

Up the River

by etherealizabeth

"She had made enough for several doses, and before she could bottle out, she gathered the last of her energy, dipped in her vial, and drank it."

Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 6

"She had made enough for several doses, and before she could bottle out, she gathered the last of her energy, dipped in her vial, and drank it."

Outside, the snow was falling. Again. Hermione sat in the Gryffindor common room, staring out the window with her chin in her hands. "You go, Harry. Have fun at Hogsmeade. I think I'll get some studying done."

"Come on, Hermione, it's Christmas break. You don't have anything to study *for*. Why are you going to the library?"

Hermione sighed heavily. She loved Ron and Harry, but there were times that she could happily throw them to the kappas in the lake. Although, if the kappas had any taste at all, they would throw them back, so it was just as well.

"I have to check on ingredients for a spell I'm researching," she said without turning or lifting her head. "I'll catch you up later."

Harry and Ron looked at each other. Harry shrugged. "We're going to Honeydukes," Ron tried. "I'm still missing Agrippa. Buy you a bag of chocoballs?"

Hermione smiled. "Sorry, boys, not now. I'll catch up, I promise."

Ron and Harry shared another look, then turned and walked out of the common room to find Professor McGonagall and the group going to town.

Hermione sighed again when they'd gone. She didn't want to brush off her friends, but they didn't understand. She didn't really want to be here at all. And by all rights, she shouldn't be. This, her seventh and last year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, her parents had decided that being here was safest for her, with Lord Voldemort on his rampage. They knew better than she did that there was nothing they could do to protect her. So she was stuck here over the holiday, no classes to occupy her mind, no Quidditch for entertainment, most of the students gone.... She might as well be with her parents at a dentists' convention.

She stood up, still gazing at the snow piling up on the icy surface of the lake, and straightened her robes. She did have some studying to do, just not for class. Well, not *really* for class. Her N.E.W.T.s were coming up fast, and she was determined not just to pass, or even to do well. She was going to ace them. And she'd put this off too long already.

She had to pay a short visit to Professor Snape.

If Ron and Harry had known what she was about to do, they would've stayed to tag along. And she just may have let them. She really didn't want to have to ask, but she needed his permission to look through the Restricted Section for what she needed. She'd been deliberating for two days about this, debating herself in endless circles before finally making up her mind to just get it over with. The worst he could say was no. So she made her way to the dungeon, hesitating every ten steps and convincing herself again to keep going. But after taking a deep breath and explaining her request, all he did was narrow his eyes at her for a few seconds, glance at his calendar, and

reach for his quill.

Hermione just stood there, dumbfounded, waiting for the other shoe to drop. This was Snape? Was she in the right dungeon?

"Will there be anything else, Miss Granger?"

She blinked and came to her senses. There it was, in his face: irritation mixed with impatience. Yes, definitely Snape. She took the scrap of parchment quickly, mumbled a negative, and scampered.

The library was a haven for Hermione. She was completely at ease among the books and looked at them the same way one might look at a long-time spouse: with love, appreciation, understanding, devotion, and a little pity when the first cracks appeared on the spines. She quested for knowledge the same way Ponce de Leon quested for the Fountain of Youth, or how Gunhilda of Gorsemoor quested for the cure for dragon pox. Or Voldemort himself, questing for immortality.

She slid her hand down into her book bag and clutched the bit of vellum as if it would Disapparate once she let up. Madam Pince was easy to find. She stalked these stacks like Snape stalked his classroom. Possessively, parentally. Madam Pince took the note and glanced at it, frowned in confusion, then read it again. And a third time. Hermione relaxed a little. At least she wasn't the only one who couldn't believe her good fortune. But then the librarian turned her suspicious vulture gaze on her for a long moment. Hermione held her breath.

Madam Pince sighed and shook her head, handing the note back to her. Hermione smiled nervously and quickly turned toward the Restricted books before Madam Pince could read anything into it. As she rounded a shelf, she heard the librarian muttering quietly, "Right strange, that is. What does Severus think he's on about?"

She wandered slowly back to the books on potions, quietly running her fingers over the endless volumes, quickly scanning the titles, looking for the one. She had read quite a few of the unrestricted books, but they hadn't contained the information she was looking for. She was working on a perception enhancement spell. The one reference she'd found already hadn't been much help, or even encouraging. Apparently, it was nearly impossible to complete. But that made it all the more tempting to try. Of course, neither Ron nor Harry would understand why she needed to do this. Ron had no interest in improving his perception of anything...the git...and Harry was often sent into sensory overload with Voldemort's connection to his scar.

She found a book that looked promising and transfigured her book bag into a pillow. This was going to take quite a while, and she wanted to be comfortable.

Hours passed, and Hermione didn't notice. She didn't notice the darkening skies, she didn't notice her grumbling stomach, she didn't notice Snape and Dumbledore passing through the aisles, giving each other meaningful looks. She did notice when her elbow started cramping from propping herself up, and sat up to look around. Her first thought was that she had missed dinner, and her stomach was quite unhappy with that, but it was worth it; she had the information she needed, and she would be able to begin the spell tonight.

She snuck into the kitchens and found that the house-elves were more than willing to send her on her way with a tray of food, but instead of taking it to her room, she walked quietly into the second floor girls' lavatory. Myrtle was not there, thankfully, but her cauldron and the ingredients she had collected were. She had also set up a small board over the sinks to act as a makeshift work table. If she had looked around closely, she would have noticed that the work table had been anchored better than she'd left it, and that the door had been warded to let her and only a few others in, but she was too preoccupied with reading the spell and preparing her cauldron to pay much attention to anything else, including the tray of food she'd been smelling all the way through the halls to get here.

It was 10 o'clock before Hermione had prepared the herbs and roots necessary to make the potion, and her tray still lay half empty on the tile. This was the easy part; it was the incantation that was going to kill her, she thought. She began stirring the cauldron clockwise with her wand and began quietly muttering and trying to count at the same time. The liquid began to change colors with each revolution of her wand. Red, yellow, violet, blue, green, and around again. 362, 363, 364, 364¼....

As she reached the quarter stroke, she stopped and said, "Finis," before slowly lowering herself to the floor. She felt completely knackered, but if the potion worked, it would be worth it. She had made enough for several doses, and before she could bottle out, she gathered the last of her energy, dipped in her vial, and drank it. It tasted better than she thought it would, considering what she'd put in it. But it wasn't unlike an energy concoction from a health food store. With a minty aftertaste.

She closed her eyes and waited. She could feel the potion dancing along through her. All of a sudden, she could hear people in the bathroom with her and she jumped up guiltily, only to find herself alone. She looked underneath all of the stalls, still finding no one, and quietly tip-toed to the door of the lavatory and leaned against it. The voices continued. She cracked the door slightly, but the hallway was just as empty as the lavatory. She looked behind her, as if for confirmation that there really was no one there, and crept into the hallway.

The voices seemed to be coming from the right. She looked for a doorway that might be hiding the source of the voices, and again jumped. She could see the hallway clearly. Every crack in the stone, every grain in the wood, every smudge on the wall. She tentatively touched the wall beside her. It was *amazing*...she could feel the plaster in a way that she never could have felt it before, and what was more, she could feel the print of every finger that had ever touched the wall here.

She listened again for the voices and heard them clearly. They belonged to Professor Vector and Professor Sprout. They were having a glass of wine and discussing what they had gotten Dumbledore for Christmas. She could tell by the conversation that neither of their gifts were anything he would actually like, and also that neither of them realized it.

She slunk back to the lavatory and collected her book bag, then looked around at the rest of the room before realizing how much the day had caught up with her. She was too tired to deal with the tidying up just yet...she could do it later. Everything that needed to be clean was, and the potion itself would keep. She desperately wanted to walk through the castle and test out these new sensations, but all she could think of was how soft her sheets would feel. And oh, would she feel them. She sighed. There was enough potion left for four more doses. She would definitely try this again tomorrow.

She started walking down the hall back to Gryffindor Tower when she realized that she'd been listening to footsteps approaching her for the past minute. She looked at her watch and gasped. It was well after curfew. Glancing around quickly and ascertaining that there was absolutely nowhere to hide, she stood still. She would just have to take whatever was coming to her.

Chapter Two

Chapter 2 of 6

"She turns around and stands, watching for what feels like close to twenty minutes, just admiring the view. The trees are so green, the sky so blue, the clouds so white. It looks almost like a painting. Except for the others floating in the river. Some of them look somehow familiar. Others are complete strangers."

