

Hermione's Search

by firefly124

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: Very belated birthday fic for LaiksMarei, written to one of her prompts from the last SSHG_Exchange. Huge thanks to ubiquirk for beta-reading, richardgloucester for Brit-picking, and Mint Stick for quasi-Finn-picking. Reference notes on the setting follow the story.

The view from her hospital room was of a car park well-baked in the late summer sun, but anything more picturesque would have been wasted, as Hermione Granger-Weasley was oblivious to it.

It was all her fault. She'd been the one with the brilliant idea to turn this holiday into something educational.

"Mum ... it's a castle," Hugo said, boredom evident in his voice.

"We spend all our time at school in a castle. Why do we need to look at another one?" Rose whinged.

"Because it's not just any castle. It's the largest surviving castle in Finland and an absolutely fascinating museum."

She knew they'd both rolled their eyes as soon as she wasn't looking.

Had they taken the "fun only" trip to the Quidditch World Cup just outside Helsinki as Ron wanted, things would have been different. They'd have been more guarded in a crowd of wizards and witches than they'd been in a place filled with Muggles.

After a morning spent wandering through various exhibits, Hugo showing a surprising interest in some of the artifacts, they'd gone to lunch. And since they'd gone along with her wish to see Turku Castle, she felt it was only fair to allow them to try the Runeberg's tart for afters, especially as it was apparently unusual to find a place that served them at this time of year.

She should have listened to her instincts. Oh, they weren't the right instincts, but at least they'd have done the job.

The dentists' daughter in her cringed at the thought of her children's teeth coated with that much jam and icing, even though the tart itself was rather small.

"Mum, you've got to try this!" Hugo insisted, holding out a fork to her.

"Just a taste," she conceded, accepting the fork and taking a small bite. It was every bit as over-sweet as it had looked, so she simply smiled and handed the utensil back.

Either that, or she should have let Hugo convince her to order a whole one for herself. If she couldn't save the rest of her family, the least she could have done was join them.

Rose was the first to double over in pain, and Hermione's first thought was appendicitis. But then Hugo followed. And Ron. It only took her a second to guess what had happened, and then her own gut began to clench as she struggled with her bag, fishing for the jar she'd always kept with her since the last time she'd been so unprepared.

By the time she had the jar in her hands and opened, her own vision was going gray. The small stones spilled out onto the table and rolled off the edge, and she scrambled after them. She found something small and hard on the rug next to her chair, hoped it was one of the bezoars, and tried to jam it into Hugo's mouth just as the gray turned to black.

And now here she was: a nearly anonymous tourist in a Muggle hospital with a funeral to arrange...or should there be three? She couldn't imagine going through it more than once...and no way to contact anyone back home. No owl, no Floo, and certainly no prayer of casting a Patronus. Why couldn't at least one of Arthur's treasured "fellytones" actually work?

An aide came in, strapped a cuff around her arm, clipped something on her finger, and stuck a thermometer in her mouth. Hermione was vaguely aware that she ought to have some curiosity how this odd machine she was being attached to worked or at least what the various readouts other than temperature meant. She couldn't be arsed.

This aide at least had more sense than to try and get her to talk. Some of the younger ones were hideously cheerful or, worse, tried to get her to be as well.

The shadows in the car park shortened, disappeared, reappeared on the opposite side of the cars. Someone knocked at her door, cleared their throat. Slowly, Hermione turned to see who it was this time.

"Oh. Kaarina. Hi," she said, wondering what the social worker wanted with her today.

The usual it seemed. No, she didn't have anyone she wanted called, at least not by any means at Kaarina's disposal. No, she wasn't sure what she arrangements she wanted to make for the burial of her husband and children, except that, yes, she would be bringing them back to England somehow. And no, she had no idea when her alleged uncle might return to help her sort all this out.

