

# Of Ghosts and Men

*by Shadow*

Severus Snape is dead. But why can't his spirit move on, and WHY can't anyone see him?

## Chapter 1

*Chapter 1 of 4*

Severus Snape is dead. But why can't his spirit move on, and WHY can't anyone see him?

Disclaimer: No money is being made from this story. Thanks to JKR for letting me play with her toys. They will be replaced in more or less the same condition.

A/N: Huge thanks to my betas, who will remain nameless until the reveal. You beautiful babes are wonderful!

~o0o~

\*\* "Look ... at... me ..." he whispered.

The green eyes found the black, but after a second something in the depths of the dark pair seemed to vanish, leaving them fixed, blank and empty. The hand holding Harry thudded to the floor, and Snape moved no more.

... Hermione glanced at Snape's body, then hurried back to the tunnel entrance. Ron followed her. Harry gathered up the Invisibility Cloak, then looked down at Snape. He did not know what to feel, except shock at the way Snape had been killed, and the reason for which it had been done... \*\*

~o0o~

Arms folded across his chest and a fierce scowl marring his features, Severus Snape leant against the wall of the Shrieking Shack, glaring down at the floor. Various footprints had disturbed the dust that had collected over the decades. At his feet was a large pool of congealing blood, and in the middle ... his dead body.

If Severus could sigh right now, he would. It was bad enough he had failed to warn Potter (he could only hope the memories he had given him would help the thick-headed dolt put it all together), but now he couldn't even die properly! Could this day get any worse?

Why hadn't he "moved on," gone to "a better place," passed on to "the next level of existence"? This was so frustrating.

"What the bloody hell do I do now?" He yelled at his still bleeding body. His vacant eyes gazed back at him. No answers there.

Severus growled in frustration, pacing back and forth along the cold, miserable room. Vaguely, he noticed how his feet made no impression in the dirt. He was nothing but a presence, a manifestation, a ... ghost.

Severus' head snapped up. The Bloody Baron! He had been dead a long time. He may be able to help Severus to figure out what was going on.

With one last disgusted look at his broken body, Severus left the Shack and headed up to the castle.

~o0o~

A huge, decapitated body lay at the foot of the steps leading up to the front doors. As Severus neared it, he realised with a shock that it was Nagini. He had done it. Somehow Potter had managed to make the Dark Lord lower his defences around that infernal beast long enough for him to kill it. *Will wonders never cease?*

Inside, the Entrance Hall was chaos; rubble, shards of glass and precious stones lay everywhere. Here there were more blood stains. Severus knew without a doubt that this was human blood.

The doors to the Great Hall were flung open, one of them hanging drunkenly by one hinge. Contradictory sounds of both laughter and sobbing came from within. Severus was unable to resist. He had to know if... how it had ended.

The Great Hall was filled with people. McGonagall was near the raised dais where the teachers ate, comforting a large group of red-headed people... Weasleys. Severus felt something cold clutch at his chest. Surely not one of them...

Severus tore his gaze from the group and forced his eyes to survey the crowd once again. His gaze again came to an abrupt halt as it found two still figures on the floor, Tonks and Lupin. He had never really forgiven the man for his part of that *group*, but he never really wished him ill. Not to mention Nymphadora. Yes, it was always easy to get a rise out of her, but he had always secretly been quite fond of her bumbling and clumsy, yet effective ways. He had heard they had a child now...

Shaking his head, Severus' gaze landed on a silent group. All three Malfoys were sitting at the end of the Slytherin table, none of them looking at each other or anyone around them. If the Malfoys were here, then surely –

Severus looked more closely at the mass of people. Many of them were yelling, drinking and laughing. From the back of the room came the drunken toast, "To Harry Potter! The boy who lives again!"

Relief flooded Severus. It had not been for nothing. Somehow the boy *had* figured it out and lived to kill the Dark Lord once and for all!

Severus' relief was short lived as a strange sensation flooded his body. Someone had just walked *through* him. For a brief moment, Severus had forgotten about his death. Looking about again, he noticed many people looking in his direction, but not one person looking at him. If he was a ghost, surely he would be visible?

Quickly, Severus turned and headed for the dungeons. That was where the baron was bound to be.

