

CHAPTER 44

THE ULTIMATE BETRAYAL

Hannah lay flat on her back against the coolness of a pebble-ridden, dirt-infested ground. The long skirt of her burgundy nightdress was bunched chaotically around her lower body, revealing her bare legs from mid thigh, along with the muck ridden black sandals that clung to her tiny feet. She struggled to sit upright, but her wrists and ankles were bound far too tightly to allow her to gain her balance properly. She gasped in pain as the harshly knotted cords imprisoning her scraped harshly against her skin at the wrists. Discouraged and defenseless, she returned her back to rest on the ground's cool surface to commence the examining of her surroundings, crooking her head in every direction to broaden the scope of her view.

All around her, she noted a grouping of life-sized stone figurines positioned atop the assortments of slate-grey engraved stones erecting from deep within the earth. There were various shapes and sizes of slate grey stained tombstones scattered about the grounds. Some of them were dramatically cracked and crumbling, while others remained intact, leaning slightly, having partially sunken into the crooked terrain by virtue of the decades of weathering they had endured. Broken blades of thin, feathery grasses embraced the broad patches of ashen dirt surrounding her. To her extreme right, she noticed a vast mound of scattered, aging, cracked, and broken wine bottles, many of them featuring peeling or missing labels.

Undeniably, the most prominent entity to grace these ominous grounds was that of a massive monument that had been purposefully arranged in the center of the rest. It was a life-sized figurine of a skeleton knight standing in a fierce battle stance, grasping a long sword in its right hand, and a broad decorated shield in its other hand. Bolted securely into each shoulder-bone of the statue, there hung two lengthy, tarnished silver chains capped with smooth, open-banded shackles. The figure stood proudly atop seven crooked and deteriorating stone steps, its empty eyes appearing to absorb every bit of her, inside and out.

A spine-chilling shudder encroached her as she peered off into the distance and rested her sights on the rotting, three-story ash-colored manor perched atop a steep, jagged hill. Many of its windows had been boarded up, and long strands of English ivy spread unchecked over its face. Hannah realized instantly where she was. This was Tom Riddle's dilapidated old estate, and she lay in the very center of its graveyard.

The four masked figures that had abducted her were moving into her view again, forming a loose-fitting circle around her. Standing a great distance away from them was Severus Snape, facing a rickety, moss-infested brick building situated on the far edge of the graveyard. Hannah tried desperately to call out to him with her mind, receiving no response. He had blocked her out completely.

She closed her eyes and concentrated deeply, softly uttering a series of intricate incantations, over and over again. Incredibly, the impenetrable Spell-Blocking Cord that had once bound her hands and feet, broke apart, and she was free. She took off at a loping sprint, leaving the Death Eaters looking to one another in amazement and swiftly resorting to the rampant firing of random spells in their attempts to impede her escape.

Artfully, Hannah managed to dodge every single spell the Death Eaters had cast her way by twisting her body into a complicated array of forward handsprings and areoles. She tried desperately to Apparate back to #12 Grimmauld, but to no avail. The grounds of the Riddle Estate had been too flawlessly enhanced to prevent such an effortless escape. So, she did the only thing there was left for her to do. She continued to run...for her life.

As she neared the edge of the hilltop by the front of the manor, she heard a familiar and powerful male voice thundering through the darkness.

“Petrificus Totalus!” howled the man. His loud vocal reverberation was chased swiftly by the prominent flash of a brilliant white light.

The jinx hit Hannah between her shoulder blades with such incredible force, she was blown several feet into the air and sent hurtling toward the ground, where she landed face down, stiff as a board. Seconds later, Severus Snape was standing over her immobile body, smiling severely, with an equally amused Draco affixed to his side.

“Well, well, Hannah Black, that was quite remarkable of you, using your elf magic in such a *shifty* fashion,” said Severus tauntingly.

Draco smirked.

Hannah remained petrified, locking her gaze firmly with Severus’s for several moments. There was a long and lingering stretch of haunting silence between them before Snape lifted her up and carted her back into the center of the graveyard, tossing her recklessly to the ground.

“See to it that she remains petrified until the Dark Lord arrives!” he barked haughtily to his heavily-veiled colleagues.

Hannah continued to absorb every portion of her surroundings, noting that several more Death Eaters had congregated in the circle surrounding her. She watched Snape as he briskly departed their company and strode several meters ahead of the others. He was heading off to greet a tall, wasted, masculine stature draped in a set of black flowing wizarding robes. She strained her vision in an attempt to catch a clear glimpse of the moving figure slowly bleeding into her view.

As the man drew near, Hannah gasped in horror at the image she collected: It was that of a skeleton thin, greenish-hued, and hairless man with serpent-like features. A pair of dark sunken cavities embraced his livid, scarlet eyes, and his nose was nothing more than two

mere slits carved into his flesh, laying flat against the surface of the center of his face. His rigid, blacked teeth sank beneath his thin, ashen lips, and his ears appeared as little more than small rounded holes entombed within tiny flaps of horribly shriveled skin. He was the most horrifying creature Hannah had ever set her eyes on; the very man who slaughtered her family and sought to destroy her all these long years, thereby symbolically raping her of the promising life she was born into. Now, he towered over her as hideous and malevolent as she could ever fear him to be — the dark wizard, Lord Voldemort.

She lay there, still petrified, lending her focus to his left hand, which clung tightly to a familiar book comprised of tatty gold-embossed pages and a black leather binding. She strained her eyes to see the initials R.A.B stretched across the bottom of the front cover. There was no mistaking it; this was her father's journal.

“Accendio!” called Voldemort with a spine-tingling approach.

Hannah's body rose into the air and floated over to the cement statue of the skeleton knight. She felt her back pressing roughly against the chilly face of the statue, while a pair of silver-banded shackles proceeded to wind themselves tightly around her wrists, binding her to it.

“RENERVATE!” Voldemort cried out.

Hannah was able to move again.

Voldemort slithered his mutilated figure eerily toward her, sneering as he raised the journal in the air.

“Well, well, well, Hannah *Black*. Such a pleasure it is to finally make the acquaintance of the ghost daughter of my greatest conspirator, Regulus Black. God rest his soul!” said Voldemort adding a villainous cackle to his speech.

Hannah narrowed her eyes in abhorrence of him.

“So, my dear friend, Severus, has graciously recovered some rather important information from you which *proves* that your father had been intentionally deceiving me for years. From what I've read in this journal, it appears as though he was attempting to discover my deepest and darkest secrets just before he deserted me. Such a terrible shame it is that he died in vain, as he was most unfortunately unable to see his dreams through to the end!” Voldemort raised his wand to the journal and cried out boldly, “Inferno!”

The journal burst into flames and the ashes feathered to Hannah's feet. Her eyes met and boldly penetrated Voldemort's eyes as he continued to taunt her while he paced shamelessly about the base of the statue where she was bound.

“I believe I knew your mother, Delaney. Ah, and your dear Aunt Grace and Uncle Andrew, too. How unfortunate that their filthy lives had to be cut so tragically short because of your father’s cowardly betrayal.”

Hannah glowered at Severus, who swiftly looked away from her.

Voldemort closed in on her, and reaching up to stroke her face with his pale, bony fingers, he proclaimed, “Although, I do believe I understand the temptation your father, Regulus, faced. Delaney was a spectacularly beautiful woman. You look very much like her, Hannah. It’s a pity that a creature so alluring had to be destroyed.” Then, turning to address Snape, he said, “Yes, indeed, Severus, I can see how her tantalizing flesh managed to sway you and muddled your sound judgment.”

He moved to face Hannah again, running his forefinger down the base of her throat and to the middle of her chest, causing the buttons on her gown to gently pop open, exposing the tops of her voluptuous black-lace-covered breasts.

“You are extraordinarily like your mother, Hannah. Hmm...Such a pity it is that you’re part Mud-blood, too, otherwise I might have thought twice and spared you.”

Hannah cringed as he touched her.

Voldemort’s voice approached her in a newly hushed and haunting tenor, “Oh, *OH!* My dear, dear, Hannah, is something wrong? From what I’ve gathered through Severus, you seem to rather enjoy the rough touch of a domineering man. Isn’t that right, Severus?” Voldemort cackled triumphantly as he passed his attentions between a broadly grinning Snape and clearly disgusted Hannah. He slithered up the rickety staircase of the statue, leaning into Hannah until his face was within a half-inch of hers.