Caught somewhere between waking and sleep, she felt something jiggle at the end of her nose. Something going into her nose! No, that wasn't quite right. It was already there. If she concentrated very hard, she could feel it going down the back of her throat.

Warmth spread through her stomach, and she finally realized the thing must be a tube of some kind, and someone had just poured something down it.

Was she in hospital? She couldn't imagine why she would be. She also couldn't imagine any other reason she'd have a tube going from her nose into her stomach.

"Sir, you shouldn't be handling that," a heavily accented voice said.

"It appeared to be leaking," a scratchy but distinctly English and vaguely familiar voice replied.

"Hmph. Next time ring for a nurse instead of trying to fix it yourself."

Who was he, this man they'd taken for her uncle? Was the scratchy voice really familiar? Or did it just sound like home because everyone else sounded foreign? It was almost the only thing she could bring herself to wonder about.

She'd realized it must be a Muggle hospital. If it had been a wizarding one, Mr. Scratchy Voice wouldn't have been the one to put the potion down the tube, when obviously he wasn't supposed to have touched it at all. And it was definitely a potion; she'd felt the magical tingles radiate through her whole body.

Kaarina was looking at her strangely. Apparently Hermione had given a wrong answer while she'd been woolgathering.

"I'm sorry," she lied. "What was the question?"

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She'd always found the Burrow a homey, welcoming place. Today, everything simply hurt to look at.

In the garden, she half-expected to see Ron teaching the children to toss gnomes. In the kitchen, Rose ought to be sighing in exasperation as Molly tried to interest her in baking. The sitting room should hold an intense game of wizard chess as Ron tried to pass his passion on to Hugo. Instead, everywhere she looked or went, she could feel the weight of the resentful stares, hear the hush that fell as soon as she entered a room, and see Ron's chin, Rose's ears, and Hugo's eyes on one or more of her in-laws.

Whoever had the idea that funerals brought closure had obviously never been to one hosted by the Weasley family.

"What're you doing out here?" Harry asked.

"Letting the rest of them mourn." She hugged herself and stared bleakly at the chickens in their run. "Is this how you felt ...?"

"After so many other people died and I didn't?" He put an arm across her shoulders. "Not exactly the same. I can't imagine if it had been Ginny and ..." He shuddered, unable to finish his sentence. "But yeah. Something like that."

They stood that way for a while, staring at the chickens as they pecked at their feed.

"We *will* catch whoever did this, Hermione." His tone brooked no other possible outcome.

Some unnamed sensation abruptly flared and died in the pit of her stomach.

"No one's found anything yet, Harry." The restaurant had come up clean and purely Muggle after several rounds of investigations and, one assumed, Obliviations. "Even if you lot do sort out the poison, and that would be a neat trick at this point, there's no guarantee you'll find who made it."

"Actually, I was thinking of tackling it from another angle."

"What other angle is there?" She huffed. "There was no trace of the poison left in my system or at the restaurant, no suspects, nothing! No wonder Rita Skeeter has half the wizarding world convinced I..."

"You'd never! Anyone who knows you knows better than that, Hermione."

"Do they?" She shot a glance over her shoulder to the house. "I'm not so sure."

Silence.

"So, what other angle did you have in mind?"

Harry removed his arm and turned to face her. "What about that man everyone at the hospital thought was your uncle? You said yourself he had to have been a wizard."

"That doesn't mean he knows anything about who did it." She frowned. "It is weird though."

Harry's eyes focused on something far beyond Hermione's shoulder and said, "I just have a feeling if we can figure that out, we'll figure out the rest."

"Who's 'we'?"

He looked her in the eye. "You and me."

She started to protest.

"Who else should I have help me with this, Hermione?" His eyes glistened. "For all the worst of it, it was always the three of us."

She closed her eyes and turned away. He had no right to be the one so ... so fired up over this. He still had Ginny and his children. She no longer had anyone. Not Ron, not her children, not her blissfully Memory Charmed parents that she hadn't seen in two decades. However, she supposed that also meant she had nothing to lose and no reason to stay here any longer than was necessary.

