

# Cursed

*by Pearle*

Hermione seeks an elusive cure for the lasting effects of a curse Bellatrix Lestrangle managed to hit her with during the Battle of Hogwarts. Her life has been lost to endless bouts of pain and despair that have plagued her these last two years. But her luck may finally be changing. A reference to a Dark potion in an obscure book may hold the key to her cure. But where will she find a Potions master knowledgeable enough to brew it? Written for Warded\_Portal for the SSHG Winter 2007 exchange.

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## The Beginning

*Chapter 1 of 6*

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Her teeth clenched, muscles tightening, eyes flashing with an unholy light, she braced herself for the wave of pain she could feel starting. It took more and more pain potion to get her through the days now, her body building up a tolerance to the magical substance. Hermione closed her eyes and drew a ragged breath as the ripple of the pain passed.

*"Come on, Mudblood, if you won't end Potter's life, the least you can do is end your own."*

*"That's it, girl. A quick Avada Kedavra and you can finish us off. One less Mudblood in the world."*

"NO!" Her scream echoed hoarsely off the walls of her room. Weakly, she flopped back onto the bed, her strength leaving as the worst of the pain drained from her body. Unconsciousness was a welcome escape from the hell her life had become these last two years. Even entranced, her right hand held her left arm in a deathly grip; her wand inches from her outstretched fingers.

"Hermione, are you okay? Did it start again? Hermione?"

Reluctantly, he stepped back and let the Healer tend to his sick friend. The lime green robes contrasted sharply with his friend's pale skin as the Healer scanned the unconscious witch with his wand. Harry turned as Ron came into the room; the two sharing a worried glance before he turned his attentions back toward the bed.

Harry winced as the Healer moved Hermione; her limbs flopping like a rag doll. "She's getting worse."

"What does that mean?" Ron watched as Hermione's limbs twitched; he hated watching an episode, as she'd termed them.

Ron glared at Harry before turning on the Healer. "You have to help her. This is St Mungo's, there's nowhere else to go!"

Wearily, Harry shook his head. "You've seen the Pensieve; there was nothing else."

"I'm here, Hermione. How do you feel?"

The voice. She was sure she was going mad. She'd thought they would put her in the ward with the Longbottoms, sure that Bellatrix must have cursed her into insanity. It was hard to explain, but she didn't think her mind was manufacturing the voice. It seemed to come from outside herself. It would taunt her, call her Mudblood, shriek obscenities whenever possible. It was obsessed with Harry. So far she'd been able to resist it, but she was growing weary of the battle; she worried what she would do when she could no longer fight it.

She'd been coming to St Mungo's regularly for the last two years, subjecting herself to every known spell and potion they could come up with in the hope of ending the pain



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[illegible]

"All right, you go have a lie in while I run to the store." It was a well rehearsed pattern they had fallen into. She was always a bit run down after a session at St Mungo's. Harry would see Hermione back to her flat, stock her fridge, and in a few days, she'd be strong enough to go it on her own again.

"Hermione, you're too weak to travel. You've spent the last two years tracking down rumors and not one of them has proved true. Don't you think it's time to stop?"

"I just..."

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"Easy there, Miss. Wouldn't want you to fall."

Within minutes she found her way to the entrance of the magical section below the main library. An old witch, magically sorting books, was working behind the main counter.

"Eh, what is it?" The hag had yet to look up from her work, books flew back and forth between cases lining the walls behind the desk. "Speak up, I haven't got all day."

Two of the books currently careening between the desks wobbled before losing altitude and fell to the floor below. Several other tomes lost height as the witch turned to look at Hermione. She took a step closer, peering suspiciously at the young woman over the top of her spectacles. "You want to see what book?"

"Do you have any idea how dangerous that book is?"

The witch peered closer. "Who are you? Do have any form of identification?"

"I know it's not a very good likeness. I've been ill for a while, but if you'd like, you can contact the British Ministry of Magic. They can verify who I am." Her face had thinned out since the photo, her hair having lost some of its fullness. Constant pain played havoc with her system.