“Oh, I know all about your sorted little affair with Severus. I know how Dumbledore ordered you and him to work together secretly in the task to prepare you to assist Potter in rising up against me. I’m well aware of how you so callously used Severus to aid your mission by pretending to love him and continuing to deceive him to try to get to me. No matter; in the end, Severus was keen to your true intentions. He managed to get what he wanted out of you as well. Yes, he had quite the blissful time with you over the years. He’s regaled to me some rather magnificent tales of your most intimate moments together. According to his word, your rather ‘*gifted*’ in the bedroom...and practically every place else” –Voldemort’s eyes glinted – “if you know what I mean!”

Hannah wretched her face in disgust and spat at him. Voldemort paused for an interim, patiently wiping his face clean with the sleeve of his robes, smiling maliciously as his words grew nastier still.

“Oh, Hannah, let it be known, that I am the *all knowing, all seeing, all powerful* Dark Lord! I know everything there is to know about you. I do believe you’re hiding another

dirty little secret, aren't you? You tried to hide it from Severus, too, but he knew straight away!"

Hannah shook her head no, defiantly.

Voldemort high pitched, shrieking laughter echoed through the night. He paced back and forth before her, staring her in the eyes and calling out in a horrible singsong voice, "I know a secret! I know a secret!"

Hannah grimaced.

"It seems you and I have something in common, Hannah. A certain desire to, oh, how shall I say this, '*stick it*' to a certain young man by the name of Harry Potter! Although, our definitions for that term are *quite different*, let me assure you. Ah, yes; it seems you've gone '*above and beyond*' in the bedroom — far beyond the orders you were given. You've even managed to sneak in a few sordid romps in the broom cupboards at Hogwarts, if I'm not mistaken. I do believe you realize what I'm talking about, don't you?"

Hannah shook her head *no*, in defiance.

"*DON'T — LIE!*" shouted Voldemort. With a wild flourishing motion, he plied his wand in the air, causing Hannah's head to slam hard against the neck of the statue."

"AH!" she cried out in agony.

"Now," hissed Voldemort softly. "Why don't you tell us all just how well you know Harry Potter? We're all *dying* to know. Moreover, I do believe you owe it to Severus to reveal the *truth* to him."

Hannah's eyes rested repentantly on Snape, whose own eyes were now gleaming with the ultimate expression of loathing.

"*Tell us!*" Voldemort demanded. He wielded his wand again, forcing the base of Hannah's head to slam repeatedly against the statue.

"OW! OW! OW!" she shrieked in agony with each strike.

This time, Hannah saw Snape close his eyes and wince. For a brief instant, she swore she heard his voice echoing in her head, beseeching her, "*Just hold on, Hannah, hold on.*"

Whether it was real or not, it kindled in her a sensational courage, one that pushed her to spit out fearlessly and defiantly, "I know Harry Potter!"

Voldemort pressed up against her, his wand pointed sharply into her chin to lift her head as he crowed out impatiently, "*You know Harry Potter?! You know Harry Potter?! Oh,*

Hannah...not only do we all know that you 'know' Harry Potter, but, for several months now, you have also been *sleeping with him!* Isn't that correct?"

"NO!" shouted Hannah in defiance.

"*DON'T LIE TO ME*, Hannah Black!" Voldemort roared, crisscrossing his wand boldly in the air, forcing her head to thrash brutally against the statue, and crowing out in elation as she yowled in pain. "It just so happens, I know for a *fact* that you've fallen in love with that disgusting, pathetic excuse for a wizard! And we've left him a message for you: He either brings me the Gryffindor sword and faces me *alone* like a *real man*, or he can choose to hide under the protective wing of the Order of the Phoenix and suffer the consequences of knowing he will be responsible for *your* agonizing death! I expect he'll be along any moment now. Harry Potter has never been able to resist the temptation to play the noble part of the *insufferable hero*."

Hannah's eyes narrowed at Voldemort in abhorrence, and she growled out, "Why don't you tell everyone what you plan to do with the sword, Voldemort; or don't you trust your loyal servants?"

"Oh, Hannah, how extraordinarily like your father you are. He, too, was a bit of a *snake*, always trying to slither his way out of things."

Hannah eyes burned a fiery scarlet as she uttered soft and hauntingly, "You're nothing more than an animal, Voldemort. I assure you."

Voldemort laughed out fearlessly, "Oh, Hannah, such a lame comeback from such a remarkably fiery soul. Perhaps you ought not to say anything further and utilize this momentous occasion to enjoy some silence whilst you can. You shall have plenty of explaining to do once your *lover*' gets here."

Voldemort stepped off the platform. Moving to address the circle of Death Eaters, he spat out commandingly, "I want everyone scattered about the grounds on *high alert!* When Potter shows, I can guarantee you he'll have his filthy little friends and those pitiful members of the Order in toe! Severus, Malfoy, you're to stay here with *me!*"

Voldemort paced the center of the graveyard impatiently, looking off into the distance in the direction of the Riddle House, searching for signs of Harry.

Hannah hung helplessly from the face of the skeleton knight statue while trying desperately to make eye contact with Severus. Each time her gaze met his, he shifted his stare in the opposite direction. She wanted so much to call out to him, but she didn't dare, for fear of sacrificing their mission. She could trust him...she was sure of it.

Draco could sense Hannah's anxiety and openly appeared to take great delight in the intense degree of her upset.

He strode over to her and scoffed arrogantly, “I could have saved your life if only you would have listened to me. I told you that you were a *fool* to deny me. But I can’t believe you’d be foolish enough to fall for *Potter*! Looks like you two are about to get what you deserve!”

Hannah sneered.

Draco’s upper lip curled in disgust, and he swung back around and returned to Snape’s side.

“Master!” called the heavily masked figure of Mulciber through the darkness of the night. “We’ve just seen Harry Potter crossing the front yard of the Riddle house! He’s headed this way!”

The newly unmasked figures of Crabbe Sr., Goyle Sr., and Rodolphus Lestrage faded into view around him.

“How *perfect*! Mr. Potter is *precisely* on time! This must be my lucky night!” said Voldemort in a mechanically joyful approach. “Well, let’s not just stand around! Let us prepare to *welcome* our guest! And, *stay alert*! I need wands at the ready when the Order of the Phoenix arrives! I *DON’T* want any interruptions!”

The Death Eaters wheeled around and scrambled up the steep hill toward the Riddle House.

Minutes later, Harry Potter was being dragged into the graveyard by Crabbe and Goyle Sr., his hands and feet tightly bound by the same magical cord they had used on Hannah. He grunted and groaned as he struggled to break free of the enchanted restraints. Mulciber trailed behind them holding the Gryffindor sword in one of his hands and Harry’s wand in his other hand. He passed them to Severus Snape, while Goyle Sr. stood Harry to his feet. Snape snatched the wand impatiently from Mulciber’s clutches and tucked it securely into his own robes, then plunged the Gryffindor sword angrily into the soft pebble-speckled ground next to him.

“Mulciber, Crabbe, Goyle — get back to your duties of securing the grounds!” snapped Voldemort.

The three Death Eaters scrambled off into the night.

Snape raised his wand to Harry, twisting it into his cheek and uttering maliciously, “*Good evening*, Mr. Potter. How very good of you to join us!”

Voldemort strode toward Harry, his palms raised importantly into the air as he called out jovially, “Welcome, welcome, Harry Potter! I do believe we can spare you the introductions, as I’m most certain you have been acquainted with everyone here.”

Harry looked to his left and saw Malfoy standing next to Snape. Then, he looked to the right of him, spying Hannah chained to the knight statue.

“Hello, *Potter!*” spat Malfoy.

Harry glared at him in aversion.

