

Come Back To Me

by savine_snape

An Extension of my Romancing The Wizard story - Lost and Found. Their romance had been, through necessity, brief yet intense, infuriatingly unconsummated, but nevertheless significant for them both. Moments were grasped whenever possible: when he brought her notes about the Horcruxes when the boys were away. What happens after the events of the Battle of Hogwarts.

Prologue

Chapter 1 of 8

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Disclaimer: I do not own Potterverse; it's the property of JK Rowling and others too numerous to mention. I make my money working in a chemistry lab.

Prologue

Their romance had been, through necessity, brief yet intense, infuriatingly unconsummated, but nevertheless significant for them both. Moments were grasped whenever possible: when he brought her notes about the Horcruxes when the boys were away. These moments acted as solace for the pair when they were apart, giving them a reason, if any were truly needed, to continue in the fight against Tom Riddle.

The man in black finally let the breath he had been holding escape his exhausted body. Potter had retrieved the sword from the lake. It had never occurred to him that Potter might struggle retrieving the sword from the bottom of the lake: Albus had been adamant that Potter needed to earn the sword. He had been moments away from revealing himself when the youngest Weasley boy had put in an appearance. Confident that the duo would know what to do, he left his hiding place and headed in the direction she had told him they were currently camping. It didn't take him long to find the spot; the protective spells felt warm against his bare skin before they recognised him and allowed him entrance.

"Severus," she sighed as his arms caught her in a warming embrace. "Did Harry retrieve the sword?"

"Yes, my little nymph, he has the sword; although I was nearly forced to reveal myself. If Weasley hadn't turned up, the blasted fool would have drowned or I would have been exposed."

He leaned in towards her neck placing small kisses on the exposed skin.

"I can't stay long, my love, I do not know how long it will take them to deal with the Horcrux. I do, however, have something to give you."

Reaching into his inner pocket, Severus withdrew a small parcel wrapped in silvery-green paper embossed with tiny serpents.

"For your birthday," Severus purred.

"But how...?" Hermione was confused.

"There are certain... privileges that come with being Headmaster," he whispered, "that of course, I would exploit." He pressed a kiss on the side of her face.

"Can I open it now?" Her question was greeted with a single nod; carefully she began to unwrapped the present. Opening the enclosed box, she sighed when she saw what was contained within.

"Severus, it's beautiful; would you put it on me, please." She turned slowly so her back faced him.

Fumbling, Severus placed the necklace around her neck. Turning her to face him once more, he placed a gentle kiss upon her soft welcoming lips.

"It's beautiful, my dear, just like you. I hope that it will be a talisman of sorts for us; a beautiful snake to remind my Gryffindor princess of me in the weeks ahead. After this war is over we will be together, I promise." Hearing an indistinct noise, Severus pulled her closer. "I have to go now my love." Severus placed a final kiss on her lips before wiping the single tear from her face. With a single turn he Apparated away.

The final weeks in the build-up to the final battle passed quickly; the boys did not notice the silver serpent necklace that Hermione refused to remove. All too soon the final battle was upon the wizarding world, and the golden trio found themselves once more at Hogwarts.

Harry had led Hermione and Ron to the entrance of the Shrieking Shack. He hesitated before entering, but Hermione was insistent that they would follow him in. Harry had expected to encounter protective spells as they approached the place from which Voldemort was conducting the battle, but there were no such barriers. As the trio arrived close to the room where Voldemort was hiding, they could hear him conversing with another. Hermione's heart jumped when she heard the baritone voice of Severus Snape.

"My Lord?" said Snape.

Voldemort raised the Elder Wand, holding it as delicately and precisely as a conductor's baton.

"Why doesn't it work for me, Severus?"

Hermione could feel her heart pounding in her chest, fear coursing through her veins. What was the maniac planning to do? Surely he would not discard Severus now, not when the end game was upon them. She was disturbed from her thoughts when Harry tightly squeezed her hand... Oh, gods, this couldn't be good.

"Perhaps you already know it? You are a clever man, after all, Severus. You have been a good and faithful servant, and I regret what must happen."

"My Lord—"

"The Elder Wand cannot serve me properly, Severus, because I am not its true master."

Hermione's heart sank; this was it: Severus was as good as dead. Voldemort believed that Severus was the master of the wand since he had killed Dumbledore. Her heart ached, tears began to well, but she fought them back. Harry and Ron would want to know why she was crying for Snape; she didn't want to discuss what they had meant to each other.

He turned away; there was no sadness in him, no remorse. It was time to leave the shack and take charge, with a wand that would now do his full bidding. He pointed it at the starry cage holding the snake, which drifted upwards, off Snape, who fell sideways onto the floor, blood gushing from the wounds in his neck. Voldemort swept from the room without a backwards glance, and the great serpent floated after him in its large protective sphere.

Hermione helped Harry gather Severus' memories into a flask as the silvery blue liquid gushed from his mouth, ears and eyes. She didn't have time to grieve for the man she had come to love; she needed to fight to avenge his senseless death.

Harry defeated Voldemort early the next morning, and whilst all the hubbub of celebration began, Hermione's thoughts drifted back to the shack. Taking advantage of the distractions around her, she slipped out of the Great Hall and made her way to the shack to tend to her fallen lover. However, when she entered the room, she found his body had disappeared; all that remained was the pool of his spilt blood on the dusty wooden floor.

Hermione finally let her grief grip her exhausted frame. Tears poured from her eyes, and her body shook with the ferocity of her sobs. Falling to the ground, she lost herself in her sorrow.

Italic sections are lifted straight from Deathly Hallows by JK Rowling.

Many thanks to Scoffy for her help and encouragement. Dearest Scoffy, you are an eternal source of joy.

Underwater.

Chapter 2 of 8

An Extension of my Romancing The Wizard story - Lost and Found. Their romance had been, through necessity, brief yet intense, infuriatingly unconsummated, but nevertheless significant for them both. Moments were grasped whenever possible: when he brought her notes about the Horcruxes, when the boys were away. What happens after the events of the Battle of Hogwarts.

Chapter One - Underwater.

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You and I are here, underwater,

Seconds are so dear, underwater,

I'm searching for a light, to draw me closer,

I hold my breath in tight, bring me closer,
I feel your touch; will you pull me up again?
It's not so bad down here, underwater,
Once you get past the fear, underwater,
I sense you through the haze, just like a memory,
I've been down here for days, have you seen me?
I feel your touch; will you pull me up again?
It's all the same to me, underwater,
There's nothing much to see, underwater,
I can not make a sound, but I can listen,
I can not tell up from down, and now I miss them,
I feel your touch; will you pull me up again?
You just in sight, will you save my life again?
You and I are here, underwater.
(Underwater Vertical Horizon.)

Hermione woke slowly from her deep sleep, blinking as she leisurely opened her eyes and grew accustomed to the bright, white light pouring in through her bedroom window. She could hear the squeals of laughter from outside. Slowly, she made her way over to the window. Pulling the curtain back she was greeted by the sight of a crisp, white winter wonderland.

She watched Ron, Ginny and Harry as they rushed out of the door, screaming that the last one outside was a dunderhead. A small smile formed on her lips; temporarily, she forgot the ache inside that greeted her every morning, the ache that had torn at her since that fateful night the previous May. She turned and made her way to the bathroom to get ready to face another day.

"Good morning, dear," Molly Weasley greeted her with a warm smile as she entered the warm, welcoming kitchen of Grimmauld Place. "Can I get you anything for breakfast?"

"A mug of black coffee and a couple of slices of toast would be great, thanks, Molly."

Molly cast a concerned look Hermione's way. Since the end of the war, rather than enjoy the freedom of not having to worry, Hermione had shut herself away from almost everyone. She had shunned Ron's attempts to court her. The only person she really confided in was Minerva McGonagall when she made her fortnightly trips to see Minerva and witness the transformation of Hogwarts. Little did Molly know that on those trips up to Hogwarts, Hermione would sit for hours next to the austere black marble headstone engraved with a simple dedication:

Severus Tobias Snape

January 9th 1960 May 21st 1998

Potions Master, Order of Merlin, 1st Class

No braver man was known than he, who gave

his life to save others.

Hermione spent time quietly contemplating what might have been. Occasionally she would laugh when she thought of how Severus would scold her for wasting precious tears over him. Nonetheless, it had become a ritual, which in a day's time, when she and Ginny returned to Hogwarts, she would be able to observe whenever she desired.

"Here you go, my dear. Have you got everything ready for going back?"

"Yes, thank you, Molly. I just need to pop over to Diagon Alley to pick up one last book."

Molly sighed as she left Hermione alone in the kitchen, having learnt some months back that coaxing her to talk about what had happened would fail to yield any results. Her heart broke every time she looked at the young woman who had once been the bubbly, talkative, know-it-all. Everybody had been surprised when Severus' will had been read, and Hermione had been named as sole benefactor. That was, until Minerva had revealed just how closely the pair had worked in the final months. Severus had gathered as much additional information about Horcruxes as he could from both Dumbledore's private library and the extensive collection of Dark Arts texts at Malfoy Manor.

Hermione sat, nursing the scarcely warm mug of coffee in her fingertips. Later she would go to pick up the book from Flourish and Blotts. She was eager to see what it looked like. In order to occupy her mind before returning to school, Hermione had utilised some of the money Severus had left her to publish an updated version of the standard Potions textbook including the footnotes that Severus had made whilst still a student at Hogwarts. Minerva had even agreed to make it the text for NEWT level Potions lessons.

Headmistress Minerva McGonagall was seated behind the large, ornate oak desk that formed the formidable centrepiece of the Head Teacher's office. She had her back to the door and was looking at the two contrasting portraits that hung on the wall directly behind the ornate desk. A low snore came from the portrait to the right as Albus Dumbledore gently slept, head hung slightly forward, Fawkes perched in the background. But Minerva was concerned about the painting to the left, where Severus stood formally in his laboratory. His portrait had made no hint of movement since it had been hung on the wall the previous September.

Lucius sighed as he entered the room two doors down the corridor from his and Narcissa's master bedroom. Narcissa had spent another night with the pale man who lay in the ornate four-poster bed. It had been seven months since Waldo, the family house-elf, had carried out his instruction to retrieve his friend from the ghastly shack, bringing him to the Malfoy's little known home in Henley. Lucius had been surprised by how accurately Severus had predicted his own demise; he had thought that Voldemort would use Avada Kedavra rather than his pet, Nagini. Lucius believed Severus would enjoy the irony of it all.

"Any change, my pet?" he asked.

"No, sweetness, no change. He still dreams fitfully, but fails to stir," Narcissa replied.

"I'll get the Healer over again. Tomorrow is his birthday, my pet: we should do something special. I know it's highly unlikely he will realise that anything is going on, yet we owe him so much." Lucius gently massaged Narcissa's tired shoulders whilst looking over at the sallow ghost of a man who lay motionless in the bed. His heart broke to think of how powerful Severus had been before the Battle of Hogwarts; the comparison with the man that Severus had become was unbelievable.

Hermione Apparated to Diagon Alley once she had carefully applied her glamour. She found it necessary to wear a disguise when walking about in the wizarding district of London: she had neither the time nor the patience to be waylaid by people wanting to talk to her about the war. It was over: that was all she cared about. She wanted to disappear from the limelight; to become the insufferable know-it-all once more, not the wartime hero. She missed Severus dreadfully, but life must go on, and so must she.

Harry and Ron had been accepted onto the Auror training programme in September with the NEWTs grades Kingsley had bestowed upon them. Hermione, however, had declined to accept the honorary results. She had thanked Kingsley for his generous offer, but said she would prefer to gain her NEWTs through hard work.

"Good morning, Miss Granger." The shop assistant spotted Hermione with ease, even though she had her glamour applied.

"Oh, good morning, Rachel. Have they arrived?" Hermione removed the glamour, safe in the knowledge that the bookshop would not open for another thirty minutes.

"Yes, miss, they have arrived. My father has them in the back; he's just checking them over before putting them on the shelf. He has set aside the first copy for you."

"Thank you." With that, Hermione made her way to the back of the shop. Entering the room, her eyes met with Eric's, provoking a warm smile to spread across the man's face.

"Miss Granger, they are so beautiful. You have done Professor Snape proud." The grey-haired old man gently caressed the spine of the book he held in his hand. Sighing, he passed the copy to Hermione. With reverence, she trailed her fingertips over the book's exterior. An obsidian cover with Slytherin green embossed lettering, the title read: 'Advanced Potions by Professor Severus Snape, edited by Miss Hermione Granger.'

"Thank you, Eric. It was the least I could do."

"You were close to him, Miss Granger?" Eric asked quietly.

"You could say that, Eric. We were dear to one another. He helped Harry, Ron and me in more ways than people will ever know. If you will excuse me, I need to go and finish my packing for tomorrow."

Lucius summoned Waldo to the room where Severus was recuperating. "Waldo, I will take breakfast in here this morning. Can you also see to summoning Healer Lewins from St. Mungo's? I'd like to discuss Severus' treatment with him."

"As you wish, master. Waldo is happy to serve the house of Malfoy in any way master sees fit." With a small bow and then a loud crack, Waldo disappeared.

Lucius approached the bed slowly. Sitting on the edge, he started to wipe Severus' brow, removing the ever-present beads of sweat from the younger man.

"Severus, my dearest and oldest friend," he murmured, "if I had known what price you would pay for my son's protection, I would never have agreed to you looking after him during the last twelve months of the war. You don't deserve to lie here fighting to survive from one day to the next."

Fifteen minutes later, there was a slight movement from Severus.

"Hermione..." Severus' voice was hoarse; more of a whisper than anything else, but Lucius had quite clearly heard the name Severus had uttered. Lucius was surprised that Severus murmured Hermione's name. His heart soared, though. Maybe this was the start of his friend's recovery, but why would he be dreaming about the young Gryffindor witch? His curiosity was piqued. Maybe a visit to Headmistress McGonagall was required.

The January rain lashed against the dirty windows of the Hogwarts Express as it thundered its way from London to the small station at Hogsmeade. Hermione and Ginny disembarked from the Express and waited for the previously horseless carriages to appear.

"Oh, gods," Hermione whispered as the Thestral-drawn carriage approached. "That's what Harry was talking about in fifth year."

The pair climbed onto the carriage. They were soon joined by Luna Lovegood and three other Ravenclaws. They made their way slowly up to the castle, and no-one dared utter a word, all of them were quietly reflecting, wondering how many friends were returning.

