Owing Her

by Alison

It is nineteen years later. But is all well?

One shot, complete

Chapter 1 of 1

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The Healer's face said it all. As I walked into the Spell Damage ward of St Mungo's, she looked up from her desk, and her harried expression changed to one of relief. She stood quickly and came to meet me.

"Oh, sir! I'm so glad you could come!"

"Is she having a bad time today?" I asked resignedly.

The Healer nodded. "I'm afraid so. We've had to use the Body Bind spell on her to stop her hurting herself. She was thrashing about, screaming and crying."

My feelings must have shown on my face because the Healer added hastily, "Nobody blames you, sir. You can hardly be here twenty-four hours a day, can you? You're probably the best visitor this ward has ever seen, coming in nearly every day..."

Nobody blames you. Those words bit deeply into my heart, although the Healer couldn't know that. "I was out of the country on unavoidable business," I answered brusquely, cutting through the chatter. "I'll see her now."

"Yes, sir. Of course. I'm sure she'll settle down, now you're here..."

Yes. The poor little darling always does settle when I'm with her. I pointed my wand at my throat and muttered the usual spell, then followed the Healer to the private room.

Hermione was lying on her back, the unnatural rigidness of her posture clearly showing she was magically restrained. I walked past the Healer, only marginally aware that she shut the door, leaving us alone together.

"Hermione!" I said aloud, infusing my voice with a gently scolding tone. "What have you been doing, getting yourself into such a state? *Finite Incantatum!*"

Hermione gave a little gasp as she was freed from the Body Bind, then stared wildly in my direction, reaching out towards me with both hands. "Ron! Oh, Ron! I couldn't find you. I searched and searched... but... I couldn't find you!"

Tears were rolling down her cheeks. I sat on the bed, pulling her close, stroking her hair and trying to ease the tremors running through her.

"Shh. It's all right, 'Mione. I'm here now. It's all right."

"We flew up from the Chamber of Secrets together, with the basilisk fangs, and then... what happened? There was a flash of light..."

I winced and buried my face in her mass of bushy hair. I remembered, all right. Only too well.

Hermione gazed wildly at me, her blind eyes silvery in the dim lighting of the room. "It was Draco! Draco Malfoy ambushed us!" She shuddered. "He... he used the Killing Curse on you, Ron!" Her voice was rising wildly, threatening to break hysterically.

"He missed, he missed me," I soothed her, cupping her cheek in my hand, trying to calm her with the reassurance of my touch.

"No, I saw you fall! And then... then, he tortured me, Ron! He was trying to get me to tell him where Harry was hiding! But I didn't know where Harry was, I didn't! He used Cruciatus on me, again and again, yelling at me to tell him where Harry was..." She was sobbing uncontrollably now, struggling against me.

"Hermione," I said firmly. "Listen to me. Draco Malfoy did use a curse on me, but not Avada Kedavra. It knocked me out, I was just unconscious, Hermione! You can feel me, you can hear me! I'm alive, I'm here!"

Slowly she stopped struggling and by intervals, the tension left her body. She turned her opaque eyes towards my face, and I steeled myself for the question that always came now. "I can't see you, Ron. Why can't I see you?"

"You knocked your head against the stone floor when you were tortured," I answered miserably. "We're here at St Mungo's. Everything's going to be all right." The lie sat in my stomach bitterly. It had been nineteen years since Hermione had lost her sight. She would never see my face again.

We sat quietly for a while, me watching her as she tried desperately to remember. Finally, as always happened, she gave up the unequal struggle. I saw it clearly when her face lost its panicked expression and her poor abused brain came up with a gentler alternative to her present situation. Now was the time she'd slip into her personal haven, "remembering" scenes from her life that had never happened, could never happen.

In Hermione's alternate reality, we had two children, a daughter named Rose and a son we'd called Hugo, after her Muggle grandfather. Both were talented magically. I had heard so much about them that I could almost picture them in my own mind as reality, rather than as shadowy characters from a dreamworld. I had heard Hermione's scenarios about when the children were born, birthdays, Christmas, trips to the seaside and her parents ...

She sat up straighter in the bed, and began looking about the dim room eagerly. "Where are they?" she said. "Oh, look! Over there, Ron!" And she lifted one hand to wave brightly.