"You're that Hermione Granger? You're Harry Potter's friend?" he asked, his voice a whisper. The man's eyes widened. She found quite a few people reacted oddly to

*A witch was in my shop earlier this evening requesting a rare and Dark potion. I believe the potion she seeks is the Potion of Glador. Since I know you have*

# Sometime The Evil You Know Is Better Than The Evil You Don't Know

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[illegible]

## Chapter Three Sometime The Evil You Know Is Better Than The Evil You Don't Know

Hermione looked up at the address on the building, comparing it to the writing on the parchment in her hand.

## The Prince's Moste Potente Potables

713 Diagon Alley

London, England

While the address on the building matched that on the paper, the name above the door did not. A large gold plaque, letters two feet high proclaimed:

Dempster, Wiggle, & Worth LLP

This was the address listed on the back of The Prince's products. The label further invited customers to contact the firm with any questions or concerns they may have. All owls were directed to this address.

Unconsciously, Hermione flexed her fingers. Almost a week had passed since her last treatment at St Mungo's. The episodes had started again; her hands trembled slightly, an aftereffect of the pain. Sighing, she pushed open the door and went in.

The middle-aged witch sitting behind the desk could only be described as grey. Her hair was a mix of various shades of charcoal, slate, and silver, liberally sprinkled with streaks of black. Her tailored robes were a deep shade of arsenic, contrasting nicely with the light dove grey of her blouse. Hermione couldn't see her shoes, but would have bet they matched her robes exactly.

"Can I help you?" Three quills danced over three separate pieces of parchment, obviously enchanted to respond to the device in front of the witch.

"Yes, I'd like to speak to Mr Dempster please."

The witch glanced up from her work. "Do you have an appointment Miss...?"

"Granger. Hermione Granger. Um, no, I don't. But if Mr Dempster is not available, perhaps I could speak with Mr Wiggle or Mr Worth."

The woman eyed her up and down. "Regarding?"

"Is one of them available? I've come on a business matter."

She tapped a blue square of parchment next to her before writing on it. Within a minute, an answering statement appeared on the parchment. Hermione thought it must have been enchanted for two-way communication.

"If you will follow me, Mr Dempster will see you now."

She was escorted to a small office off the main corridor. A short, balding man dressed in odd cranberry coloured robes rose to greet her. "Miss Granger? A pleasure to meet you. Please, have a seat." He gestured to the chairs in front of his desk. "Would you like something to drink? Tea, pumpkin juice?"

"No, I'm fine. I appreciate you seeing me, Mr Dempster. I hope you can help me. I'm trying to locate the chief Potions master for The Prince's Moste Potente Potables products."

The little man's face closed, his smile fading abruptly. "I'm sorry you wasted your time. I don't know anything about the company. I can't be of any assistance."

"Mr Dempster, you are aware that your address is listed as the business address for The Prince's Moste Potente Potables? The back of the label directs owls to this location. How is it that you don't know what your firm is doing?"

The wizard rubbed a pudgy hand over his shining pate. "Is there a problem with one of the products?"

"No. I was told he may be able to help me with a medical problem I have. Please. I just want to speak with him for a minute."

"Granger? Potter! What are you two doing here?"



"Snape?" Harry stared in disbelief; he'd been right. The Prince was Snape after all.

"Snape?" Hermione screamed, her eyes glowing with a manic light, an odd smile gracing her lips. "You bastard! Did you think you could betray my Lord and live to tell about it? I was right. You lied to Cissy that night to save your greasy soul, you Slytherin bastard. Traitor! Shall I mete out a bit of justice? Cruc..."

"*Expelliarmus!*" Hermione's wand flew into Harry's outstretched hand. "Hermione, what is wrong with you?" he shouted.

"Potter. At last, I can kill you, too." The witch turned, her hands flexed to claw his eyes out as she launched herself at her best friend.

"*Incarcerous!*" Severus' spell caught her in mid leap, ropes shooting out of the end of his wand, binding the young woman as she tried to attack Harry. A hasty casting of Petrificus Totalus guaranteed the witch's silence as well as her unwilling cooperation as the two wizards brought her into the house.

Severus directed her to the sofa, her eyes snapping madly as she glared at them. "How long has this been going on?"

Shakily, Harry ran his hand through his hair. "I don't know what's wrong with her. Why would she attack either one of us?"

"How long, Potter?"