"Ginny isn't going to be very understanding about this," Hermione pointed out, opening her eyes again. Two of the chickens were trying to peck at the same bit of food. There was plenty of other food just a foot or so away, but they didn't appear to care.

"Yes, she will." Harry's voice was firm. "He was her brother, Hermione. And your children were her niece and nephew. She wants their killer brought to justice as much as you and I do."

She cut her eyes at him. "And when the *Prophet* starts saying we planned it all along and we've run off together?"

A squawk from the squabbling birds nearly made her jump.

"They'll say what they want anyway. And when we find the bastard and haul his arse back to Azkaban, they'll act like they'd always known what we were really doing."

There really wasn't any point in arguing with him when he got like this, and she did want to get far, far away from the Burrow. Not that going back ... there ... was going to be any improvement.

"All right." She didn't bother turning back to him. She knew what expression would be on his face. She'd seen it enough times before.

"All right. I'll ... I'll make the arrangements and handle telling the others."

"You do that, Harry."

In the run, the victorious bird gobbled down its prize.

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Their liaison in the Finnish Ministry was about as helpful as Hermione might have expected, though at least not quite as obstructive as Kingsley had inexplicably been. She declined her offer of tea, little caring that she probably seemed as paranoid as Alastor Moody, and settled into the somewhat uncomfortable chair she had been offered. Harry, she noticed, took a pass on the tea as well.

"We have already made inquiries to what few English expatriates we have," Herra Hämäläinen said in a tone that indicated they should have known this and not wasted everyone's time by coming here. "None have any more knowledge of who may have helped you than they do of who is responsible for poisoning your family."

"They could be lying," Hermione pointed out.

"Yes, they could," Herra Hämäläinen agreed. "However, we do not question people under Veritaserum without more evidence than an accent and a few vague descriptions."

That had been the most frustrating. No one seemed to know quite what the wizard had looked like. He had probably used a subtle variant on the Muggle-Repelling Charm. Brilliant spellwork, if bloody unhelpful.

"No one suggested ..." Harry began.

"Yes, they most certainly did," Hämäläinen snapped. "In fact, your Minister Shacklebolt seemed to think we ought to allow your Aurors to interrogate every wizard or witch of British descent currently living in Finland!"

Hermione bit her lip so hard it bled. While she would just as soon question them all as well, she was furious that Kingsley's heavy-handedness had been so counterproductive.

"If we could at least have that list of names," Harry said, "we might be able to work out if any might have either a reason for either the poisoning or for helping."

The glare he received in return made it abundantly clear that would not be forthcoming either.

Hermione turned to look out the window and tuned out Harry's insistence that Hämäläinen go over the entire sequence of events again. They'd been poisoned, taken to a Muggle hospital...too late for Ron and the children, why had they bothered?...someone had forwarded an article from the Muggle press to the Finnish Ministry of Magic, and some mysterious person had sneaked into the hospital and given her a potion. Nothing new. It had been a wasted trip after all.

The wizarding Market Square was bustling with activity, and absolutely anyone down there might be either the one who'd poisoned her family or the one who'd posed as her uncle to save her, or they might be somewhere else entirely, and it seemed there was just no way to know.

"Wait," Harry said. "Tell me that bit again. Something doesn't sound right."

Hämäläinen shrugged. "It is not that unusual that the article came from a Swedish-language newspaper. However, it did seem moderately strange that the accompanying note, also in Swedish, appeared to have been written by a non-native speaker."

While the two of them nattered on, Hermione tried to process this, as it was the first truly new thing they'd heard. From what she'd learned while touring...her mind skittered away from the incisive questions Rose had asked the guides on the subject...it was very common for Finns to have Swedish as a second language. But why would someone who was Finnish write such a note in imperfect Swedish? To hide their identity? Surely there were better ways.