Since Hermione and Ginny were to share Head Girl duties for the remainder of the school year, they were also sharing the Head Girl's dormitory.

Hermione turned to face Ginny once she had taken all of her things from her trunk and found them homes. "Ginny, would you mind taking sole responsibility for the Head Girl duties tonight? I'm tired and think I need an early night. I'll ask one of the house-elves to bring me a snack whilst you're at the Welcoming Feast."

"Sure thing, take your time. It must be odd, I mean, being back here knowing Sna... Severus won't be teaching us. I wonder who will be. Do you think Min... Professor McGonagall has got Professor Slughorn back?"

"I don't know, Ginny. In a way, I hope so: at least we'll be familiar with his methods... But, ewww, in another way, I hope not. Just think how pleased he'd be to have us in his club. I just want to get my NEWTs out of the way."

"Hermione, if that's how you feel, why have you come back?"

"Because, Ginny, I have to do this. I need to get my NEWTs because I earned them, not because Kingsley decided to bestow them upon me."

Minerva sat regarding Severus' portrait. Contemplating his lack of movement, she heard a quiet tap on the door.

"Enter," she muttered in her soft, lilting, Scottish burr.

Hermione slowly entered Minerva's office.

"To what do I owe this pleasure, Hermione? Tea, or would you prefer something a little stronger?" She Summoned the decanter of Firewhisky from the nearby table.

"Yes, tea will be fine, thank you. I just thought I would come and see you before the madness of everything. Do you mind if I leave Ginny to complete the Head Girl duties tonight? I feel like I need an early night. Also." She hesitated. Minerva was only too well aware of what would be causing Hermione to stumble. "I may need some quiet time tomorrow. I hope you understand."

"Hermione, take all the time you need. It must be strange being back here, I mean knowing that he won't be teaching you Potions..." Minerva felt caution would be the better part of valour. She was no fool: she knew exactly where Hermione would spend most of the next day. She would send Winky to keep a silent watch over Hermione tomorrow.

Hermione awoke the next morning to soft sunlight pouring through the window. Blinking slowly, her eyes adjusted to the light, and she sighed before rising and taking a shower.

She let the warm water run over her shoulders, hoping it would ease the pain she felt inside. However, the ache was worse than ever. "Severus," she sobbed. "I can't do this. It's too hard without you. Why? Why did Riddle take you from me?"

Hermione slowly made her way to the Great Hall for breakfast, joining her friends at one of the long tables. Minerva had decided, in an attempt to encourage better inter-house friendship, to discard the formal seating plan in favour of a more relaxed style. Following breakfast, Hermione grabbed her warm cloak and made her way down to the lake, armed with flowers for both Albus and Severus. She silently laid the flowers on the tomb that enclosed Albus' body before slowly making her way over to the headstone that had been erected in Severus' memory. The surviving Death Eaters who had been rounded up had been questioned about the disappearance of the body, and Malfoy Manor had been searched, but no trace of Severus Snape had ever been found.

Removing the shrunken rug from her cloak pocket, Hermione cast Engorgio and then settled upon the rug with the hip-flask of Firewhisky Minerva had given her when she had left her office the night before. She remained seated by the headstone for a few hours, alternately sobbing and filling Severus in on everything that had been happening.

"So, my love, it's time I returned to the castle." Stopping slightly, she placed a single kiss upon the black headstone before retreating once more to the comforting confines of the castle.

The single pair of eyes watched silently as Hermione returned to the castle, and tears ran down the cheeks of the young house-elf.

Lucius had spent the previous night tending his friend. Both he and Narcissa were now familiar with how to care for Severus in his highly dependent state. He had had to mop the younger man's brow frequently during the night, hardly sleeping himself. It was the early hours of the morning when he was roused from his dozing by Severus yet again trying to speak... The one word he uttered again was "Hermione."

Lucius made a mental note to go to see Minerva McGonagall at the earliest opportunity: maybe she could fill him in on why Severus kept muttering the young witch's name.

Many thanks to my darling betas, sc010f (scoffy) and little_beloved. Ladies, thank you for your encouragement and support. I am in awe of the additional magic you both weave for me.

Somewhere In Between

Chapter 3 of 8

How is Hermione coping, and just what is keeping Severus in his coma-like state?

You could be happy and I won't know

But you weren't happy the day I watched you go

And all the things that I wished I had not said

Are played in loops 'till it's madness in my head

Is it too late to remind you how we were

But not our last days of silence, screaming, blur

Most of what I remember makes me sure

I should have stopped you from walking out the door

You could be happy, I hope you are

You made me happier than I'd been by far

Somehow everything I own smells of you

And for the tiniest moment it's all not true

Do the things that you always wanted to

Without me there to hold you back, don't think, just do

More than anything I want to see you, girl

Take a glorious bite out of the whole world

(You Could Be Happy Snow Patrol)

Lucius' anxious grey eyes watched Severus closely. Sweat poured off the younger man's sallow skin, dripping off the end of his hooked nose; his breathing became rapid as his eyes darted quickly beneath his shuttered eyelids. Lucius sighed: this distressed slumber had become the norm for his friend. Casting a simple Frigidus Charm once more on the bowl by his side, Lucius applied the cool, damp flannel to Severus' forehead to alleviate his fever. He found the physical act of cooling Severus' brow was soothing to his disquiet; he felt that he was at least doing something to help the prone man's recuperation.

He had consulted with Healer Lewins regularly since Severus had been rescued from the Shack. He had summoned the young Healer again that morning, anxious about

Severus' fever. Lewins had Flooded over, and in order to calm Lucius fears, he had performed a series of complex diagnostic spells. However, nothing new was revealed. Severus was in much better shape than when he'd first started treating him ten months previously.

"I'm sorry, Mr Malfoy. The spells reveal no obvious cause for Mr Snape's distress. The wound caused by the snake bite has healed as well as can be expected. The potions, brewed by Mr Snape himself, have eliminated all trace of the venom and its toxins. His previous wounds are infection free... I'm sorry, there appears to be no obvious cause for his distress." The young Healer turned to face Lucius, concern for both men etched upon his young face. "His disquiet appears to have no physical cause. Perhaps there is something else, something that is troubling his mind, which is prolonging his recovery." Lewins smiled weakly before making his apologies and returning to St Mungo's.

Lucius contemplated what the Healer had told him: No obvious physical cause. Maybe a mental malady was inhibiting Severus recovery. Lucius' mind recalled everything that had happened since the Battle: the only other obvious event connected with the fever was Severus' distressed muttering of Miss Granger's name. His mind made up, Lucius asked his wife to sit with Severus whilst he sent an owl to the Headmistress of Hogwarts.

The spring sunshine poured through the leaves on the trees surrounding the lake, casting dappled shadows on the ground below. Hermione rested her back against one of the old oak trees, her Potions text open on her knees. She stared out across the lake, recalling the service that had been held there almost a year ago for the fallen heroes of the Battle of Hogwarts.

The summer sun hung high in the May sky. The Golden trio had taken up positions towards the front of the congregated students, teachers, former students who had answered the call to fight, magical beings and, of course, representatives from the Ministry of Magic and Wizengamot. Kingsley had called everyone to silence their friendly banter in order to begin the service by clearing his throat.

"Before we begin our service, I would like to take this opportunity to make public the outcome of yesterday's extraordinary Wizengamot meeting. It was brought to my attention by Mr Harry Potter shortly after the battle that a certain Potions master and former Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry was, in fact, acting on the instructions of Albus Dumbledore. We were able to view Severus Snape's memories, which he donated to Mr Potter, and we also had access to the diaries of Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, which corroborated the memories of Severus Snape.

"It is my pleasure, as interim Minister of Magic, to publicly declare Severus Tobias Snape a war hero. As such, it is my great privilege to posthumously bestow upon Severus Snape the Order of Merlin, First Class, for services rendered to wizarding kind." Kingsley's baritone voice reverberated through the air. Those gathered gasped when he revealed the truth about Snape. As Kingsley finished speaking, a small ripple of applause began accompanied by shocked murmurs: Snape had managed to fool everyone with his duplicity. Slowly, the sound of applause built to a crescendo of noise as everyone gathered rose from his or her seats.

Whilst Hermione was remembering the previous year's events, she failed to notice that Ginny was approaching. Her friend had a worried look on her face. Ginny had returned from her Quidditch practice expecting to find Hermione studying at her desk in their shared room. When she had failed to find her friend anywhere within the Gryffindor tower, she had then realised that Hermione must be down by the lake. Ginny approached Hermione with caution, careful not to startle her, as she seemed deep in thought. She sat down gently next to her friend and placed her hand lightly upon Hermione's forearm. Hermione, startled by the light touch of Ginny's hand upon her arm, turned. Ginny noticed that tears were beginning to form in the older girl's eyes.

"Oh, Hermione." Ginny pulled her friend into a tight embrace. "Come here."

With that, Hermione could no longer hold back the tears. She missed Severus dreadfully, but she knew she needed to start to live again, not merely survive. It seemed to her, at that moment, that taking the next step would be an impossible task. She didn't want to forget Severus or what they had come to mean to each other, but she had to accept that he was gone.

Ginny slowly wiped the tears from Hermione's cheeks "'Mione, we all know that you miss him. Hades, I can't imagine how hard it is for you to be back here without him, but, you're a shell of your former self. I still miss Fred, but we have to pick up the pieces and move forward. Don't let Severus' death have been in vain." Ginny pulled Hermione in closer. "I'm sure he would want you to move on, Hermione. He's set you up for life. You have the rights to all the potions he researched; he left you Spinner's End. Please, I'm begging you as your closest friend and confidant: you have to start to live again. Don't ever forget him, but please learn to live again." Ginny gently stroked Hermione's hair.

"Ginny, it's so hard. I keep thinking I see him. I haven't even ventured anywhere near Spinner's End yet." Tears began to fall down her cheeks once more. "I can't bear the thought of finding personal things that will make it seem like he's just gone out for a walk."

"You know, I would go with you... to help clean up Spinner's End." Ginny rubbed Hermione's back gently. "I know how much you love Severus, and it won't be easy to see where he lived."

"I'd really like that, Gin, if Harry could bear to be apart from you, that is."

"This is more important, Hermione, helping you take that first step to moving on. I'm sure Harry will understand, and if he doesn't... well, let's not go there." Ginny was relieved to see a small spark appear in Hermione's blood-shot eyes. It wasn't much, but it was a start. Something Ginny felt sure that they could build on.

Lucius had sent his owl to Minerva requesting a meeting with her at three that same afternoon. Minerva was intrigued as to why Lucius would need to speak with her: it couldn't be regarding Draco, who had transferred to Durmstrang for the remainder of his final year. Of course, she would grant the man his meeting; after all, he remained a member of the school Board of Governors following the Malfoys' generous donation towards the restoration fund. Turning to face the portraits behind her, she cleared her throat. "Albus, do you have any idea why Lucius would be requesting a meeting?"

"No, Minnie, I have no idea. I am intrigued as to what would cause him to seek your council." Albus popped a lemon drop into his mouth with a slight moue, somewhat disgruntled that painted lemon drops never quite tasted the same. "Has my dear boy moved yet?" he asked.

"No, Albus, I'm afraid there has been no sign of movement whatsoever." Minerva sighed.

"Mmmm, how peculiar. I wonder what's causing his lack of animation. Excuse me, Minnie: I need to go have a chat with Sir Nicholas." With that, Albus departed his frame in search of the Gryffindor ghost.

Narcissa was disturbed from her needlework by Severus once more muttering Hermione's name weakly. Casting a Frigidus Charm to cool him slightly, she gently stroked his sweat-soaked hair from his face. Caressing his cheeks, she observed the anguish that played across his face.

"Oh, Severus. If only we knew what it was that prevents you from returning to us." She continued to gently caress the ashen man's haunted face, "As far as we know, Hermione is safe, studying for her NEWTs at Hogwarts. I wish we knew what troubled you so and why Miss Granger holds such a fascination for you."

Lucius Apparated to the front steps of Hogwarts. Carefully, he smoothed his clothes before entering into the atrium. Minerva was there to greet him at the appointed time; she was intrigued by his appearance. The man appeared to be sleep deprived. His normally bright grey eyes had a distant look to them, and his hair hung somewhat limply

around his troubled face. He did not appear as manicured as she remembered him. He still had a formidable appearance, but it was less imperious, more world weary.

"Lucius, it's good to see you."

"Headmistress, it is good to see Hogwarts almost back to it previous magnificent state. You have done a great job overseeing the rebuild."

"I must thank you personally for your kind donation to the restoration fund. It enabled work to proceed almost immediately after the students left."

The pair silently made their way to the Headmistress' office. Muttering the password, Minerva passed through to the office, silently followed by Lucius. Sitting in one of the chairs that sat either side of the large fireplace, she indicated that Lucius should seat himself in the opposite chair.

Narcissa was disturbed from reading Draco's letter by Lucius gently massaging her back. Sleepily, she turned to her husband.

"What has our boy to say for himself this week, petal?" Lucius asked.

"He has settled well: Durmstrang is very much to his liking. He has had no trouble from his fellow students, and Krum has asked him to join the Quidditch team. We made the right choice sending him away, did we not? I doubt he would have been left alone had he returned to Hogwarts."

"On the contrary, my dear, I believe Minerva would have done all she could to guarantee his safety. But yes, the decision to send him away was for the best. He doesn't have to worry about maintaining the secrecy around Severus' existence."

"So how did the meeting with Professor McGonagall go?"

"That woman..." He sighed before composing himself. "Minerva is almost as insufferable as the old coot Albus had become." Lucius continued to stroke his wife's back.

"I'm sorry it didn't go well, dearest. Did you get any answers?" Narcissa laid her own hand on top of her husband's causing him to rest on her shoulder.

"She was initially very resistant to answering my questions, but when I played a few Slytherin moves, she soon loosened her tongue." Narcissa's head moved to one side. "Apparently, Severus and Miss Granger formed an alliance of sorts in the run up to the Battle of Hogwarts: he was supplying information which aided Potter in finally defeating Riddle. It would seem that they formed an... attachment of sorts. His will has left everything of any significance to the young witch."

Narcissa regarded her husband with a look of puzzlement. "That would explain Severus' fixation with the young witch's name. It doesn't explain what is keeping him comatose. I wish we knew what was trapping him; I do miss his presence, and it's so hard sitting here caring for this ghost of a man." Narcissa wiped a lone tear from her face.