"Uhm, she's...she's been having problems with recurring pain since the Battle of Hogwarts. The Healers at St Mungo's think it's some type of echo from the Cruciatus Curse. That's why she came here today. Someone told her about a mythical Potions master that could heal her."

Snape shook his head. Two years. He'd thought she was probably suffering from residual pain after realizing the witch Omar had owed him about was Granger, his solicitor's letter citing the witch's identity, but he never expected her to be like this.

Harry watched Snape as he ran his wand over the still form of his friend. "She's never acted like that before. The Healers have tried different treatments. Nothing's ever worked. You know Hermione, she's read everything she could on the subject, but still nothing."

Severus snorted. Yes, he knew the know-it-all's penchant for research. It was her research that had brought Potter through his search to find and destroy the Dark Lord's Horcruxes.

"Can you help her?"

Severus locked eyes with the angry witch. "*Legilimens*," he whispered. He slipped into the vortex that passed for Hermione's mind, silken strands of silvery blue threads floated past him in groups, the most current memories at the front of her mind. Vague images formed a slide show as Severus searched for a clue as to what had precipitated the attack. Her comment about Cissy had given him an idea; he only hoped he was wrong. It took a few minutes, but Severus found what he was looking for. He'd felt the presence the minute he'd entered the witch's mind, just not sure where it had sequestered itself among the memories. Unfortunately, he'd been right in his assumptions. Gently, he withdrew.

"Where was Miss Granger hit when Lestrage cursed her?" Surprisingly gentle fingers brushed the hair from Hermione's face as he looked for the curse site.

"Her left shoulder. Why?"

Severus unbuttoned the top three buttons of Hermione's jumper, peeling back the loose cloth as her ran a calloused finger over the curse scar on her shoulder. "Bellatrix was cursing both Miss Granger and Miss Weasley when Molly attacked her?"

"Yeah, well, she was a strong witch. But what does that have to do with why Hermione suddenly went berserk outside?"

Severus turned on the young man. "Think, Potter. Bellatrix was favored by the Dark Lord. She was privy to many of his inner most secrets. It was the reason he entrusted her with Helga Hufflepuff's Cup. He knew she was loyal to him, it was the reason I was instructed to send the Sword of Gryffindor to her Gringotts vault. I believe her soul must have shattered from the force of Molly's curse."

"Shattered?" Harry sat abruptly, his legs barely holding him as realization dawned. "Hermione is a...*Horcrux*?"

"So it would seem." Severus stood lost in thought. Potter had been the only human Horcrux Severus had ever known. He didn't believe Bellatrix had planned to create a Horcrux, but then neither had the Dark Lord intended for Harry Potter to be one either.

"Why go crazy now?"

"She must have been resisting her all this time, though I imagine the pain and constant contact have been wearing her down. Miss Granger's surprise when she saw me allowed Bellatrix to surge to the forefront." He could see the dark circles under Hermione's eyes. Her face was too thin; a general sense of weariness enveloped the young woman. He had hoped the scar would've held an answer or clue, but it did not appear to have any special characteristics.

"Contact?" Harry watched Hermione, only her eyes moved in her frozen state. The anger and madness that radiated from his friend would give him nightmares for years to come.

Severus nodded. "I could hear an echo of Lestrage's voice when I searched Miss Granger's mind. I would imagine she has been talking to her these last two years."

"How do we help her?"

"Help her?" Severus turned, frowning as he regarded the young wizard. "Do you have another Resurrection Stone on hand? No? I didn't think so. Do you recall what happens when you disarm a Horcrux? You are dealing with Dark magic, Potter."

"We can't leave her like this."

"No, I don't suppose we can." Severus closed his eyes. It seemed the Fates were determined to conspire against him. He'd just gained his life back only to have these two show up on his doorstep. There was nothing he could do. Nothing concrete that he was sure would work. He'd made up his mind to tell Potter they would need to consign the poor witch to a padded room in St Mungo's when he looked up into Lily's eyes. Blast the witch. Even if he'd managed to save her offspring, those eyes reminded him he hadn't saved her. Severus sighed; the young woman didn't deserve this fate. "There may be a potion. I don't know if it will work. It's never been tried on a human."

"Do you have it?"

