

A Circular Path

by Bambu

A brief encapsulation of Hermione's life post-war (in honor of her birthday.)

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Chapter 1 of 1

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All standard disclaimers and full series spoilers apply. The characters and world are not mine, but this little vignette certainly is.

I couldn't let the day pass without a small birthday gift to Hermione.

~o0o~

The empty headmaster's portrait was your first clue.

That there was no body was your second.

You were a very busy witch after Voldemort's defeat, but making certain Severus Snape was alive and recovering remained at the top of your long list of things to do (in all its variegated color and cryptic runic symbols.)

You knew he was either dead or alive. A simplistic concept, perhaps, but Snape was a special case. At least in your mind. None of your friends were concerned, except Harry, yet he was too busy to really think about it, and after all, it was more convenient to admire Snape if he was dead.

But Harry told you things. He told you about Snape's memories -- which only caused you to add another rune to your list, right next to Snape's name -- and how easily Dumbledore had made you a pawn.

Your respect for the revered headmaster took a dive off a very high cliff into exceedingly shallow water. In the long run, you were grateful Dumbledore wasn't still alive when you confronted him ... the everlasting scorch mark on his portrait cost you a hefty fine, and even Shackbolt didn't quite buy your explanation of overwrought nerves and hair-trigger reflexes.

But weeks passed and Snape's time ran out. You knew if he was alive it was because he had help.

Nonetheless you worried. And you sent owls; once a week for three months, and then monthly thereafter.

None of your letters were ever returned and it gave you hope for some perverse reason.

Through all the post-war trials, your own amongst them (acquitted of all charges -- exigencies of wartime -- and Gringotts was repaid for its damages out of a Ministry

Contingency Fund,) through all the media hoopla including, but not limited to, the up close and personal interview by Xenophilus Lovegood, you nevertheless clung to the possibility that Snape might have lived.

On the one-year anniversary you sent your final owl. You thanked him again for his sacrifices, and you wished him happy in his new life.

On your twentieth birthday you received your only reply. There was no return address and the direction was a single line *Miss Hermione Granger*, but you would never forget that spiky scrawl.

Nor its message.

Granger,

You're welcome!

Now go and live your own bloody life.

It was, of course, unsigned.

You laughed until you cried, and then you sobbed for awhile, and then you opened a bottle of Old Ogden's – because champagne wasn't appropriate – and drank a toast to Severus Snape, the bravest and most irascible man you had ever met.

But that wasn't sufficient, so you drank a second toast.

And a third.

That's when you decided to take Snape's advice.

You Floo'd to Grimmauld Place and walked, tripped, into Ron Weasley's bedroom, no matter that it was long past midnight. And you discovered that, in the privacy of his own four walls, Ron could be heart-stoppingly tender, even if he was clumsy with inexperience. You thought, perhaps, just perhaps, he might be the man you'd always seen beneath the insecurity and occasional outburst of buffoonery.

Perhaps not, but it was your life and you were going to live it.

It was fortunate for your budding relationship Ron never heard you mumble, *Thank you, Severus,* as you fell asleep.

And it was fortunate Ron never knew you kept the letter through nineteen years of a dysfunctional but sometimes happy marriage ... and two children.

You drank champagne the day the divorce was final, and you framed the letter the day you moved into your own cottage on Guernsey (one more eccentric amongst the island's small population.)

And when your nearest neighbor answered the door to your attempt at returning the cat you'd rescued from your brambles and thought might be theirs, you saw right through his glamour. You laughed and then you cried, just as you had the day you received his one and only letter.

When he removed the cat from your arms, he snapped, "Stop that ridiculous grizzling! I don't care whether you come or go, but shut the damned door. You're letting out the heat."

You shut the door, of course, but not until after you'd stepped inside his house.

It was one of the happiest days of your life, but it didn't compare to the day you married him, nor the thirty-five years you've lived together since.

~o0o~