"Hush, my pet. There was one note of interest that Minerva let slip. Miss Granger has published Severus' Potions modifications in a new textbook, which is now being used for NEWT level students. You remember: the ones he created during your final two years at Hogwarts. That was the reason he initially came to the notice of Riddle... his ability to brew the highest quality potions whilst making some alterations to the established methodology for their brewing."

Lucius and Narcissa's attention was diverted from their conversation by a low groan that came from the man in the bed. A groan which was accompanied by a small twitch of his lower limbs. Husband and wife exchanged glances before returning their eyes to the man on the bed. This could be a small, yet significant step, in Severus' recovery.

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Ladies, you rock and you make my world a brighter place.

Distractions

Chapter 4 of 8

An Extension of my Romancing The Wizard story - Lost and Found. Their romance had been, through necessity, brief yet intense, infuriatingly unconsummated, but nevertheless significant for them both. Moments were grasped whenever possible: when he brought her notes about the Horcruxes. What happens after the events of the Battle of Hogwarts. Hermione gets her NEWT's results and Severus starts to make progress.

Distractions.

I look at you all see the love there that's sleeping

While my guitar gently weeps

I look at the floor and I see it needs sweeping

Still my guitar gently weeps

I don't know why nobody told you how to unfold your love

I don't know how someone controlled you

They bought and sold you.

I look at the world and I notice its turning

While my guitar gently weeps

With every mistake we must surely be learning

Still my guitar gently weeps

I don't know how you were diverted

You were perverted too

I don't know how you were inverted

No one alerted you.

I look at you all see the love there that's sleeping

While my guitar gently weeps

Look at you all . . .

Still my guitar gently weeps.

While my Guitar Gently weeps The Beatles

Hermione woke slowly from her dream. Rubbing the sleep from her eyes, she groaned as she became accustomed to the bright July sunshine that streamed through the windows of her bedroom. Minerva had kindly agreed to allow her to stay on at Hogwarts after the rest of the students had left for the summer break. Sighing, she rose from the comfort of her bed. She hadn't had such a vivid, lucid dream in many months, and her heart ached as she slowly began to piece together what she had experienced.

"Oh, Severus." Hermione walked from her bed over to the window. "Of all days, today I wish you were still here." She looked across the sun-scorched lawn towards the black lake. "Mum and Dad aren't here to see what I have achieved... I so wish you were still here with me."

The arrival of a small white owl distracted her from her thoughts. "Hello there, little one," she murmured as she took the parchment from the owl's left leg. "And who do you belong to?"

Gradually she unrolled the parchment, smiling as she recognised the handwriting. Harry had remembered that she would be getting her NEWT results today. Placing the parchment on the windowsill, Hermione reached for the bag of owl treats she had and offered some to the owl. "Here you are, little one. Thank you for bringing me this note."

She remained at the window for several minutes after the owl left before deciding she had better get dressed and face the new day. She made short work of getting ready and made her way to Minerva's room to share breakfast with the Headmistress, as she had every morning for the last five weeks.

Minerva had risen early that morning, checking the NEWT and OWL results once more before presenting them to the school board at 10am. Everything was in order. A gentle tap at the door disturbed her musing as Hermione entered the room.

"Good morning, my dear." Minerva greeted Hermione with a warm smile. "Winky has brought us breakfast already; I'll be with you in a moment."

Hermione took her seat at the small table and started to eat her breakfast of yoghurt and fresh fruit washed down with a large mug of black coffee.

The bright morning sunshine warmed the guest room where Severus lay. Lucius sat watching the younger man. There had been increasingly encouraging signs since the day when Severus had first shown signs of awakening. Last night, however, had seen the return of the prolonged bouts of fitful sleep.

"Severus, if only we knew what vexed you so," Lucius muttered. "I have a meeting with Lewins later today at St Mungo's; I will enquire if he can recommend a new approach." Lucius began to pace the room. "Narcissa will sit with you later."

Returning to the small oak bureau that had been placed in the room at Narcissa's request, Lucius checked over the paperwork one more time. Not only had he and Narcissa contributed to the rebuild of Hogwarts, they had also contributed to the development of a new Magical Maladies wing at St Mungo's. Currently, it was home to the Longbottoms and Lockhart, and although Lewins had repeatedly offered to provide a place for Severus, Lucius had declined his offer, preferring to keep Severus' survival secret until he himself could decide whether or not he wished to be lauded as a hero or to be allowed to disappear without a trace.

Hermione sat on the edge of the small wooden jetty, dangling her toes into the cool water of Hogwarts Lake. The midday July sunshine was fierce in its intensity. She was pondering her dream from the night before. It had been months since Hermione had dreamt about Severus. She had been so wrapped up with studying for her exams that she hadn't remembered any of her dreams.

"Miss Granger... Hermione... I believe I have some information that you and the other members of the trio will find... of benefit to your latest crusade."

Hermione sighed as she remembered their meeting after he had saved her from Greyback, when he had used Legilimency to show her why he had cast the Avada Kedavra that had killed Albus Dumbledore.

"Professor Snape, how do you know that you have information that will be a help to us?"

"Please, I am no longer your Professor, Hermione. In fact, since you have failed to return to school, a fact that pleases me immeasurably, call me Severus."

"Severus, how can you be sure that you can help us?"

"Let's just say a little bird has hinted that you might find information in this text helpful."

The sound of someone approaching startled her from her reminiscences.

"Hermione, I have your results for you." Minerva passed a small white envelope to her.

"Would you stay whilst I open these, please, Minerva?" Hermione stammered.

"Of course I'll stay, my dear."

Hermione took the proffered envelope from her and carefully broke the seal. Removing the parchment, she slowly digested the results.

"But, this means I have... I don't believe it. How, I mean, I've achieved identical results to Severus' NEWTs record."

"Indeed it does, my dear, well done. I am sure that Severus would be incredibly proud of you today, Hermione."

Minerva stood watching the Hermione as tears formed in her eyes and her heart ached for the young woman who stood before her. As part of the golden trio, she had been through so much since Albus' death. "Hermione, would you join me in my room tonight? Would 6 o'clock be all right with you?"

"That would be perfect, thank you, Minerva"

Narcissa sat at the small bureau by Severus's bed. The latest edition of the *Daily Prophet* that Waldo had dropped off with her afternoon cup of Earl Grey caught her eye.

"Well, I never, Severus," Narcissa whispered. "It would seem that Miss Granger is the toast of the wizarding world. She is the first witch to match the high standard you set all those years ago. Minerva did tell Lucius that the young witch had thrown herself into her studies. I wonder if she realises that she has matched your score. Ahhh, but of course she will. Minerva will take great delight in the fact that you have been equalled by her favourite little Gryffindor cub."

Turning to face the man who lay upon the bed, she awaited a response. Every day had seen a subtle improvement in Severus' condition. She was surprised when seconds after her comment about Miss Granger, the dark eyes of the recovering wizard met her own.

"Hermione," Severus whispered.

Rising rapidly, a warm glow of hope filling her, Narcissa made her way over to the fireplace and Flooed Healer Lewins immediately.

"Where's Hermione?" Severus rasped.

"Hush, Severus, Hermione is fine. She is safe at Hogwarts with Minerva. Rest up, dear friend. The Healer will be here soon." Narcissa gently moved sweat-soaked hair from the side of Severus' face, smiling at the change in the wizard. He was returning to them at last.

Moments later, Lewins and Lucius entered the room, disturbing the stillness with a flash of green and a roar from the Floo.

"What has happened?" Lucius asked as he reached his wife's side. He looked in the direction that Narcissa was looking: his eyes met the obsidian ones of Severus. Lucius took in a deep breath, bewildered yet euphoric at the change in Severus' status.

Lewins had followed Narcissa's nod towards the bed. Realising that Snape was partially propped up by a bank of pillows, he walked over to the side of the ornate bed. Withdrawing his wand he proceeded to perform some routine diagnostic spells.

Smiling, Lewins finally spoke. "I am pleased to report, Mr Malfoy, that Mr Snape seems to be making a speedier recovery at last. The intensity of all his vital signs is improving." Both Lucius and Narcissa released the breath neither realised they had been holding, relieved that Severus was at long last making discernable progress.

Hermione sighed as she sat before her dressing table brushing her hair. She had spent the afternoon mostly down by the lake, but had ventured to Severus' headstone shortly before returning to the castle. She had a lot to consider: there was the matter of finding a job, or taking up either Minerva or Flitwick's offers. She also had to think about Ginny's offer of helping her clean Spinner's End.

Once she had completed brushing the knots from her hair, Hermione made her way to Minerva's private room.

"Enter," Minerva shouted so Hermione would hear. "I believe Winky has left us a pot of tea with the sandwiches. Do you want to pour? I'll be through in a moment."

Hermione smiled as she took the seat on the left of the ornate fireplace. She poured the tea into the two small china cups.

"Ahhh, thank you, my dear," Minerva stated as she sat in the chair opposite Hermione.

"Minerva, I've been thinking: if the offer is still open, I would like to help Irma in the library for a while. Ginny had offered to help me with Spinner's End, and I think I need to make a decision about whether or not I am going to keep it."

Minerva smiled kindly at Hermione. "Of course the offer to help Irma is still there, Hermione. I appreciate that you have a lot to consider. However, I am perplexed as to why you have not considered Filius' apprenticeship offer?"

"I have thought about it. I think I'd rather get some loose ends tied up before deciding what to do. You have been so kind, Minerva, but I have to face Spinner's End sooner rather than later."

Minerva sat watching Hermione as she spoke about Spinner's End. The pain of Severus' loss was still clear for all to see. Hermione still struggled with her grief, although it was nowhere near as painful as it had been when Severus' will had been read the previous June.

"Hermione, I will shortly be returning to my cottage in Ireland. I was wondering if you would care to join me for a small break before you truly decide where your future lies?"

Hermione raised her head to look at Minerva. She seemed to consider the offer for a while. "Thank you, I would enjoy that very much."

Hermione sat eating her breakfast in the kitchen of Minerva's holiday cottage. They had been in Glendalough, Ireland, for almost three weeks and were due to return to Hogwarts in a couple of days' time. Despite her plans to contemplate her future, she had been kept busy by Minerva.

They had spent a lovely afternoon just outside Avoca, at the Meeting of the Waters, and Hermione had been intrigued when Minerva had informed her that the Muggle poet, Thomas Moore, was said to have written his Irish melody the *Meeting of the Waters* while he sat upon the rustic seat where Hermione was sitting. They had also visited Russborough House, which Hermione had marvelled at. She had enthused about the Palladian style of the house, commenting that the style was far superior to that of the Malfoys' family home.

"So, my dear, what have you planned for today?" Minerva asked as she sat down at the breakfast table.

"I was just contemplating Apparating to Avoca again. Maybe I'll visit the pub, what was it called?"

"The Meeting, I believe, dear."

"Yes, that's it. I was going to sit and have a think again and then maybe get a spot of lunch."

"That sounds like an excellent idea. I'm sure you don't need me to go with you." Minerva smiled at the younger woman warmly.

Once Hermione had Apparated from the cottage, Minerva cleared the breakfast pots and placed the cereal and jam on the small pine sideboard. Muttering a spell she set the pots to wash before returning to her bedroom.

Asking Hermione to join her in Ireland had been inspired. Hermione had been an excellent companion, and the visit had served to distract her from thoughts of Severus. Minerva could only hope that giving Hermione space now would allow her time to decide what to do next. Sitting before her dressing table, Minerva removed a small painting of Albus from the right-hand drawer.

"Albus."

He responded to his name with a gentle snore.

"Albus, I know you're not sleeping. Hermione has returned to Avoca. Doesn't young Pdraig live close to Avoca?"

"Are you referring to the young man who was an apprentice of yours a decade or more ago?"

"Indeed I am, you old goat," Minerva teased affectionately.

"I do believe that Pdraig lives just outside Avoca. Why do you ask, Minnie?"

"I have a plan. Plans that even you would be proud of, Albus."

The old wizard chuckled as his blue eyes bore a faint glimmer of mischief.

Severus had continued to make excellent progress since he had woken. He was now able to spend short periods of the day sat in the high-backed chair that Lucius had moved from the library. His improvement had been such that Lewins had contacted a friend of his to start Severus' Magiotherapy.

Severus took an instant dislike to Trewella. The stocky young Healer, with his shock of untamed, red hair, reminded him too much of the dunderheaded youngest male Weasley.

Glowing across the room at him, Severus growled with frustration. He was finding even the simplest of magic taxing.

"Don't smirk at me like that, boy. Remember I am a Potions master, and as such, it would do you well to remember that I should be treated with at least a modicum of respect. Damn it, Kingsley has seen fit to laud me with an Order of Merlin; the least you can do is refrain from smirking when I detonate a Godforsaken peacock feather."

"I'm sorry, Professor. I will..."

Severus cut the younger man off before he could say any more. "I am no longer your Professor, Trewella, nor can it be said I will return to being a Professor. I have vague recollections of tolerating your presence for Potions lessons." He paused. "Weren't you in Hufflepuff?" he snarled.

"I was, sir, although I didn't continue with Potions past OWL level," Trewella stuttered. He had always been nervous around Snape, and now that he had taken once more to snarling at him, as though he were a first-year again, he was once more the scared, withdrawn Hufflepuff who had melted cauldrons with nearly as much constancy as Longbottom had.

"Ahhh, it's coming back to me now: you were almost as apocalyptic as Longbottom."

Trewella's facade of courage crumbled. Muttering his excuses, the young man activated the Floo and fled the Manor.

Severus smirked.

Hermione Apparated to Avoca initially before Apparating on to the Meeting of the Waters. She had much to consider: Minerva had offered her the chance to stay at Hogwarts, helping Irma in the vast library, which for a bibliophile like Hermione, was a very tempting offer. Flitwick had also offered her an apprenticeship in Charms, which Hermione found to be tempting. She was also aware of the fact that she needed to venture to Spinner's End.

"Ahhh, but what will you find there, Hermione?" she mused to herself as she sat on a small bench by the two rivers. "When was the last time that Severus had been there?" She wondered what she would find and how would she cope it.