Hermione closed her eyes and waited. She found herself inhaling deeply and was startled to find that she smelled milk thistle, comfrey, lemon, and tea. *Milk thistle?* It had to be Snape coming down the hallway. She sighed inwardly. No more passes to the Restricted Section now. If she were extremely lucky, she might only serve the rest of her life in detention. If she were unlucky, she would be serving the rest of her life in detention after he took her apart and left her to put herself back together again.

"Miss Granger." She looked up to see Professor Snape acknowledging her presence as he walked by her. Walked by her. Walked by her. Walked by her?!

She stood where she was, waiting for him to come back and give her the hell she had been expecting. Minutes passed before she realized she couldn't hear his footsteps anymore. Slowly she turned around looking for him. He was no longer in the hallway. Had he not known it was past curfew? No, surely not. This was Snape.

What is going on here?

Hermione gathered her wits about her and practically flew to Gryffindor Tower. She didn't notice the startled looks of those in the common room. She raced into her room and slammed the door. She never had been so relieved to be Head Girl and have a room to herself.

She leaned against the door, breathing heavily. She waited until her heart no longer felt as though it were trying to escape her chest, and eased away slowly. Not bothering with a light, she found her nightgown on her bed and quickly shed her clothes in favor of the homespun cotton. Her nightgown had never felt so soft. As she sank onto her bed, her last thought was that the mattress felt different, somehow firmer.

Hermione is floating downstream. She can see out the corners of her eyes that there are others floating with her. The water is clear and comfortable. Above her, the sky is cornflower blue and the clouds are puffy and white. There is a forest of tall green trees on either side of her. Somewhere out of sight, birds are singing and squirrels are calling to each other. She feels at peace.

Then it occurs to her that she is floating downstream in a river, and yet she can't swim. She and water aren't the best of friends...probably not even distant friends, come to that. She tenses, panic creeping into her mind, but the water feels so good on her skin, and the sounds of the landscape so peaceful, that she decides to let it go and relax while the water carries her... where? For that matter, where did she get into the river? Now she finds herself trying to keep her head above water, and she stops floating. Her feet touch the bottom, and panic subsides once again when she realizes she can stand, though the water comes up to her shoulders.

She turns around and stands, watching for what feels like close to twenty minutes, just admiring the view. The trees are so green, the sky so blue, the clouds so white. It looks almost like a painting. Except for the others floating in the river. Some of them look somehow familiar. Others are complete strangers.

She looks up again at the clouds, finding three rabbits, a turtle, and an open hand before realizing that none of them are moving....

The light was blinding.

Hermione sat up slowly and rubbed her eyes. She felt like she'd just laid down and closed her eyes. She dangled her feet over the bed for a minute and frowned. These were not her blankets. Did the house-elves confuse her with someone else?

She got up slowly and looked around the room. It *looked* like her room. It even had the chink in the stone just above the standing mirror. But nothing else about the room told her she lived in it. It didn't have the same feel. Maybe... maybe some Slytherin had snuck up here and somehow switched her into Ravenclaw Tower? She looked at the closed door and took a step toward it. One look at the common room at the bottom of the stairs would tell her for certain. But no, all she had on was her nightgown, and she'd rather die than have the lot left of Ravenclaw gawking at her.

Instead, Hermione walked toward the wardrobe and opened it. One look, and she closed it again. Quickly. She hesitated over the dresser drawers, but tried them too. These things at least weren't as horrendous, but none of it was hers. None of it. Not only weren't they hers, but the knickers looked like something her grandmother would wear. Solid. Not sexy in the least. Certainly not something she'd find at La Senza. Or nothing she'd *get* there, at any rate.

She shoved the drawer closed and sagged over to the window to look outside. It had snowed during the night, but she would always be able to recognize the grounds. She was definitely still at Hogwarts. And from the view, she knew she was still in Gryffindor Tower. So why...? Where...? What was going on?

Nearly in tears, she turned back to the bedroom. She needed to find someone to talk to. She really needed someone who knew what was going on, but she doubted anyone would fit that description. At any rate, she couldn't go out in her nightgown. She went back to the wardrobe and stood there with the door open for a moment, contemplating the nightmares inside. She reached in for a random blouse without looking and immediately shoved it back in. Flower print. OK, but did the flowers *have* to be the size of teacups? Looking this time, she grabbed another one skeptically. Purple paisley? And another: blue tie-dye? Well, that one wasn't so bad, except for the... Grateful Dead? They were all like that. And the slacks. Bellbottoms? *Ew!* The dresses were even worse. Wide frilly collars or something that looked like a cross between a sundress and a corset, or just a hem that would only go halfway down her thighs. She shuddered at the thought that anyone would wear this stuff on purpose. Running through the Gryffindor roster in her head, she couldn't think of anyone who would. And she had got to know the girls pretty well.

Turning her back on the wardrobe again, she rifled through the drawers and finally found a plain white blouse that didn't scream too loudly (though it was a bit small in the chest), and a pair of jeans that looked well-loved. She could live with the bellbottoms if only because she knew the wizard robes hanging on the coat rack would cover them, but the nasty-looking underpants would just have to stay in the drawer.

No underpants? P-shaw! Reluctantly, Hermione pulled out a pair, uncovering the girl's wand. *Hmm....*

Grabbing the wand, she quickly transfigured the parachute into something more resembling panties, then slid them on, silently thanking the house-elves for faithfully doing the laundry. After only a slight hesitation, she took a bra and fixed it as well.

She had to squeeze a bit to fit her hips into the jeans, but they wouldn't button at all. Feeling rather guilty about altering the girl's only weekend togs, she adjusted the jeans to fit as well. She would just have to remember to restore them both when she returned them and found her own clothes. Hopefully, whoever the girl was who lived here wouldn't even notice when she got back from holiday. But she wasn't here *now*, and that was all that mattered.

She found a pair of trainers at the bottom of the wardrobe, and these actually fit. Good. She wouldn't have to remember to change too many things back.

Hermione studied herself in the standing mirror and nodded grimly. These clothes would have to do. If no one looked too carefully, the robe covered everything. Except her hair. It was all stuck up in the wrong places. She spent a full minute looking for the girl's hair accessories before realizing that she would've taken them with her. Groaning frustratedly, she filled the washbasin by the mirror and dunked her head in. She would still need a brush, but now it only looked wet instead of slept-on. The last thing she needed was a toothbrush. She still had that aftertaste, only now it was coating the roof of her mouth. But even if the girl had left her toiletries here, using someone else's toothbrush was just ick. She'd much rather wave the wand at her face and use the *Dentifricio* spell. Smoothing her hair away from her face, she looked at herself in the mirror again. She looked pale, but otherwise as close to herself as she could under the circumstances.

She summoned her nerve and left the room, only to stop dead at the bottom of the stairs. Here was a Gryffindor common room, but not *the* Gryffindor common room. The furniture was different. The colors seemed brighter, somehow. The carpet seemed newer.

She shook her head and went on through, and out of the tower. But as soon as the door clicked shut behind her, she felt a terrible knot form in her stomach. If her bedroom was different, and the common room was different, surely the password to get in was different. Not for the first time, she despised the Fat Lady.

Walking quickly to the Great Hall, Hermione felt the acid of fear rising from her chest into her throat. At least the Great Hall looked the same. She glanced at the staff table and halted. It was then that she knew where she was. Or rather when.

Some of the staff were the same: Flitwick (looking as ancient as ever), Kettleburn (with a few more extremities than he had her first year), Madam Pomfrey (even more beautiful without so many years), Professor McGonagall (looking harried, but less worried somehow), and finally, there in the middle, Dumbledore. The other faces she only half recognized, from an old yearbook she had found for Harry in the library once. She was some time in the past. She tensed at the realization, then relaxed slightly with the thought that if anyone could help her, Dumbledore could.

She walked past the few students staying over for the holiday and approached the High Table to look at a much younger version of the man she knew. "Professor Dumbledore, sir, could I have a word with you?" she said in a rush, at once trying to keep her voice down so as not to draw attention from any of the other teachers or the students and trying to breathe her way past the fear in her stomach.

Albus Dumbledore looked at her for fully half a minute before drawing himself out of his chair and motioning her to follow him out of the Great Hall. He said nothing as they crossed the Entrance Hall and continued up the stairs to the second floor, finally stopping at the statue of a gargoyle that hid the door to his office. He quietly muttered something that sounded suspiciously like "Fizzing Whizbees," and the door swung open. At a gesture, she ducked in and rode the spiral stairs to his office. She'd been here before, of course. He'd given her special permission to use the Time-Turner to take a double course load third year. They'd talked it over in this office, with Professor McGonagall. She started toward one of the squashy chairs in front of the desk, but spotted the gold and crimson body of Fawkes in the near corner and veered that way. His stand had been moved.