Half an hour later, Severus had still not found the elusive ghost. It was also very frustrating not being able to open doors. Just when he was ready to give up and try to find one of the other ghosts (Heaven help him if he had to ask a Gryffindor) a flash of silver caught the corner of his eye.

"Baron," Severus called commandingly, confident the Baron would answer his summons. He had never ignored him before. When the spectre did not answer him, Severus strode around the corner, watching the ghost float slowly away from him.

"Baron!" Severus barked, quickening his pace until he was standing in front of the ghost.

"Baron, I need your assistance." The Baron floated on, as if completely unaware of his presence. "Baron, for the love of Merlin, at least pretend you still have some respect for me!"

As the Bloody Baron floated past him, completely unaware of the former Head of House standing two feet away from him, something cold and hard landed in the pit of Severus' stomach.

He was dead, but not a ghost. He was a phantom, but not visible, even to other ghosts. No one could help him, because no one could see him.

"What the bloody hell do I do now?"

Suddenly, with an inaudible pop, Severus Snape disappeared.

~o0o~

While every other soul was up in the castle, celebrating, commiserating, comforting and grieving, one other snuck into the crude and shabby hut that had seen the passing of one of the Wizarding Worlds greatest, but unsung heroes. Slowly, the figure made its way further into the building.

Quickly, quietly, it found its target. Then, as silently as it had arrived, the figure disappeared, taking the body of Severus Snape with it.

~o0o~

A/N: I have used Prompt no 6: The kids leave after Snape dies. He sits up and realizes he is a ghost.

\*\* Direct quote from *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Chapter Thirty Two, The Elder Wand*, pg 528, UK edition and *Chapter Thirty Three, The Prince's Tale*, pg 530

(No infringement intended)

## Chapter 2

*Chapter 2 of 4*

Severus Snape is dead. But why can't his spirit move on, and WHY can't anyone see him?

Disclaimer: See Chapter 1

Special thanks to my betas. Ladies, you are wonderful!

~o0o~

Late autumn breezes raced through the graveyard. Orange and red leaves floated on the skittish gusts, seeming to chase each other. They came to an abrupt halt at the feet of a darkly clad man, as if his very presence had taken the joy out of the late afternoon frolicking.

Severus Snape glared down at the two grave markers before him. One he tried his best to ignore, as it contained the remains of his worst childhood enemy, the usurper of his happiness. He concentrated instead on the grave he had truly come to visit. Lily: his one and only love.

Severus' knees buckled as a sob escaped him. Kneeling before the grave, he let out a howl of pain and frustration.

"I am so sorry, Lily, so sorry. I tried, really tried to save you, even if it meant saving Potter too. He wouldn't listen. He had to kill the boy. And you had to be brave and protect him."

Severus reached out, running his fingers over her beloved name again and again.

"But I kept my promise; I kept your boy safe for you. How I despised him for looking so much like his father. But I did it for you. Even with all of Dumbledore's schemes, he did it. He defeated the Dark Lord. But you know that, don't you?"

Severus' hands clenched into fists as a wave of pain washed through him. "Merlin, I miss you so much! I cannot even move on to the next life to be with you. Why am I not moving on, Lily? Why can't I see you?"

Severus broke off at the constriction in his chest and allowed himself to collapse on the grave he could never bring himself to visit before.

~o0o~

Harry walked slowly through the village. He could not suppress a shudder when he thought of the last time he had been there, nearly a year ago. Images of a snake and human skin falling to the floor like dirty robes played through his mind. Harry shook his head, firmly pushing those memories as far into the back of his mind as he could.

It was different this time. Late afternoon sunlight shone through the trees that were beginning to lose their autumn splendor. Children raced from cottage to cottage, dressed in all sorts of costumes. A little girl ran past him, dressed in a Muggle version of a witch: pointy hat, grey wig, long warty nose and gnarled fingers. Harry suppressed a laugh when he thought about what Hermione would say.

Turning his thoughts to the more pressing matter, Harry continued to trudge along the lane through the village. No one paid him much attention, as the parents were much too busy trying to control their little trick-or-treaters.