"Well, Miss Granger," she chided herself. "Of course you will cope. After all, you are not alone," she mumbled. "I have Ginny, Harry, Ronald and Minerva... I can do this, and I *shall*. Ginny was right when she said Severus had set me up. I have a home and an income... OK, it won't be a fortune, but it's a start and means I don't have to rush into making a decision about my future just yet. I can take my time and find the right option."

Hermione was diverted from her musing by a gentle tap on her shoulder.

"A penny for those thoughts of yours," a strange voice murmured into her left ear.

Hermione's amber eyes met the pale blue eyes of the gentleman who stood before her. His face bore a warm, genuine smile, and his eyes glittered with a hint of mischief in the warm summer sunshine. They reminded her of Albus, and his shock of red hair made her think of the Weasley family. She surmised that his height was not that dissimilar to Severus, and he was most likely to be of a similar age.

"What could a beautiful young lassie like you have to worry about? Would you care to join Pdraig for a drink and a bite to eat in the pub across the way?"

Smiling, Hermione took the proffered hand. She decided that she would, indeed, join the man for lunch. What would be the harm?

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A Time To Grieve

Chapter 5 of 8

Hermione finds she has more in common with her stranger than she initially thought, and Severus finds out about the book Hermione has written.

A Time to Grieve.

I stood on mountaintops that overlooked the world

I can't find anything except a void inside

I went to places where I could forget your name

I can't find anything except a void inside

I don't have anything because I don't have you

I don't have anything

What can I buy to make the sky turn blue again?

Where can I go to feel like I'm alive again?

Show me the places where I can forget your name

I can't find anything except a void inside

I don't have anything because I don't have you

I don't have anything.

I've been stripped of everything except some flesh that bleeds

And I've been robbed of everything except a soul, except a soul

that needs...you, sweet you

I don't have anything because I don't have you

I don't have anything

(I Don't Have Anything VAST)

Lucius waltzed into Severus' room with a mass of paperwork on one arm and a wide grin on his face.

"Good morning, Severus."

"Is it? I hadn't noticed," Severus snarled. He sat up and glared at Lucius' back as the older man poured two mugs of coffee.

"Has someone got out of the wrong side of bed this morning?"

"No, Malfoy, someone has yet to get out of bed whether it is the right or wrong side. Someone is, however, waiting for his early morning dose of caffeine before the return of that dunderhead from St. Mungo's."

"Funny you should mention St Mungo's. I have a meeting with Lewins this morning, and Cissa is expecting Andromeda in an hour, so you'd best stay in here until after lunch," Lucius replied as he passed Severus his mug.

"Oh, *excellent*. Another day surrounded by the same four walls: I can't wait," Severus muttered.

"No need to be so petulant, Severus. If you would only try to use the stick Trewella left for you, you would be able to join Cissa and me for breakfast in the conservatory. Merlin knows you could do with a change of scenery."

"That dunderhead knows as much about Magiotherapy as my left foot does, Lucius," Severus spat. "Given the time, should you not be making plans to depart for your meeting?"

"Ahhh, I see the coffee is working." Severus glared at the older man. "Waldo will be in with your brunch shortly."

"Good riddance, *Lucius*. Go, bother Lewins, though I have no idea what the man has done to be blighted by your presence."

Placing his mug back on the tray, Lucius turned and left Severus alone. He was glad that Severus was making progress, yet he was still concerned for his friend. Severus was still prone to murmuring Miss Granger's name during his sleep but he still failed to divulge the true extent of their friendship. Narcissa was adamant that Severus and Miss Granger must have formed a very close attachment. He would find out exactly what had happened between his friend and Miss Granger but first he had plans with respect to Severus' employment once he had recovered.

* * * *

Hermione took Padraig's proffered hand. She felt a small tingle of magic thrum through her.

"You... You're a wizard," she said, smiling at the older man.

"I am, and *you* are a witch," he replied. "Shall we go find somewhere to sit?"

Hermione followed the man, Padraig walked a little faster than she did, but she soon matched her own pace to his.

The pub's outer walls were rendered and painted sunshine yellow. As far as Hermione could tell, each window was adorned with a terracotta window box packed tightly with a multitude of flowers and ferns. Hanging baskets hung on both sides of the main entrance to the pub. Hermione was amused when she realised that the basket held tumbling cherry tomatoes as well as gold and orange nasturtiums.

The aroma of stale tobacco, beer and home-cooked food assaulted Hermione as they entered the pub. To her relief, the interior was just as traditional as the exterior.

To their right, Hermione could see two old men nursing pints whilst playing a game of dominoes, and there was also a pool table and a dartboard hanging on the far wall. Hermione smiled, remembering the time that she, Harry and Ron had pinned a picture of Umbridge to a dartboard during their fifth year.

An ornate Victorian fireplace dominated the left side of the pub and arranged around it were numerous wooden tables and chairs. In the far corner was a secluded snug area, perfect for a courting couple or for people who did not wish to be disturbed.

"Shall we sit in the snug?" Padraig asked.

"That would be agreeable. Shall we get drinks first?"

"Anything in particular?" Padraig asked.

"When in Rome." Hermione's eyes lit up. "I guess it would be rude not to at least try some of the local stuff."

"Half of Guinness it is, then. I'll get these, whilst you grab a seat."

Hermione settled into the snug and perused the menu. Padraig was right: the menu consisted mainly of traditional home-cooked fare. Her mouth watered as she looked down the list, which could quite easily have been a list of her Mum's comfort food. So many things on the list were tempting.

"Penny for those thoughts again," Padraig teased.

"Sorry, this menu looks so like the food Mum used to make me when I needed some comfort."

"I told you it was traditional stuff," Padraig replied as he took the menu from Hermione's hands. "You have the advantage at the moment: You know my name is Padraig, so what is your name?"

"My name?" she mumbled. "My name is Hermione... Hermione Granger," she whispered.

"Well, Hermione Granger, it's a pleasure to meet you." Padraig's face lit up with a warm, genuine smile as he shook Hermione's hand.

Hermione blushed, waiting for Padraig to bombard her with questions.

"So, Hermione. What brings you to this part of Ireland?"

Hermione was both staggered and bemused that he hadn't asked about the war. "I was brought here by my mentor. I have just completed my NEWTs, and Minerva, Professor McGonagall, brought me here."

"I know Professor McGonagall: I studied at Hogwarts. In fact, I was her Transfiguration Apprentice nineteen years ago." Padraig's eyes twinkled. "So, were you involved in the war?"

"I was. I suppose you could say I was the brains behind the brawn..." she said as she forced a smile.

"You don't have to elaborate if you don't want to. Are you ready to order?"

Hermione took a sip from her drink. "Yes, I'll have the beef and Guinness hotpot."

"Righto, Hermione Granger! A traditional hotpot it is!"

Hermione released a breath she didn't realise that she had been holding. Absent-mindedly, she sipped her drink as she waited for Padraig to return.

* * * *

Severus sat in the chair that Lucius had asked Waldo to bring in from the library. The only sound was the gentle patter of rain against the large bay windows and the occasional screech from the Malfoys' white peacocks. Lying in his lap was a copy of *Advanced Potions by Professor Severus Snape*. Slowly, his eyes passed over the dedication that Hermione had penned:

All my love to my friends for your unwavering friendship, encouragement and love. Harry, Ron, Ginny, Luna and Neville, thank you.

Thanks to Harry, Ron and Ginny also for making my life brighter after such sorrow gripped our world.

I extend my deepest thanks to Professor Minerva McGonagall, Headmistress of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. You have been a source of encouragement and support over the years.

I would also like to extend my regards to my editors, Athena Broody and Augusta Tramp, without whom I would not have been able to see this project to completion.

Finally, a thank you to the one professor who made a true difference, both in the fight against Voldemort and, as you will see from this text, to the world of Potion making. Severus Snape was the bravest man I have ever had the opportunity to meet: He laboured to save my friends and me during our years at Hogwarts.

I dedicate this book to the memory of one of the greatest professors and Potions masters to have ever lived: Severus Tobias Snape. The bravest man I ever knew

Narcissa had entered the room without Severus realising. She placed her hand on Severus' shoulder, disturbing him from his thoughts.

"You know, you could always let her know that you survived. Lucius has yet to be informed that she wishes to take ownership of Spinner's End. She is not lost to you yet," she said.

"I have no idea what you are blathering on about, woman. Kindly leave me alone. Lucius said that you were expecting company: shouldn't you be waiting to receive your sister?"

"Severus, think about it, please. You can start again with Hermione, if that is what you want."

"Leave me alone, Narcissa. I am too old, too broken and far too dark for the likes of Miss Granger. She is destined for far greater heights than she would ever achieve with

me."

Narcissa turned to face the door, shaking her head. As she went to exit the room she turned once more to face Severus.

"You do yourself, and Miss Granger a disservice, Severus," she replied, "It is clear to me from that dedication that you meant a great deal to her. Open your eyes, Severus, and wake up to the possibility that love may be waiting for you."

"You're just as pathetic as Albus. Look at me, Narcissa. Who would want to have me escorting them about the wizarding world? I am a wreck."

"I'm sure Miss Granger would welcome you, Severus."

"Leave me alone, Narcissa. Go, wait for your sister."

Narcissa sighed as she left the room; she only hoped that Lucius' plan would work.

Severus huffed as Narcissa left the room. "Why must my life be blighted by insufferable people who believe they know what is best for me?" he growled as he looked at the dedication again. Maybe Narcissa had a point: maybe Hermione did still love him, but would she feel the same if she were to see him as he was now?

* * * *

"Hermione." Padraig gently tapped Hermione's elbow. "Surely I'm not boring you already?"

"Sorry... I have a great deal to contemplate about my future, Padraig. My mind wandered whilst you were ordering the food. Will it be long?"

"Should be with us shortly. So, tell me about yourself: Who is Hermione Granger?"

"That's just it: I don't know." Hermione sighed.

"Well, what were you just thinking about?"

"It's complicated. My whole life is one great complicated mess."

"What about if I were to tell you a little about myself first? Then you can talk when you are ready."

"Okay," Hermione murmured.

"Right," Padraig began, "well my family name is Fitzpatrick. I studied at Hogwarts during the late seventies and early eighties. I was a couple of years behind James Potter and Lily Evans. After I completed my NEWTs, I decided to apply for Professor McGonagall's Transfiguration Apprenticeship and spent the next three years studying and perfecting my skills.

"A year after completing my apprenticeship with Professor McGonagall, I became the Transfiguration Professor at the Salem Institute for Witches and Wizards in the States. I returned to Ireland recently, after receiving a letter about my mother's failing health. She pleaded with me to stay at Salem while the second war raged. I would willingly have come home and joined the fight, but mother was frightened I would not survive."

Padraig took a sip of his drink, watching Hermione over the rim of his glass. "I lost friends during the first war one very special friend," he continued, "and my mother was worried I would become reckless if I came face to face with the person responsible for my girlfriend's demise. The witch responsible for Ophelia's death was Bellatrix Black. No doubt she married one of his henchmen: I don't know, and I don't particularly care enough to find out..."

"Bellatrix is dead," Hermione whispered. "Molly Weasley killed her during the Battle of Hogwarts."

"I can't say I'm sorry to hear that." Padraig reached across the table to take Hermione's hand in his. "Ophelia was the love of my life, a bright, loving witch. There isn't a day that goes by when I don't miss her. Of course it's got better with time... I wish I had come back to fight," Padraig sighed wistfully.

Their conversation was stalled when a young waitress approached them. "Who ordered the hotpot?"

"The hotpot is for the lady, and I ordered the steak," Padraig replied.

Hermione smiled at Padraig as she began to eat the food in front of her. "Mmm, you were right, this is lovely."

"I told you so. I'm sure Minerva has not let you rest since you've been here, so where has she taken you apart of course from coming here?"

"Well, Minerva brought me here first. She told me that this is where the Muggle poet, Thomas Moore, wrote *Meeting of the Waters*; we've also spent a couple of days on the coast..."

"Oh, I bet that was funny. I can't imagine what Minerva looked like at the beach."

"We also visited Russborough House; it's such a lovely place."

Hermione and Padraig continued to exchange small talk as they ate the rest of their meal.

* * * *

Minerva hummed to herself as she tidied her bedroom, making a start on packing her oak trunk.

"Minnie, what has made you this cheerful? What have you done?"

"Albus... I... Oh, Albus, I had the most perfect idea. As we speak, Padraig and Hermione should be sitting enjoying each other's company."

"How many times did you berate me for being a meddlesome old fool?"

"Albus, I have Hermione's best interest at heart."

"You could be playing a very dangerous game, Minnie."

"I learned from a master, Albus."

* * * *

Hermione gave a satisfied sigh as she pushed her empty plate away.

"So." Padraig smiled. "Are you ready to tell me a bit about yourself now, Hermione Granger?"

"I'm sure you've read some of the post war commentaries. I am a Muggle-born witch, who made friends with the Boy-Who-Lived and his side-kick, Ronald Weasley. I was

the one who solved all the problems; I am the Know-It-All... I am a fraud..."

Hermione slumped forward, resting her head on her folded arms, and her body shook from the ferocity of her tears. "I had help... help from a most unexpected source. A person very few people can say they were close to, a person few have ever got close enough to know; a person who did not survive the war; a person I miss terribly. I miss him so much, and I have no right to feel this way. Why won't it all just go away? Why can't I have those moments back? I can't stop thinking about all the things I should have said, but I never did. All the things I should have given..."

Padraig rose from his side of the table and sat down next to Hermione, wrapping her in his arms. "Who was this person, Hermione? Who helped you?"

"Professor Snape... Severus, it was Severus who helped us defeat Riddle." Another sob erupted from her still shaking body.

Padraig pulled Hermione closer, sighing as the young witch fell to pieces in his arms. Murmuring words of sympathy, Padraig waited for Hermione to stop crying.

Hermione hiccupped as the tears slowed. "Not many people know that he helped us... The Minister of Magic knows; he's seen my memories as well as those that Severus shared with Harry and has spoken with Albus' portrait, but the Minister has decided to keep quiet about just how much help Severus was."

"There's something you're not telling me, Hermione."

"We... Harry, Ronald and I spent what should have been our seventh year trailing around the countryside hiding from Death Eaters whilst we searched for Voldemort's Horcruxes. Severus would come to hand me information whilst the boys were out either scavenging for food or looking for the Horcruxes. We... Severus and I, we became friends which slowly..." Hermione paused and sipped her drink. "Severus and I became close; he was a completely different person once I was no longer a student. It was like we became equals, joining forces to defeat Riddle, sharing information and ideas. He let me know what was happening at Hogwarts, Riddle had installed him as Headmaster, which worked well for both the Order and Riddle himself. Riddle had a trusted solidier in charge of the school and the Order had someone who could attempt to lessen the impact of the Carrows."