"Hello, Fawkes," she said softly.

The bird leaned his head into her shoulder and sang quietly while she petted his head and neck feathers. When she looked up, Dumbledore was studying her.

"Please, Miss...?"

"Granger, sir. Hermione Granger."

"Miss Granger. Please have a seat. You must tell me how you came to be at Hogwarts, and how you know my friend Fawkes so well."

"That's just it, sir. I don't know. I mean, I attend Hogwarts, but not now." And she went on to explain how she made the potion the night before and woke up the following morning, thinking that the house-elves had made a mistake, then finding her way to the Great Hall for breakfast only to lose her appetite when her situation became clear.

Dumbledore rested his chin on his hands for a moment before saying, "Miss Granger, do you know the meaning of the word *paradox*?"

Hermione paused. Knowing was one thing. Putting it into words was something else. "It's... when two truths contradict each other, sir."

"Exactly." Dumbledore smiled gently. Even more years fell from him. "Then you must also know that while you are here you must not try to affect anything. Since you are not supposed to be here, anything you do will alter the course of events ever so slightly, to the point that when you return to your own time, it may not be the way it was when you left. That is to say, it will not be your own time at all. The future of this present may not lead to the past of your present. There may not be a place for you if too many of the wrong things are changed."

Well. That certainly made her want to hide in her room until it was over. Or at least, hide in the room she'd found herself in. She didn't even know.... "Could you tell me what year it is, sir?"

"Of course. It is 1977. What year did you come from, if I may?"

"1997," she sighed.

"Exactly twenty years," he mused.

"Well, Miss Granger, as the student who usually resides in the dormitory you came to be in is away for the Christmas holidays, I see no reason why you cannot continue to sleep in it until we can find a way to get you home. Again, I must urge you not to change anything. Even if the change is minute, it could very well be the flapping of a butterfly's wings that cause a hurricane on the other side of the world. It could mean the difference between everything... and nothing."

"Yes, sir. And what should I do until then?"

Chapter Three

Chapter 3 of 6

"He hadn't paused in his reading, hadn't even flicked his eyes in her direction. Maybe he hadn't noticed her. She would just back away quietly and hide in one of the aisles until she could figure out how to get past him and out of the library without him seeing her. Yes, excellent plan. But the moment she lifted her foot, he looked up."

Hermione wandered round the library. Professor Dumbledore had given her a note so she would be allowed to look at whatever she liked. She got the feeling that it was meant to pacify her. She sighed. Yesterday, she would have killed for this kind of privilege. Today... For once, she didn't even feel like running a hand along the ropes, much less perusing the Restricted Section at will.

She picked a random aisle and grabbed the first book that came to hand. The illustrations were familiar. She'd read this one before. No surprise, though. She'd read most of these already. But this one was the book in which she'd found references to transfiguration potions but no recipes, the reason she'd gone to Lockhart for permission to get *Moste Potente Potions* out of the Restricted section to make the Polyjuice Potion... that had nearly turned her into a cat. She put it back on the shelf.

Thankfully, most of the students were home for the holidays, so there was no one to stare at her and ask nosey questions. She had no idea what she would say if they did. She had no idea what she *could* say.

She took a few more steps into the Potions aisle and pulled out a different book, then settled into one of the overstuffed chairs to read. She was somewhat hoping to find a potion that would get her back to her own time, but she knew the probability of that. She wouldn't even know where to start looking. But she had nothing better to do, so she read. When thirty minutes had gone by and she realized she'd read the same page four times in a row, she closed the book. This wasn't going to work.

A strange noise made her peer around the room. She thought she had heard a sneeze, but she was the only one here other than Madam Pince. The librarian was in plain sight and there wasn't any evidence that she had sneezed.

Then she heard it again. This time, she raised herself up out of the chair and began to look for the source.

She found it a moment later, and could only stare. It hadn't occurred to her that even avoiding the staff, she would still run into people she knew. Apparently, Dumbledore hadn't thought of it either. But there, sitting in the corner with his back to the wall and knees in the air, she saw him. His prominent nose was millimeters away from the rather thick book propped up on his thighs, but she recognized him all the same: Severus Snape. A young Snape; he looked to be about her age. His black hair was just as long as it would be in her time, but now it just hung over his face, untied and unruly. He was skinnier, too, like a folded-up scarecrow.

He hadn't paused in his reading, hadn't even flicked his eyes in her direction. Maybe he hadn't noticed her. She would just back away quietly and hide in one of the aisles until she could figure out how to get past him and out of the library without him seeing her. Yes, excellent plan. But the moment she lifted her foot, he looked up.

Hermione knew, of course, that she could not tell him anything substantive in case whatever it was ended up changing something important. She was scared to death that she would mess something up and not be able to get home; or worse, get home and have there be no home to go back to. This was worse than using a Time-Turner.

He studied her for a moment before asking, "Who are you?" The voice wasn't quite as polished as the older Snape's, but the potential was there.

She smiled at him and opened her mouth to introduce herself and caught it in her throat. She couldn't very well tell him who she was. She wasn't supposed to be altering anything. Her name was unusual enough that he that he'd remember it when he caught up to her first year and taught her Potions. So she picked another name. "I'm Jane," she said. "I'm visiting Albus Dumbledore for the holidays." It wasn't *really* a lie. Her name *was* Jane...her middle name, anyway...and she *was* visiting Dumbledore, albeit not by choice.

"Severus," he offered her his hand tentatively, as though he thought she might laugh. But she took it and, against her better judgement, sank down beside him.

"Nice to meet you, Severus. What are you studying?"

He grimaced slightly and turned the book over. It was a book of dark spells. But the response he was obviously expecting never crossed her mind. This was Snape, after all. She just nodded sagely and said, "There's another one three shelves down from that one, I think, that has clearer directions."

He frowned slightly and said, "Show me." She got up and retrieved the volume, grinning. When she returned, and he saw which one it was, he relaxed. "I've already read that one." He cocked his head and just looked at her for a moment before asking, "You've looked at these?"

Hermione felt blood creeping up her neck into her cheeks and nodded into her lap to hide it. "I do a lot of research."

"Well, don't say that too loudly around here. If you are still visiting after the holidays, there's a whole group of... students"...he said this word as though it left a nasty taste in his mouth..."who will make your life hell for wanting to learn."

Hermione calmed her face by concentrating on not giving herself away. She had an idea who he meant, and "Jane" wasn't supposed to. "Oh. Well, I'm hoping to be back home before the term starts." Another bent truth.

He marked his page with a finger and closed the book to converse with her properly. "What topics do you research?" he asked.

"Well... Right now, I'm researching a perception enhancement spell. But that's... on hold until I get back home." And to keep him from asking the wrong questions, she turned it right back to him. "What are you researching?"

"Dark spells in general, I suppose. Just once, I would like to have... a leg up over those who... hurt me. I am... tired of being walked on. If I had enough power, perhaps those who make mockery of me now would no longer be inclined to do so..." He trailed off, lost in thought.

Impulsively, she hugged him. She understood that he was hurting, and it pained her. He didn't pull back immediately, but it was probably from shock, which was evident on his face when she let go. So she tried filling in the empty space. "And you will achieve that power by gaining knowledge over them?"

"Of course," he said. Then he found his thoughts once again. "How else? It's not as though I have any way of using brute force."

Hermione pulled her head back a little and considered him carefully. He was taller even if she didn't know that already, she could tell by the way his legs folded. He was also thin, but not fragile. Wiry. There was a toughness there. "True, but there's really nothing wrong with your build. I find it attractive." *What? What did I just say? Snape? Attractive? What am I saying?*

"Do you know, that was the first time anyone has embraced me." He said it so quietly that she almost didn't hear him.

Carefully, she took his hand and tried to expel from her mind the thought that she was on the brink of changing something important. "Severus, that's terrible. I'm so sorry."

"I don't want your pity, Jane," he said a bit gruffly, withdrawing his hand.

"Severus, you don't have my pity, you have my affections. You don't need anyone's pity...or approval, I suppose...but I want to be your friend. Is that so wrong?" And there it was: the brink. She saw it, but couldn't help herself from walking right over it.

"Jane," he said slowly, "very few people seek me out for anything other than to torment me. I am not a likable person. I think you should wait at least until the end of the first conversation before deciding that you want to be my... friend." He scowled and then added, "And now, I believe we have reached the end. Good day." And with that, he got up and left the library, leaving Hermione sitting on the floor with his book of dark spells.