Voldemort met Harry with a sinister smile, taking to taunting him ruthlessly, “You missed quite a party so far, Potter. Perhaps, we ought to catch you up to speed, then, shall we? We were just discussing your lovely girlfriend, Hannah’s, uh, *exceptional* and *erotic* skills.” — Voldemort strode over to Hannah, scaled the rickety staircase of the statue, and snuggled up to her side — “It seems as though she has quite a *knack* for entertaining,” he said softly while he ran one of his scaly crooked fingers along the top of her chest and down toward her navel, causing several more buttons on her gown to pop open.

“*Get your filthy hands off of her!*” Harry roared.

Voldemort flicked his wand lazily at Harry, who, in turn, felt a blunt force hit him square in the jaw, sending him crashing to the ground.

“*DON’T* interrupt me while I’m speaking, *Potter!*” bellowed Voldemort.

Harry let out a loud grunt, then slowly wriggled himself into a standing position, his wrists and ankles still bound tightly by the ropes.

Voldemort descended the tombstone staircase, strode over to Harry, and said suggestively, “Harry, perhaps you could share with us *your* most pleasurable encounters with our dear Hannah. Severus has already regaled to us some of *his* finest and fondest moments with her: the potions closet, the third floor corridor, oh, and the Great Hall — right on the staff lunch table, if I’m not mistaken. Isn’t that correct, Severus?”

Severus nodded, his ravenous grin stretching wide.

Harry bestowed upon Voldemort a look of utter bewilderment and pure loathing as he snapped out nastily, “What are you going on about?!”

“Oh-ho! *Oh-HO!*” jeered Voldemort. He scurried over to Hannah, crooking his head as he continued to speak out in a loud voice full of elation, “You mean, *you didn’t tell him*, Hannah? You didn’t tell Potter about the sordid little affair you’ve been carrying on with Severus? Well, up until you fell in love with Harry Potter, that is!” He returned his attentions to Harry and cackled shamelessly.

Harry turned a hideously violent shade of lavender as he looked to Hannah, completely revolted by Voldemort’s despicable proclamation.

“What’s he going on about, Hannah?” snarled Harry.

“Harry, I’m sorry! I’m so sorry!” wailed Hannah.

“No — *NO!* Not *him!* *HIM?!* *HE* was your lover?!” howled Harry in revulsion. “I suppose *he* was also the anonymous masked man you claimed was helping us this whole time, too? The same man you allowed access to all of Grimmauld Place?”

Hannah hung her head in shame.

“*My god, Hannah!* How could you be such a *bloody fool!* *He used you!* He used you to get to *me!*” roared Harry viciously.

Voldemort let out a gruesome series of maniacal chortles as he passed his focus between a disquieted Hannah and an openly affronted Harry.

All at once, they were abruptly shaken by a remarkable display of exploding streams of vibrant lights and loud booming reverberations, all of which shook the earth supremely beneath them. These were the unmistakable sounds of Unforgivable Curses hitting their mark somewhere off in the distance.

“At last! It appears as though the Order of the Pheonix has arrived! Never fear! My fellow brothers and sisters are fully prepared to see to it that we are not disturbed whilst we tend to a little business here,” said Voldemort with glee. Smoothly, he tapped his wand against his pointed chin and said, “Now let’s see, let’s see; where to begin? Ah, yes, I know...*CRUCIO!*” His wand slashed wildly at Hannah, and a flash of bright green light hit her square in the center of her chest.

Hannah shrieked out in agony.

“*Stop it!*” shouted Harry.

Voldemort ignored him, holding the curse over Hannah, and chortling mercilessly as she bawled out several consecutive ear-piercing screams.

Harry drew himself back, thrashing around violently, fighting desperately to get between Hannah and Voldemort, and screaming out in terror, “*Stop it!* Leave her alone! It’s *me* you want to kill! Take *me* and let Hannah go! I’ve done what you asked me to do! I brought you the Gryffindor sword!”

“*Foolish boy!* Did you actually think I would let her off the hook that easily? Oh, no, no, no, Potter! I am going to let her live — long enough so that you can watch me crucify and destroy your precious love!” He turned to Snape and roared. “Severus! See to it that Harry stays put while I tend to our beloved Hannah!”

“Yes, my Lord,” said Snape, bowing low. He glowered at Harry, digging the tip of his wand into his chest and backing him next to the sword.

Hannah hung from the chains, gasping for breath. Red faced and panting, she threw her head boldly in the air and spat out fearlessly, “Why don’t you tell Harry the *real* reason I’m hanging here...*UNCLE!*”

“UNCLE?! *UNCLE!?*” screeched Harry.

“*That’s right, Potter!* Dear Lord Voldemort is my *Great-Great-Uncle!* Lucky me,” said Hannah sarcastically.

Voldemort sneered and flicked his wand sharply at Hannah, causing her head to smash hard against the gravestone.

“AH!” she wailed.

“Stop it! Stop doing that to her! Let her go!” yelled Harry.

“I’m warning you, Potter! Keep your mouth *SHUT*, or I will *REALLY* make her hurt!” bellowed Voldemort.

Though the extent of her pain was unbounded, Hannah proceeded to taunt Voldemort unabated, snarling out, “Go ahead, Voldy...tell him...tell Harry how *SICK* all of this truly is! This isn’t just about my father deserting you! Come on, then!”

Voldemort’s eyes flamed an unfathomable red; his black mottled teeth clenched and ground together; the slits of his serpent-like nostrils flared with a rage too devastating to be conceived as human. He made wild sensational arcs into the night sky with his wand, sending red sparks soaring into the infinite darkness as he conjured a stunning force to nail Hannah viciously across her face.

Hannah screamed in outrage and shouted out defiantly, “Go on, Voldemort! Tell everyone about how my Great-Grandmother, Cecelia, ruined your *pathetic* Half-blood existence!”

Voldemort stepped up to the platform where Hannah was bound and lashed at her with the back of his hand. Her head jerked violently backward as his crushing blow met the right side of her jaw.

Harry lurched forward and howled out, “Hannah, *SHUT UP!* Stop egging him on!”

“*NO! I won’t shut up!*” snarled Hannah, blood spewing wildly from her bottom lip as she spoke. “I want everyone to know the *TRUTH* as to why I’m truly hanging from these chains! Come on, *VOLDY!* I think your dedicated followers have a right to know what part of their loyal service to you has been all about all these years, don’t you? Well, it’s

like this — It appears as though our dear Lord Voldemort is seeking vengeance over a petty little vendetta he had with my Great-Grandmother *decades ago*. You see, long before Voldemort was born unto Tom Riddle, my Muggle Great-Grandmother, Cecilia, carried on a beautiful love affair with Tom. Their love was unparalleled. They were engaged to be married and would have been, were it not for Merope Gaunt, Voldemort's mother, and her plot to steal him away from my Great-Grandmother. Merope had an eye for Tom and was constantly trying to come between Cecilia and him. She wanted Tom all to herself." Hannah turned to face Voldemort and snarled out darkly, "Isn't that right, Voldy? That wretched monkey-faced bitch of a mother of yours was never good enough for your father. He saw her only as a repulsive hag, a waste of a woman. It was laughable, really, the way your mother doted over him, hanging out the window of her house and peaking through the hedges to watch him every time he happened by."

"CRUCIO!" Voldemort roared.

"AHHHHHHH!" shrieked Hannah. Her intense screams hacked through the thick darkened night with the blunt force of a giant axe, sending Harry into a crazed fit of despair.

He plunged to his knees howling out "*NOOOO!*" over the piercing reverberations of Hannah's cries.

Hannah scrambled for sufficient breath when Voldemort finally lifted the Cruciatus Curse off her.

Now speaking in a cruel and pointed tenor, Hannah said, "Come on, Voldy, tell them the *whole* story; how your mother was so pathetic that she had to use a love potion just to get Tom to look her in the eye without retching. Once he was under her spell and she had convinced him to marry her, she went and got herself pregnant with his child: YOU. It wasn't but a year before your mother had a sudden attack of conscience and stopped giving Tom the love potion. She was so besotted with him that she truly believed he had grown to love her; *but he didn't!* The instant the effects of the potion wore off, he left her and never returned! He went back to wed his one true love, my Great-Grandmother, Cecilia. Your mother later died giving birth to you, forcing you to have to live out your wasted life as an orphan, since no one else would have you — *not even your own father!* You never forgave your father for this. And you blamed my Great-Grandmother for breaking apart your family. Consequently, when you discovered that your father and Cecilia bore a child together and that child later married Harry Maslin, the only other living descendent of the noble pure-blood, Salazar Slytherin, you vowed to seek revenge on them both! *That's* why you killed your father and his family, and then you sought to destroy *mine!*"

"That makes you —" gasped Harry.