"Hermione, are you implying that you and Severus became lovers?"

"Not as such; we did mean a great deal to one another." Hermione reached for the silver serpent necklace. "He gave me this as a talisman of sorts... we never... there was never the opportunity to... I miss him so much, but I don't think he was ever really mine."

"Hermione, he must have thought a great deal about you to give you that necklace."

"That's not all that he gave me..." Hermione stilled for a moment. "Padraig, he left me everything... his home, his research. I've not been able to visit Spinner's End. I'm too scared of what I may find there."

* * * *

Gently, Padraig lifted Hermione's chin so that he could look directly into the younger witch's eyes. "Hermione, it seems obvious to me that you meant a great deal to Snape. For him to have left you everything..."

"But, I'd rather have him here with me, than be surrounded by memories of what I can't have." Silent tears began to fall down her cheeks once more. "Don't you ever wish that Ophelia had survived?"

"I do, every year, on her birthday, I raise a glass to her wherever she may be," Padraig replied. "It does get easier, Hermione. You say he left you his home, have you been to see it?"

"I can't!" Hermione frantically shook her head. "I can't go there, Padraig, I'm too scared of what I may find there, what if... what if it looks like he's just popped out..." Hermione's body shook again as she sobbed.

"Hermione, look," Padraig implored. "You need to face whatever secrets that place holds. You have to start to move forward. You can't keep hiding from what has happened. I'm sure Snape wouldn't want you to live a half-life. By leaving you everything, he has set you up in many ways to pursue your heart's desire. What is it that Hermione Granger wishes to do with her life, now that Riddle has finally been defeated?"

Hermione's breath caught as she hiccupped, "Minerva has offered me a position at Hogwarts, helping Irma in the library, and Filius has said he'd gladly take me on as an Apprentice. Severus and I had talked about me becoming a Potions Apprentice somewhere in Europe; he said there was a possibility that I could study with the same master he had studied with." She took a final sip from her glass. "I have to admit, the possibility of working in the library at Hogwarts is very tempting, there are scores of books I never got a chance to look at whilst I was a student. It's a tempting offer since I am such a bibliophile."

"What about Snape's home?"

"Ginny... Ginny Weasley has offered to go with me. She offered to go in first to see what was there. I suppose I really should get in touch with Elgin Blott to discuss the finer points of Severus' will."

"That would be a start: Do you know who the executor of the will is?"

"I don't. Mr Blott came to Grimmauld Place to read the will shortly after the end of the war, I don't remember any mention of who was executor. Mind you, I don't remember much about the reading of the will; I remember hearing that Severus had left everything to me, and then I believe I fainted. I was so surprised that he had done such a thing."

Hermione paused to look at her watch. "Oh my, look at the time! Minerva will wonder where in the name of Merlin I am. I'm sorry, Padraig, I have to go."

"Hermione, its only 1:30 pm, I'm sure Minerva isn't worried about you yet."

"I told her I was only going to be a couple of hours, she will wonder what has happened to me."

"Hermione, I'm sure Minerva will not mind you being a little late back to the cottage."

"No, but I said I would be back early afternoon..."

"How about I escort you back to Avoca?"

"That's very kind of you, but..."

"It's not an imposition, I assure you, Hermione."

"Well, in that case, thank you, Padraig."

Disclaimer: As always, I do not own Potterverse; it all belongs to JK Rowling and others too numerous to mention.

I am, as always, eternally grateful to my fantastic support team. Scoffy, thank you for the long Y!M chats about this chapter and your endless support, and nit picking "smooches". I also extend thanks to little_beloved for mopping up my punctuation errors.

Finally, there is a new member in my support team, beffeysue. Thank you so much for all your encouragement and the love you show for this story. You have no idea how much it means to me.

Ladies, you rock my fanfic world, thank you!

Everything Passes By

Chapter 6 of 8

An Extension of my Romancing The Wizard story -- Lost and Found. Their romance had been, through necessity, brief yet intense, infuriatingly unconsummated, but nevertheless significant for them both. Moments were grasped whenever possible: when he brought her notes about the Horcruxes when the boys were away. What happens after the events of the Battle of Hogwarts.

Want to stay here forever, feeling the warmth from your skin.

How was to know life would make a joke out of all our love?

Everything passing by, is not coming back.

How could I be so careless? It's not like we live forever.

How was I to know life would make a joke out of all our love?

Everything passing by is not coming back. (x2)

Let me stay here forever, feeling the love from your soul.

I'd give up all my days to have just one more day with you.

Everything passing by is not coming back. (x2)

(yeah yeah)

Everything Passes By – VAST

* * * *

Severus allowed the breath he had been holding to escape as Lucius waltzed out of the room. It wasn't that he didn't appreciate what Narcissa and Lucius were doing for him; he appreciated that his friends were putting themselves out for him, though part of him was only too well aware that they could just be doing this because he'd saved Draco.

On the other hand, he could not handle their constant questioning about his association with Hermione. He appreciated that Narcissa was concerned for him; after all, she had witnessed the effect Lily's death had on him and was rightly concerned as to how Severus would handle himself if and when Hermione moved on and found a new love. Lucius was also worried about how Severus would fare; he had made progress since waking from his coma-like state, and the last thing Lucius desired was for his close friend to have a relapse.

Severus had spent many sleepless nights pondering how he would react to a picture of Hermione in the arms of another of another wizard. He knew it would rip at his heart, but she had so much to live for, and he was a broken man, unable to control even the simplest spells. He no longer had a role to play.

* * * *

After washing and dressing, Severus seated himself in the dark-brown leather, wing-backed chair Lucius had placed in the bay window of his room. Just outside his window was a border crammed with sweet-smelling rose bushes. Severus sighed as he picked up the next newspaper from the pile to his right. Lucius had had the foresight to save any papers which contained news that he had thought his friend would find significant. Today's edition was from June 1st, 1998, and splashed across the front page was news of his acquittal for Albus Dumbledore's demise:

Yesterday saw the final ceremony to honour the fallen heroes of the Battle of Hogwarts. The amassed crowds were stunned and surprised when acting Minister for Magic, Kingsley Shacklebolt, Order of Merlin, First Class, announced the acquittal of Headmaster Severus Snape. He informed those present that the Wizengamot had been able to review both the diaries of Albus Dumbledore and the memories that Harry Potter collected from Headmaster Snape as he lay dying on the floor of the Shrieking Shack.

Not only did the Minister announce that Snape, whom most people believed to be loyal to He-Who-Shall-Not-Be-Named, had in fact been carrying out the direct requests of the late Headmaster Albus Dumbledore when he cast the Unforgivable last year, but Shacklebolt also announced that the Wizengamot had unanimously agreed that the former Death Eater should be awarded the Order of Merlin, First Class, for his endeavours during the war.

Acting Headmistress Minerva McGonagall announced that she and the Board of Governors, which still includes Lucius Malfoy amongst its numbers, are hoping to have Hogwarts ready to reopen in time for the start of the spring term on 6th January. The Headmistress stated that any students wishing to return to Hogwarts to complete their OWL and NEWT courses should contact her directly for a list of self-study topics.

"Hmmm," Severus growled. "That was one of my less inspired ideas: permitting my memories to escape quite so fully. Damn Potter and, by extension, I assume, Hermione. I can imagine the pair of them badgering Kingsley until he acquitted me."

Turning the pages of the paper, he huffed at all the reports until he stumbled across Rita Skeeter's column. As he read the column, his heart raced: the woman was reporting that Hermione had been seen placing flowers at his memorial and had spent an hour sitting beside the memorial talking and crying. She loved him despite everything—foolish girl.

Picking up another paper, Severus was bemused to read an advertisement for a new Potions textbook. He read further and realised that it was a text which included all the

alterations he had made to his Potions book whilst still at Hogwarts. So Potter had *had* his book. "Waldo," he rasped.

Waldo appeared with a soft pop. "What can Waldo be doing for Master Severus?"

"Can you ask Narcissa to come to me? I need a word with your Mistress."

Moments later, Narcissa appeared in the doorway. "What's the matter, Severus? Should I summon Trewella for you?"

"Did you know about this?" he demanded, pointing to the advertisement.

Narcissa walked across the room to stand beside him.

Severus watched her intently as the colour drained from her face. "I'll take that as a 'yes', then," he whispered.

"We... that is, Lucius and Lewins thought it would be best to wait and not tell you until you were stronger, more able to deal with such a revelation, from what we have garnered from talking to Minerva."

"You've spoken to Minerva?" Severus' face contorted with rage.

"Severus." Narcissa placed her hand on his shoulder. "We were worried about you. Lewins said there was no obvious reason for your prolonged coma. You kept muttering Miss Granger's name during your fevers, and Lucius contacted Minerva in the hope of getting some answers."

"Does Minerva know I am alive?"

"No, Lucius was very vague during his meetings with her. He approached her as the Executor of your will; he told her that he was just interested as to why you left everything to Miss Gra-Hermione."

"I see. So, what did Minerva impart to him?"

"She was unable or unwilling to cast too much light on his question. Lucius knew she had been there when you made your will, but she was reluctant to tell him the whole story; he came home almost as annoyed as he had been following meetings with Dumbledore."

Severus smirked at the thought of his former colleague evading Lucius' enquiries.

"She told him that whilst Hermione was waiting to return to the school to complete her NEWTs, she had filled her spare time with improving the standard Potions text with the modifications the Half-Blood Prince had made to a textbook. Apparently Hermione had copied the notes from the book Horace gave Potter."

"Do you have a copy?"

"Severus, I'm not sure it would be a wise move for you to see the book just yet. She put a dedication in the front of the book...."

"Do you have a copy, Narcissa?" he interrupted, raising an eyebrow and tilting his head slightly.

"I'll get it." Narcissa turned and left, returning shortly with a copy of the book. "Are you sure about this, Severus?"

"Please, Narcissa. I would like to see what Hermione has written."

"Minerva told Lucius that Hermione achieved a sense of calm while she wrote this. She was adamant that Hermione took it on as a labour of love, a way to secure you the recognition she believes you deserve...."

"Narcissa, just give me the damn book."

Reluctantly, Narcissa handed Severus the book and then turned to leave. "If that is all, Severus, I will go prepare for my sister's arrival."

Severus dismissed Narcissa with a wave of his hand. Watching as she left the room, he waited until he heard the door click softly before he allowed his fingers to graze across the book's dedication. The words Hermione used fractured his heart:

"The bravest man she has ever known... bahl!" Severus threw the book across the room in a fit of rage. "Coward, more like!" he hissed.

Rising from the wing-backed chair and hobbling over to where the book had landed, he stooped, and, leaning heavily upon his walking stick, he retrieved the book and returned once more to the chair. Opening the cover, he looked at the small black and white photograph of Hermione on the dust cover. Lazily, his fingers followed the outline of her face before passing across her lips. Closing his eyes, he leaned back, remembering how it had felt to have Hermione nibble the exposed flesh of his neck, how her kisses on his lips were always fierce and demanding, how alive he had felt when she was in his arms.

Hermione had given him a dream to fight for, a desire to pursue with every ounce of his being. With her, he could become someone else; with Hermione, life was worth living.

He hadn't been able to bring himself to gaze upon the wound on his neck: he had let his fingertips graze the uneven surface numerous times, but had not gone farther. As for his ability to walk, one-hundred-year-old wizards could do so much better than he. No, it was better for Hermione to believe that he had perished on the dusty, dirty floor of the Shrieking Shack, bathed in a mixture of blood and memories. It was better to leave her with the memories of what they had had. Growling, Severus wiped a solitary tear from his cheek—she was better off without him, regardless of what Lucius and Narcissa believed.

* * *

Severus' contemplation of the book was interrupted by the crash of Trewella as he stumbled through the Floo and knocked over a fireside table.

"My day continues its descent into hell. So, tell me, Trewella, what torture do you have in store for me this time?" Severus snarled as he glared at the young Healer.

"Mr Snape, we will be working on your leg today... I need to ascertain how much damage occurred... and how well your body is repairing the..."

"You know full well the state of my atrophied limb," Severus snarled. "If you lack the correct information I'm sure Lewins would be only too glad to provide you with an in-depth report of my survival and recovery before you blighted my days."

Trewella paled; even though he had been attending to Severus's Magiotherapy for eight weeks, the man still managed to make him feel like a first-year all over again.

"What I meant, sir, was that I need to check the progress of your rehabilitation."

"Very well," Severus growled. "What are you waiting for, a written invitation?"

"No, sir," Trewella mumbled as he made his way to where Severus was seated. He made several intricate patterns with his wand as he made his assessment of the limb.

"If you ask me, it's all just foolish wand waving. I doubt you garner as much information from waving that stick over me as you would from asking me questions, stupid boy."

Trewella continued his assessment, ignoring the snide comments spewing from his ex-professor. When he had completed all the spells, he rose from his knees and smiled weakly at Severus.

"You are making progress, though I dare say you'd progress further if only you would use your stick regularly to enable you to walk farther. I believe that Mr Malfoy has an exceptional copy of Hogwarts' potion garden."

"Are you finished?"

"Well, I suppose..."

"Excellent. Kindly leave me in peace."

Trewella was relieved to have got off so lightly. Making a hasty exit, he vowed to seek out Lewins to discuss Mr Snape's recovery. He'd have to wait until Lewins finished his meeting with Mr Malfoy, but the time would allow him to write up his notes on Severus Snape's recovery and rehabilitation. Maybe Lewins could suggest a method for him to provoke Severus to move beyond the confines of his bedroom suite.

* * * *

Lucius walked imperiously to the display that hid the entrance to St Mungo's. Paperwork securely stowed in his satchel, he muttered the incantation, entered the hospital's atrium and was immediately greeted by Healer Lewins.

"Mr Malfoy, if you care to follow me," he said as he turned to the receptionist, "I will be with Mr Malfoy for the next hour. Hold all my Floos, Lydia."

The receptionist smiled sweetly as Lewins and Lucius left the atrium.

* * * *

"The idea has merit, Mr Malfoy. We would benefit from employing someone who is familiar with brewing the Wolfsbane Potion. Whilst we have many skilled Potions masters, none are as familiar as Mr Snape with the delicate procedure. It may also aid his recovery if he were encouraged to return to the laboratory. We would, of course, continue to preserve his anonymity."