"Your Minister Shacklebolt has already inspected the note personally," Hämäläinen said, handing the parchment to Harry. "I can't imagine what you think you'll find."

As Hermione watched, all the blood seemed to drain from Harry's face.

"What?" she demanded. "Harry, you can't even read Swedish. What is it?"

He didn't seem to hear, so she leaned over to read it. Well, look at it. She couldn't exactly read Swedish either, though that was what Translation Charms were for.

She didn't need one. The spiky, spidery handwriting burned her retinas and threatened to scorch her brain. It had been over twenty years since she'd seen it, but it was entirely too memorable to miss.

"It can't be," she murmured.

"I know it can't." Harry still hadn't moved.

"But it has to be." She thought a moment. "And Kingsley knows."

Harry nodded slowly. "And that's why he tried to stop us coming."

For the first time, Hermione glimpsed a shard of hope that they might find her benefactor and, in so doing, whomever had poisoned her family. She chose her next words very carefully.

"So, if you were an English wizard hiding somewhere in Finland, but it made more sense to learn Swedish, where would you be?"

Herra Hämäläinen lifted an eyebrow in eerie if unknowing imitation of the man they now sought to find. "The Åland Islands, most likely."

"Well, that's it, then," Harry said. "Show us where they are, and we'll just go have a look around these islands."

"That might take a while," Hämäläinen said blandly. "There are more than six thousand of them."

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Given the way their meeting had started out, Hermione was not the least bit surprised that Herra Hämäläinen did not have any intention of turning them loose to search the Åland Islands on their own and, in fact, arranged a Portkey to take them back to England for the next day. Fortunately, these things worked as slowly here as they did back home, so that did give them just about twenty-four hours. Not enough time to search over six thousand islands...and no need, as most were uninhabitable skerries, but that still left about three hundred...but enough time to do a bit of preliminary research.

She could see why the so-called Peace Islands would appeal to someone whose life had been dominated by war. The Muggles had declared them demilitarized ages ago, and for all that they were officially part of Finland, they were essentially autonomous. No wizarding population to speak of, but that could be a point in their favor as well for someone who hadn't exactly been well-treated by the wizarding world. And sparsely enough populated in places to get away with a fair amount of magic without the Muggles catching on. Yes, she could see their appeal quite well.

When they arrived in London, Harry *Evanesc*ed the now useless crumpled tin can and said, "So, you'll come to the house once you're ready?"

Hermione merely nodded and watched him Apparate home to Ginny and the children.

She very much did not want to return to her own home. However, she needed several things that she could not afford to simply buy new, and so she focused hard on her study and turned.

When she arrived, she was dismayed to find she'd landed in her garden. Obviously she hadn't wanted to enter the house quite strongly enough and was lucky she hadn't splinched. With a sigh, she went inside.

Rather than head straight for her study, she wandered into the kitchen. There was very little food there, but she managed to rustle up tea and biscuits. They'd have to lay in some supplies for the trip back.

Somewhat fortified, she went into her study and grabbed several books that she thought might be useful, shrank them, and stuffed them into her bag. Almost as an afterthought, she pulled one of the books back out, re-enlarged it, and flipped through to the applicable section. She noted that there were, in fact, other supplies they would need, some of which she had, some of which they would need to purchase.

At least she didn't need more clothing, as she was already packed from their original trip. The last thing she wanted to do just now was venture into her bedroom. For the short time she'd stayed here before and after the funeral, she'd slept on the sofa. She wasn't sure what was worse, being in that room or having to pass the children's rooms along the way. If she even entertained the question, she'd spend the rest of the day sobbing, so she focused instead on the task at hand.

One last check to be sure she had all she needed, and with a crack, she Apparated first to Slug and Jiggers, then to Harry and Ginny's. This time, she had no trouble with maintaining the correct degree of deliberation.