"It's a rare potion, created with Dark magic. So, of course I have it in stock. I'll just nip back down to my lab and fetch it for you." Severus shook his head, glaring at the young man. "I'd have to brew it. I suppose I can put Miss Granger into a magically induced coma while I tend to the potion. The full moon is only two days off; I will need to have the base ready by then. It will take another seven days after that before the potion will be ready." He stared at the young man before him, his expression softening. "Do you know what Muggle chemotherapy is, Potter?"

Harry started from the sudden change in topic. "Chemotherapy? Yeah, it's treatment for cancer. Why?"

"Chemotherapy does not distinguish between good and bad cells. When given, it attacks all cells that match the cell structure that is to be eliminated."

"Right, that's why some people lose their hair."

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"You must first stew lacewing flies for twenty-one days in a steel cauldron over a low flame. Various ingredients are added during this process. Diced leeches and

powdered bicorn horn are added after the first seven days of brewing. Knotgrass should be added after ten days, but will still create a useful potion if added after day twelve. At seventeen days, you add finely chopped fluxweed picked at the full moon. On day twenty, you add the shredded boomslang skin. When the potion is finished, you will need to add a bit of the person you wish to turn into, such as a piece of their fingernail or a hair."

The Potions master smiled; yes, it was definitely Granger. "And what would happen if you added a hair that was not from a human being?"

Even in her frozen, bound state, Hermione had the grace to blush. "As you well know, the hair of an animal, even something as harmless as a cat, only transforms part of the person. Adding on the base characteristics of the animal to the human form but not allowing for full transformation. Medical attention is required to return the person to normal."

"Miss Granger, I assume you heard what I said to Potter? I can try to remove Lestrage from your mind, but the cost may be dear to you. The best we can hope for is your recovery with your magic intact, but there exists a real possibility that you will lose your magic, if not your life."

"I do understand, Professor. I also know I can't take much more of this. It's not just the episodes of pain; it's her, whispering to me all the time. Whatever happens, it has to be better than this."

"And if you lose your magic?"

"There will still be quite a bit I can do, research, for one. Whatever the outcome, I can't do this anymore. It's becoming harder and harder to stay in control. She's only slipped out twice before, but I'm afraid she seems to be getting stronger. I won't let her have me. Do whatever you have to."

Wearily, Severus nodded. "I need to finish the base before the full moon two nights from now. It will take another seven days after that to complete the potion."

Harry nodded. "That's fine. Hermione can stay with Ginny and me. I'll bring her back when you're ready. Unbind her, and we can go."

"Have you actually listened to the conversation, Potter? She no longer has full control over Lestrage. Care to tell me what will happen if she turns into Bellatrix and decides to kill you and Mrs Potter in the middle of the night?"

While he knew Hermione would never harm him, the scene at Snape's door was still fresh enough to worry him. "So, what do we do until you're ready for her?"

"She will remain here. There are several potions I will need to administer over the week's time to strengthen her body and spirit. I can induce a magical coma with the Draught of Living Death; it should allow her body to recharge itself without her mind's interference. Toddy," he called.

A small elf, dressed in a gaudy tea towel appeared in the doorway. "Yes, Master Snape, sir?"

"See that the back bedroom across from mine is cleaned and aired. Miss Granger will be staying here for a few days."

Harry nodded. "Okay, I'll need to Floo home and pick up a few things. I can be back in an hour."

Severus turned to stare at the young man. "Whatever for?"

"If she's staying, I'm staying. You don't think I'm going to leave Hermione alone here with you?"

Severus sighed. "There is nothing you can do for her. The magical coma should stop Bellatrix from advancing on her mind; in any event, she will be unconscious the entire time. I will see that she gets the proper potions and care, but until the potion is complete, there is nothing more to do."

"She's not staying here alone."

"It's okay, Harry. I trust Professor Snape."

"It's no longer 'Professor,' Miss Granger."

Harry stepped closer to the couch, his hand resting on Hermione's unmoving arm. "I'm not leaving you alone here. I just need to pick up a few things and tell Gi..."

"Ooooh, isn't that sweet. Wittle bitty Potty and Snapey playing nice nice with the Mudblood." Hermione's head whipped back and forth as she tried to reach out and bite Harry's hand.