Ah. I knew this scenario, it was one of Hermione's favorites. We were at Platform Nine and Three Quarters, waiting for the Hogwarts Express. Rose, as I knew from long experience, was already wearing her brand new Hogwarts robes, and we had just found Harry and his family in the crowd. I played along, feeling relief that Hermione had calmed down so quickly. Some days, the memory of her torture went on for hours until I was sobbing as hard as she was, telling her it was a nightmare, just a nightmare, she was safe with me and I wouldn't let anything or anybody hurt her, ever again...

Hermione turned to me with a little smile. "I knew you didn't Confund the driving examiner, Ron! I had complete faith in you."

I listened to her as she spoke with her imaginary family and friends, once more immersed in her happy dreamworld. I was content merely to be with her. Here in her imagination she was secure and I'd do all I could to make sure that the real world didn't impinge and spoil it for her. It was all she had left, and I owed her that much.

"Oh! It's Draco Malfoy!" Hermione's voice cut into my brooding thoughts and I started, but then saw that she was gazing at a spot on the wall to the left. "That must be his son, what's his name again? Oh yes, little Scorpius."

I listened with interest. This was a new twist in the familiar plot. Always before, any mention of the Malfoy name was met with instant hysteria. Was she recovering enough to put the torture behind her? Or was she instead retreating further into her imaginary world, where even the fact of her terrible torture was merely the echo of a bad dream?

"Ron, for heaven's sake," Hermione said, in response to something I had apparently just said. "Don't turn the children against each other before they've even started school!"

"You're right, sorry," I mumbled, wondering what I was supposed to have said to prompt that half-stern, half-amused tone from her.

She raised her hand to touch my face in a conciliatory gesture, then paused as she felt my long hair brush against her fingers. "My, your hair's gotten long!" she said in surprise. "You'd better let me cut it for you when we get home, otherwise Molly will be after you to do it!"

I relaxed as the one-sided conversation began again, letting it wash over me: dinner at Harry's house, plans for a weekend shopping trip with Ginny, all the minute details that Hermione's brain used to block out the sickening reality. For Harry was dead, killed by the Dark Lord. And who could ever have thought it would be otherwise, really? A teenager, going up against the most powerful wizard the world had ever known, how could he ever have hoped to win? And Ginny had been kissed by a Dementor and was now being used to give Voldemort heirs...

"Oh, I am tired, Ron," Hermione said at last, sinking back against the pillows of the bed. "I didn't sleep much last night, what with the excitement of Rose starting school and everything today."

"Have a nap here in the car then, while I drive," I said, pulling up the blanket and tucking her in. "I'll wake you when we get home."

Hermione yawned widely, then nodded drowsily. "I love you, Ron."

"I love you, too, Hermione," I whispered. It was the only true thing I'd said since I walked into the room.

I stood a little longer by her bedside, watching her sleep. Her face was peaceful again, and with her eyes closed, she looked not that much different from the studious young witch I'd fallen so hopelessly in love with at Hogwarts. But even then, I'd denied my feelings; for how could I, a pure-blood, ever hope to have any sort of relationship with a Muggle-born? The very idea was ludicrous...

I took one last look at her. She smiled in her sleep, and I fervently hoped her dreams were pleasant ones, unlike the nightmares that haunt me every time I close my eyes. I turned and walked back out the door, waiting until it clicked shut behind me before ending the spell that let my voice resemble Ronald Weasley's. The one time I'd forgotten to cast the spell had been the only time: Hermione had gone into a screaming hysterical terror when she heard my real voice and had needed to be sedated for a week.

Oh, if only I could turn back time! I'd never have followed the Dark Lord's orders, but I was a gullible young man back then, thinking that if I could win back his favor I could save my father's life! And the only way to do that was to give him Potter. But when I realized what I'd done, I was sickened. I've tried to atone ever since, bringing Hermione here to St Mungos, paying for every treatment and facility available. Nothing can erase what I did to her in my youthful arrogance, but at least I can make sure she's treated with gentleness and kindness and see to it that she has her comforting dream world.

The Healer looked up at my approach. "How is she now, sir?"

I nodded. "Better. She's sleeping."

"Good. Will you be back to visit tomorrow?"

"Yes. I don't have any more trips scheduled for some time, so I'll be here."

The Healer's expression was relieved. "She's always so much better when she's seen you, sir. Calmer."

I tried not to wince. It's due to me that Hermione's in here at all. I could only nod as I walked towards the exit. The Healer's cheery voice followed me out the door.

"Good night then, Mr Malfoy. See you tomorrow."

The End.