Lucius nodded. Lewins wasn't the only one bound to silence. Severus had demanded that he and Narcissa should swear an oath to keep his survival secret until such a time that Severus was happy to integrate with the wizarding community. Lucius had asked Lewins to sign a Secrecy Agreement and had promised a substantial amount of money to secure his silence.

"My Henley residence boasts a Potions laboratory, second only to the one Severus worked in at Hogwarts, but I have yet to raise the subject with Severus. I was contemplating asking him to brew a simple hair care potion for Narcissa, but I will wait until I hear word from Trewella."

* * * *

Trewella stumbled through the Floo in the Healers' staffroom. Dusting himself down, he breathed a heavy sigh of relief. At least he'd got away without Snape hexing him as he had the previous week in a rare demonstration of magical control. The man was becoming completely unbearable.

Trewella had been waiting for twenty minutes when the door to Healer Lewin's office opened, and the young wizard stood and waited for Lewins and Malfoy to emerge.

"Ahhh, Trewella." Lewins smiled at him as he followed Lucius out of his office. "I'll be with you in a moment: I'll just see Mr Malfoy to the entrance. You may as well go in and sit down; I wish to speak with you about Mr Snape."

Trewella nodded politely to Lucius before grabbing his notes and entering the office. He wondered what Lewins needed to discuss with him. He didn't have to wait long, as his musings were interrupted by Lewins seating himself once more behind his large, paper-strewn desk.

"So, tell me, Angus: How is Snape progressing with his rehabilitation? Mr Malfoy tells me that he refuses to leave his room. I would have thought that by now you would have managed to encourage him to get out and about a bit more." Trewella made an attempt to speak, but Lewins barely took a breath before continuing: "I know that Snape is not the easiest person to get along with, but you have been working with him for two months, now."

"Sir, I have no idea how to stop the man from brooding. He is rude, uncooperative, and his insults..."

"Trewella," Lewins interrupted abruptly, "you were taught by the man for seven years: surely you know that his bark is worse than his bite? Do you need me to come with you next time?"

"No, sir, it's fine. I know I have to stand up to him." Trewella looked Lewins in the eye. His boss was right, of course. Although he had been sorted into Hufflepuff, it was high time that he demonstrated that he was no pushover. He had achieved the highest recorded marks for his training, and he was a skilled Magiotherapist. It was time for him to assert himself with Mr Snape and find a way to get through to the man. "Thank you, sir. I don't think your presence will be required. However, I do think I need to speak with Mr Malfoy before I see Mr Snape again. There's something bothering Mr Snape, and I would like to get at least an indication as to what it might be."

Trewella made to leave the office, but Lewins halted his progress before he reached the door.

"Trewella, wait; you're probably better off speaking with me. Mr Malfoy and his wife are acting as Secret Keepers for Mr Snape, and I'm unsure as to whether or not Mr Malfoy would be willing to share what I have to tell you. Please, sit." Lewins rose from his seat and began to pace his room. "As you know, Snape worked for both sides of the war. He supplied the Death Eaters with information, while also being the person to provide Potter with the Sword of Gryffindor. Despite the fact that he tainted his name by carrying out Dumbledore's last wish, he formed an attachment with Miss Granger. He would pass information to Miss Granger about the task Dumbledore had given Potter, and from what we garnered from Snape himself and the current Headmistress of Hogwarts, Snape and Granger were close."

Lewins took a moment to stare out of the window onto the street below. "Snape has refused to allow Malfoy to contact Miss Granger and inform her of his survival. He has left everything to the young woman. If you can get through to him about his grief, for that is what he is suffering with, I believe you will be able to make progress with his rehabilitation. Snape needs to recognise that all is not lost. Minerva tells me that, even now, Miss Granger is feeling his loss deeply."

Suddenly, Trewella could see a way forward. If he could indeed get Snape to open up about his role in the war, he could get Snape to accept that he was not quite as broken as he believed he was.

* * * *

Lucius left Lewins in the atrium of St Mungo's once more. Their meeting had been a partial success. Lewins reported that the extension to the Magical Maladies wards was going well. The Longbottoms and Lockhart were doing as well as could be expected, but were oblivious to the changes that were happening around them. He had also offered hope that Severus might respond positively to getting back into a Potions laboratory.

Narcissa was there to greet him when he arrived back at the manor.

"How are Andromeda and Teddy?" he asked before leaning in to kiss his wife on her cheek.

"Fine."

"Fine?" Lucius looked at his wife, noticing her furrowed brow, "What's the matter? Is something wrong with Severus?"

"Fine, in as much as Teddy is teething again. Not as such with respect to Severus." Narcissa turned to the drinks table and poured two glasses of cognac before facing her husband once more. "You'd better sit, love."

Narcissa sat beside her husband on the sofa and offered him one of the glasses. "Severus was reading the papers you have set aside for him this morning. You'd only been gone a short while when he summoned Waldo to request my immediate presence. It would seem one of the papers held a report both of his acquittal and the tentative work Hermione had done on the Potions text."

"Damn." Lucius paled. "Did he ask to see it?"

"Of course."

"Have you given him the copy?"

"You know how persuasive the man can be and how unpredictable his control of his magic is at the moment. I didn't wish to experience his anger first hand."

"And?"

"I haven't been able to see him since I left him with the book. He's cursed quite a lot... I had to put a Silencing Spell up while Teddy and Andromeda were here."

"Leave it to me: I think I can handle him." Lucius drained his glass before leaving the sitting room.

* * * *

In the hours since Narcissa had given him the book, Severus had experienced a range of emotions. He had been angered that they had kept the book from him, his heart had been ripped apart by Hermione's dedication, and then an unswerving determination had gripped him.

Severus was seated in the wing-backed chair when Lucius barged into the room, wand in hand and a determined look on his face. He had removed the papers from the table and had placed them before him. He was concentrating on the white peacock feather that rested on the table top.

"*Wingardium Leviosa.*"

Lucius watched as the white feather twitched slightly before rising slowly in the air. The look of concentration on Severus' face suddenly changed into a smile of sorts. Before Lucius had time to react, Severus was probing his mind, rifling through his memories searching for something.

"Severus, what are you looking for?"

"Silence, Lucius. Show me... show me your meetings with Minerva."

Lucius was powerless against Severus; even though the younger man was physically weaker than he, he had always surpassed him when it came to Occluding and reading others' minds. How else could Severus have survived their meetings with Voldemort?

Breathing heavily, Lucius pulled the memories of his meetings with Minerva to the front of his mind.

"*Well, Lucius, I have to admit I was intrigued by your request for a chat.*" Minerva offered the younger man a cup of tea.

"As you may know, Minerva, I am the Executor for Severus' will. I am somewhat surprised that he has left everything to Miss Granger."

"Ah, I see now why you have asked for a meeting. Severus and Miss Granger arrived at an understanding... I don't think anything was acted upon, but from what I understand, Severus and Hermione were working together through most of the last year. When Severus' lawyer drew up the will, he asked Remus and me to witness the paperwork after a meeting of the Order. I thought it strange that he would leave everything to Miss Granger—it was then that he informed me of their association."

"You don't seem perturbed by the fact that Severus was attracted to a witch many years his junior."

Minerva tilted her head in a way which reminded Lucius of his friend. "Mr Malfoy, of all the witches I have seen come through this school, Miss Granger is the only witch I could ever see Severus being attracted to. Yes, he was infatuated with Miss Evans whilst a teenager, but their friendship was doomed from the minute she was Sorted into Gryffindor and he was Sorted into Slytherin."

Minerva rose from her seat and began to pace the room in a manner reminiscent of her predecessor. "Were you aware that Severus was the one who gifted Harry with the Sword of Gryffindor? The attachment that Hermione and Severus formed haunts her still. She can often be found down by the lake, talking to Severus' memorial. I have given my house-elf, Twinkie, instructions to watch over her while she sits and talks and sometimes weeps for her lost love."

Lucius was intrigued, yet managed to school his face so as not to betray his inner ponderings.

"I take it Hermione has not been to Spinner's End yet?" Minerva questioned before taking a sip from her tea.

"Not that I am aware of. This, of course, does not mean that she has not been to look at the... well, it's not a particularly nice place from what I remember of it."

Severus slumped back in the chair, exhausted. Beads of sweat prickled the surface of his skin, and his breathing was rapid and uneven. Lucius slumped slightly, surprised by Severus's non-verbal invasion of his mind.

"Has she been yet?"

"Been?"

"Has Hermione been to Spinner's End yet?"

"Not that I am aware of," Lucius panted.

Closing his eyes, Severus allowed his head to fall backwards against the chair.

"Minerva was right: she misses you. She has been inconsolable. I went to visit your memorial this year with Minerva for your birthday, and she was seated on the ground by your headstone. I stayed for, maybe, twenty minutes."

"I don't want to hear this," Severus rasped as he pinched the bridge of his nose.

"You may not *want* to hear of such things," Lucius snarled as he rose to stand, "but it's about time you *did* hear some home truths. She loves you, Severus, and yet you refuse to ask me to fetch her to you..."

“What use am I to her? You've seen her scores for her NEWTs: the world is her oyster...”

“And it means nothing to her; she has nothing without the man she loves by her side...”

“What do you know of love, Lucius?”

“More than you, obviously.”

“How dare you presume that...”

“What, you think twenty years devotion to a woman *whenever* thought more of you than friendship and a year-long entanglement with Miss Granger make you knowledgeable about love?”

Severus sighed. Lucius had the bit between his teeth; all that Severus could do was sit and listen.

Lucius spun away from his friend, anger thrumming through him. “She is devoted to your memory, foolish chit that she is.” Lucius swirled around to once more face his friend. “She is what you *need*, Severus. Narcissa and I can only do so much.”

“Leave, Lucius. I need to think.”

“Damn right you need to think. Don't throw Miss Granger's love away.”

With that, Lucius exited the room, leaving Severus to contemplate his next move.

* * * *

Lucius slammed the door behind him and leaned against the wall. Breathing heavily, he slid to the floor.

“What have I done?” he muttered to himself.

Narcissa was shocked when she saw Lucius in a heap. “What happened?”

“He was concentrating on his magic when I entered, but before I knew it, he was rifling through my mind.” Lucius slowly stood. “He wanted to see my meeting with Minerva, and after he was satisfied, he withdrew, and then we argued.”

“Come, love, you need a drink, then you can tell me all about it.”

* * * *

Severus slumped further into the chair after Lucius exited the room. Looking at the clock above the fire, Severus realised that it was still only mid-afternoon. Pinching the bridge of his nose, he began to ponder Lucius' words.

* * * *

Hermione smiled as she turned to say goodbye to Padraig. Before Padraig could depart, however, Minerva stood at the open door to her cottage.

“Well, what a surprise. How lovely to see you again, Padraig, I wasn't aware that you knew Miss Granger.”

“Minerva!” The young man smiled at his former professor. “How lovely to see you again. You look well. I've just met Miss Granger: We were both visiting Avoca, and I saw that Hermione seemed a little lost, so we had lunch and talked. She filled me in on everything I've missed while I've been away.”

Minerva was relieved that Padraig was keeping up the pretence in front of Hermione. “Why don't you come in for some tea? I have some cake, too.”

“I don't know if that's...”

“Nonsense!” Minerva had another plan forming in her mind. “I won't hear of it. Come, I can make a fresh pot, and we can catch up on what you've been doing recently.”

Padraig looked at Hermione and smiled an apology; he knew it was useless trying to resist Minerva when she had plans brewing.

Disclaimer: As always, I do not own Potterverse; it all belongs to JK Rowling and others too numerous to mention.

I am, as always, eternally grateful to my fantastic support team. Scoffy, thank you for the long Y!M chats about this chapter and your endless support, and nit picking *smooches*. I also extend thanks to little_beloved for mopping up my punctuation errors.

Finally, beffeyesue, thank you so much for all your encouragement and the love you show for this story. You have no idea how much it means to me.

Ladies, you rock my fanfic world, thank you!

Realisations and Revelations

Chapter 7 of 8

Hermione ponders her “accidental” meeting with Padraig. Severus continues to make a slow recovery whilst finally venturing outside the four walls of his bedroom.

Pray God you can cope.

I stand outside this woman's work, this woman's world.

Ooh, it's hard on the man, now his part is over.

Now starts the craft of the father.

I know you have a little life in you yet.

I know you have a lot of strength left.

I know you have a little life in you yet.

I know you have a lot of strength left.

I should be crying, but I just can't let it show.

I should be hoping, but I can't stop thinking

Of all the things I should've said, that I never said.

All the things we should've done, that we never did.

All the things I should've given, but I didn't.

Oh, darling, make it go, make it go away.

Give me those moments back.

Give them back to me.

Give me that little kiss.

Give me your hand.

(I know you have a little life in you yet.

I know you have a lot of strength left.

I know you have a little life in you yet.

I know you have a lot of strength left.)

I should be crying, but I just can't let it show.

I should be hoping, but I can't stop thinking

Of all the things we should've said, that were never said.

All the things we should've done, that we never did.

All the things that you needed from me.

All the things that you wanted from me.

All the things that I should've given,

But I didn't.

Oh, darling, make it go away.

Just make it go away now.

This Woman's Work – Kate Bush.

Hermione slept fitfully during the night, tossing and turning, her mind racing as she replayed the events of the previous day. Did Padraig *happen* to stumble across her in the innocent manner in which she had first perceived their meeting, or did Minerva have a part to play? If she was pushing her towards Padraig, what did she hope to achieve? Minerva hadn't seemed all that surprised when she had returned with Padraig in tow, and that troubled Hermione: she respected her mentor, but if she was trying to push them together, she wasn't sure how she would react.

She finally awoke at 5:30. She groaned as she rolled over to peer through sleepy eyes at the glaring alarm clock. Deciding that she was unlikely to get any further sleep, Hermione slowly sat up, untangling the sheets and blankets from her limbs as she rose. She grabbed her dressing gown and crept silently from her room to the kitchen. Casting a silencing spell, she prepared a mug of black coffee and stared out of the kitchen window at the swirl of early morning mist.

She picked up her mug and crept out the back door and stood watching the sun rise over the rolling hillside outside Minerva's cottage. She was mesmerised by the colours as they changed from orange through to yellow, painting the dark sky with multicoloured early morning light. The cool air chilled her slightly; she took a sip from her mug of still steaming coffee and sighed as the coffee warmed her from the inside.