"*Petrificus Totalus*." Severus had turned just in time to see Hermione trying to bite Harry. Quickly, he recast a Full-Body Bind Spell, breathing a sigh of relief as the possessed witch fell back against the couch cushions. "That is what I was talking about. I shall return momentarily."

Harry tried to still the trembling in his hands. How had he not noticed what was going on with Hermione all this time? While he still questioned where Snape's true loyalties lay, regardless of his actions during the final battle, he had no such doubts in the man's abilities. Still, to leave her here, alone, with him.

The Potions master in question emerged from his basement lab holding a small green bottle. With great care, Severus administered a dose of Living Death to the troubled witch. The effect was almost instantaneous. Her eyes slipped closed; the tense set to her body changed as she relaxed into the couch, her limbs resting bonelessly against the cushions. Even her breathing had evened out to a calm, steady pace.

"Toddy, is Miss Granger's room ready?"

Once again the little elf appeared. "Yes, Master Snape. Shall I take the Miss upstairs?"

"See that she is comfortable. I will need you to monitor her while she is here. There is a series of potions that must be given to her over the next week. I'll draw up a schedule for you to follow."

"Yes, Master Snape."

Harry watched as the elf guided his friend's body up the stairs. "She'll be all right, won't she?"

"I can assure you, no harm will come to her here. I cannot say the same will be true after I try to remove Lestrage. Not that I particularly care, but where is Mr Weasley through all this? I would think that for Miss Granger's sake, he would be shadowing my steps like a lost puppy dog."

"It's not like that. Ron's on the road with the Chudley Cannons. He stops in to see Hermione or me when he's in town. But they're just friends now." Harry hesitated. "Snape, I'd like to bring Ginny here to see Hermione. I know she'll be worried about her."

Severus passed a weary hand across his face. "Fine. Bring whomever you wish. I will reset my wards to recognize you so can visit Miss Granger. Though might I remind you, this is my home and not the Gryffindor common room? Please keep that in mind when you bring the masses through here to visit. You can see yourself out. I need to get started on the base. The Ginseng root must be added two days from now when the moon is at its peak, or I'll have to wait until next month and try to brew the potion again."

"It's not that I'm not grateful for your help. But I know you never liked any of us. So, why are you doing this?"

Severus stopped in the open door and looked into Lily's eyes. "Because maybe this time I can actually make a difference." Without a backward glance, he disappeared

down the stairway.

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With an economy of movement, Severus finished chopping the daisy petals and added them to the bubbling cauldron to his left. The potion changed from a warm goldenrod to a sunny yellow as the petals dissolved. Selecting a glass rod, he counted out twelve clockwise stirs, followed by thirteen anticlockwise turns, and three full figure eights. Tomorrow night the potion would be ready. Potter and Miss Weasley, Mrs Potter, he mentally corrected himself, would be on hand in case something went wrong.

Severus shook his head. Potter. While Granger in her frozen state was tolerable, the young wizard had stopped in daily to check on the witch. Mindful of Severus' comment, he only brought his wife and Weasley to visit the first night. Often, he could hear Potter talking to the young woman, assuring her that everything would be fine.

The Dark man snorted. Everything will be fine? Potter's optimism was more than he could bear. This was not some fairy tale where Granger's fairy godmother would appear and put things to rights. Even magic had its limits.

There was no handsome prince waiting in the wings to place a chaste kiss on the fair maiden's lips to wake her from her enchanted sleep. He was the only prince that would be attending her, and even he could not guarantee what the outcome would be. Happily ever after was the stuff of childhood stories and held no place here.

With a weary sigh he checked the potion's progress. He only hoped *both* he and Granger survived the exorcism of Lestrangle from her mind tomorrow night.

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A stone basin, odd runes and other symbols carved along the edge, sat on the nightstand. An etched ribbon of leaves, their flat broad images mingling with the runes and interspersed with the image of a small flower indicated that the Pensieve may have been designed to contain something more than just memories. A Scottish thistle, its thorns arcing toward the bowl's edges, was etched into the bottom of the receptacle.

Harry studied the stone basin. He'd had previous experience with both Snape's and Dumbledore's Pensieves before, but this one looked different from those.

"Is that a thistle on the bottom?" Ginny watched mesmerized as the swirling liquid, at least she thought it was liquid, formed random patterns across the surface of the bowl.