She sat for a moment staring after him before standing, brushing the wrinkles out of her robes, then trudging back to Gryffindor Tower. When she reached the portrait entrance, she eyed the Fat Lady grimly and said the password Dumbledore had given her, then made her way through the common room and up the stairs to the Head Girl's room.

The Head Girl's room. And she'd just gotten used to calling it her own room. She sighed and opened the door. It certainly wasn't her room now. Walking in and closing the door behind her, she suddenly wondered exactly whose it was. She hadn't spent much time analyzing her surroundings this morning beyond confirming that they weren't her own. If she hadn't been frantic, she probably would've taken the time to look for clues. But now seemed as good a time as any.

The desk chair had a homemade afghan throw over the back that pretty much screamed 70s. On the desk itself was the usual quill and inkpot, with a small stack of parchment to one side, held down by a clacker. Hermione had seen one before...it was basically a key in the middle of a piece of string with two snooker balls at the ends. It was a child's toy, but one that took great coordination to be able to clack the balls together without bugging up the string. More importantly, it was a Muggle child's toy. This was a surprise, to say the least.

Hermione checked the desk drawers for clues, but all she came up with was a handwriting sample sharing a scrap of vellum with several doodles of hearts and flowers... and as close as black ink can come to a rainbow. Girlie stuff, but nothing identifying. She closed the drawer.

Putting her back to the chair, she swept her gaze around the room for anything out of the ordinary. The bedside table caught her eye. It was on the other side of the bed from her own time, covered by a large red doily to protect it from the falling needles of the miniature Christmas tree there. Now how did she miss that this morning? Well, the bedside table had two drawers, and what better place to keep personal effects.

Hermione threw herself across the bed and reached over to the drawer. *Jackpot.* She pulled out a small brown leather journal inlaid with the initials "LE" in gold. Feeling slightly guilty, she cracked the book open and flipped to a random page. Then another. And another. They were all blank. Of course. The journal was probably charmed to

keep others' large noses out. Not that she blamed the girl. She'd done the same thing with her dream journal.

Replacing the journal and scooting forward so she could see into the drawer, her questing fingers found a pen. A rollerball pen. In fact, it was a Parker pen, something she'd find on High Street. More Muggle technology. It made sense, really. Keeping a quill and an inkpot by the bed would just be an invitation to disaster. Especially waking up in the middle of the night, feeling her way through the drawer in the dark to find the journal to record that perfect dream...

The last thing in the drawer, way in the back, was a photo. Two, actually, but only one of them moved. Both were of the same boy. A tall, thin boy with spectacles and unkempt hair that stuck up in the back. He kind of looked like Harry, actually.

Hermione dropped the pictures. It wasn't Harry, it was James. James Potter. She couldn't have asked for a better clue as to whose room this was. "LE"? Lily Evans. She was Head Girl her last year at Hogwarts, as Harry's dad was Head Boy.

She rolled over and threw her hands over her face. *Harry's gonna kill me. At least it's Christmas, so there's no chance I'll meet them. Unless I'm stuck here. Where's Ron when I need him?* "Bloody hell!"

She lay there across the bed, staring up at the ceiling, and tried to piece it together, figure it out logically. She thought about all of the things that led up to her predicament, starting with why she was even *at* Hogwarts over Christmas. After dealing with the Death Eaters at the Department of Mysteries, being knocked on her arse by Dolohov's purple flame spell, and being prescribed all those daily potions just to keep her alive, her parents were... wary, to put it lightly. But she was still alive and well, eager as ever to do the whole magic thing, and they didn't want to stifle her growth. The next Christmas, however, when three students never came back, and then at Easter break another two... Even with the "official" word being that they were "removed" from Hogwarts, word got out that the Death Eaters were picking students off. If it had been possible, her parents would have kept her at school over the summer as well as Christmas break. As Muggle as they were, they still knew that if anyone could protect their daughter, it would be Dumbledore. Ironic, really, since keeping her at Hogwarts led directly to this mess.

She thought about spending yesterday in the library, and how it was so entirely different from her experience there today. She realized that she had left a mess in the lavatory and wondered briefly if anyone had found it and guessed what had happened to her. She wondered if time were continuing while she was here, and if anyone missed her. Snape at least would be able to vouch for her presence in Hogwarts the night before...

And then it hit her like the Hogwarts Express. *Snape*. He had given her the pass for the library without even asking why she wanted it or even a scathing comment about her bookish habits. He had seen her in the hallway after curfew without deducting a bazillion points from Gryffindor, let alone giving her detention. He knew! He didn't ask why she wanted the pass because he *checked his calendar*. The dates must be etched in his mind! And he didn't ask her about breaking curfew because ~~he~~ *he knew about the potion*. He must have gone in there to double-check, and possibly do a quick cleanup while she was standing there braced for the tirade. He remembered her and knew that she was going to be a part of his past. If he hadn't given her the pass, he would've created the paradox himself and erased that part of his past... But what exactly would that have done? Not meeting her certainly wouldn't make him decide to give her the pass. He must've been ensuring his past for a reason, but whether it was himself or her he was protecting, she didn't know. Obviously, though, he believed he had to let her come. But why?

Dumbledore would know. Her Dumbledore, anyway. And then she realized that he probably did know. He was the first person here she talked to. If he knew about her and Harry using the Time-Turner to save Sirius and Buckbeak before they'd actually done it, surely he would remember this little episode. At least it would've happened chronologically, from his perspective.

And that led to the next thought: if Snape and Dumbledore knew she were here and had not tried to prevent her from coming...had, in fact, passively encouraged her to do so...then was she here for a purpose? How was she to know what was acceptable to do and what would create paradox? This was *the* past, not *her* past. She had no idea what was and what wasn't supposed to happen.

She thought about it some more before eventually deciding not to care. It was too much for one person to handle. She had a feeling she would be able to sympathize with Harry a bit better when...if...she got back. She was just going to do what felt right, and any repercussions would be dealt with later. The future would go on with or without her.

She hoped.

Chapter Four

Chapter 4 of 6

Irony, noun. That cosmic entity responsible for cock-ups created while trying desperately to prevent them.

A sharp knock at the door brought her out of her reverie.

She sat up quickly, a surge of irrational guilt running through her, as if she'd been caught sneaking chocolate biscuits. The thought that Lily had returned flashed through her mind before being crumpled up and tossed in the bin. Of course Lily hadn't come back. It was still Christmas break. But if any of Lily's friends came looking for her, explaining her presence instead would be... problematic. As it was, Dumbledore had asked her to avoid the common room as much as possible and the Great Hall entirely, and to take her meals in her room to avoid any possible confrontation with another student. And she was fine with that. Instead, he'd given her a pass to peruse any and all stacks in the library, which led directly to a confrontation with another student.

Irony, noun. That cosmic entity responsible for cock-ups created while trying desperately to prevent them. She was rather hoping that it was Dumbledore outside the door now, come to tell her that he had discovered a way to send her home, and that she could forget this one entirely.

The knock came again, and she realized she'd been staring at the door for a good long minute. She got to her feet and opened the door. Her jaw dropped.

Standing there, holding a covered tray of food and looking contrite, was Severus Snape. *Contrite*? "I intercepted this from the house-elf. He told me where you were staying. I was hoping to apologize for earlier. You didn't deserve what I said to you."

My, my, she thought wryly. *If only I had a tape recorder.*

Instead, she reached for the tray and smiled. "It's all right, Severus. I understand your need to be defensive. Believe it or not, I've gone through some of what you have, and it can make it rather hard to trust. Please, come in." He nodded and stepped past her into the room, allowing her space to close the door to the stairs behind him.

Stairs. "How did you get up the stairs without setting off the alarm and getting dumped on your bum back in the common room? For that matter, how'd you get the

password to get past the Fat Lady? Aren't you Slytherin?" She flushed when it came out, and added quickly, "I mean... I assumed...."

He grimaced. "I am, yes. However, I have found that if one pays enough attention at the right moments in the right places, it is possible to learn a great many things. The password for the Hufflepuff common room, for instance, is 'toil and trouble'. At least for now. They change it like clockwork every two weeks, and probably will again the day after holiday. It pays to know these things, on occasion. As for the... uh... staircase...." He looked away, clearing his throat.