"Auntie 'Mione!" Lily wrapped her aunt in a vise-like hug.

Hermione reflexively hugged her niece. After a moment, she realized the girl was shaking with tears. Across the room, Ginny's expression was bleak.

"What is it, sweetheart?" she asked, knowing it was probably a foolish question.

"Daddy didn't bring them back," she sobbed. "I want to play with Rose! I want to play with Rose, and Daddy's supposed to be able to fix anything, and he can't bring back her or Uncle Ron or Hugo." Lily broke the hug and beat her small fists against Hermione's torso. "And I don't want you to take my Daddy away again because then he won't come back either!"

Stung, Hermione sank into the nearest chair and pulled Lily into her lap, tears now streaming down her own face as the girl shifted her blows to Hermione's shoulder but made no move to leave. What assurances could she give? She hadn't managed to keep Hugo and Rose and Ron safe, after all.

"I know," was all she said, in a whisper so soft she wondered if Lily would even hear it. "I want them back too."

"We all do." Harry was suddenly kneeling beside them, stroking his daughter's hair and settling his other hand over her fists to stop them. "But there's no way to do that, Lily. I'm sorry you thought that was why I was gone before."

Hermione felt her heart break just a little bit more, impossible as that seemed. How must it be to be ten years old, to think your Daddy had left to fetch your uncle and cousins back, not just because he's your Daddy and he can do anything, but because *everyone* believes your Daddy can do anything, and then to have him return empty-handed.

"What Auntie Hermione and I need to do now is find out who did this," he continued. "Because whoever it is, they're very bad, and they'll do it again. We can't bring back Rose or Hugo or Uncle Ron, but we can make sure that doesn't happen to anyone else."

The edge in his voice told Hermione that he feared his own family would be the next target. He might well be right.

"You'll come back?" Lily asked. Her voice sounded as if she were half her age.

Harry kissed the top of her head. "I'll come back."

The look Ginny shot him said, "You'd better."

The look she gave Hermione was unfathomable.

"Come on, then," Harry said. "Give your old dad a hug. The sooner we go, the sooner we'll be back."

Lily sniffed, climbed out of Hermione's lap, and grabbed onto Harry as if she never planned to let him go. Eventually, Ginny pried her away, picked her up as if she were half her age, and gave Harry a sound good-bye kiss of her own. Feeling a strange mixture of envy and embarrassment, Hermione looked away.

"Ready?" he asked once he was done.

She nodded and pulled out the bookmark she'd decided to use for a Portkey. Tapping it with her wand, she set it to go to the island they'd chosen.

"See you soon," Harry said as he reached for the bookmark.

Unable to find her voice, Hermione simply nodded. She was saved from any need to attempt more when the Portkey activated, spinning them out of the house and on their way.

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It had been hard to decide the best course of action. An uninhabited island was clearly the best choice for arrival, given that the population was almost entirely Muggle, but how much could they really accomplish there? On the other hand, in the more populated areas, they'd stick out as strangers not acting like proper tourists. As Snape was clearly taking Muggle newspapers from someplace, thus going about in public, that would risk him learning they were there and running.

They finally decided to stick with the island they'd chosen. It was uninhabited and hardly more than a skerry but had a decrepit shack on it that was easily altered inside to be livable. And while its boat shed was empty, they should be able Transfigure a boat if they needed to get to one of the other islands by Muggle means...or, at least, Muggle-appearing means.

Once they'd cleared out the cobwebs, enlarged the inner space from "shack" to "two-bedroom flat," and got the plumbing working, Hermione promptly unpacked and settled in to read the books she'd brought, assigning Harry one as well once he'd unpacked.

"I don't think this one's going to be much good," Harry said after an hour or so. "Most of these are the spells we tried in order to locate his body when it turned up missing. If they were going to work, they'd have worked then."

"I know," Hermione said. "There is one section in here that looks promising, but if he's made his home Unplottable or placed it under Fidelius, I'm not sure it'll work." She pointed out the section she'd noted earlier as Harry came over to look.

