent and looked straight ahead at the white wall instead of her. He remained thus for a good long while until she could bear it no longer and reverted to her usual form as an inquisitive barrister. "What's the question? You haven't even asked a question and you are sitting here beside me."

She turned to the venerable old wizard as he laced his long fingers together. His only response was to stare at her, his blue eyes sparkling a little in silent invitation for her to go on. "The question is," she went on, looking away and removing the horsehair wig from her head. "Why am I so worried? Who am I worried for? And what is the answer? Hmm?"

Once again, her neck craned her head in the old wizard's direction, and she pursed her lips tightly. Once again, he said nothing and continued to stare blankly at her. "Well, Professor Dumbledore?" As he trained his gaze on her, she turned to her hands and fiddled with her wig. "Ha! By Merlin, listen to me filling in the silence."

"With?" His lips finally parted with a sound.

Startled, she jerked her head to look at him. "With?" she parroted.

"With what, Hermione?" he asked, leaning forward conspiratorially.

"Words, words, words," she said, twisting her lips into an ugly smirk. "This is like Waiting for Godot. Anything to hold the terrible silence at bay. Yet silence pours in -- like water into a sinking ship."

"The good news is that words don't mean very much, and that we can very easily ignore them. I thought you already know with your fancy silk robes and horsehair on head. It is all about looking at the evidence and deciding whether we can be sure of what they tell us. Words are like belief, trust, conviction they can be mistaken, and as I have discovered in my long life, they can be wrong. Go with the first thing your mind tells you. That often helps," pronounced Dumbledore sagely.

"Even if my mind tells me my children are all right away at school where I cannot see them?" she questioned with a sigh. "Even if my mind tells me Ron's family does not mind the fact that I divorced him when he persists in sulking about his family members telling them how I have wronged him?"

"Your children are safe and well; you know that from their letters," he said gently. "Freedom from Ron's possessiveness and tantrums is something that keeps your children safe as well."

"And Severus?" Her voice barely above a whisper. "Even if my mind tells me he is doing well and that the curse is likely lifted, I cannot help but worry about him. He is an old soul trapped in a young body, what if..."

"Not worried that he'll give himself away, are you?" Dumbledore's eyes twinkled. "He really wants to have this life, let him lead it. Live and let die, the saying goes."

"That's 'live and let live', Professor," she corrected him with an arch smile. "Live and Let Die is the name of a James Bond film a Roger Moore one."

"Oh yes the one with the voodoo subplot." Dumbledore nodded agreeably. "Let Severus live as he was supposed to have. He seems happy this way."

"Not quite today," Hermione noted, a frown lighting her brow. "He was much shaken. His first loss since joining Chambers; his metaphorical ulcer has been perforated so to speak. He was quaking and paling all at once."

"Did you allow him to vent?"

"Of course I did!" She waved a hand dismissively at his offer of some kind of hard sweet. "You know how he's like when he is agitated and tries to appear cool and collected? He was like that today. I worry about him. I worry about that side of him. It's a chip on his shoulder. I fear that if I chip away the chip, he'd fall apart."

Dumbledore replaced his spectacles on a higher position on his nose. "He sometimes gives the impression of anger when all he really feels is hurt. He will learn and he will manage. He has already found himself, that is half the battle won already. Don't worry so much. He isn't angry with you for beating the pants out of him, he knows you frighten the pants off nearly everyone who has been at the receiving end of your tongue in your profession. He's hurt because he thinks you did not notice that he did not react aggressively towards you and your client what is the phrase you like to use cutthroat; he did not go cutthroat."

"I will make it a point to pat him on the head then. For heaven's sake, he's not a boy," Hermione cried out.

"Ah, but he is a boy this time around. He has relived twenty-six years of his life. In this life, he isn't the same boy that he was twenty-six years ago and Tom Riddle's supporter. He's still a boy as far as I am concerned."

"What am I to do with him? He's a maelstrom that came spiralling into my life, upsetting me with nightmares of his death, upsetting me with visions of him turning back time and reliving most of his life, upsetting me with the things he knew about me the allergies and whatnot. What am I to do with him?" She continued fiddling with her wig, tugging at its ends.