"That's right, Potter! For, the heir of Slytherin, there are *two!*" said Hannah, still breathless, beads of sweat rising on the surface of her fair skin and trickling down her

body. “And dear Voldemort here is about to finish the job he started long ago — killing off the all heirs of Hogwarts so that he can claim sole ownership of the only space where he ever felt at home! Poor, poor, Voldy: Spending his childhood *alone* in an orphanage with *no one* to love him. Such a terrible tragedy. I nearly feel sorry for him.”

Voldemort’s face lost all trace of humanity. His eyes were spitting a solid bloody villainous glare. The wretched skin on his face had entirely disappeared beneath the heat of 70 years of deep loathing and confounding hatred as he hissed and spit in a horribly chilling tenor, “*I’m going to kill you, Hannah Black!*”

“*GOOD!* Kill me! But, you cannot kill the truth! You can bury it right along with my body, though it will *never* die! Though, someday, YOU WILL, Won’t you, Voldy? *You’re little more than an animal!*”

“Why do you keep saying such pathetic things to me?” spat Voldemort. “I will NEVER die! Three of my experiments remain in tact and have been stowed safely away where *no one* will *ever* find them!”

“You’re the one who’s pathetic, Voldemort! You’ve been so preoccupied with masking your pitiable fears of death and destruction and with bullying everyone into submission, you failed to look beyond the magic that houses your psychotic experiments long enough to realize that all of them have been *destroyed!* I bewitched them with the souls of animals to trick you into thinking they were still in tact! There is no spell that can indicate *what type* of soul lies within the depths of a Horcrux; it only reveals the *existence* of a soul! I knew your focus on your insatiable greed would cause you to overlook this! So, alas, with the exception of Harry Potter, you have NO Horcruxes left! There’s no *spell* that can remove the Horcrux from him safely without destroying it; Lilly Potter has seen to that! Moreover, if you kill him, you will become *mortal!*”

The expression that crossed Voldemort’s face was beyond unfathomable as he growled out, “You may have won the battle by managing to destroy those Horcruxes, Hannah Black, but you know very well what it is that I need to salvage the one planted inside of Potter — *Hematite*. It just so happens that Severus uncovered all about your filthy little plan to help Harry, months ago, when you fell in love with that insufferable fool! Thanks to the Sectumsempra fiasco he and I staged, I revealed for certain that you still loved Severus enough to consent to cooperate with him by handing him over the rest of what I required from you. I knew it would devastate you to see him being punished for your betraying me, just as your family was punished because of your father’s cowardly betrayal of me! Severus played on this guilt until he managed to convince you to deliver to me the very things I needed most: Harry Potter, the information on how to safely retrieve the Horcrux from him, *and* the Gryffindor sword!

“So, Hannah Black, I am going to kill you, and Harry will watch as you suffer and die. Severus will then extract my experiment from Harry, and I will eliminate that meddling fool, for good! I will be able to make the Elixir of Life with the Pheonix

tears stashed away inside the center ruby, should my last Horcrux be destroyed, and then I will remain immortal and invincible!”

Hannah sneered at him.

“It is time, Severus!”

Snape cleaved Harry by the arm, yanking him to his feet. He retrieved a small vial of Veritaserum from his cloak pocket, tracing the open neck of the bottle over Harry’s scar with it.

Almost instantly, Harry’s surroundings pooled, then vanished before his eyes.....

He was in Godric’s Hollow, inside his parent’s home. His mother was cowering over him, whispering frantically into his ear, waving her hand feverishly over him, with the emission of her every hushed utterance.

*Voldemort was hovered over her, shouting out, “Step aside, **mud-blood**, and let me have Harry! If you step aside, I shall let you live!”*

**“Not Harry, not Harry, Please not Harry!!” shrieked Lily.*

*“Stand aside, you silly girl! Stand aside, **now!**” roared Voldemort.*

*“Not Harry, please no, take me, kill me instead!”**

The sound of Voldemort’s shrill voice shrieking with laughter filled Harry’s brain as his mother continued to beg for his life.

“Not Harry! Please...have mercy...have mercy!”

Voldemort’s horrible face contorted with a ferocious, blaring revulsion toward her as he bawled out, “Avada Kedavra!”

“HAAAAARRRRYYYYYY!” bellowed Lily, reaching out desperately for him as a bright flash of green light plunged straight through her heart.

*His mother’s voice shook him down to the core of his soul as he watched her crash to the ground, **DEAD**, her brilliant green eyes drawn into a fixed lifeless stare.*

“NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!” Harry cried out and he toppled over onto the ground.

*“Get up, Potter! You *weak — pathetic — FOOL!*” snarled Voldemort, striking Harry from a distance with a Battering Hex.*

Harry writhed on the ground in pain. Snape gripped his arm, yanked him to his feet, and draped a large blood red stoned necklace around his neck. Snape's cold black eyes burrowed fiercely into Harry's as he began circling Harry's scar with the face of the stone, chanting in hushed vigorous tones.

Harry staggered backward, when, out of nowhere, he began to hear Snape's voice ringing loudly in his ears. Only, Snape wasn't speaking with his *mouth*, he was speaking with his *mind*.

"The sword, Harry! Throw the sword at Voldemort when he performs the killing curse on Hannah! I shall destroy the Horcrux and rescue her in time."

Harry's eyes widened in bewilderment, and he whispered in amazement, "Did you just.... say something to me?"

Snape grimaced, and Harry heard his voice ringing in his head again.

"Do as I say, Potter! When I give the word, throw the sword at Voldemort! I'll take care of Hannah and destroy the stone!"

There was a strong moment of silence between the two of them, and Harry felt the magical ropes that bound his wrists and feet begin to loosen. He was free. His attentions were immediately called back to the present moment by the sound of Voldemort's malevolent and pointed laugh.

"How does it feel to know you are but an inch from death, Hannah?" cackled Voldemort wildly. "What a pity it is that such a beautiful girl as you should have to die in such a dreadful manner. You can thank Potter and your filthy mud-blood Great-Grandmother for that!" He raised his wand to her, crowing out riotously, "CRUCIO!"

Hannah's once poignant screams faded into jumbled echoes of her own inner voice. She now hung limply from the chained statue, nearly unconscious. Harry looked to her with the deepest sense of despair.

Just then, she raised her head sharply and gazed deeply into his eyes. She opened her mind to him, her voice ringing inside of his head, "*I shall love you, always, Harry Potter!*"

Harry felt Snape jerk his arm forcefully, just as Voldemort bellowed ferociously, "Say goodbye to the love of your life, Potter! AVADA KEDAVRA!"

"NO!" Snape cried out.

At that instant, Harry tore away from Snape's grasp, darted toward Hannah, and pitched the sword at Voldemort, hurtling himself into the path of the deadly curse. The brilliant flash of green light that burst forth from Voldemort's wand hammered *hard* into the

center of Harry's chest. He slammed violently against the base of the statue where Hannah was chained, and he collapsed to the ground, face down, *lifeless*.

The sword he had thrown plunged straight into Voldemort's heart, forcing the Dark Lord to his knees. In a state absolute astonishment, Voldemort tussled with the hilt, trying desperately to rip the blade out from within him, blood spurting in every direction and pooling beneath his form. His hallow eyes shot Hannah and Snape a momentary repulsive glare before the prominent scarlet light emptied from them, and he collapsed rigorously to the ground...DEAD.

"*HARRY! NOOOOO!*" shrieked Hannah in horror, still bound to the statue. "*NOOOO*, Harry! Oh god, *N-ho!* she sobbed wildly, kicking her legs madly into the air. "*HARRY!*"

An entirely staggered Draco took off running into the darkness of the night, while Snape rushed over to Hannah and released her from the chains.