Hermione noticed the palest pink traces around his collar and the tips of his ears. Was he blushing? No, surely not. But he was stammering. She smiled and shook her head, walking back past him to put the tray down on the bed. "It's all right, Severus. Your secret is safe with me." *As long as no one's around in the common room when you pull this stunt, anyway.*

"I..." He cleared his throat again and thrust his clenched fists straight down at his sides to force it out. "I've figured out how it works. I never actually... touch the stairs." Then continuing right on to forestall any comment she might have, he said, "I have never been in Lily Evans' room before. Do you know her?"

It worked, she'd give him that. Even if she hadn't already figured out who the occupant of this room was, he'd just clinched it. As it was, just the confirmation knotted up her stomach again. Yes, he was definitely good at changing the subject. Carefully, she schooled her face to hide any recognition of the name. She really didn't need to go down that road. "No. I've... heard about her. In passing. Why, what's she like?"

"What is she like? She's beautiful, intelligent, talented...." His lips curled into a sneer as he completed the thought. "All the things that go so well with... Potter." The last word was absolutely dripping in contempt.

Hermione nodded knowingly, desperately trying not to grin. She wasn't supposed to know these people. "And you think he's the same."

"I do. Not to mention pompous, arrogant, bullying, conceited...."

This time she had to clamp her hand over her mouth to keep from laughing. She remembered Harry's concern about the memory he saw in their Snape's Pensieve: an incident that had happened only a year and a half ago, by this time. Harry had said that his father had come across much the same way. So much, in fact, that he had to go find Sirius for assurance that he wasn't. Poor Severus.

Severus was now looking at her with raised eyebrows. "I'm sorry," she said, trying to compose herself. "I have a friend who used nearly those exact same words to describe him. Seems like a popular assessment."

"Really." He said dryly, "Anyone I know? I would love to meet someone with similar views. There don't seem to be many."

"Maybe someday you will," she said, smiling. She knew full well that he would indeed meet Harry, but telling him ahead of time would either cock things up for her own timeline, or it wouldn't affect a thing, and he would still despise Harry when they did meet.

So instead, she changed the subject. "Have you eaten?"

He blinked, then shook his head slightly. Had she caught him off guard? *Contrite? Blushing? Caught off guard? Who is this, and what has he done with Professor Slimy Stick in the Mud?*

"No," he answered when his train of thought caught up to her. "Not yet."

"Well, then." Hermione sat down on the bed by the tray and reached for the lid. "This thing is heavy enough that...." She lifted off the cover to reveal the mounds of food and gaped. Definitely more than she'd expected. "Yes. The house-elves obviously think that I need to be fattened up. They must have been talking to my grandmother." She rolled her eyes and shook her head, then looked back at Snape. "There's enough for two here. Would you care to join me?"

He hesitated, his left eyebrow rising slightly in an unspoken question.

"Come on, Severus," she chided, patting the bed. "Sit down. I won't bite." She glanced at the food and grinned. "Well, you. I do intend to eat, after all."

The corners of his mouth turned up almost into a smile, and his shoulders lost most of their tension. He sat down across the tray from her, looking warily at the food.

"It won't, either, Severus."

This time he did smile. "Are you quite sure?"

Hermione smiled back quizzically. His smile looked odd. Then she realized it was the first smile she'd ever seen on his face. With that thought, her smile settled more naturally. "Quite," she nodded. She took a mandarin orange slice and held it close to his face. "See?"

He looked into her eyes for a second, then took hold of the slice with his teeth. As he accepted it from her, his lips grazed the tip of her finger, and she blushed, then covered it by looking down at the tray for another piece.

They sat on the bed for a while, feeding each other in silence. It was the most intimate thing she had ever done, and she suspected such was true for him as well. At least, she hoped it was. She couldn't imagine Snape doing anything like this. Ever. But here he was, hand-feeding her dinner while sitting on her bed in her private room, and *relaxed!* If he didn't look so much like his older self, she would swear this was a different person entirely. She ~~shook~~ this Snape.

If anyone had told her even a month ago that she would be sharing an intimate moment with Snape, she would have thought them mad. And if they'd even subtly hinted that the moment might lead to something else, she would've summoned a straightjacket and sent them off to the Janus Thickey Ward for long-term residents at St. Mungo's. After all, who could imagine Snape to be interesting or romantic? Or both? But now.... She was half considering a straightjacket for herself. As much as she tried, when she looked at him, she couldn't see the laughing-should-be-outlawed cold fish that was her Potions master. She only saw Severus, who only shared that man's face. This Severus was a boy...almost a man...that she admired and understood. A man she wasn't quite ready to leave.

When the last of the custard had been scraped from the sides of the bowl, and the small cup had refilled itself for the fifth time, he stared at her for a moment before leaning over and brushing his lips against hers. "It grows late, Jane. I must go."

She could only nod dumbly. They'd had to light a candle what must have been a half hour ago. Rising with him, she reached out and hugged him. A second or two later, his arms found their way around her as well. They stood there holding one another for a good five minutes until she pulled away and walked him to the door.

"Will I see you tomorrow?" she asked on impulse. She knew Dumbledore's warnings, but she also knew her own heart.

He nodded, smiling again. "You will. Shall I collect you after breakfast?"

"That would be lovely, Severus."

He kissed her again gently and walked out the door. She closed it quietly behind him and leaned on it, sighing contentedly *Strange coincidence*, she thought. *Twenty-four hours ago I was leaning on this very door after running away from Snape. Now, I can hardly keep myself from yanking this door open and running after him myself.*

Hermione turned to the wardrobe where she had appropriated a hook to hang her nightgown from the night before and pulled it out, tossing it onto the bed. She slipped off Lily's clothes and adjusted them back before placing them in what she could only assume was the laundry basket behind the other door, and walked naked into the

bathroom. She drew a bath and, feeling only a little guilty, stole some of the lilac-scented bubble bath.

As she soaked in the warm water, she closed her eyes and ran her hands over herself, idly wondering what Severus' hands would feel like. Her hands found her breasts and tight nipples, and idle wonder turned to active imagining. In her mind, it was *his* pale hands and graceful fingers touching her. She drew one hand down her stomach to rest in the nest of curls between her thighs. She began to stroke her fingers up and down, inserting first one then two, but pulled back before she got too worked up. She knew now what she wanted, and she wanted that for him.

She dipped under the water, then washed and conditioned her hair with the corresponding toiletries. It felt luxurious.

She stepped out of the bath and lotioned herself with the lilac creme she found on a stand beside the tub. She wanted to smell nice for tomorrow.

Digging into the dresser again, she relocated the wand and transfigured the quill from the desk into a hair brush, then settled on the bed to do her hundred long, thin strokes. When she got to seventy-five, she stopped and heaved a sigh, realizing she'd already counted seventy-five. At least twice. She couldn't put off sleep any longer. She put the brush down on the bedside table and laid her head back for a moment before crawling underneath Lily's sheets and extinguishing the candle.

Hermione is standing in the dark. There is a light in front of her, but faint, far away. She can barely see her hand in front of her face. She is in what appears to be a field of sorts. She takes a step toward the light so she can see her surroundings better when she feels something touch her foot. She looks down. Creatures slither and crawl, creep and swarm over the ground all around her. Grey, gruesome things, none are bigger than the average house cat. Some walk on two legs, some on four or six or eight, and some on no legs at all. But they all stare at her blankly through the same dead eyes, grinning maliciously with long, jagged teeth.

She turns to run, but only darkness and more, larger creatures surround her. She starts to panic...is there no escape? Then she remembers the light and turns back, already running. The demons swarm after her, clutching at her legs and nightgown, and now higher...claws in her hair, at her cheek, reaching for her eyes. She ignores the snags in her clothes, the scratches on her arms, legs, and face. She fixes her mind on reaching the light. If she can just reach it, everything will be okay.

She stumbles and falls.

She can hear them coming after her, shrieking, chanting in horrific tongues. And pounding out a rhythm of death. Louder and louder, closer and closer....

The pounding was deafening. It was coming from the door. Hermione sat straight up, rigid and shaking, and clamped her mouth shut. The shrieking stopped.

"Jane, open the door! Jane, are you all right?"

She flew to the door and opened it as Severus' hand came up to knock again. She took advantage of the position and rushed into him, nearly knocking the breakfast tray out of his other hand.

"Oh, Severus, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to worry you. I was having the most awful dream."

He brought his arm around her and rubbed her back as she shook with relief. He kissed her head and soothed, "It's all right now. It's over. I'm here, and we are going to have breakfast. Can you walk?"

She nodded weakly and let him guide her to the bed, where once again they sat on either side of the tray. She watched him while he cut up slices of melon, separated and buttered the rolls, and stirred jam into the steaming bowl of porridge that held two spoons. He had brought two forks this time as well, and again they fed each other. Now this was something she could get used to.