October 31st Halloween the seventeenth anniversary of his parent's death. As he neared the graveyard, Harry began to wish he had taken up Ron and Hermione's offer to come with him. But this was something he knew he had to deal with himself. This trip to Godric's Hollow was not fraught with danger. It was time for him to lay his past to rest.

Harry hesitated before opening the gate to the cemetery. With a physical effort, he repressed the memories threatening to overcome him and ducked through the rusty old gate. A few steps in, Harry moved behind a large tree, made sure no one could see him and took out his wand. As quietly as he could, he conjured up one single black lily.

Harry moved from behind the tree, making towards the graves he had come to see. His mind was so busy thinking of what he would say to his parents, that, at first, he failed to notice the figure huddled in his way.

Harry's befuddled brain seemed to register two things almost simultaneously: The black-clad figure seemed to be kneeling right before his mother's grave, and the figure bore a remarkable resemblance to the late Professor Snape.

Harry quickened his pace as his heart began to race. The Snape look-alike did not seem to take any notice of his approach. It was too impossible, but stranger things had happened...

"Professor Snape?" Harry began tentatively.

Snape's head jerked up so quickly, that if he had any muscles in his neck, he could have done himself some real damage.

"Potter?! You can see me?" Snape was incredulous.

"Of course I can, sir." Harry looked at Snape as if he were approaching a wild and crazy beast. "If I may ask, where have you been? Everyone thinks you are dead."

"That may just be because I am dead, Potter. You seem to be the only one who has been able to see me in five months. Merlin knows I tried everyone else..."

Snape broke off, pacing up and down the grass, muttering to himself. Every now and then Harry caught a snatch of a phrase...

"...Of course, the Baron was no help..."

"... Bloody house-elf..."

"Uh, sir?"

"... And don't even get me started on Minerva..."

"... My luck, Harry bloody Potter!"

"Professor?"

"... Help from a Gryffindor..."

"PROFESSOR SNAPE!"

"What?" Snape rounded on the hapless Harry. "Can you not see that I was concentrating on a train of thought, boy? What is so important that you had to interrupt me?"

"Professor Snape, I don't understand what's going on. We saw you... I saw you die in the Shrieking Shack. But here you are, at my mother's grave, seeming alive and well! How did you survive?"

Snape gave Harry a look of pure condescension.

"I did not survive, Potter. I did die that night on the filthy floor of the Shrieking Shack. Only, for some perverse reason that only Merlin knows, my blasted spirit will not move on, and I am stuck here with no where to go."

"Professor Snape," Harry's voice took on a confident tone. "Now that I have found you, you can help me gather evidence in your favour." Harry's face took on a smug look as he found what he thought to be the solution to everyone's problems.

Snape stood gaping at the Boy Who Refused to Bloody Well Die and Leave Him Alone.

"And what trial are you babbling on about?"

"Your 'posthumous' trial is set to begin in a few weeks time. I am your advocate and am most determined to prove you were working for the Order and Dumbledore the entire time. Of course, now that I have found you, I can take a few more memories and other evidence you can provide me with to clear your name!" Harry was now positively beaming at the thought.

Snape continued to stare, flabbergasted, at the idiot. When he was finally able to close his gaping mouth (visions of Neville Longbottom in Potions class came to mind), he gathered his scattered wits and directed his most ferocious glare towards the unlucky young man.

"And how, pray tell, are you planning on gathering memories and evidence from a ghost that none but your esteemed self has been able to see? Will you put me as a witness and act as a translator too?"

It seemed it was Harry's turn to gape like a trout out of water. He blinked once, slowly, as if to clear his brain.

"I don't understand," Harry began, ignoring Snape's muttered comments about how obvious that was. "Professor, I am standing here, talking to you, looking at you, but you keep claiming to be dead!"

"Oh, for the love of Merlin's holey socks, Potter! Fine! To prove this to you once and for all, follow me."

Snape set off through the graveyard, not giving Harry a choice of whether to follow him or not. Harry looked down at the flower clenched in his hand. Kneeling down, he gently laid it across his mother's grave.

"Sorry this is such a short visit, Mum. But something quite important has come up. I promise I will visit again."

With that, Harry scrambled to his feet and followed Snape out the graveyard.