Hannah plunged to the ground, throwing herself over Harry as she continued to bawl out, "Oh, my god, *NOOOOO! NOOOO!*"

Snape leaned forward, took her by the hand, and gently plucked her away from Harry's body. He pulled her into his loving embrace, pressing his cheek tenderly against the top of her head. His voice was thick with repentance as he spoke:

"Hannah, I'm so sorry. I told him I would save you. He wouldn't listen. I managed my way into his mind just before the curse hit him. He said he wasn't willing to risk that you might die because of him; he didn't trust that I would save you."

Severus cupped his hands compassionately around her face and whispered to her in a quiet, broken voice, "Hannah, I assure you, your life was *never* in jeopardy. I was completely prepared to die for you tonight. *I* would have stood in front of the curse for you if I knew it was the only way."

Hannah blinked away her tear-filled eyes, happening upon the colors of the deepest regret screaming boldly against Severus's pale face. She closed her eyes and nodded subtly, falling again into his comforting embrace.

Abruptly Severus pulled away from her, his eyes sweeping the horizon stretching behind the Riddle House as though he was trying to catch a glimpse of something.

"Severus? What is it?" whispered Hannah.

"I'm not sure," he muttered, pushing her behind him, shielding her by belting one of his arms around her and securing her to his back. Slowly, he raised his wand as he heard what sounded like an army of hurried, muffled footsteps hammering hard against the ashen ground. The muted clatter grew louder and louder. A group of dark shadows was racing toward them, but two were far ahead of the rest.

“HARRY! HARRY!” called out Ron and Hermione, intermittently.

The others were atop the hill, rounding the front of the Riddle house, headed in their direction.

Hermione and Ron spotted Hannah and Snape, and then turned to face to the base of the statue, where Harry lay lifeless on the ground. They rushed to Harry’s side, dropping to their knees beside him, shaking him frantically, and calling out for him in a horrified panic.

“HARRY!” yelled Ron.

“HARRY!” cried Hermione. “Oh, no, Harry!” She scrambled to rise to her feet, standing motionless in a completely numbing state of perilous shock.

Ron remained knelt beside his best friend, equally as distraught, bawling out, “Hermione, I think he’s DEAD! He’s not breathing and he won’t wake!”

Hermione’s big brown eyes drew thin, her fierce anger spewing wildly from the slits of their constricted space.

In a crazed fit of rage, she hurtled violently toward Hannah and Snape, screaming out, “*Expelliarmus! Expelliarmus!*”

Hannah and Snape went hurling into the air, smashing brutally against the ground beside one another. Hermione lunged toward them again.

With her wand aimed directly at their faces, she shrieked madly, “The two of you killed him, didn’t you?! You, sadistic, vile — AVADA—”

“NOOOOO!” Remus howled out from behind her. “EXPELLIARMUS!” he bellowed, jinxing her wand out of her hand. “They’re on *our* side! They’re with *us*! *Here*; see for yourself!” He handed Hermione several rolls of parchment with Snape’s handwriting scratched across the pages. “This arrived at the Ministry shortly after Hannah was kidnapped. It explains everything.”

“It was Voldemort — he did this to Harry!” said Hannah. She jumped to her feet, pointing to a large mound of tattered, blood-soaked robes that shrouded the body of the Dark Lord, who lay in a crumpled heap on the ground across from them. “He’s **dead**, Hermione! Harry killed him before he jumped in front of the killing curse that Voldemort fired at me! Harry saved my life!”

In the next moment, the DA and The Order of the Phoenix flooded the graveyard. They were gasping, shouting, and pointing in sheer horror as their eyes met the lifeless form of Harry Potter slumped against the statue. All the while, they crowed out in elation upon addressing the carcass of the Dark Lord Voldemort, lying opposite him.

“Everybody, *get out of the way!*” said Remus, rushing to Harry’s side.

The members from the Order and the DA closed anxiously around him. Many were sobbing in the background, while others whispered frantically to one another. Yet, most stood in silent troubled awe, looking on as Remus leaned into Harry to examine him.

“Harry, it’s me, Remus. Can you hear me, Harry?”

Several minutes passed before anyone realized what was happening. Hannah stood before Snape with her head buried in his chest, sobbing out feverishly. He cradled his strong arms around her in a noble show of absorbing the staggering blow of sorrow abounding her. Hermione and Ron stood beside them, clinging to one another, watching on in equal despair.

Remus glanced up and around at the crowd, then looked back to Harry again. He remained, knelt by Harry’s side, staring down at the magnificent bespectacled wizard in bewilderment. He plucked the now blackened, blood red stone from around Harry’s neck and examined it thoroughly.

Remus mumbled quietly to himself in utter amazement, his voice steadily growing louder and louder with each word he uttered, “I-I don’t believe it...*He’s breathing...he’s-he’s alive!*” Slowly, Remus rose to his feet, then stood stationary, having been entirely paralyzed by his wonderment. His gaze continued to circle about the cluster of witches and wizards surrounding him. Finally, he raised the stone necklace high in the air. The crowd drew closer to him, becoming perfectly silent and still, locked wholly in his stare.

In a flash, Remus’s voice erupted into a booming series of ecstatic shout-outs as he exclaimed, “He’s ALIVE! Everyone, HARRY POTTER IS ALIVE! The curse — *it hit the stone!*”

Hannah shoved away from Snape, dashed over to Harry, and cast herself over his unconscious form. She coursed her fingers anxiously through his unkempt hair, and smoothed her palms dramatically against the sides of his face, looking him over restlessly, crying out, “Harry? Harry? It’s me, Hannah. Can you hear me?”

Harry gave no response; he remained as stationary as before. Hermione and Ron hurried over to him, planted themselves firmly beside Hannah, anxiously examining the still form of their dearest friend.

“Harry, *please!*” said Hannah beseechingly. She cradled his face tenderly in her hands, impressing a sweet, delectable kiss upon his lips. “Please wake up, Harry! *PLEASE!* I’m sorry for everything! I’m sorry I didn’t trust you enough to tell you of the plan! I Love you with my *whole heart*, Harry! You have my *WHOLE heart*, you do! I know that now! Harry, *PLEASE!*” She collapsed beside him, stowing her head emotionally into his chest.

A low rumble of hushed troubled whispers rustled through the crowd as Hannah continued to lay with Harry, tears leaping from her face and onto his form. Hermione leaned into Ron, planted her head into his shoulder, and began to cry again, too. Ron cuffed his arm around her, watching over the scene in heartbroken silence, his face drawn and stark white.

Unexpectedly, Harry began to groan. In a full-fledged fatigued show, he lifted his hand and dragged it lazily along the ground, gently bumping it against the fist of Hannah's hand.

A great hush fell over the crowd as Hannah swung her head into the air, faced the group, and shouted through a flood of her elated tears, "He's waking!"

Sure enough, the bold emerald green of Harry's eyes gradually escaped the burdening flesh of his eyelids, and he moved his head to address her.

"Can you hear me, Harry?" said Hannah gently.

"H-Hannah?" he answered in a feint staggered whisper.

"YES! It's me; it's me, Harry; I'm right here," exhaled Hannah breathlessly, reaching around him and carefully shifting him into a sitting position.

"W-w-what happened?" he uttered weakly.

"Voldemort tried to kill me! You threw the Gryffindor sword at him and jumped in front of the curse and...you collapsed. I thought you were dead! We all thought you were dead! Harry, you saved my life!" said Hannah in a near frenzy.

"V-Voldemort — is he — is he—"

"He's *dead*! You did it, Harry! You've destroyed him *forever*!" said Hannah, throwing her arms around him in elation.

Harry smiled meekly and said jokingly, "No wonder I have such a terrible headache."

"I thought I'd lost you. I was terrified," said Hannah in a choking whisper as she backed off him and brushed one of her hands kindly against his cheek.

Ron and Hermione leaned into Harry, clapping their arms delightedly around him.

"You gave us a right good scare there, mate," Ron sobbed, briskly mopping the tears from his flushed cheeks with the corner of his wrinkled t-shirt.

"Oh, Harry, thank goodness you're alright!" exclaimed Hermione through a streaming flood of emotional tears. She threw her arms around him and kissed his cheek.

The on-looking crowd of witches and wizards began to rejoice loudly, embracing one another and shouting out in elation.