Chapter Five

Chapter 5 of 6

"Did you ever doubt it, my love?" She let the endearment slip into her sentence purposely. She couldn't tell him that she was not in her own time. She couldn't tell him that she would never see him this way again if she and Dumbledore were successful. She couldn't tell him that she loved him in any way but this. It hurt, but it was the best she could do."

Anti-Litigation Charm: This is clearly not the work of JKR and I'm making no profit from it, save the pleasure of my readers.

After breakfast, he surprised her with a question. "Would you take a walk with me?"

Hermione blinked. "A walk? Outside? I didn't think you.... I mean...."

Severus gave a slight frown. "You didn't think I would want to be outdoors for the sheer joy of being outdoors, seeing as I am Slytherin."

She swallowed. "No, that's not what I..."

"Yes it is," he said. Then his frown turned up. "It's all right. Outside of class time, most of my House refuses to leave our common room unless they have to. And even then, it's usually to the Great Hall to eat. Sometimes, one or two of them will find their way to the infirmary to gloat, but...."

"But Madam Pomfrey shoos you away pretty quickly," she finished for him. He cleared his throat in lieu of an answer, but by the way his eyes would rather focus on his bootlaces than meet hers, she knew it was a confirmation. She thought she'd save him the embarrassment. "I'd love to have a walk."

Severus blinked to catch up with her train of thought. "You would?" But his voice sounded adolescent even to himself. He cleared his throat. "Splendid."

"Could you wait for me in the common room while I dress?" He took a step back and looked at her nightgown, smirking, and even opened his mouth to object, but she saw it coming and beat him to it. "Please. I won't be a moment."

His eyebrows underlined his smirk, but he nodded and left. Hermione chuckled and sighed, especially when she could hear him whistling...whistling!...on his way down the

stairs. *He's so different now. I wonder what must have happened to change all this, to make him such a bastard.*

After a moment, she turned to the wardrobe. She did want the walk, but she had to dress for it. It had snowed a bit again last night, adding perhaps an inch to what was already on the ground. The sun had been streaming through the window not ten minutes ago, but it had gone off somewhere. It felt like it was going to snow again shortly, but she still hadn't a handle on Divination...meteorological or otherwise...and she'd be rather idealistic to be prepared for anything other than the cold. There had been a sweater before....

Twenty minutes later, Hermione had settled on resizing and restyling a pair of corduroy jeans and a soft pink sweater. She also picked out another pair of what she turned into pretty panties, as well as a second bra that she had to adjust up. She didn't want to think about Severus seeing her in the underwear, but she wasn't going anywhere without them. She dressed quickly, ran the transfigured quill-brush through her hair, and cast a charm to make it behave. As a final touch, she looked back into the wardrobe to see if Lily had a spare jacket that she hadn't taken home with her. As luck would have it, she did. And thankfully, Hermione didn't have to alter it at all. With a cursory glance in the mirror, she hurried out of the bedroom, warding the door behind her.

The two strolled the snowy grounds hand in hand. When they came to the lake, Hermione peered down into it, trying to see past the ice. She often wondered what happened to the giant squid and the merfolk in the cold weather. Severus bent over to put his head close to hers and, as if he knew what she were thinking, said, "It's all right. It never freezes all the way to the bottom. Water is the only substance that expands when it freezes. The ice, being less dense, floats on the top and acts as an insulator, keeping the water below above 0° Centigrade."

She stopped walking and gave him a look that clearly meant that she knew perfectly well what the physical properties of water were, and she'd thank him not to lecture her. What she didn't let show on her face was that she'd learned the physical properties of water in first year Potions class...*from him.*

Large, fluffy white flakes began to drift from the sky. Hermione's glower transformed into a dreamy smile as she let go of Severus' hand to twirl around in the falling snow. Hermione loved snow. As far as she was concerned, snowflakes were a gift from God. Each was different and unique in its own way, something that she could appreciate.

She paused when she saw him looking at her. It was a look she wasn't familiar with. He held his hand out to her, and she took it uncertainly. He tipped her chin up to look at him and kissed her mouth. She pressed closer to him, and he encircled her waist with his free arm. She parted her mouth a bit, and he took the invitation to slip his tongue between her lips. He pulled back to kiss away the snowflakes from her eyelashes with his mouth. He held her to him tightly and whispered, "You are truly beautiful, Jane. Such a wonderful, free, giving spirit. No one has ever been this close to me before."

She smiled at him, mentally removing the clappers from the alarm bells that were sounding in her head. She reached up for another kiss, but he leaned further to whisper, "Come closer to me, Jane. Please."

Hermione looked up at him and knew what he meant. His eyes were glittering, sharper somehow, but she could see the bravado all the same; he was afraid that she was going to say no. She couldn't. She could hardly bring herself to believe that this was the same man who taught her Potions class. The difference was day and night. This man was gentle, giving, comforting. Nothing like the harsh, unyielding creature who dwelled in the dungeons and deducted points from Gryffindor for tripping over a Slytherin's outstretched foot.

She looked at him and nodded. Quietly, she said, "I've never known a man before you. I don't want to know any after." And as it came out of her mouth, she knew it for truth.

He led her back into the castle. They didn't speak...not because they had nothing to say, but because they didn't have to say anything. They passed through vacant corridors and down empty stairs until she realized that they were underneath the lake. She could see the fish and merpeople swimming behind the glass. They barely looked cold. When the giant squid passed by, her breath caught for a moment. No, there were no problems here. No wonder Severus had been amused; he saw this everyday.

When they reached a particular stretch of blank wall, she looked the other way and politely pretended not to hear Severus as he whispered the password. The door swung open, and he guided her through the common room to his dormitory. It looked much the same as the Gryffindor dormitories, except for the color scheme.

"I am the only one from this House staying here for the holidays," he said. "We should be ensured privacy."

She didn't trust herself to speak. Instead, she concentrated on undoing the buttons on his black wool jacket. She felt him returning the favor and gave a small smile. She dropped her arms long enough for him to pull her jacket off, then resumed her task. He wore a black sweater that went nicely with his black pants and shoes. She felt a tug on her heart; the more things changed, the more they stayed the same. She pulled it over his head and waited as he ran his fingers over the soft material of her sweater. His chest was more muscled than she would have thought, with a dusting of fine black hair. He had well-muscled arms that made her want to test them. She placed her hands on his chest and ran her fingers through the down and over his nipples to let him know that she was getting a bit impatient. He smiled and removed the sweater. She pulled him down to kiss her while she kicked off her shoes. She grinned into the kiss when she noticed that he was following her example. If this kept up, it would be a bit like the blind leading the blind. He really hadn't been exaggerating when he had said no one had been close to him before.

He guided her into his bed and pulled the dark green curtains closed around them. When he turned back to her, she was lying on her back. Smiling, he lowered himself onto her. She looked up at him expectantly, and his smile turned a bit sad. "Regrettably, I have plans this evening with a friend." He paused dramatically. "At seven. That only gives me six hours. It is less time than I would like to take to please you, of course, but would you be willing to make that sacrifice for me?"

She gave him her own smirk. "I suppose I could do that. I think I'm supposed to meet with Professor Dumbledore this evening. I haven't seen him since the morning I got here. Can you promise me more time tomorrow?"

"I shall do my best."

"Now or then?" she asked teasingly.

"Both," he said, then kissed her passionately, weaving his fingers through her hair. She wrapped her arms around him and explored his back with her fingers. She brought them down to his pants and cupped his buttocks tightly. He groaned a bit and pressed into her. She ran her hands up experimentally and slid her fingers underneath his waistband. He pulled up from the kiss and said, "I get the idea that you may think I'm overdressed."

She smiled coyly and said, "Actually, I was thinking that we're both a bit overdressed. Perhaps we should remedy that before we go any further. I hate to look...auspicious." He threw his head back and laughed. His rich baritone echoed in her ears, and it was the most wonderful sound she had ever heard.

He pulled her up briefly to unhook the clasp on her bra and lowered her again in order to enjoy the view. He closed his eyes momentarily and said, "Jane, I am going to pay homage to this beautiful body of yours, but I am weak and overwhelmed. Please forgive me." Then he lowered his mouth to her nipple. She gasped into his touch and brought his hand up to the other breast. He traced circles around her areola with his finger and mimicked the action on the other with his tongue.

"Oh, Severus, you don't need forgiveness. This feels lovely...." Her eyes closed with pleasure. Her breath was becoming ragged, as was his. He left her breasts and kissed a trail farther down her stomach until he reached the waist of her jeans. He deftly unbuttoned them, and she raised her hips to aid in his endeavor.