"Look at you," chuckled Dumbledore. "Worrying over him as if he were a boy. There's no need to. So he lost today, but he knows you didn't do it on purpose. He knows whatever it is that you do in court is for the best interest for your client. Think of it this way he is an invaluable addition to your Chambers. You have flair and he has gravitas. It will be a good partnership for Chambers. You are the best; he will learn from the best. Simple as that."

"I hate your guts," Hermione said at last, resentment crossing her face as she looked at Dumbledore. "You have always known about Severus's efforts in creating a counter-potion to the dark magic in Nagini's venom. You knew I do not think like Ron and Harry. You knew I would not dismiss the nightmares of Severus's death. You knew it would get to me. You knew I would not let it rest until I resolved the mystery. You wanted me to know about Severus; you knew it would get to me. There has to be a purpose or a design; there always is with you. What do you want me to do with him now? You knew I would not look at him in the same eyes as Harry or Ron if they knew he had returned. You knew I would not regard him with reproachful eyes. You arranged it, didn't you? Well, mastermind, what now? What do you want me to do with him now?"

Dumbledore rose, took her hand and bowed low over it. It was a courtly gesture a gesture of finality a gesture of farewell. "My guts, as you called them, hung me out high and dry -- killed me you could say. Keep an eye on him for me. Continue to treat him as he deserves to be treated, as a human being, not Severus Snape, not as a former Death Eater. I must go now, my duty is done."

Before she could answer, the sounds of human chattering assailed her ears. The doors burst open and a crush of people entered the corridors, poured into the seats and loitered around the corridor. Strangely enough, it seemed that no one had noticed her. Was she a nonentity in the place where she felt most comfortable and most at ease? She did not know. There were too many incongruous facts, and she had come to point where she would like to sit and observe for a spell instead of jostling with the crowd and making herself heard about the murmur. She did not know why no one looked up at her even though she could hear the heels of court shoes softly clicking on the parquet flooring. As she found her presence steadily disregarded, she settled for stepping out of the Inner London Crown Court for Wizards and into the sunlight.

Whatever her plans prior to her purposeful exit from the court building, Hermione found herself no longer in the Newington area under the glare and the heat from the sun. When her eyes flickered open briefly, she saw that it was almost dark and the sky was an array of warm colours rich yellows, bold reds and smooth oranges. "How odd," she mused, closing her eyes briefly, "The sky had never looked so peaceful and inviting before." She struggled to raise herself to a sitting position, but found herself much too comfortable to want to move. Even stranger, was the fact that her head was slightly raised on something soft.

"Hush," a silky voice murmured, as light fingers swept the hair back from her forehead. "Do not exert yourself. You fell asleep, rest a bit. We have had a long day."

"And you? You paled when the jury failed to look at the client," she said tiredly.

He snorted as though their verdict disgusted him. "I always hate it when they fuck over the client. You are right, you know, the jury never looks the chap who they want to fuck over in the eyes. I don't approve of such cowardice you know how I am."

"I know *what* you are. I know *who* you are. Still, I'm proud of you. It was brave, clever and right. You didn't go cutthroat, or incite a spectacularly noisy loss," she quietly pointed out.

"The things I learnt from my beautiful and supremely wise pupil-mistress, and the things I get from going against my beautiful and supremely wise former pupil-mistress, Hermione Granger, KC," came his laughing reply.

"If that's going to be your reaction, remind me never to lead you in a good murder case. Joke aside, you were whiter than white linen soaked in washing blue. Are you really all right? Or are you shortly going to tell me the curse has reasserted itself?" she enquired, covering a yawn with her hand.

"It has nearly been a year and still no sign of *thenaja naja's* bite mark reappearing, and there hasn't been a need to consume either elixir. It appears that the potion of Hsi Wang Mu is effective," the man with the silky purr answered thoughtfully while tracing lips with an index finger.

"I worry, you know," she said simply. Unable to bear it any longer, she finally opened her eyes and succumbed to the desire to reach out to touch his cheek. As if sensing her attack, the gentleman lightly seized her hand as it was about to prod a part of his visage and held it reverently. Thwarted in her plan, the lady willed herself to get up and regain her previous leverage with her companion, but found herself unable to manoeuvre herself effectively from her current position. Until that moment, she had no idea that the state of lying with her head on a fellow's lap while simultaneously possessing the good fortune to have her dominant hand seized by the owner of the lap was as good as being pinned down. However, she did not mind. There was a comforting aura radiating from him as they remained in silent thought.