“Alright, Harry?” inquired Remus, patting away briskly at Harry’s back. “You gave us a bit of a run for our money there, son.”

“I think so, yeah,” said Harry numbly.

Remus stepped forward and worked his way over to Snape, taking a firm hold of his hand as he said, “We received your owl just in time, Severus. You have my sincerest apologies and my eternal gratitude. I shall be forever indebted to you for what you’ve done in the name of Lily and James Potter. It was not an easy task — deceiving Voldemort the way you did these many years. It was a brilliant plan, I must say. You and Hannah had us *all* fooled in the end.” And moving to address Hannah, he collected her into his embrace, proclaiming joyfully, “Hannah Black — I believe it’s safe to address you by your true name, now that Voldemort has been destroyed and his followers are being sent to Azkaban under the restored guard of the Dementors. You, too, should be proud. You risked your life to help Severus save Harry.”

Hannah turned a meek smile.

Then, Remus returned his focus to Harry. With his hands resting proudly on Harry’s shoulders and looking him straight in the eyes, he said, “You’ve done a more courageous thing than you can ever imagine, Harry. You were willing to give your life to save Hannah — to save us all from Voldemort’s wrath. I believe I speak for everyone here when I say thank you, Harry Potter. We shall never forget what you have done here for us tonight.

“All right, then,” said Remus to the crowd, patting Harry gently on his back and stepping away from him. “Let us give Harry and his friends a bit of space for a moment, shall we?”

One by one, the members of the crowd dispersed and hustled off into the distance; some called out to Harry in triumph as they passed him, while others slapped him proudly on the shoulder, nodding to him with the mark of eternal gratefulness.

Harry eyed Hannah suspiciously and inquired, “Wait a minute. What owl and what plan is Remus talking about, Hannah?”

Hannah inhaled deeply, looked to Harry, and began to explain the owl Snape had written to Remus. “Well — Severus, Dumbledore, and I originally plotted an entirely different plan in our mission to help you destroy Voldemort, over a year ago; but only the three of us were privy to it. Severus was instructed by Dumbledore to use his pretend role as a faithful spy to Lord Voldemort, declaring to Voldemort he would continue to use his post as a Hogwarts’ teacher to spy on Dumbledore and you. All the while, Severus was being instructed by Dumbledore to provide him with top secret information about Voldemort,

and to unveil all of Voldemort's intentions for you. Meanwhile, *I* was commissioned by Dumbledore to accompany all of you in your mission to destroy Voldemort's Horcruxes, and then, once our task was complete, we would face and eliminate Voldemort together.

“However, last summer, when Voldemort unexpectedly ordered Draco Malfoy to find a way to kill Dumbledore or suffer the consequences of his whole family being executed if he failed, our whole mission was turned upside-down. The instant Severus learned of Voldemort's plan, he went straight to Dumbledore, who instructed Severus to go to whatever means necessary to protect Draco Malfoy and his family and to see to it that our plan would not be thwarted. That's when Dumbledore officially appointed me as your sentinel, ordering me to watch over you in the event of his untimely demise.

“Sure enough, soon thereafter, Severus was coerced into making the Unbreakable Vow with Narcissa, promising to kill Dumbledore should Draco fail, thus sparing the Malfoys of suffering from Voldemort's wrath whilst ensuring the protection of our plan by making himself appear to be a faithful Death Eater. Dumbledore ordered Severus to follow through with the vow at all costs, knowing that, eventually, Severus' solid connection to Voldemort would prove to be the key in helping you and I destroy him for good.

“On that fateful night that Dumbledore discovered Draco and the Death Eaters were scheduled to storm the castle to execute Voldemort's orders, Dumbledore made plans with you to retrieve the Horcrux that lay within the potion surrounding the Slytherin locket. Whilst you and he were out, he made certain to have the Order of the Phoenix guard patrolling the castle corridors in order to ensure that the other students and the faculty were well protected. Severus was ordered to wait out the evening in his flat until Dumbledore sent you to fetch him once you and he returned to the school grounds after securing the Horcrux. Then, when you arrived at Severus' flat, Severus was supposed to immobilize you in order to hide you away to protect you from being seen or harmed by any of the Death Eaters. Afterward, he would kill Dumbledore, all the while *secretly* destroying the piece of Voldemort's soul that Dumbledore had ingested when he drank the poisonous potion containing the Horcrux. Dumbledore knew all along that he would die once he consumed the lethal contents, and this made for the perfect set up. No one realized that he was actually dying from a poison. When Severus performed the killing curse on him, as per his orders, it truly made Severus look like a ruthless murderer, a faithful servant of Voldemort.

“Dumbledore's plan became a bit hampered that night when your friends unexpectedly joined in the fight and forced the Death Eaters in the direction of the path you were meant to safely take to Severus' flat. Dumbledore was then made to perform the Petrificus Totalus Jinx on you to stop you from going into the castle. Fortunately, McGonagall had sent Professor Flitwick to fetch Severus, and Flitwick made Severus privy to the chaos. Severus was then forced to knock him out to keep him from causing any further damage to the plan. From there, Severus immediately headed to the front of the school grounds where Dumbledore had instructed him to go to execute his 'murder'.

“As anticipated, once Severus ‘killed’ Dumbledore, he lost his post as a Hogwarts’ professor and as double spy for the Ministry, having led everyone to believe that he had truly defied Dumbledore. In turn, Voldemort and everyone else believed Severus to be a most faithful servant of Lord Voldemort. That’s where I was to come in.

“Dumbledore, Severus, and I *knew* that Voldemort would be furious with Severus for failing to deliver you to him that night when he had the chance. As it turned out, our sentiments were correct. He threatened to execute Severus for losing his only connection to Hogwarts before managing to hand you over, and he demanded that Severus find a way to get you to him, or pay with his life. So, we implemented the next part of the plan. We had me pretend to go to Severus and offer to become Voldemort’s connection to you and to Hogwarts by having me join the Order of the Phoenix, relaying to Voldemort Dumbledore’s desire to have me watch over you. I was to declare to Voldemort that I recognized real power, Voldemort’s power, and that I was turning on you and Dumbledore. I was to tell Voldemort that I wanted to aid him in his mission to destroy you. Severus regaled to Voldemort and all his followers our longstanding intimate relationship in order to secure their confidence in me.

“As expected, Voldemort accepted my offer straight away. He realized he couldn’t ask for a better spy than one who was appointed by the noble trustworthy Dumbledore as *your* personal guard. Voldemort’s mission for me was simple. I was to collect all the information that you, your friends, and the Order had acquired about him, to discover the full terms of the prophecy, and to deliver you to him on his command. He decided that when he was ready for you, he would use me as bait to get to you to him by threatening my life, then using the Gryffindor sword as negotiating tool, saying he would spare me if you delivered it to him; that way, he would be certain to acquire all that he needed from you to ensure your demise.

“Coincidentally, at the same time Voldemort took me on as his spy, the Minister of Magic, Rufus Scrimgeour, privately bequested me to utilize my connections to Severus to become a double spy for the Ministry. You see, once Rufus became privy to my private studies with Severus, he figured that I had formed a special bond with him, which I did. He wanted me to make use of that bond to the greatest extent. I agreed to his proposition, as I knew it would be very useful in that it would give me greater control over your care. However, I was careful *not* to reveal to him the secret plot that Severus, Dumbledore, and I had created to destroy Voldemort, for fear that somehow the information would get leaked and destroy our plan. Rufus Scrimgeour’s only orders for me were that I take whatever means necessary to follow all of Voldemort’s commands, to work as closely with Severus as possible, all the while reporting Voldemort’s plans for you, to Rufus alone.

“Meanwhile, unbeknownst to anyone else, Severus and I proceeded with the secret plan that he, Dumbledore, and I had set up. Our objective was to carry on with our mission to help you destroy Voldemort’s Horcruxes, all the while pretending to abide by Voldemort’s orders of following through with the rest of his plan of getting you to the graveyard alone so that he could ‘finish you off’. On that fateful night, Severus was to

send a last minute owl to the Ministry which included a signed letter of acknowledgement by Dumbledore explaining our entire plot. Dumbledore had penned it before his death in order to verify his part in planning our secret mission. The letter contained his specific instructions for the Ministry and the Order of the Phoenix to lay in wait and back you up by keeping the Death Eaters distracted, whilst Severus and I tended to aiding you in the final execution of the prophecy, the destruction of Voldemort.