He found Snape waiting for him at the rusty old gate, his eyes fixed on an elderly lady across the road who seemed to be watching Harry intently.

"Observe, Potter. I am only doing this once."

Snape walked through the closed gate, strode up the woman and promptly began waving his hands in front of her face. The woman didn't even flinch, her curious gaze never leaving Harry.

Harry schooled his feature to a semblance of calm, ducked through the gate and crossed the street to where Severus now stood smirking at him.

"Um, excuse, me ma'am? Did you see the man I was with in the cemetery? Tall, dark hair, smug expression?"

"No, dearie. I saw you standing by the graves, talking to yourself, but I never saw anyone with you."

"Thank you." Harry shot a glare at Snape and stomped off up the road until he found a quiet, secluded ally. He was quite gratified when Snape followed him.

"This doesn't prove anything, you know. Muggles can't see ghosts, so even if..." Harry trailed off as he realized what he said.

"Ah," Snape retorted, smirking in earnest now. "But it does prove that I am dead. Really dead, not the faking-my-own-death-to-avoid-Azkaban kind of dead."

"But... but... You don't look dead. I mean like a ghost. All the ghosts I have seen have been transparent and float around! You look solid and normal-coloured, and you walk, not float!"

"I wish I knew, Potter. You are the first being, living or dead, magical or Muggle, human or creature to actually see me. I have no idea what is going on and why my spirit is not moving on! I have tried to research this, but I cannot access my books in this form."

As he finished this last sentence, Harry's face began to light up.

"Sir, there is one person I would like to have on my side when it comes to problems that need to be researched and solved, it's..."

"Hermione Granger," they both said together, Harry's face beaming, while Severus tried to sigh in resignation.

~oOo~

A picture of the flower Harry conjured for his mother can be found at these links:

[http://www.myweddingflowers.co.nz/p3\\_1.htm](http://www.myweddingflowers.co.nz/p3_1.htm)

[http://www.flowersbulbs.com/ibulb\\_black\\_calla\\_lily\\_hot\\_chocolate.php](http://www.flowersbulbs.com/ibulb_black_calla_lily_hot_chocolate.php)

## Chapter 3

*Chapter 3 of 4*

Severus Snape is dead. But why can't his spirit move on, and WHY can't anyone see him?

Special thanks to my fabulous betas! Ladies, you are terrific.

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Hermione Granger sat in the study of number twelve, Grimmauld Place. Or, more correctly, Hermione Granger was sprawled across the study of number twelve, Grimmauld Place. Books, crumpled balls of parchment, quills, jars of ink, fresh sheaves of parchment and a disgruntled orange cat were scattered across every surface of the room.

In the centre of the chaos, the young woman in question lay on her stomach on the threadbare carpet, brushing the end of a quill thoughtfully back and forth across her

chin as she studied the text in front of her. Every now and then, she would pause to scribble a note on a piece of parchment.

Ron Weasley paused in the doorway, looking around in bafflement. How Hermione could find order in such chaos always astounded him. She had always seemed so ordered and in control at Hogwarts, but it seemed he and Harry had only seen the final part of her studying habits, where most of her notes were already contained to a few, concise feet of parchment. Now it seemed that the more space there was available, the more space she took over to do whatever it was she did.

Ron smirked evilly when he spotted Crookshanks' grumpy face. The only time Ron had ever seen a different expression on the beast was after he had eaten the custard slice Ron had been saving. Then his expression had been one of smug satisfaction that he had won for the rest of the day. Ron did get the satisfaction of wiping that self-satisfied look off the half-kneazle's face by leaving a canary cream out "accidentally" that evening. Needless to say, Hermione had not found it half as hilarious to see her familiar shedding yellow feathers. The upside was that now the ugly creature wouldn't eat anything Ron had touched.

Clearing his throat, Ron stepped further into the room.

"Hermione, you've already passed your N.E.W.T.S with about a billion Outstandings and the three of us agreed to take a while off to relax before we have to get jobs or start further training. What can you possibly be studying now?!"

Hermione rolled over and stretched lazily, smiling at her friend. They had tried dating for a few weeks, but after the hundredth time of both of them giggling hysterically whenever they kissed, they both decided it was much better for them to remain best friends.