"You are in no condition to worry about me, not when I have prevented you from rising and assuming a more dignified position," he cautioned placidly, his calm voice and his eyes glittering.

"That is easily remedied," she answered, struggling out of his grip and prop herself up into a sitting position. As soon as she had done so, she knew that he had allowed her to wiggle free. It was a sign, she felt, for her to cease all talk of the curse of the spectacled cobra's dark *prima materia*. She rolled her eyes at his diversionary tactics it would take more than that to discourage her. "I did not ask you out of idle inclination. We never did establish whether the ancient Chinese counter-potion would work. I only have your word that you have not suffered any relapse."

"Believe me, if there were a relapse, my adoptive mother would have smuggled me back to Bavaria, and challenged you to a duel to the death for further poisoning me. Not even the grateful independent wizarding state of Tajikistan would be able to save you from her," he chuckled in spite of his fatigue. He paused and the corner of his eyes crinkled lightly at a thought that crossed his mind. Whatever it was, it gave rise to a thin smile playing at the ends of his lips "Perhaps I should tell her. It would be an interesting sight to bear witness to."

"You're incorrigible" she protested, liberally showering his arm with smacks.

"I know. It is one of my qualities." His lips curled into a lopsided smirk.

"I noticed you deliberately omitted to say whether it was one of your better or worse traits," her voice rang out teasingly. After a slight pause, she continued with a certain resignation in her voice as she shaded her eyes from the setting sun. "There is nothing to worry about, is there?"

"For me? No. I am already fortunate to be part of Chiswell Square Chambers, and living a quiet life," he said quietly whilst staring out at the green from their perch on the wrought-iron bench. "Unless you are worried for yourself? Well... Your divorce was finalised three months ago, and your children are coping well. It is time, perhaps to live a little for yourself. You lived for your friends and their cause in your youth; you lived for your dreams when you married, and when you made law your profession; you even lived for your children by initially turning a blind eye to your ex-husband's infidelity. You have yet to live for yourself."

"Spare me the lecture," she murmured as the sounds of running footsteps came upon them from behind.

"Miss Granger, Miss Granger!" the deceptively bubbly voice of her senior clerk, rang out across the green. She turned around to see the doors of Chambers still open. The solicitor from Strauss and Leibniz, Charles Warrington stood half in the shadows with one hand at the open door, talking to one of the junior clerks. No doubt, Summerby had run dashed out to her immediately upon receiving the brief from Warrington. That was highly possible given that he had a clear and mainly unobstructed view of the green from his desk. No doubt, Warrington or perhaps one of his equally shady clients had specifically asked for her again. "A ripe, jolly-good attempted murder, Malfoy versus Goyle, the royal families of British wizarding crime. We've got the Malfoys, as usual; Graftonleigh, the Goyles," he declared stoutly, handing her the file. Upon which

task, he executed a polite nod at his Head of Chambers' companion.

"Same old, same old," remarked her companion. "Nothing ever changes there. Anything for me, Melvin?"

"Mr Warrington brought a copyright plagiarism case for you. It's in your pigeonhole. New wizarding invention called the 'Illusory You', allegedly stolen from the Skiving Dummy spell of Messrs George and Frederick Weasley. Where Messrs Weasley and Weasley's spell enabled the magic user to seem as if they are in a place when they are not, the 'Illusory You' allows the user to be where they are not expected. One targeted at skiving employees, the other at bosses who want to be in two places at once to crack down on skiving employees," said Summerby as Hermione tried to catch the brief that he was waving around as part of his oracular process. "Mr George Weasley had specifically requested someone from our Chambers."

Hermione took hold of the brief, and looked levelly at her senior clerk before the other barrister could answer. "Who am I leading?" she asked with a warning smile at the rotund little man.

"You pick, Miss," Melvin Summerby answered.

"Oh Perseuss," she began in a sweet singsong voice, holding out the file to him.