“In addition, shortly before Dumbledore met his demise, he made certain that Tonks was privy to our entire plan, as an added precaution. He knew that her word to Remus would keep Remus at bay and ‘off my back’ enough so that he wouldn’t interfere with our mission. Though Tonks tried hard to convince Remus that I was trustworthy, Remus was skeptical. Since she was sworn to keep quiet about her knowledge of Dumbledore’s, Severus’s, and my secret ploy to help you annihilate Voldemort, she could not offer him the proof he needed to have confidence in her word. And then, when Remus and Arthur accidentally stumbled across the knowledge that Rufus Scrimgeour had hired me as a double spy and had me working side by side with Snape, Remus grew exceptionally worried. He, like everyone else, believed Snape to be a traitor, which is why he suddenly began keeping such a close, watchful eye over me. Later, when he discovered my true identity and that Snape and I were romantically involved, he became enraged, thinking I was truly loyal to Voldemort and was seeking to betray you. It was then that I was forced to reveal our entire secret plot to him, which, thankfully, Tonks was able to confirm for us.

“In any event, when Severus and I had begun the actual executing of our missions for the recovery and the destructions of the remaining Horcruxes, Voldemort suddenly called upon Severus to collect an ‘experiment’ for him — the Hufflepuff Goblet. Voldemort instructed Severus and I to bring you along and tell you that this ‘experiment’, if destroyed, could be detrimental to him. Voldemort ordered us to retrieve it and ‘pretend’ to destroy it with you. He told us that this would help us to gain your absolute trust. All the while, unbeknownst to Voldemort, we really did destroy it.

“You see, he suspected all along that you knew about his Horcruxes. He was testing Severus and I to see if *we* knew what they were, too; for, if we admitted to him that we did know, he would have killed us straight away, as he wanted to rid the earth of anyone and everyone who was keen such privileged knowledge.

“At any rate, at first, Severus and I believed that Voldemort directing us to the location of the cup was a fluke, until Voldemort began to request that we collect some other ‘experiments’ for him — the Marvolo Ring and the Slytherin Locket. When Severus revealed to him that both of them had gone missing, Voldemort became enraged. That’s when we knew for certain that he was aware his secret was out. His ordering the Death Eaters to execute witches and wizards with the initials R. A. B. in their names confirmed our suspicions as just.

“So, we decided to wait for his instruction before retrieving any of the other Horcruxes; that way, he wouldn’t become suspicious of us should any of them go missing. The only

'experiment' Voldemort did not mention to us was Nagini. We assumed that this was because she was almost always under his watchful eye and could be protected by him. That's why I took you to the Riddle House that night. We *had* to be *sure*.

"Prior to handing over each one of the destroyed Horcruxes to Voldemort, Severus and I bewitched them with the souls of animals. That way, Voldemort would believe that they were still in tact, giving him a false sense of security, hence, making him think he still had the upper hand on you."

Harry leaned forward and inquired anxiously, "The woman who was helping us, who was she?"

Hannah smiled and said, "*Andromeda Black*, Tonks' mother. You see, she was the one who helped my father in his acquiring of the Slytherin locket, hence the true reason they signed the note inside the locket you retrieved with the initials R.A.B. It was she who helped my father depict the location of all the other Horcruxes. Other than Severus and Dumbledore, she and Tonks were the only people he trusted with his discovery and with my existence."

"I never would've guessed it was *her!*" exclaimed Harry in amazement.

Hannah smiled and continued on, "Anyway, when we had proven successful in our mission of returning all of Voldemort's 'experiments' unscathed, to his belief, Voldemort asked for us to perform a very special task: He asked for us to uncover a way to retrieve 'a part of his magic' that he believed he had inadvertently planted in you the night he tried to kill you. He confided in Severus that he needed him to assist him in discovering a means of retrieving those 'powers' from you without destroying them.

"To further secure the success of his plan for your destruction, Voldemort ordered me to become romantically involved with you when he discovered your feelings for me. By that time, we realized that he was certain that you possessed the knowledge required to destroy him and that you were not willingly divulging it to me because we were not 'involved' enough. He felt that the more emotionally intimate I got with you, the more likely it would be that I would be able to get the truth out of you about what you really knew about him. He believed you would then reveal to me if Remus, Arthur, Bill, and Ron knew anything about his 'experiments,' as well. He had come to believe that they were aiding you in your mission to destroy them, and he wanted those pieces back before they were ruined. He knew I was the only one who could aid him in his endeavors.

"*That's* why Severus became so enraged when he found my father's diary laying about the secret room. It could have ruined our entire plan. If anyone else would have read through it, they would have discovered that it was really I who was helping you destroy Voldemort's Horcruxes. Certainly such information would have eventually found its way back to Voldemort. That's why Severus confiscated the journal from me. He held onto it, thinking it could be of use to our plan later.

“And when Hermione discovered my true identity and that Severus was my lover, I was forced to reveal our entire plot to her. When I told Severus about this, he decided it was time to change our plan in order to protect our mission. Too many people were revealing the truth about who I really was. He feared that if Hermione was able to uncover my secret, it was possible that others would become suspicious of me and uncover the truth, as well.

“So, Severus and I decided to pretend that I betrayed him. He handed Voldemort my father’s diary and told him that he discovered that I was using him all along in my mission to help you destroy him. Everyone already realized that the relationship between you and me had grown serious, so my treachery was not surprising to Voldemort in the least. Severus then told Voldemort that he wished for me to pay for my betrayal and that he would do whatever necessary to aid Voldemort in this process.

“As we expected, Voldemort tested Severus’s loyalty to him and my loyalty to Severus, by torturing him to see if I would come to his aid. That way, Voldemort could ensure that Severus and I were still connected on a broad enough level to continue working together. Once we picked the wrenches out of the plan and made ME look like the traitor, we decided to release to Voldemort the information I uncovered about how to get the Horcrux out of you. Severus pretended to *con* the hematite necklace from my possession, and he handed it over to Voldemort. Then, Severus pretended to talk me into handing over the Slytherin Locket and the Ring.

“Once Voldemort felt that had everything he needed to kill you, he instructed Severus to kidnap me and leave a note for you to bring the Gryffindor sword to the graveyard in exchange for my life. This last minute change in Voldemort’s plan, having me kidnapped, was Voldemort’s sick little way of testing Severus and I further. Voldemort wanted to be certain that Severus was truly on his side. Unfortunately, Severus didn’t have a chance to reveal the changes to me. But, I knew something had changed. I could sense it. So, once I was taken to the Riddle Estate, I pretended to try to escape, knowing that Severus would be the one to come after me. We used those few moments to implement our Legilimency skills on one another to communicate the changes to the plan, changes which regrettably consisted of me being bound, gagged, and tortured for a bit. It wasn’t exactly my idea of a night on the town, but we had no choice; it was the only way Severus could convince Voldemort of his loyalty to him.

“Harry, the reason Dumbledore always knew that he could trust Severus was simple: Severus went willingly to Dumbledore shortly after Voldemort killed your parents and made the Unbreakable Vow, promising to help you destroy Voldemort for good, or give his life if he failed. He was in love with your mother, Harry. But, something horrible happened, something that Severus didn’t mean to happen. The night he helped my father stage his death, he was instructed to bring me to Voldemort, but he did not. He lied and said that I could not be found. Voldemort was furious when Severus returned to him empty handed and he nearly killed Severus for it. As a result, Severus revealed the first half of the prophecy that he had overheard, knowing that would encourage Voldemort to

spare his life, as Voldemort would then come to find that Severus could actually be worth something to him.

“Once Severus realized that Voldemort’s interpretation of the prophecy led him to target you and your family, Severus suddenly became responsible for the death of your mother, the very woman he loved. He begged Voldemort to spare all of you by trying to convince Voldemort that he had interpreted the prophecy incorrectly, but Voldemort refused him. That’s when Severus made a personal vow. He decreed that he would not rest until Voldemort was destroyed for good. And as you can see, he kept his word: He became a Hogwarts’ professor and turned double spy for the Ministry. All the while, he made Voldemort believe he was still a faithful Death Eater working for him and spying on Dumbledore. In the end, he initiated the ultimate betrayal, the murder of his master.”