Severus looked up from the potion phials he'd been lining up on top of the other nightstand. "The thistle represents protection. It is believed that evil will become trapped in the thorns of the flower and stay ensnared there. Do you remember any of the history Binns taught you? It's said that an invading Viking trod upon a magic thistle and alerted the Scottish wizards to his presence. It was fast work to turn the intruders back once they were identified."

His eyes softened as he looked at the 'sleeping' witch in the bed. "I'm sure Miss Granger would tell you, if she could speak, about a group known as The Most Ancient and Most Noble Order of the Thistle. Their motto loosely translates to 'no one attacks me and gets away with it.'"

"And the leaves around the edge? The Pensieves that I've seen only had runes on them. They didn't look like this." Harry gestured to the edging of the basin.

"That's because it's not a Pensieve; it's a containment vessel. That's rosemary along the edge. A spell is woven into the leaves to contain the soul I intend to trap within it."

"You're creating a Horcrux?"

"No, Potter, not a Horcrux. If it were a Horcrux, Lestrangle could conceivably be brought back from the dead. I intend to permanently seal her soul in the vessel. Once her soul fragment is in the basin, the leaves will come together and seal the top. I have no desire to ever see Bellatrix walk this earth again. I'm quite certain Miss Granger would agree with me."

"What do you want us to do?" Ginny's quiet voice cut through the tension mounting in the small room.

Severus held up a clear cut-glass phial, the liquid inside sparkled bright yellow as though lit with an inner glow. A second phial appeared in his hand; this one showed a deep, rich ruby color in the room's candlelight. "If all goes well, there'll be nothing for you two to do. This potion," he swirled the yellow liquid the color of trapped sunshine, "should weaken Lestrangle's hold on her mind. I'm going to draw the fragment forward to the front of her mind and try to draw it into the basin."

"And the other potion?"

"I'd rather not have Lestrangle take up residence in my mind. Consider this Occlumency in liquid form. It should block any attempt she tries to cross over into me."

Harry looked at Severus in horror. He remembered entering Snape's mind when he'd tried to teach him Occlumency in his fifth year. "Lestrangle could end up possessing you?"

"It's not likely, but there is a possibility. The connection into her mind will open a small gap into mine. Fortunately, Lestrangle was not a skilled Legilimens. I have enough ghosts to haunt me without her madness in my head, too."

"Why didn't you mention this before?"

"And what difference would it have made if I had? Would you prefer to pack Miss Granger up and commit her St Mungo's right now? Or would you rather wait until she tries to attack you again? I suggest you focus on the here and now so that we may begin."

Ginny's soft touch to his shoulder stilled his anger. "Forgive my husband, Professor. He can be an idiot at times. Words alone cannot express our gratitude for your help. Just tell me what to do, what I should watch for, and we can get started."

Severus smiled tiredly at the young woman. She was a force to be reckoned with all on her own: strong willed, level headed, and a powerful witch. Potter was lucky to have her, as she would balance his recklessness when all else failed. "I'll remove the hex, but Miss Granger will have to remain bound. I don't know that Lestrangle won't try taking over her body again. She may thrash or yell out. My estimation is that the process will be painful as well as physically debilitating. I shall attempt to draw the spirit out much the same as you would a memory. If all goes well, only the soul fragment will be removed."

"And if things... don't go well?" Ginny asked softly.

Severus ran a hand through his hair. "Some memory may be lost. I'm hoping to leave her magic intact. I imagine it will be more of a metaphysical duel, but I hope to sever Lestrangle's hold on Miss Granger's magic before removing the fragment from her mind. It's most likely been the source of her continued pain these last two years."

"What should we watch for?"

"See that she doesn't harm herself. If I'm... not conscious when this is through, make damn sure it's Miss Granger you're talking to when she wakes up and not Lestrangle. If she stops breathing while I'm still connected to her, separate us, and cast Rennervate. You should still be able to save Miss Granger's life if you act quickly enough." From a side pocket, Severus drew a third phial, the potion inside blacker than midnight. "The fragment should glow red when I drop it into the basin. Pour that potion over it immediately. The leaves will grow over the top and seal the vessel."

Harry smiled lopsidedly at Severus. "Whatever else you may be, Snape, I do trust your abilities. I know you can do this."