"Yes?" He extended his hand to receive the file, but was unable to remove it from her grip. They exchanged an intelligibly speaking glance, and as they understood each other, uneven smirks lighted on both their lips

Still tightly grasping it, she continued, "I need a junior. Forget the 'who is leading whom' nonsense. Equal partnership?"

"Equal partnership," he replied, acknowledging her gracious offer by walking her back to Chambers arm-in-arm.

~ **FINIS** ~

FOOTNOTES:

During the unpleasant fracas (or 'wankage' as some have called it) over this modest piece of writing, it came to my attention that some readers felt the title was stupid and had no relation whatsoever to the plot. Permit me now to explain that I settled on *From the Blood of the Gorgon* for a very simple reason. The Gorgon in the title refers to Nagini. I know she is not a 'real' Gorgon. However, I believe her role in the books position her as a kind of symbolic Gorgon. In the traditional myth, the Pegasus sprang from her blood. The implication is clear something as corrupted (in the literary sense of the word) as the Gorgon could potentially give birth to new life. Severus was bitten by Nagini and left for dead. This, ironically, set in motion the whole set of events leading to him reliving 26 years of his life as Perseuss von Bastiae. In effect, Perseuss did spring 'from the blood of the Gorgon'. I would have thought that a name like 'Perseuss' and with a title like *From the Blood of the Gorgon*, it would be very clear to the readers. However, it appears that it was not the case.

Legal references are to British Law. American readers, please bear with me. My beta also made the suggestion that readers unaccustomed to the legal jargon herein pretend you are watching "Rumpole of the Bailey" or "Sherlock Holmes".

* Please bear in mind that barristers from the same set of chambers may indeed appear on opposite sides in the same case. Please also note that Chambers does not equal law firm. In a firm, only the partners manage it and everyone works for the benefit of the firm. In Chambers, everyone pitches in to help with the rent, but each barrister essentially acts for himself/herself. This essentially means that two barristers from the same Chambers may appear on opposite sides of a case.

Chambers for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

Head of Chambers for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

'Employed' barrister for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

Barrister for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

Solicitor for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

'Brief' or 'Briefs' for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 3.

Propelling pen for definition and explanation, c/f footnotes in Chapter 1.

"Words, words, words" is Hamlet's reply to Polonius when the latter asked the Prince what he was reading.

When Hermione mentions **"Waiting for Godot"**, she is quoting from and referring to the play written by Samuel Beckett.

In the UK, in organisations and educational institutes, people often communicate using **pigeonholes**. Documents and messages are placed in a person's pigeonhole for them to collect; they can reply by putting a response inside the sender's pigeonhole.

Washing Blue is a household product used to improve the appearance of white fabrics. Used during laundering, it adds a trace of blue dye to the fabric. White fabrics acquire a slight colour cast after use (usually grey or yellow), because they can never be cleaned perfectly. Adding a trace of blue colour to the slightly off-white colour of these fabrics makes them appear whiter. I use washing blue instead of bleach because it is cheaper where I am presently.

Video et taceo is one of the mottos of Elizabeth I of England. It means 'I see and I remain silent'.

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#### Acknowledgements

I wrote this story at the back of interview notes and in between margins of newspapers in between field research in rather trying conditions without access to the Deathly Hallows book. Thus, any errors in situations or errors in dead Weasleys (i.e. whether it is Fred or George) I acknowledge as mine and humbly beg your forgiveness.

My thanks are extended to my beta who was both kind enough to make the best of a convoluted tale, and sensitive enough to ask me for clarification on the various points of the story. Beyond offering the service of her concise eye for details and many suggestions, she also made sure that my health did not suffer.

Sincere gratitude also to my prelim reader, Mr L., who is not in the Harry Potter fandom, for taking time out of his busy real life schedule to go over the handwritten drafts of the story and debate the various philosophical implications of the plot developments.

Finally, my thanks to the readers who have followed the story as well as its twists and turns for 11 chapters. I know that the shifting perspectives of dreaming and reality sometimes appeared confusing, and the depictions of Hermione may not be always palatable. I had deliberately blurred the lines between dreams and reality because dreaming vs. reality is one of the themes of the story. Any inconvenience to the reader is deeply regretted. I know that my writing style is rather heavy at times and not for everyone. That, however, does not change the fact that I appreciate the kind words and encouragement of the regular readers and reviewers alike.