Hermione descended from the porch and slowly meandered down to the bottom of the garden. She didn't register the dew-damp grass brushing the bare soles of her feet as she made her way to the foot of the garden; she continued to ponder Minerva's reaction to Padraig's presence.

When Hermione reached the bottom of the garden, she leaned back against the gnarled trunk of an oak tree. Her mind drifted to the morning Severus had surprised her whilst they had camped in the Forest of Dean. They had arranged, via the portrait of Phineas Nigellus Black, to meet a short walk from where the trio had been camping. A tear slid down Hermione's cheek as she remembered how safe she had felt wrapped in Severus's embrace. They had discussed the most likely places that Bellatrix would have chosen to stow the Hufflepuff cup.

She crept out from the tent early that morning whilst Harry and Ron slept. Leaving the tent, she made her way to the oldest, most gnarled and resilient looking tree. Leaning against the trunk, Hermione waited for Severus to arrive.

She spun, wand at the ready as she heard the soft 'pop' of Severus's arrival in the small clearing.

"Severus, I'm so glad to see you!" she squealed.

"Shush, my nymph, we don't want to wake your cohorts."

"They sleep like the dead."

Severus frowned as Hermione placed a kiss on his cheek.

"You need to relax a bit," she whispered.

"I can't relax, love. The Dark Lord grows restless; he's been off searching for something in Europe..."

"Harry mentioned he'd **seen** Vold..."

"Don't. Say. His. Name. He has Snatchers looking for you."

Hermione shook the memory from her mind, looking at her wrist watch. Realising time was slipping by, she turned to return to the cottage.

She was surprised to meet Minerva as she approached the cottage's back door. The older witch looked at her with concern.

"I wondered where you had got to," Minerva stated as she looked the younger witch up and down.

"Sorry, Minerva, I had trouble sleeping last night," Hermione replied.

"Would you like me to Floo Poppy for some Dreamless Sleep?"

"Thank you, but that really isn't necessary."

"As you wish, my dear."

Silently, Minerva and Hermione made their way back to the cottage. Minerva sat and had breakfast whilst Hermione disappeared to get ready.

* * * * *

He stared at the young woman before him, mesmerised by her beauty. Her lips were swollen from his possessive and passionate kisses, eyes half lidded with an unbridled desire for him. The soft blush of her cheeks spread down her neck and stretched tantalisingly across the swell of her wonderful breasts. His hands ghosted upwards from her hips to her breasts; her taut nipples called to him. Leaning forward, he kissed her left breast as his right hand gently teased and tweaked the other. His tongue circled, flicked and licked, caressing her nipple before biting playfully, eliciting a moan of ardour. Her incoherent babbling drove him on, encouraging him to suck. At the same time, his cock began to swell and twitch within its fabric prison.

"Merlin, witch, you'll be the death of me," he growled. His voice, low and seductive, like molten chocolate, elicited more mumbling as her hips moved against his.

She whimpered as his hand moved down from her breast, ghosting over her soft curves. No longer existing on berries and mushrooms since the end of the war, she had regained her womanly form. She murmured her disapproval as his mouth released her nipple, and she gasped as his mouth travelled up to her swollen lips. Reflexively, her fingers curled within his hair, massaging his scalp as she pulled him closer, deepening the kiss as his lips found hers.

If this was love, he'd willingly pass through the veil to have it.

His left hand arrived at its destination; gradually his fingers pushed aside the slip of cloth that covered her sex. His murmur was mirrored by hers as his fingers moved forward, seeking her clit. She bucked against him, trying to direct his ministrations. Slowly, he moved his fingers back towards her entrance; teasingly he circled before slipping into her with a single finger.

She keened as a finger slipped into her, followed by a second. Little by little he moved, building the pace. She whimpered when he withdrew completely, stepping back from her.

"Bed. Now!" he growled as he made his way across the room. She followed him, stopping just in front of him. "May I?" he asked as his fingers twined the waistband of her cotton knickers.

Unsure of her voice, she merely nodded her consent as her eyelids closed and her chest heaved, sucking in air to breathe.

He inhaled deeply, desperately trying to control his growing desire to join with her. His need burned within him like a roaring, savage fire. He needed her, just as surely as she needed him.

Reverently he knelt before her, gently pulling her knickers down. She stepped out of them before sitting on the edge of the four-poster bed. "Please," she murmured, twining her fingers in his hair once more. "Please, make love to me."

Two fingers entered her as his mouth found her clit. He sucked and licked as his fingers slid in and out. She fell back on the bedspread, her hips arching to meet him, wanting more but unable to form the words. His cock twitched; wordlessly he removed his clothing. He shuddered as he felt the cool air on his heated, naked skin.

She whimpered as his lips left her. Turning, he placed a kiss on the milk-white skin of her inner thigh. Standing, he manoeuvred her into the centre of the bed before joining her.

Slowly he rocked against her, causing his erection to move along her before positioning himself, ready to enter her, desperate to become one.

Her voice deserted her as his eyes locked with hers, a nod of her head and the burning desire in her eyes the only way for her to communicate her need for him. With a snap of his hips, he was sheathed within her. His groan was mirrored by her as she arched upwards to meet him.

Severus woke as her name fell from his lips: *Hermione*. His body shook as he came undone. With a whimper he rolled over, burying his face in the cool pillow.

Disgust rose within him. He'd come undone, like an over-sexed teenager, to a dream of a woman he could no longer hope to be with. Lifting his head from the pillow, he searched for his wand. Unable to locate it, he rolled onto his back before slowly sitting. Wiping the sleep from his eyes, he was thankful when he remembered his room was en-suite. Summoning all his inner reserve, he rose from the bed, grasping the canes Trewella insisted he use and determinedly made his way across to the small bathroom.

Switching on the shower, he waited for the water to warm before stepping underneath it. The warm water soothed his dismay as he washed away the traces of his reaction to the dream. He didn't hear Lucius enter the room, nor the sound of his breakfast tray being left. All he heard was the pounding of water as it fell from his body into the porcelain bath.

* * * * *

Lucius entered the room, determined to apologise for his outburst the previous evening. He was surprised not to find Severus within his bed; he was even more surprised at the haphazard arrangement of the sheets. The air was thick with the smell of sweat and something he couldn't pinpoint. It was then that he heard the combination of

running water and heart breaking sobs. Deciding that, for once, discretion was the better part of valour, he placed the breakfast tray on the small coffee table, turned, and left his friend undisturbed.

* * * * *

Hermione stepped from the shower, expertly twining her hair in the small towel before spell-drying her skin. Wrapping a larger towel around herself, she made her way across the room and stared into the mirror above the sink. "Well, you're a sight for sore eyes," she murmured before casting the glamour without a second thought.

She gradually removed the towel from her hair, and with a practiced arc of her wand, the no longer damp mass of curls fell softly over her shoulders. Severus would have chided her for foolish wand waving, but it got the job done.

She padded across the floor to her bedroom, retrieved her jeans and bra from the heap of clothes on the floor and retrieved a pair of knickers from the drawer in the dresser.

* * * * *

Padraig stood on the doorstep, nervously shuffling from one foot to the other. He was sure that Minerva had given the game away the night before with her less than shocked welcome when he had appeared at the cottage with Hermione. How would Hermione react to him? Had she already started to ponder their "accidental" meeting? Did she already suspect that all was not what it seemed? Would she still wish to go on the picnic with him? He hoped that she did, as he was longing to take her to the place he went to in order to feel closer to Ophelia.

He didn't have to wait long before Minerva opened the door to him. "Padraig, please come in." She stepped back to allow entrance.

"Is she ready?"

"I am," Hermione replied as she crossed the room to stand between them.

"I thought we might go see Powerscourt House and the waterfall."

Minerva's smile turned wistful. "Oh, I remember the first time Albus took me to Powerscourt. It's a magical place. I can't believe I forgot to take you there," she enthused as she held Hermione's gaze. "You'll enjoy the gardens, I think, Hermione."

"Well, if we are to see the house, gardens and waterfall, we need to get going," Padraig replied as he stepped towards the breakfast bar. "Is this the basket for our picnic?"

Minerva roused herself. "Yes. There's wine and plenty of food. Go. Have fun, no need to rush back."

Hermione could have sworn that Minerva "twinkled" as she pushed the pair out of the door. Shaking the thought from her head, she followed Padraig to a secluded spot from which they could Apparate.

* * * * *

Severus stepped from the shower and dried himself with a towel before dressing in casual trousers and a black jumper. Steadily, he walked across the room to where his breakfast tray had been left. A casual flick, and the warming charm disappeared. Lifting the silver cover from the food, he smelled the bacon and eggs, breathing deeply before he made short work of the food before him.

Sated, he called Waldo to collect the tray. The house-elf appeared and removed the tray without a word. Severus snorted: at least one of the Malfoy household was keeping quiet.

Slowly, he rose from the chair by the coffee table and shuffled the small distance to the wing-backed chair and resumed his perusal of the old papers. Lucius had kept anything which had a report about Hermione, Draco or Hogwarts.

* * * * *

Narcissa watched as Lucius departed for the day: he had another meeting at St Mungo's, and then he was meeting up with Draco. Satisfied that Lucius wouldn't be returning, Narcissa decided that now was the time for her to talk with Severus.

* * * * *

Severus sat reading an article in a back copy of *Potioneer Monthly*, scribbling notes on a scrap of paper. The article was causing his ire to build: it was written by a peer with whom he'd had numerous disagreements over formulation and potential enhancements that could be made to some potions. He was so engrossed that he didn't hear Narcissa enter the room. He jumped when she placed her cool hand on his shoulder.

"I'm sorry, Severus, I didn't mean to startle you. I was wondering if you would care to join me for lunch later? Perhaps afterwards we could go for a walk around the garden; I liked some ideas from you on where best to situate the garden for your potions ingredients," Narcissa said quietly.

With a heavy sigh, Severus turned slightly to face her.

"You won't grant me any peace until I agree, will you?"

"Some say I am a persistent witch."

Severus snorted. "You, Narcissa, are almost as bloody-minded as Minerva, and let me tell you, she has the fortitude of a mountain goat... much like Albus." As he mentioned the former headmaster's name, his head sank towards his chest, and he took a moment to compose himself. "I will join you, Narcissa, not because I want to, but because I wish to placate you."

"I will leave you alone then; I'll expect you downstairs at 12:30."

With a triumphant smile on her lips, Narcissa turned and left Severus to his musing.

* * * * *

Hermione stumbled away from Padraig as they arrived at Powerscourt House. After the number of times she'd Side-Along Apparated, she ought to be prepared for arrival by now.

She took a deep breath, taking in the scent of the flowers that surrounded them. Padraig had Apparated them to a secluded spot. Giggling, Hermione made her way out to the clearing.

"I hope we don't need to come back here to Apparate later today?" she asked.

"No, we'll visit the waterfall last, by that time there should be fewer Muggles about, and we should be able to just Apparate back to Minerva's."

"Well, come on then, let's go look at this house you are so eager to show me and the gardens that had Minerva turn all whimsical on us."

Padraig smirked as Hermione headed off: from what Minerva had told him, this must be what Hermione was like before and during the war.

Hermione gasped as the house came into view: she had thought that Russborough was a striking home, but Powerscourt was breath taking. The avenue which led straight up to the Palladian house mirrored the magnificence of their surroundings. Looking about her, Hermione gasped at the beauty of the sculpted gardens.

"Well, if you're impressed by this, I have no idea how you're going to respond to our picnic site," Padraig stated as he led Hermione further up the avenue.

* * * * *

Narcissa sat waiting for Severus to join her. Whilst waiting, she contemplated what it was she wanted to say to him. It was as plain as the nose on his face that Severus still cared for the Muggle-born witch. The problem was that when he made his mind up to take one direction, it had always been difficult to sway him in an opposite direction.

Narcissa turned as she heard a *tap, tap, tap* as Severus approached. She rose and opened the door, waiting for him to arrive.

"Severus." She stepped aside to allow him to enter. "It's good to see you out and about. I dare say that you could do with a change to the four walls you normally stare at."

"Enough small talk, Narcissa, I really am not in the mood for it. Let's eat, and then you can get to the item at the top of your agenda," Severus growled as he tried to hide the pain he felt. "Don't look at me like that, Cissa, I've known you for far too long to believe that you don't have an agenda in mind."

Narcissa smiled as she made her way back across the room to the table.

"You always were more perceptive than my dear husband."

"Enough of false platitudes, Narcissa, eat, then we shall talk like grownups." As if to underline his refusal to talk, Severus picked up a sandwich and began to eat in silence.

* * * * *

"So, have you decided when you will go to Spinner's End yet, Hermione?"

"Padraig, please, I know I need to go to Severus' home, but..."

"No buts, Hermione, it'll be part of the healing process. Where's your Gryffindor bravery?"

Hermione gave Padraig a watery smile. "Severus always referred to the perceived Gryffindor bravery as hell-bent stupidity."

"Be that as it may, you need to face your perceived demons. I'm sure Spinner's End will just be your average two-up-two-down, completely insignificant."

"There's every chance that he could have left something..."

Padraig wrapped his arms around Hermione's waist, causing Hermione to stiffen.

"There is a possibility that you will find all sorts of trinkets and treasures; hell, you might even find a picture of him with Lily Evans."

"Padraig, you're not helping, you know, with comments like that."

Gradually she removed Padraig's arms. Turning to face him, she looked directly at him.

"Padraig, was our meeting truly accidental?"

Padraig held Hermione's gaze. "Does it matter?"

"It matters to me. I've been manipulated and toyed with since I was eleven. I'm not a silly girl; I am a young woman, trying to make sense of the world I live in now, trying to heal after my dreams were torn from me. I can't just forget Severus; we meant too much to each other."

"No one is expecting you to completely forget him, Hermione, but hiding in a stone castle, building barriers and keeping those who care for you at arm's length isn't living. As I've already said, I'm pretty sure Severus would not want you to wallow in pity."

Hermione's calm face suddenly coloured with rage.

"You're just like *everybody* else. You don't understand. You witter on about *your* lost love, but you act like what Severus and I shared was trivial, insignificant... I wanted to be his wife; I wanted to be his passion; I wanted to fulfil his every desire..."