He stopped short of her underwear, instead running his finger down the crease where her folds met. The fabric was a little more than damp. He looked in wonder, "You are so wet, Jane. Do I truly have this effect on you?"

"Did you ever doubt it, my love?" She let the endearment slip into her sentence purposely. She couldn't tell him that she was not in her own time. She couldn't tell him that she would never see him this way again if she and Dumbledore were successful. She couldn't tell him that she loved him in any way but this. It hurt, but it was the best she could do.

His response was to carefully remove her knickers as though she were made of something fragile and toss them outside the curtain. He sat back on his knees and brought each foot up to his mouth, making her smile at the pretty gesture. He kissed each leg to the thigh before settling between her thighs and placing his hands underneath her to bring her to his mouth. He licked the crease where her legs met her sex and then licked the outsides of her folds. She groaned, trying to control herself from arching further into his mouth. He parted her with his tongue and began to lap her juices as a parched man laps water. He looked up long enough to say, "I would have you climax this way. I am told it is difficult to do so the first time and I want to be sure of your pleasure."

She nodded and placed her hands in his dark hair. He leaned back into her and sought out the center of her flower, teasing it until she could take no more and cried out, "Oh, Severus..." over and over as the waves of ecstasy washed over her.

He came up to her and she kissed his face repeatedly, tasting herself on him until she gave into the desire of licking his lips and drawing his tongue into her mouth. She felt erotic and sinful, heavenly and wicked.

She looked him in the eye and grinned with the wickedness. "Turnabout is fair play," she said, crawling out from under him.

He turned over and caught her hand. "I want to spend inside you. Be careful." She nodded and began rubbing her face in the hair on his chest. She caught his nipple in her mouth and grazed it with her teeth. She heard him moan, and it encouraged her to pay equal attention to the other nipple. She traced down his chest to his belly button and dipped her tongue for just a moment. He pushed up against her and she laughed, an admission of her power. He helped her off with his trousers, and she noticed in passing that he wore black silk boxer shorts...she filed that factoid for later retrieval.

Then she came to his phallus and immediately had to touch it. She had no basis for comparison, but she marveled, somewhat fearfully, that such a thing was going to be inside her. She pulled back the foreskin and chastely kissed the head. He groaned louder, and when she brought her mouth down over him, he looked nearly undone. She experimented with how much she could take without gagging. Feeling braver, as she found a steady rhythm with her mouth, she let her finger wander down past his sac and tentatively touched his anus. He bucked against her, and she took this as a sign that it felt good. She paused long enough in her ministrations to lick her finger. She rubbed against his rear portal before sliding in. The ringed muscle clamped around her finger almost painfully and she looked up to see him biting his lip to keep from crying out. She worked her mouth and finger in time with each other until his fingertips gripping her shoulder started digging in.

She disengaged her finger and tongue to look up at him. "Is it time?"

He nodded and rolled over once again to put her on her back. He hesitated a moment, looking thoughtful, and left the bed. She sat up, frowning until he came back with a black towel.

He smiled ruefully and said, "Let's not spoil the sheets." She smiled with him and nodded, somewhat relieved that even during coitus, he was unchanged.

After arranging the towel beneath her, he moved his knees between her legs to open her a bit more. "As soon as I break the barrier, we are going to stop until you are ready to go on. I will not see you hurt."

She looked up at him trustingly and said, "Are you sure this is your first time doing this?"

He looked askance. "I assume by your tone that you think that I have this well thought-out."

She tilted her head thoughtfully and pulled him down to her. He placed her hand on his member and topped it with his own. He slid in slowly, studying her face. He closed his eyes and she felt braver watching his response. He was clearly feeling quite a bit of pleasure. He looked up at her and pulled back just a little. She braced herself, and he stopped. "No, Jane. Trust me. Relax yourself and yield to me." She closed her eyes and breathed evenly, deeply. And then he thrust forward. Tears sprung to her eyes, but she cinched her eyelids tighter, willing the tears not to run down her face.

"My angel, my perfect, beautiful angel," he murmured, wiping away her tears. "So brave. So giving." He waited until her shudders subsided and began to move again slowly. He increased his tempo, and she was allowed to see how much this meant to him. He trusted her enough to show her his true emotions. As he climaxed, she thought her heart would burst from the sight of love on his face.

A/N:

Many people have told me that they think this is a little soon for intimacy, and that may be true under most circumstances. However, please keep in mind that Hermione realizes that she has limited time with Severus, which may make her less conservative than she would be otherwise. And Severus? Severus is a seventeen-year-old male who is used to being rejected, and has just found a girl who loves him. What else would he do?

I hope that all of you have enjoyed!

Chapter Six

Chapter 6 of 6

Hermione sighed. Of course it couldn't have been that easy. Even the Time-Turner she'd been given Third Year, the simplest of time devices, was so complex she was amazed they'd even thought of allowing her to use it. Compared to this, that was cake.

Hermione awoke some hours later alone in Severus' bed. It felt odd to be there without him, and she shivered despite the warmth of the blankets. Trusting her with his room...his things!...was nearly as intimate as their earlier joining. It was consummation of a different sort. How odd that nineteen years from now (or last year, if she wanted to be *really* surreal) he wouldn't even trust her alone with a size 2 cauldron.

It occurred to her as she pulled on her clothes that there must be some reason as to why Severus was so different from the Snape she knew. Why on earth would he treat her of all people so horribly in her own time when they had just shared the loss of virginity in his? Honestly, was it possible for two people to get any closer? What exactly was going to happen that would scar him so badly? Not to mention her part in all this. She had never been one to rush into *any* sort of intimacy. Why on earth had she jumped in so fast with Severus? She had barely known this aspect of the man forty-eight hours, and she was already giving herself to him without reservation. She'd told him she loved him, for God's sake! Under any other circumstances, it was unthinkable.

The heavy thoughts weighed on her mind as she made her way to the gargoyle guarding Dumbledore's office. She leaned over to the stone beast and whispered in his ear, "Fizzing Whizbees," as if it were a secret. He smiled sardonically as the door opened, and she stepped onto the revolving stairs.

The door to Dumbledore's office opened while her fist was still in midair. *The man is still maddening, even twenty years ago!*

"Do come in, Miss Granger." Hermione hesitated, then entered. Fawkes immediately fluttered over to her, crooning, and began to preen her hair. She absentmindedly reached up and scratched his head where he appeared to be molting.

Allowing Fawkes to ride on her shoulder, she made her way to one of the squashy chairs in front of Dumbledore's desk and sat.

"I thought I might come to see you, sir. I was... wondering if you'd made any progress on how to get me home.... Well, my home in... my time, not my home now, since there's no real need for me to be looking at the house twenty years before I should really be there...." She let the sentence fade as she realized she was babbling.

The old man studied her for a moment with half a grin and a glimmer in his eyes before answering, slowly. "I'm not sure. You say you made a perception enhancement potion and went to sleep, only to wake up in this when, correct?" She nodded. "Well, it seemed to me that perhaps you hadn't made the potion quite right, and that was what caused it, so I went into the library to research potions with time travel side effects. I even went to the Library of Alexandria for a more comprehensive search. I didn't find anything. So it may be that the potion wasn't what brought you back at all. I believe a few more questions are in order...."

Hermione sighed. Of course it couldn't have been that easy. Even the Time-Turner she'd been given third year, the simplest of time devices, was so complex she was amazed they'd even thought of allowing her to use it. Compared to this, that was cake.

"Perhaps you've forgotten something," Dumbledore suggested. "Did anything happen after taking the potion but before you woke up here?"

She opened her mouth to deny it, but her tongue remembered better. "Yes, sir. I was on my way back to Gryffindor Tower when Professor..." She hesitated on naming him, for fear of giving Dumbledore too much information about his own future. If her relationship with the boy-who-would-end-up-being-the-man cocked up the timeline, so be it. But adding to that knowledge of Snape's tenure as Potions master was just begging for trouble. "...when a professor stopped me in the hall," she finished. "It was after curfew. When he let me leave, I went straight to bed." Then something else occurred to her. "I had a dream...."

Dumbledore's eyes lit up. "Oh?"

"Yes. It was very strange." And she told him everything she could remember about it, from the chill of the water to the blue of the sky, from the billowy clouds to the random faces floating with her on the river. Hermione amazed herself at how clear it still was, even a day and a half later.

Dumbledore just sat there, eyes sparkling over his half-moon spectacles, fingers steepled in thought. And then his lips twitched upward in a grin.