"Well, he's obviously not staying hidden away all the time," Harry pointed out. "Even he needs to be able to go out among people once in a while, and he gets a newspaper."

Hermione nodded as Harry looked thoughtfully at the Charm she'd indicated.

"If we can figure out how to combine that with a standard Surveillance Spell," he said, "it should work."

Hermione chewed her lip. That did sound like a good idea, if a bit difficult to pull off. The Surveillance Spell could be set for an almost unlimited duration of time, but needed to be focused on a specific location or cast directly on a person who was physically present. The Unhidden Spell already combined a charm and a potion to locate a person who had forgotten who they were, though it looked as though it should also work to find someone who wished to *be* forgotten. Linking it to another spell would be chancy, but as it probably would not work on its own unless they used it at a time Snape was out of whatever protections he had on his home, it seemed they would need to try.

Something else about it was bothering her.

"Harry, what if he doesn't know anything?"

He sighed. "Then we'll have hit a brick wall, at least for now."

She thought he was being rather generous with that last bit. There simply were no other leads. And they'd have hunted him up why, then? To thank him for saving her life? No doubt Harry would do exactly that. She'd rather hex him into next year for it.

Then again, if he couldn't point them at whomever was responsible for her family's deaths, perhaps that would do.

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"Hermione, come quick!"

She dropped her book and darted over to look in the Charmed Mirror that both held the Surveillance Spell and had been treated with the potion from the Unhidden Spell.

There, plain as day, was Severus Snape, walking through what appeared to be a Muggle marketplace, dressed in Muggle clothing. In the lower right corner of the mirror, a map indicated that he was in Mariehamn, the capital of Åland.

"So much for the idea he's on one of these supposedly-uninhabited islands under a Fidelius," Harry said with a snort.

"He still could be," Hermione replied. "He's well-hidden somewhere, or it wouldn't have taken us a week to see this much."

"Let's go." Harry scooped up the mirror and patted his wand in his sleeve.

Hermione turned on her heel and bolted for the sailboat they'd Transfigured for just this sort of situation. They couldn't very well Apparate or Portkey into such a populated area. Neither of them knew how to sail, but they could hope no one would notice that they were controlling the boat by magic. Even if they did know how to handle a sailboat, they'd need magic to get it to move quickly enough, as they were at least fifty kilometers from the main island.

As it was, they were only halfway there when Hermione, who was watching the Charmed Mirror, saw Snape climbing into a boat, presumably his own.

"Why didn't we see that before?" Harry asked.

"I think the spell didn't pick him up until he was around other people," she replied distractedly. "But now it's found him, it'll keep on until something stops it."

"Like whatever spells he's using to hide where he's been living."

"Probably." She actually wasn't sure about that. Depending on what those spells were, the Charmed Mirror might be able to follow him through them. Or it might not. They'd find out soon enough.

Leaving Harry to control the spells propelling and guiding their boat, she watched Snape cast off from the pier and maneuver out to open water. She wasn't sure whether to hope he was heading to his home or not. It would be easier than trying to confront him in public, but they would also be at a definite strategic disadvantage.

Not that it mattered what *they* hoped he would do.

Fortunately, wherever he was going, he took a path that was headed roughly towards them but along a different enough course that they wouldn't meet on the water. In fact ...

"Harry, slow down." She looked from the map on the mirror to the map of their location to a boat off to their left. Er, port. "I think that's him. No, don't turn yet! Let him get out of sight first."

"I wasn't going to turn." Hermione didn't need to look at him. She could hear the pout. "I've been an Auror for almost twenty years. I think I know better than to scare off someone I'm trailing."

Hermione sighed but didn't reply, hoping their sudden swerve had looked like poor sailing, if Snape had seen it at all.