“Wow. I-I never would have guessed. He had me completely fooled. He certainly played his part well,” said Harry breathlessly.

“Indeed,” said Hannah.

Harry leaned against the statue exhaustedly and abruptly said, “Hang on! If I was hit by the Avada Kedavra curse, why is it that I’m not dead?”

“The stone — the curse hit it. The Avada Kedavra curse destroys the soul of the living. Voldemort’s soul was hanging on the necklace just outside of yours, so the curse was directed into it,” said Hannah. “Thus Voldemort became mortal again, just as the Gryffindor sword penetrated his skin.”

Harry stood silent for some time and then replied, “Snape got into my mind. He told me throw the sword and that he would save you, but I didn’t trust him. I couldn’t let him take that chance. I didn’t want you to risk your life....for me.”

As if he knew Harry was talking about him, Snape swiftly approached them and held out his hand to shake Harry’s, muttering suavely, “Congratulations Potter. You surprised me. I didn’t think you had it in you. You have my sincerest apologies. I seriously underestimated you. You’re much more like your mother than I ever realized.”

Harry nodded subtly and said, “I’m sorry I doubted you, as well.”

“It’s alright, Potter. I suppose I haven’t given you much reason to trust me.”

Harry turned to Hannah looking almost insulted, as he questioned her. “Hannah, why didn’t you tell me what was to happen tonight?”

Hannah looked to him repentantly and explained, “Harry, it was too risky. You’d become a fantastic Occlumens, but we were afraid that your emotions would get the best of you. We worried that you might accidentally open your mind to him and he would discover our plan and destroy us all. It was too difficult for Severus and me to determine just how

closely you and Voldemort were connected by the Horcrux. I'm so sorry, Harry. I should have had more faith in your abilities."

"It's okay. I understand, now," said Harry, turning a meek smile.

Hannah leaned over and kissed him.

With that, Snape turned briskly to Hannah, and in a troubled tenor, he inquired, "Hannah, might I have a word with you, please?"

"Um, sure," said Hannah distractedly. She knelt down to Harry, brushing her hand kindly across his face. "Harry, I'll be back in a few minutes, okay? Hermione, Ron, would you mind looking after him whilst I speak with Severus?"

Hermione and Ron nodded in accord and settled beside a clearly anxious Harry, who watched on fretfully as Hannah walked off with Snape.

Snape swathed his arm around Hannah's waist ushering her into the darkness with him. They strode along in silence until they arrived at a small brick foundation at the far end of the graveyard, where Severus drew her to a halt.

"Hannah," he said in a painfully quivering voice as he rested his hands on her shoulders and caressed them lovingly. "We need to discuss something."

Hannah reached up to him, and stroking her hand kindly against his face, she said concernedly, "Severus, what is it?"

After lingering over her words for a moment, he took her hands in his and said, "I need to know what you plan to do. It appears to me that your intentions are clear, but I suppose I need to hear it directly from you."

Hannah studied him intently for several moments. As if he had suddenly allowed his mind to open to her, she clapped her hand over her mouth, and in an astonishing upset she choked out, "You're in love with me, aren't you, Severus? You actually... *do* love me."

Severus stared back at her, keeping silent. It appeared as though he was choosing what he was willing to reveal to her next.

"I've never been one to wear my heart on my sleeve, Hannah; I believe you know that of me. It is my belief that one's true position lies within their actions, not in their words. I am who I am, and I cannot change that verity. Nevertheless, I have always remained loyal to you, willingly sacrificing my life for you all these years, hanging before the face of death to ensure your safety. I should think that those very actions alone speak volumes of my thoughts for you."

Hannah sighed heavily as she cradled her arms around her sickened stomach and turned her back on him. Then, closing her eyes, and speaking in a grieving whisper, she said, "Oh, Severus, if only you could have told me how you truly felt." She turned to face him, tears of anguish gleaming in her eyes as she professed, "How I loved you all these years. How I acted on faith alone, for so long, waiting, hoping the time would come that you would quit shelling out your logic on why we should remain apart. How it crushed me, being deprived of your love, time and time again, feeling disparaged because I couldn't keep my emotions in check as you have done these long years. Even now, you still can't bring yourself say those three words I so desperately need to hear from you." She bit her lip, and with unwavering resolve, she said, "Severus, you've pushed me away, over and over again, for reasons you meant as valiant and true. I felt them as savage and cruel, and — I've let you go. I've let you go, and there's no turning back for me. I'm in love with Harry. It's a love that I am not willing to sacrifice for *you*, or for *anyone*, *ever*. I'm sorry, but...*you're too late*."

Snape looked trampled by her admission, yet somehow, almost prepared for it.

"Alright then," he said, immediately sensing defeat and surrendering to the reality that he had truly lost her. "You've made your choice. I shall back away graciously." Speaking very seriously, he added, "But, know this: I shall always be here for you, should you ever need me." He frowned slightly as he looked into her eyes, realizing he didn't stand a chance. Gathering her in his arms, he kissed her tender lips while he brushed his fingers longingly through her thick wavy hair.

As Snape's lips lingered over her lips, Hannah closed her eyes, her heart breaking as she realized this would be their last moment together.

"Goodbye, Severus. I will always love you," she whispered, claiming his kiss one last time.

"I shall never forget you, Hannah," said Severus in a choking whisper. Then, swiftly, he backed away, whirled around, and strode determinately away from her.

Hannah stared after him as he faded into the bleary darkness, fully overcome by a sense of terrible loss. She struggled to flush the tears from her eyes and the memory of his touch from her heart. She wondered how it could be possible to love two men at the same time, yet still be able to know which one was right for her.

At long last, she trailed back to the graveyard to rejoin Harry and the others, who were anxiously awaiting her return. The instant Harry saw her brilliant form breaking through the darkness, he leapt to his feet and ran for her, lifting her off the ground and into his warm embrace.

"I wasn't sure you'd come back," he said breathlessly.

“Don’t be silly,” said Hannah, smiling through her drying tears. “You’d better watch out. I’m not so sure I’ll be willing to let you out of my sight again.”

“Excellent. I’ll hold you to that,” said Harry, ever grateful that she had chosen to be with *him*.

And, he kissed her.

After a long stretch of lingering in his intense passionate kisses, Hannah pulled away from him and glanced about the graveyard.

“So where do we go from here?” she inquired softly.

“Forward,” said Harry with a purposeful smile. He reached into his pocket, retrieved a shiny diamond engagement ring from its confines, and slipped it onto Hannah’s finger.

“Indeed — *forward*,” said Hannah breathlessly, nodding in accord.

With that, Harry’s arm claimed her waist, and they set off together, past the Riddle Estate and into the cool, moonlit night with Ron, Hermione, and the others cheerfully rejoicing behind them.

THE END

***Please note: Any phrases surrounded in *asterisks* are segments taken from J.K.’s books.*

The Myth of the Basilisk:

But what was to attack this terrible and unapproachable monster? There is an old saying that "everything has its enemy"- and the cockatrice quailed before the weasel. The basilisk might look daggers, the weasel cared not, but advanced boldly to the conflict. When bitten, the weasel retired for a moment to eat some rue, which was the only plant the basilisks could not wither, returned with renewed strength and soundness to the charge, and never left the enemy till he was stretched dead on the plain. The monster, too, as if conscious of the irregular way in which he came into the world, was supposed to have a great antipathy to a cock (rooster); and well he might, for as soon as he heard the cock crow he expired.

There are three ways to kill a Basilisk:

- 1. Carry a crystal globe or mirror and reflect its image or breath back upon itself.*
- 2. Carry a weasel whose bite would kill the Basilisk,*
- 3. Carry a cockerel whose crowing would send the Basilisk into fits and it would die.*

Footnotes:

The Myth of the Basilisk: <http://www.mythome.org/bfcxxxvi.html>

Three Ways to Kill a Basilisk: <http://www.sacredspiral.com/beastuary/B/basilisk.html>