TBS

## Chapter 5 of 6

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Hermione shifted in agony as Bellatrix fought back. The witch was helpless to stop the constant deluge of pain racing through her body. Tears streamed from her eyes, her

*It's time to join your master in hell, Bella.* Slowly he pulled back; a thin, red thread seeped from Hermione's temple following Severus' wand as he withdrew from her mind. As soon as he'd broken free, he destroyed the connection he'd formed with Lestrage and cast the thread into the basin. Harry had been waiting. As the fragment sank to the bottom, he poured the potion across the top. The vessel glowed from within, the leaves closing to form a seamless closure, the fragment encased for all eternity.

"Hermione? Snape, what's wrong with her?"

"Harry?" Hermione looked lost as she looked around the room. Her eyes widened in surprise as she spied Snape.

"Her magic? Is she all right? The fragment was red, like you said. But I thought I saw a white thread or two tangled up with it."

"And her magic?" Harry asked, wondering just what would happen to his friend if her magic didn't return.

"And until then?"

"She's gone. I can't feel her anymore. Oh, God, Professor, how can I ever thank you?" Her tears started anew, the young woman finally free of the terror that she'd lived with the past two years.

The little elf popped in next to the nightstand. "Yes, Master Snape, sir?"

"Professor, I can't stay here. I've imposed on you long enough."

Hermione smiled softly. "I'd miss my magic, but if I never cast another spell again, I would still thank you. She's gone. I don't know how I'll ever repay your kindness. You have no idea what the last two years have been like."

[illegible]

They'd moved awkwardly from 'Miss Granger' and 'Professor' to first names when he'd blown up the third time she used the honorific title he now seemed to despise. He was no longer her professor, he reminded her tersely, hadn't been since before the war ended. By tacit agreement they hadn't discussed the events leading up to his leaving Hogwarts or the circumstances surrounding the final battle. It was almost a relief to leave those topics behind and move on.

The days quickly fell into a predictable pattern. She'd wake to find that a light breakfast, kept fresh under a warming charm, waiting for her. The room had been charmed to fulfill a number of requests, a self-cleaning wash basin and other toiletries would come on command. She could almost forget she was unable to do magic for the moment, as the objects whisked back and forth between her and the dresser. But the sudden silence when she looked around the room would remind her that she was alone in her own mind once again. That it was just Hermione that held control, and with that thought, nothing else mattered. Periodically Severus would find her listening to the silence, an odd smile on her face. He, of all people, might have understood her relief, having felt the madness when he'd first probed her mind.

Severus would join her for dinner, their conversation covering a variety of topics, usually centering on whatever article Hermione had read that day. He would help her to the lounge before settling himself into one of the side chairs in front of the fire, the two reading in companionable silence until, invariably, she would fall asleep. She assumed it was Toddy who magicked her back to her room and bed, not knowing that it was Severus who'd taken to carrying her up the stairs after the third night.

"Budge up."

"Move forward. Your neck is still bothering you?"



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Once in the lab, a room magically enhanced to encompass his growing business, he directed her to a side table and the stool in front of it. Gathering several ingredients he needed, he gave her careful instructions as to their preparation and left her to the task. Begrudgingly, he answered her questions, explained the potions that were in various stages of completion, and maintained his distance.

This, too, became part of her daily routine.

She no longer needed constant exercise, choosing to spend her afternoons in the lab with Severus instead. Ginny had given her a funny look when Hermione had mentioned the change in her schedule during their weekly lunch date one afternoon, asking her what was going between her and Snape, not really accepting her friend's mumbled explanation either.

It was a few days later when Harry showed up to question her himself.

TBS

# Someday My Prince Will Come

Chapter 6 of 6

Hermione seeks an elusive cure for the lasting effects of a curse Bellatrix Lestrange managed to hit her with during the Battle of Hogwarts. Her life has been lost to endless bouts of pain and despair that have plagued her these last two years. But her luck may finally be changing. A reference to a Dark potion in an obscure book may hold the key to her cure. But where will she find a Potions master knowledgeable enough to brew it? Written for Warded\_Portal for the SSHG Winter 2007 exchange.