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When they pulled in to the pier on the island of Kumlinge, there was no sign of Snape. There was no sign of anyone else, but this was the same sort of pier their shack had. Rather like a driveway for boats as opposed to a car park.

There were other houses in view, with similar piers, but they were rather far off. Hardly surprising that he'd choose someplace without neighbors too close by. If anything, it was surprising he'd chosen a place with any neighbors at all.

"Guess that's why he didn't use a Fidelius," Harry said. "It's one thing to go walking into an invisible house in London. There are enough buildings and enough people to get away with it. But here?"

"It is Unplottable though." The house itself had never shown on the Surveillance Mirror's map. Fortunately, the spell had still been able to follow him.

Silently as they could, and that required a fancy bit of spellwork, they tied their now-Disillusioned boat up to the pier as well. It would be tricky to find it again, but a *Finite Incantatem* cast towards the correct area of the pier should do it. They didn't expect to need to leave with anywhere near as much stealth, after all.

There wasn't much to work with for cover, so they waited until they'd reached the front door to remove the Disillusionment Spells from each other.

"I'm surprised we haven't been hexed yet," Harry murmured as he raised his hand to knock.

"That is only because I knew which pair of dunderheads was following me," a raspy voice answered from behind them.

Hermione turned slowly, as did Harry, hands up to show they weren't holding their wands.

Snape, on the other hand, was most certainly holding his and had it carefully trained on them.

"I should have known the two of you could not leave well enough alone," he snarled. "Was it not enough that I saved your life, Mrs. Weasley? Surely you did not think I require your pathetic gratitude."

"No, it bloody well wasn't enough!" Hermione exploded, lowering her hands and advancing on him, little caring that he was still pointing his wand at her. After two steps, she thought better of it and stopped. "Enough would have been saving my husband and children!"

"It was already too late," he said in a somewhat lower tone that finally registered as Mr. Scratchy Voice from the hospital. "By the time I'd read it in the newspaper, the others had already died."

"Then you should have let me die too!"

"As should you!" he snapped. "However, as you did not, it seemed only appropriate to reciprocate."

"What?" Harry and Hermione demanded in unison.

"As this is my property upon which you are trespassing, I believe I shall ask the questions, beginning with what the bloody hell the two of you are doing here."

Firm as his voice was, Hermione thought he appeared startled by their reaction. While his ... accusation or whatever it was made little sense, she was still too infuriated to give it much thought.

"Looking for answers," Harry replied quickly. "No one's managed to find any leads as to who poisoned them, Snape. Not a single reliable clue."

"And you thought I might be willing to go back to spying? For you, Potter? Not a chance!"

"Of course not, you idiot!" Hermione took another step towards him, though she stopped again when he flicked his wand at her, warning sparks flaring at the tip. "We thought you might know more than all the Muggle witnesses. At the very least, you know what poison was used since you managed to give me the antidote."

"In fact, Mrs. Weasley, it is not that difficult for almost anyone to get hold of the necessary ingredients to make an Execution Elixir, nor is it particularly challenging to brew. It could have been almost any former Death Eater or sympathizer wishing to avenge themselves upon two thirds of the Golden Trio."

"And two children who'd never done anything to them. Who weren't even born yet during the war." She swallowed the tears that threatened. Crying in front of Harry was one thing. She wouldn't fall apart in front of Snape.

"Yes." His wand lowered an inch or two. "I am sorry for your loss, Mrs. Weasley."

"Thank you," she replied from sheer habit, though she still didn't feel at all grateful.

"But I cannot help you find the perpetrators. I do not know who they were, and the identity of the poison is as much a clue as to say they must have been wizards instead of Muggles." He stepped to one side as if bowing them out. "Now leave."

The fight gone out of her and feeling nearly as hopeless as she had the day of the funeral, Hermione began to walk past him, then stopped and looked at him through narrowed eyes, a new distraction pulling her away from her despair. "What did you mean when you said I should have let you die?"