"I'm not actually studying. I saw something interesting in *The Prophet* today, and I suppose I just got carried away with looking it up. It's quite fascinating really. In 1576 the Wizengamot passed a motion-"

"-That affected someone and made some creature's life a misery and now you are finding out what happened and how it affects the creature now?" Ron interrupted her, smiling fondly at the blush that crept up her face.

"It's all very interesting, I'm sure. You'll have to tell me all about it some time."

Ron turned away as if to inspect a book on the couch. "Preferably when I am unconscious or in a coma," he muttered under his breath.

"Come on," he urged, turning back to her and reaching out a hand. "Kreacher has made a huge chicken pie for dinner and I am starving. I hope Harry gets back soon. Kreacher won't let me eat until he is."

Hermione accepted Ron's assistance. Her grin slid from her face as she contemplated their friend. Harry had refused all their offers to go with him to Godric's Hollow. She remembered too well what had happened there the last time they were there and did not want him to have to face those memories alone.

But Harry had insisted it was something he had to do alone and had Apparated away before they could argue further with him.

That had been a few hours ago, and it was time for him to be back already. Hermione knew she would never forgive herself if something happened to him. There were still a few Death Eaters out there that would love to harm Harry Potter. What better time or place to do it than when he was visiting his parent's graves?

Without her noticing, Ron had led the way down the stairs and into the kitchen. She had been too busy worrying to notice. Ron always told her that all her worrying and fretting would give her premature wrinkles. Hermione rubbed her fingers along her forehead before raising her gaze to meet the smirking one of her red-headed friend.

"You look just like Professor Snape when you do that," she retorted, stifling a snigger when he paled.

"I'm only kidding, Ron. It would take a lot more than a smirk for you to look like Professor Snape."

Ron still didn't reply, his pale face going slightly green, making his freckles seem to jump off his face. He opened his mouth as if to say something, closed it again, and then opened it again, leaving it to gape open unbecomingly.

"Honestly, Ron. If such a joke could leave you such a gibbering idiot, I won't do so again."

"I highly doubt your sense of humour could reduce Mr Weasley to a level I have already established he exists on," came a deep sneering voice from behind Hermione.

Hermione turned around slowly, hardly believing her own ears.

"I rather expect it is the presence of my self that has reduced your beau to a ... 'gibbering idiot,' was it?"

"Oh, Professor Snape," whispered Hermione as she sat heavily on the chair behind her. "Uh, um," she stuttered as her mind struggled to come to terms with the vision she was seeing. Finally, her brain remembered the correct thing to do when unexpected company arrived.

"Welcome to Grimmauld Place. Would you like some tea?"

## Chapter 4

*Chapter 4 of 4*

Severus makes some startling discoveries.

Thanks to my beta, Charmed Force. You're great!

~o0o~

Four weeks...

Four blasted weeks!

Severus stormed around the kitchen of number twelve, Grimmauld Place. Anger and frustration had robbed him of his usual grace; his patented stalking stride had been reduced to *stomping*. This, of course, did nothing to improve his mood and only made him stomp around more.

"How much longer must I live in this half life?" he fumed. "Neither dead nor alive; unable to move on, definitely unable to go back. And, best of all, the only people who can see me are Potter and his two sidekicks!"

Severus' thin lips twisted up in a smirk as he remembered the look on Weasley's face when he had first seen Snape, the dreaded (and dead) Potions master standing in the doorway. Miss Granger's polite offer of tea had been the last straw, and Severus had left Potter to do the explaining while he went to the library to see what information he could possibly find in this dismal old house.

The room was a mess. Books, parchment, bottles of ink and quills littered every possible surface. Severus had picked his way to where a pile of books were threatening to topple over onto a fat, orange cat. Severus had reached out to straighten the tower only to have his hand pass through the tomes.

Rage and frustration blazed through his chest. For a minute, he had forgotten this thrice cursed ~~condition~~ of his.

A soft gasp from the doorway caused Severus to jerk his hand away from the books and tuck it behind his back. Miss Granger stood just inside the room, a look of horror and something else on her expressive face.