"Professor?"

"Miss Granger, this is absolutely magnificent."

"Sir?"

"That wasn't a dream. You managed to project yourself out of realspace. Now, as I am certain there isn't a potion with that kind of effect either, would you perhaps share with me which potion it was you were trying to make and at which failed so... spectacularly?"

If Snape had asked her that, the tone would have been completely different, and meant in a mocking way. Coming from Dumbledore, though, she had to chuckle along with him. If time travel was the side effect of the perception enhancement potion she'd made, she *had* failed. Spectacularly, in an amazing discovery kind of way. "I'm not sure, exactly," she said. "I was browsing the stacks and pulled down a book that looked like it might have what I wanted in it. And it did. Or, I *thought* it did. I can't even remember the name of it."

"Would you be able to find it again?"

Hermione thought for a second, then nodded. "I believe so."

"Off to the library, then."

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Hermione walked into the Restricted Section and began gazing at the aisles in thought, before wandering over to a shelf and running her fingers over the titles. In the twenty years' difference, some new books had been added, and some had been removed, so the one she was looking for was in a different place, but she found it and pulled it out. It was a large tome...so large in fact, that she brought the book down to the floor before flipping through the recipes.

She came to the potion in question and stopped. "Professor?"

Dumbledore sank down on his knees beside her and studied the book.

"Sir, this is the correct book, and this the correct potion, I'm sure of it. But...."

"But?"

Hermione didn't know how to say it. It was different, really. The perception enhancement potion...Tincture of Acumen...began with the ingredients at the bottom of page 109 and continued onto 110 for the instructions. "I remember at least two more ingredients on the next page, and completely different brewing instructions."

Dumbledore hemmed thoughtfully, then turned the next page and said, "Is this more like what you remember?"

Hermione cringed, then nodded, sighing exasperatedly. "Yes." No wonder she had botched it in such a fantastic manner...she had managed to combine two spells. How could she have been so careless? Morbidly curious, she turned back a page and looked at the potions there. A groan escaped her throat when her eyes caught the name of the potion spanning the two pages: Elmer's Adhesive Elixir. She sighed. The pages must have stuck together in *her* book. Somehow. *And we know how that happened, don't we?*

"So I must have combined the potion I was trying to make with this one at the bottom? Morphambulus Potion? What is that?"

"Fascinating," Dumbledore breathed. His twinkling eyes had already been through the description and half the ingredients on this page. "Apparently, it's a potion for dreamwalking. Combining this with the Tincture of Acumen.... You must have been dreaming of time in order for this to work, especially since you missed the ingredients to actually travel to another's dream. Your potion did indeed enhance the perception of your surroundings, but it did so as you were observing your own dream of a river, which represented time. If the results weren't so unreliable, this would be a marvelous discovery."

She was confused, and her face showed it. "I don't understand, sir. How does a river represent time? Isn't it more like a... a road?"

"Nonsense," Dumbledore chuckled. "Whatever gave you that idea? No, time is most certainly like a river. It carries us forward as the natural course of events. When you stood up in the river, time continued to flow past you, effectively putting you *upriver*. Twenty years upriver."

"Ah." That would certainly explain it. But it also made her reevaluate her understanding of the Time-Turner.... "So what does that mean for my returning home, sir?"

Dumbledore mused, "I think the best course of action may be to view your memories of the dream through a Pensieve in order to capture all of the details. If we can

recreate the potion, you could view an altered version of your original dream in the Pensieve instead of sleeping naturally and possibly dreaming of something else entirely. In the altered dream, I would be with you...using the Morphambulus potion myself, as a matter of fact...conducting the flow of the altered Pensieve to guide you back down the river to your own time. Your mind can be cued to wake you up when your memories in the Pensieve end."

He smiled, satisfied at himself for discovering a solution. "Although," he amended, "I may still need time to give some details additional thought, in order to ensure that you make it back to the correct place in the timeline. We wouldn't want you being sent too far forward, for instance, or backward yet more. And I will still have to think of how to keep you floating freely in the river, to make sure nothing at this point is keeping you here. There will be no room for errors."

At that thought, Hermione looked down at her shoes.

"Miss Granger? Is there something you wish to tell me?"

She looked up to the very blue, very concerned eyes of Albus Dumbledore and lost her voice. What came out was no more than a whisper. "I've discovered something, I think, sir. Something to... keep me here." She hesitated, then shook herself out of it. So much for keeping certain future faculty information to herself. She proceeded to tell him about getting a pass for the Restricted Section from Professor Snape for the potion to begin with...about how he checked his calendar and granted her the pass without question...and then reiterating the story of the confrontation with him later in the hall, only filling in the details she'd tried to protect him from.

She refocused on the Headmaster's face to find him frowning and tried to continue without biting her lip. Her feet were already wet; she might as well jump in. Slowly, then with more confidence, she recounted the meeting of Severus in the library and how they'd become friends...but that was as far a relationship as she was willing to describe, thank you. No need for him to know of his trips to Lily's room or their romp in his sheets only a few hours ago. She did tell him that her Snape was a former Death Eater turned spy for the Order of the Phoenix, but she knew for a fact that it hadn't happened yet. "... And so I think I might have been given a chance to stop him from joining," she finished in a rush.

Dumbledore was pinching his nose in a way that suggested that he had received entirely too much information in much too short of time for his brain to process and was feeling the beginnings of a repercussive headache. "So both Severus and I must have known you were coming and allowed you to do so in order to avoid paradox...."

She nodded fervently, completely missing the look of irony on his face.

"Miss Granger, I am not certain that I understand all the facets of the situation. It may also be that you have told me more...much more...than was strictly necessary. Even knowing one's own future can sometimes lead to paradox." Hermione squirmed. Yes, she was quite aware of that. "But perhaps the time for worrying about that is over. Continue your friendship with Severus for the time that you are here. It may serve some purpose that you and I cannot yet see, but I must urge you not to encourage him to change what is to be his future. It could set events in motion that neither of us would be able to prevent." A pause. "Especially if he turns out to be a spy for the Order."

Hermione looked at the elder wizard in shock. "But, sir! Morsmordre...the Dark Mark...has ruined his life! He spends all of his time in bitter regret. He can't even forgive himself, much less anyone else. If I could change that for him, think of how much pain he wouldn't have to endure. Think of how much better the quality of his life could be!" And in case all else failed, she tried an appeal to his stark practicality. "Think of how much better a *professor* he would be!" She could hear her decibels creeping up along with her rage, but couldn't control it. This man had all the power in the world to help Severus to stay Severus and not the loathsome, overbearing man he was to become; and he was going to forbid it for fear of *changing the future*?! Wasn't that the entire idea? She was willing to sacrifice whatever she had to in order to help Severus, even if it meant giving up her very existence and the existence of her entire specific timeline. Why wasn't Dumbledore, the alleged epitome of Goodness and Light, willing to do the same?

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

It was the wee hours of the morning when she finally left the library. They still didn't see eye to eye, but he had gotten her to promise that she wouldn't tell Severus his future and that she would leave him to make the choices he would, which wasn't to say that she wasn't still furious, just resignedly so.

As she made her way through the Gryffindor common room, she noticed something odd: the bedroom light was on. She was certain that she had extinguished it before she and Severus left for their walk.

She very carefully put her hand on the doorknob and turned. The wards were most definitely down, because the knob turned in her hand with no resistance.

Panic rose in her as her heart forced its way into her throat. Had Lily come back early? Were Dumbledore's hopes for avoiding paradox now moot because the girl's Muggle family couldn't handle her all the way through the holiday? She was halfway into deciding on her apology speech when the knob was pulled out of her hand as the door opened on Severus.

"Ye Gods, Severus! You scared the daylights out of me!"

"Well, I was trying to surprise you, Jane, although I thought it was going to be in waking you." His eyes looked away while his lips parted in a devilish grin. "Are you hungry? I brought you a tray from the kitchens."

All of a sudden, Hermione realized that she was famished. She hadn't eaten since he thought to bring her breakfast this...no, yesterday...morning.

As they sat on the bed feeding each other, as had become their habit, Hermione sensed something different about the man in front of her. He seemed quieter somehow, more subdued.

"Did your meeting go well, Severus?" she finally ventured.

"As well as I expected, thank you."

"Only you're being awfully quiet. Would you like to talk about it?"

He glanced up at her then quickly back at the tray. "I decided to ensure that Potter and his friends aren't going to be so problematic in the future." And with that, he rolled up his sleeve to reveal the unspeakable outlines of the Dark Mark.