"Madam Pomfrey informed me that I had you to thank for treating my wounds," Snape replied. "That and informing her that she had another patient to be retrieved from that infernal Shack."

"You did that?" Harry asked. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't!" she insisted. She'd hardly have been so upset at the fact she'd done nothing if she had, in fact, at least tried to save him. "I left the Shack with you, and then we went to the castle and comforted the Weasleys while you went off to Dumbledore's ... to Snape's office."

Snape rolled his eyes at her correction.

"And then we were fighting again." She paused. Something there seemed just the least bit off. "But Voldemort had given you an hour. I don't think we were all standing around crying and hugging for an hour."

"You weren't," Harry said. "At least, I saw Ginny as I was leaving. She was taking care of one of the firsties."

"Clearly, Mrs. Weasley, your memory was modified." Snape appeared thoughtful. "I should have expected Kingsley to see to that."

Hermione felt her jaw drop. Now it was Kingsley she wanted to hex. Not that she hadn't done as much and more, to her own parents no less, but that had been for their own good! Did he honestly think she wouldn't have kept Snape's secret? And this, this was why he'd tried to stop her coming here? Tried to stop her from avenging her family?

"Come on, Hermione," Harry said, tugging at her wrist. "Let's go. I'm sorry we bothered you, Snape. Thank you. For everything."

Snape didn't reply, not that she'd have expected him to, had she had the mental energy to spend on expectations. She was still reeling from the disappointment that even though they'd found him, they were still no closer to finding out who'd killed her family, compounded by the shock of learning that she'd saved his life and had the memory of it erased.

Harry had to guide her back to the boat, where she stared out over the water all the way back to their shack.

"It was all for nothing," she said once they'd finished returning the shack to its original non-magical state.

"We'll keep looking." Harry looked mulish, though she could tell from his tone that he was nearly as discouraged as she. "Come on. Let's go home."

Resigned, she touched the bookmark and felt it tug them away from this little deserted island to the much larger and emptier-feeling one that no longer seemed like home.

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"What, exactly, are you doing here again, Mrs. Weasley?" Snape demanded, his scowl reminiscent of many a classroom moment.

Hermione wasn't put off in the least. The only thing she truly felt was relieved. Two years later, she'd wondered if she would find him in the same place or whether he would have moved somewhere completely different for the very reason that she might do exactly what she was doing now. Fortunately not.

"I needed to ask you something," she replied, her well-rehearsed speech having fled the moment he'd opened his door.

"I still do not know who murdered your family." A note of frustration suggested he'd actually tried to discover that answer.

"Did it work?" she blurted. "Going someplace completely different and starting all over again. Did it work?"

She'd watched him for a bit yesterday, after she'd created a new Charmed Mirror, the old one long since destroyed to protect his secret. She wasn't sure why she had. The point had only been to find him again, to be sure where he was, not to spy on him. But he'd looked oddly at peace when she'd seen him first in the market, then fixing his solitary tea, and something about seeing him like that had compelled her here.

"After a fashion," he replied, his features softening. "The past never leaves, but most days it is ... muted."

She nodded. Muted would be an improvement.

"However," he added, "one does occasionally miss home." He tilted his head and examined her, then seemed to decide something. "Would you like a cup of tea, Mrs. Weasley?"

"Thank you."

As he stood aside and gestured for her to enter, she smiled and stepped over the threshold. A cup of tea here sounded much more appealing than anything back in England.

Fin.

A/N: I've never been to Finland and thus depended heavily on Wikipedia for the setting, which was part of LaiksMare's prompt. My apologies for anything I've managed to get wrong. Here are links to some of the details I decided to include:

Turku, official website

<http://www.turku.fi/>

Turku Castle

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turku_Castle

Runeberg's tart

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Runeberg%27s_tart

Åland Islands

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%85land_Islands

Åland in Brief

<http://www.aland.ax/alandinbrief/>