"Oh, Professor," she cried moving further into the room towards him. "Harry told us, but I could hardly believe..."

Hermione stopped dead at the fierce look on his face.

"I am no longer your professor, Miss Granger, and I especially do not need your sympathy. Now, if you would be so kind as to leave me in peace, I would like to attempt to do some research."

Hermione stood still as her former teacher stalked across the room and came to a stop in front of the book shelves. At her continued silence, Severus turned to face her with an inquiring look.

"Oh, by all means, *sir*. I would not dare to intrude on your research. If you would pass me that large book on the top shelf in front of you, I will be on my way."

Hermione stood, watching him serenely as his face darkened.

"Insufferable girl! Tell me what you want from me and have done with it!"

"I don't want anything from you, *sir*. I just wanted to know how it would be possible for you to do any researching when you are unable to even open or move a book."

Hermione glanced at the dark scowl on Snape's face, took a deep breath and continued.

"I want to help you." Hermione hurried on before he could refuse her. "I am sitting in this house looking up odd facts I find in the newspaper. I hardly go out anywhere anymore because of what happens if anyone recognises me. *Sir*, I am bored out of my mind with nothing to do. Besides, what has happened to you is very intriguing, and I never could resist a good research project. Harry told me about your situation, about how it seems that only the three of us have been able to see you. I just want to help. Truly."

Hermione finished her rushed speech, wondering if she should bat her lashes a little like they always seemed to be doing in those romance novels her mother loved. Looking at his hard face, she decided it was better not to.

Snape looked down into the earnest face of the Gryffindor know-it-all. If he had the force of that formidable mind behind him, he was sure to find some solution to his little... problem. However, it would never do for him to agree too easily.

"While I appreciate your eagerness to help me, what makes you think I want or need your assistance? I am quite capable of doing my research unaided."

Hermione gave him a skeptical glare before retorting.

"*Sir*, if you were so capable of doing your own research, why are you still here in that ghost-like form?"

Merlin, if that girl did not stop stressing her "sirs", he was going to have to beat her severely. Or find a way to do it. Being a ghost could be extremely vexing at times.

"Fine, Miss Granger." Severus gave her one of his fiercest glares for good measure. "Your solution has some merit. I would rather have you assisting me than one of those two dunderheads downstairs."

~oOo~

Much to his surprise, Severus and Hermione had worked quite well together for the first week. Severus would peruse the shelves calling out to Hermione the titles he wished to look at. Hermione would collect the books, setting his place opposite her so that she could reach to turn his page or change books for him, while still being able to read her own books. At the end of the day, the two of them would discuss their findings while Hermione took notes.

If Severus had expected an immediate solution, he was soon disappointed. He did, however, come to appreciate the routine Hermione brought to his life. Her strict rules about how each part of the day was to be spent was something he could appreciate. He loved rules and schedules.

At the end of the day, when she had put back all the books, organised her notes and packed away her parchment and ink (at his insistence), she would gently persuade him to join her and her friends in the kitchen for dinner. Although he could not eat, he did appreciate her effort to include him.

Despite his intentions to be as aloof as possible, he often found himself chuckling at the antics of her two best friends. They reminded him of how he used to watch Potter and Black across the Great Hall, joking and playing tricks on each other. The difference was that this time he was included.

When Harry needed the library for his own research for Severus' case...Severus was quite surprised at how dedicated Harry seemed to be about winning this...he and Hermione would settle in the TV room Harry had set up, and discuss theories for hours. When they could remove Ron from the Muggle cartoons, that is.

It was during one of these discussion afternoons that Severus had discovered the most disturbing fact about his "death" so far.

Severus had had another night of stomping around the kitchens and lower floor and was in no mood to listen to another one of her drawn out theories. He was watching the birds flying across the cloudless sky, wondering why he never appreciated nature when he had the chance. *Oh, yes. It's because I prefer the peace and quiet of my own chambers instead of the incessant chatter of a female irritant!*

And so he sat, tuning out Miss Granger's voice, thinking about how much he missed all his books in his private chambers at Hogwarts.

"Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah," lectured Miss Granger.

Severus nodded his head, raising his eyebrows once or twice to feign his interest.

"Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah..."