"Then grasp life with both of your hands, Hermione. Follow the dreams you shared; become the woman he saw in you. The fighter; the light of his life; the reason ~~he~~ kept fighting."

"You really are a piece of work, Padraig. How long has it taken you to get over Ophelia? Oh, hang on **you** haven't got over Ophelia, *have you?*" she spat. Turning, she ran down the path into the Italian garden, not really caring where she ended up. She had hoped that he was different, that he understood her heartache, but his words confirmed her darkest fears: no one understood how lost she felt without Severus.

As always, I don't own the Potterverse; it all belongs to JK Rowling and others too numerous to mention. No money is made from this amateur work.

My thanks, as always, go out to Scoffy and Beffy for hand holding, encouraging, and general awesomeness. Beffy helped out when it began to feel like this chapter would never happen. Scoffy, as always, did a wonderful job helping to tweak and twist the words into their current state. Little_beloved then wrapped the whole thing up by mopping up my remaining punctuation errors.

Ladies, as always, you rock my fanfic writing world. You really are the Bee's Knees.

Hopefully the next chapter will not take as long to write. I've left it with a slight cliffie on purpose to try and lure more from the muse.

Leave Me Sleeping

Chapter 8 of 8

An Extension of my Romancing The Wizard story – Lost and Found. Their romance had been, through necessity, brief yet intense, infuriatingly unconsummated, but nevertheless significant for them both. Moments were grasped whenever possible: when he brought her notes about the Horcruxes when the boys were away. What happens after the events of the Battle of Hogwarts.

Leave Me Sleeping

I close both locks below the window

I close both blinds and turn away

Sometimes solutions aren't so simple

Sometimes goodbye's the only way

And the sun will set for you

The sun will set for you

And the shadow of the day

Will embrace the world in grey

And the sun will set for you

Pink cards and flowers on your window

Your friends all plead for you to stay

Sometimes beginnings aren't so simple

Sometimes goodbye's the only way

And the sun will set for you

The sun will set for you

And the shadow of the day

Will embrace the world in grey

And the sun will set for you

And the shadow of the day

Will embrace the world in grey

And the sun will set for you

And the shadow of the day

Will embrace the world in grey

And the sun will set for you

Shadow Of The Day Linkin Park.

Padraig cursed under his breath, running his fingers through his hair, as Hermione ran down the path. How could he have been so foolish? Minerva had warned him that if he pushed too hard, the young witch was likely to take off. With a deep sigh, and more muttered imprecations, Padraig gave chase.

Hermione didn't know, nor did she care, where she was heading. The only desire that welled within her was to get as far away from Padraig as she could. Her chest heaved with each lungful of air, her heart raced as adrenaline pumped through her veins. Looking up, her heart sank; before her stood a dead end. She wrestled to calm her raging emotions. Even though Padraig had failed to substantiate her belief that Minerva had manipulated and masterminded their initial meeting, the fact that he didn't immediately refute her fears was more than enough. Who else had Minerva been plotting with? Was Molly in on the plan? What about Albus? After all, Minerva had been able to communicate with his portrait for the past fourteen months. There was more than a subtle hint of Dumbledorian plotting running through this scheme, she needed to think.

* * * * *

Severus sat watching Narcissa. He was increasingly amused by Narcissa's vain attempts to hide her growing ire. He would, of course, let Narcissa get everything off her chest, but like a cat playing with a dead mouse before discarding it for their owner to step on, Severus was relishing her discomfort. She never had mastered the subtle art of Occlumency; it had always been easy to read her emotions.

As he observed Narcissa fight the urge to question him, Severus was reminded of another witch who could never stop asking questions.

"... you are, I believe, yet to learn the art of non-verbal spell casting. Tell me, what is the advantage of a non-verbal spell?"

Hermione's hand shot into the air. Snape took his time looking around at everybody else, making sure he had no choice, before saying tersely, "Very well Miss Granger?"

"Your opponent has no warning about what kind of magic you're about to perform," said Hermione, "which gives you the upper hand momentarily."

"An answer copied almost word for word from *The Standard Book of Spells, Grade 6*," Severus snarled at her, "but accurate in its rudiments. Yes, those who perfect the ability to use magic without broadcasting their incantations gain an element of surprise. Not all wizards can do this, of course; it is a question of attentiveness and mind power which some," his gaze lingered maliciously upon Harry, his top lip curling, "lack."

"Severus... Severus, are you feeling all right?"

Severus turned his head in the direction of Narcissa's voice, and he realised that her hand was clamped on his shoulder. Her face was a picture of worry and concern.

"Unhand me, woman, I am perfectly fine," he spat.

Narcissa withdrew her hand, keeping a watchful eye on her companion as she returned to her seat.

"I was merely concerned about you, Severus; you seemed to be somewhere else for a while. I was worried that you were beginning to have a relapse. Trewella has warned that it may happen once you start to ..."

"For Merlin's sake, woman, stop twittering like some over-eager first year. I am in reasonable health; I was merely caught up in a memory. If you and Lucius are going to jump to conclusions every time such a thing happens..."

"There's no need to be quite so defensive, Severus. We care about you, we owe you a debt. Please, allow us to worry about you for a while."

"Again, Narcissa, if I am to have a relapse, you will know beyond doubt that such a thing has occurred. I was caught up reminiscing about my days of purgatory, when my time was spent attempting to teach dunderheads rudimentary survival skills for the then rapidly approaching war."

Narcissa smiled weakly at Severus. It didn't take a genius to surmise about whom Severus had been thinking. She would bet her last Sickle that Severus had been revisiting memories about Miss Granger. All was not lost, but she needed to proceed with caution.

With a soft 'pop' a house-elf appeared brandishing a silver tray, upon which sat a teapot, milk jug and sugar bowl. Carefully, the elf set the tea-set down, bowed reverently to Narcissa and Disapparated back to the kitchen.

"Shall I be mother, Severus?" Narcissa asked as she once more seated herself at the table.

He nodded giving a low grunt as his consent.

* * * * *

As Padraig rounded a corner, his racing heart eased. Before him, kneeling on the ground, head in her hands, sat Hermione. Once more he berated himself for his stupidity. After all the progress Hermione had made when they had shared lunch the day before, he had knocked her back to square one: her grief was palpable as he watched her shoulders shudder with each intake of breath.

Slowly, he approached, taking care not to startle her: the last thing he wanted to happen was for Hermione to run away from him again.

He cleared his throat. "Hermione, I'm so sorry," he murmured as he placed a hand on her shoulder. "Minerva ... Minerva is worried about you. She meant no harm. She ... Hermione, please you're right, of course, I haven't got over the loss of Ophelia. It still hurts, but there are more good days than those which are bad."

Hermione's breath hitched as she pulled a cotton handkerchief from her beaded bag. She blew her nose loudly before turning to face Padraig.

Padraig berated himself as he looked at Hermione. Her red-rimmed, bloodshot, hollow eyes stared back at him.

"I'm tired of games," Hermione sighed as she stood up. "I'm tired of people telling me that I need to move forward, that I need to, essentially, forget what Severus and I shared. I'm tired of people thinking that they know what's best for me. I'm scared that I'll forget him ... that I'll forget the scent of potions ingredients and soap that was so quintessentially *him*. I don't want to forget ...ever. If ... if it weren't for him, Harry would have died before the end of his first year at Hogwarts; if it weren't for him spilling forth his memories of meetings with Albus as he lay dying on the floor of that stupid shack, Harry wouldn't have known how to defeat Voldemort. If it weren't for him ... it doesn't bear thinking what our world would be like today."

"Your friends aren't expecting you to forget Severus, but they miss you, Hermione. They miss the girl who lost herself in her books. Yes, Minerva told me about your love of the written word, the girl who provided the answers to their questions. They miss your laughter and your smiles, and they are worried that you're not even bothered that your parents preferred to stay in Australia rather than coming home with you. You don't have to forget Severus; no one expects you to forget him, but you do need to grieve and you do need to let yourself heal."

Padraig offered Hermione his hand, just as he had the day before. Slowly Hermione took his hand. "Where do you go, Padraig, when you want to remember the good times?" she asked.

"Come with me; it's not far from here."

* * * * *

Severus sipped his tea black, no sugar, slice of lemon slowly. He continued to analyse Narcissa's every move.

"Stop staring at me as if I am about to blow up one of your precious cauldrons, Severus. I am not a first-year. I have known you long enough not to be intimidated by your glares and sneers."

Narcissa lifted her cup to her lips, inhaling the tea's perfume before taking a slow sip. She shuddered as she realised that she hadn't added any sugar.

"I have something to show you that may be of interest to you," she stated as she added a cube of sugar to her tea. "Trewella is delighted with your progress and Lucius had an interesting and informative meeting with Lewins yesterday. I wonder, are you itching to get back to brewing?"

Severus snorted before taking a sip from his own cup.

"I'm not going to get any peace until you show me whatever it is you are determined to show me, am I?" he drawled as he placed his cup back on to its saucer. "All I ask is that you permit me to finish my tea. I do so *abhor* to waste such fine leaves."

Severus watched Narcissa reach once more for the sugar bowl, a wry smirk played across his lips; she had already added three cubes of sugar to her tea.

"Are you sure you want to go showing a ghost around your mansion?" he questioned watching as Narcissa sipped her cup.

Smiling sweetly at her companion, Narcissa placed her cup down before rising from her seat. "You're hardly a ghost, Severus, a pig-headed fool maybe, but ghost is pushing things a bit, don't you think? I have only one jar of your face cream left; you could say I have an ulterior motive for wanting to show you my surprise. No one brews

a face cream as luxuriant as yours."

Severus harrumphed. He noted silently that if Narcissa had been a student, he'd have to give her points for persistence. "Very well, Narcissa, I can see that I can no longer prolong your agony. Lead the way."

* * * * *

Hermione stared at their surroundings. It truly was a beautiful place, quiet enough to sit and reflect whilst not being completely isolated. She could hear the joyful shrieks of children playing nearby, but there were plenty of secluded spots to sit amongst the copse. As she looked around, she saw couples walking their dogs. She sighed; Padraig was a complex person, not dissimilar to Severus all things considered. The problem was she felt betrayed by the very people she needed to help her move forward.

"Why did you agree to do it? Why befriend me?" she whispered, turning to face Padraig.

"Minerva told me about everything you did in the run up to the war, how devastated you were when you found out Severus had left you everything. She thought I'd be able to offer you something none of your friends can, an impartial opinion, some pointers maybe on moving forward," Padraig whispered as he placed his arm around Hermione's waist.

Hermione felt her ire build; her fingers began to twitch as she pulled herself away from Padraig.

"Offer pointers about moving forward. Ha! She couldn't have chosen a worse person for the task then, could she? You yourself have admitted that you are not over Ophelia.

"I really do wish that people would allow me to grieve in my own way. I shouldn't have come here with Minerva; I should have spent my summer with the Weasleys. At least Molly would have given me space to breathe and grieve!"

Without another word, Hermione twirled on the spot, Apparating away from Padraig with only one destination in mind.

* * * * *

Narcissa placed her empty cup back on to its saucer. She waited patiently as Severus deliberately took his time to finish his own cup.

"Are you ready?" Narcissa asked expectantly.

"Lead on, MacDuff," Severus replied, a note of amusement colouring his tone.

* * * * *

Minerva sat at the small table, taking sips from the large mug of herbal tea; before her laid on the table top was a copy of *The Quibbler* open on the puzzles page. She was disturbed from her rumination of nine down by the crack of Apparition. As she looked up, she was shocked to see Hermione arrive without Padraig. Where was the wizard? Why did Hermione have a scowl that would petrify first years on her face?

Without a word Hermione stormed into the cottage and stomped past her mentor and friend. Minerva sighed heavily; from the determined and hurt look on Hermione's face, she concluded that all was not well.

Rising from her seat, she mentally berated herself. Had she pushed too hard? Was Padraig really up to the task? Should she have chosen another? Without further ado, Minerva made her way down the small corridor to where the twin bedrooms were. She turned right and looked in on Hermione.

She was shocked to see Hermione standing in the middle of the room, wandlessly directing her clothing into her small carry-all. Magic seemed to crackle in the air. Minerva deduced that Hermione was struggling to control her emotions which were, in turn, causing her to struggle to control her innate magic. She stood frozen to the spot; she didn't know what to say or do to calm her young cub.

"I have to get away from here, from Padraig, from you, too, Minerva. I trusted *you*. I thought you were genuinely concerned. But, in truth, you're just like the rest of them. You think you know what's best for me; you think I need to forget about Severus."

Minerva was speechless; it was a long time since she'd heard Hermione talk with such anger. There was even a hint of hatred in her tone. Minerva had believed that she was doing the right thing introducing her young charge to Padraig; she had obviously under-estimated the grief that Hermione felt but had yet to confront.

"But I can't, Minerva. How can I forget that he gave his life so that Harry could defeat Voldemort? I look at Harry and do you know what I feel? *Abhor* him. I look at my best friend and I wonder why he survived yet Severus perished, and that hurts almost as much as the loss of Severus. I look at Ginny sometimes and I'm jealous of her. I'm resentful of my best friend because she has a lover, someone to hold her when the nightmares become too real, someone to tell her he loves her, someone to catch her should she fall, and someone she in turn can soothe and love."

"Hermione..." Minerva whispered as she stepped into the room.

"No, Minerva, I can't listen to you right now. I need space. I need to be somewhere where I know I can be alone and yet I'm not truly alone. Ginny said I could visit anytime. She said she'd accompany me to retrieve the key for Spinner's End. Please, Minerva, respect my desire to be somewhere other than here with you. I won't truly be alone; I'll have Harry and Ginny."

With that, Hermione grabbed the small hold-all and Disapparated away from Minerva, away from Ireland and away from Padraig.

My heartfelt apologies for the long delay that has occurred with this story; an awful lot has changed over the last eighteen months. For those of you who are sticking with this story, thank you for your patience. I have been to hell and I am only just getting back on a even keel.

I would have abandoned this story if it weren't for the support of some amazing ladies. Tales, MorethanSirius, Beffeysue, Scoffy, Teddy, and Quiescent have all cheered me on. Thank you ladies, you rock my world.

As always, Potterverse does not belong to me. I make no money from this amateur work, nor is any requested. Snape's memory of Hermione in class is slightly modified from that which can be found in the *Half-Blood Prince* during the first DADA lesson of the trio's sixth year at Hogwarts.

I hope you enjoy this update.