Severus flicked his fingers and added a grunt this time. There, that sounded like he was listening.

"Blah, blah... and your body disappearing-"

"What?" Severus interrupted. She had his full attention now.

"Well, I assumed that your condition has something to do with the disappearance of your body-"

"My *WHAT?*" Severus bellowed. "My body has disappeared?"

"Well, yes. Didn't you know?"

"No. Of course I bloody well did not know. Right after the battle I somehow managed to Apparate myself to Spinner's End, as you know. I have spent most of my time there researching my condition; fruitlessly as it turns out. I did attend the mass funeral for the fallen heroes. Why is my grave there if I am still on trial for all my crimes, and if my body is missing, what is in that grave?"

"When Harry, Ron and I returned to the Shack, your body was gone. We can't explain it. It had disappeared. Kingsley and Professor McGonagall decided it was best that it was kept a secret, and there is only an empty coffin under your headstone. Harry fought very hard to have you buried there."

"But no one has yet discovered the whereabouts of my corpse?"

"No. We knew you had died in the Shack, so you could not have recovered and moved yourself. The only answer is that someone removed it shortly after we left, for their own..."

"Their own reasons." If Severus had blood, he was sure he would have gone paler than he normally had been when he had been alive. He could only hope that whoever had taken his body had no evil intentions towards him.

Severus had to clear his throat twice before he could ask his question.

"How do you reason that my... situation has something to do with my body's disappearance?"

Hermione's eyes clouded over in thought, oblivious to Snape's skeptical glare.

"Well, I think your soul can't rest until it knows that its body has been..."

Severus tuned her out again as his mind whirled with the possibilities. He was no closer to finding a solution. In fact, he thought they were even further away, and now he had to worry about who had taken his body and why.

~o0o~

Weeks later they were still going around in circles. Severus felt all the anger and frustration welling up inside him until he felt like he would burst. Partly out of habit and partly out of pure irritation, Severus swung his leg back and delivered a mighty kick to the old tin bucket next to the table, watching as it clanked and rolled its way across the floor. Severus continued his pacing before freezing mid stomp. Slowly, he turned around, a look of disbelief on his face. He had moved the bucket.

Spinning on his heel, Severus took the steps two at a time until he got to the first floor landing. Hearing voices from the library, Severus looked into the room to find Harry bent over a huge book; Ron was sprawled across the couch also reading. On closer inspection the book appeared to be *Who's Who of the Chudley Cannons 1655 to 1995*. Severus shook his head. Some things never changed.

Severus was looking around the rest of the room for their female counterpart when Potter called his friend over.

"Look at this!" Harry showed Ron the page he was poring over.

"Ron," he asked excitedly, "are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"I think so, Harry," Ron replied. "But what are we going ~~todo~~ with thirty crates of rotten tomatoes?"

"Be serious. I knew I should never have shown you those Muggle cartoons!"

Severus shook his head and continued up the stairs. Hermione must have taken some books to her room to continue her research in peace.

As was their custom, Severus walked through the door. Granted, he had never walked through ~~her~~ door, or this late at night, but it was not as if he could knock.

"Miss Granger, I think I may have stumbled upon something-"

He broke off as he focused on the young woman in question. Her hair was a tangled mess around her head, and her face was peaceful. Her soft, even breaths caused a curl to flutter across her cheek. She was sound asleep with her arms flung up above her head. Not even his deep voice had disturbed her.

As Severus turned to leave, something caught his eye. Gleaming palely in the streetlight that shone through her window was one pale breast, its nipple pebbled in the chilly night air.

Severus strode forward. Concentrating all his energy, he managed to tug the sheet up to her throat, then tucked the wayward curl behind her ear.

"Goodnight, Miss Granger," he whispered before turning away and striding out the room.

Severus headed down to the kitchens. He had lots to think about tonight.

As he passed the library, he heard the boys' voices.

"That's it for now, I think. I'm knackered. What do you want to do for the rest of the night, Ron?"

"The same thing we do every night, Harry. *Try to take over the world!*"

"Aaaaaaaaahhhhhhh!"

~o0o~

A/N: Sorry for the long time between updates. Real life has been really hectic lately. I promise I will try update more regularly.