Prompt: AU, EWE: Hurt/comfort. Years after the final battle, Hermione struggles daily with the after effects of Bellatrix Lestrange's special brand of Crucio. St. Mungo's advises treating the symptoms, but Hermione wants to live her life. She goes to the oldest center of Wizarding population, Alexandria, Egypt, chasing a rumour: a Potions master with a dual expertise in Legilimency. For some reason, he doesn't want to help her. Without knowing his true identity, Hermione must persuade him she is worth his time. Romance, happy ending please. (Bonuses include: archaeology, magical artifacts, history, dusty libraries, and moments of crazy stupid in love).

Summary: Hermione seeks an elusive cure for the lasting effects of a curse Bellatrix Lestrange managed to hit her with during the Battle of Hogwarts. Her life has been lost to endless bouts of pain and despair that have plagued her these last two years. But her luck may finally be changing. A reference to a Dark potion in an obscure book may hold the key to her cure. But where will she find a Potions master knowledgeable enough to brew it? Written for Warded\_Portal for the SSHG Winter 2007 exchange.

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Disclaimer: Not mine. All characters and settings belong to JKR, et al. I promise to return them when I finish playing with them.

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## Chapter 6 Someday My Prince Will Come

Severus had gone to London on business, leaving her alone in the house. Hermione had taken the opportunity to curl up on the sofa and lose herself in a Muggle novel she'd found interspersed among the magical texts. Not expecting anyone, the sudden knock at the door startled her.

Toddy appeared, his hand posed to open the door. "Toddy will see to the visitor, Miss. Master Snape says you is to rest until he returns."

Hermione smiled at the little elf, chuckling quietly when she remembered how Severus had threatened to throw her out if she mentioned S.P.E.W. to him. The door opened to reveal a slightly disheveled Harry Potter standing on the doorstep.

"Harry, come in. Toddy, would you get us a cuppa and maybe a few chocolate biscuits if there are any left?" The elf disappeared into the kitchen only to reappear a few minutes later with an elaborate tea service.

Harry settled into the side chair by the fire, grinning boyishly at Hermione. "Sorry I haven't been by in the last few days, but you look great. How are you feeling?"

"I feel great. My magic is back to normal, and I'm sleeping through the night again."

"Great. So, how about we pack up your things and you come and stay with Ginny and me for a while. We both miss you and everyone's been asking after you. Where's Snape? He can give me a list of the potions you still need to take and we can get out of here."

"Thanks, but really, I'm in no hurry to leave."

"Hermione, you've been here almost six weeks. Don't you think that's long enough? Snape can't be pleased with having you here."

"I was unconscious for the first ten days, Harry."



"Still, this is... Snape we're talking about." Harry smiled sheepishly, hoping to defuse the thunderclouds he could see gathering in her eyes.

"You just can't let it go, can you? He saved my life. No, more than that, he saved my sanity."

"I know and I'm grateful for what he did for you. But don't you think that could be the reason you're not thinking too clearly. He hasn't... done anything to you, has he? I just... Hermione, be reasonable; he's Snape." He knew he was whinging. He couldn't help it. It was... Snape for God's sake. What was there to think about?

"I don't believe you." The young witch's glare cut daggers through him. "After saving my life, after everything he's done, how can you doubt him... still?"

"I know he was on our side. I was there. I saw him fighting. Without him I never would've been able to finish off Voldemort. I know that. I know he switched sides. You don't have to remind me again." Harry held his hand up to forestall her argument. He'd had years of Hermione telling him that he should respect Snape, years of listening to her try to change his mind about the wizard. "I know you respect him. But he started out as a Death Eater. Doesn't that tell you something about the man to begin with?"

"And no one ever changes, right?"

"That's not what I'm saying."

Hermione studied her friend; he shifted uncomfortably under her gaze. "What about Dumbledore?"

Harry swallowed thickly. "What about him?"

"Was he good, Harry? Did he follow whatever rules you have set down to be a hero? 'Cause I have to tell you, I have a hell of a lot more respect for Severus than I do for Dumbledore. Yes, I know he was a Death Eater. It wasn't the wisest thing to do. And believe me, no matter how many years he's spent trying to atone for that horror, I don't think he will ever be able to forgive himself, so I really don't think he needs you to be judge and jury for him.

"At what point in his life do think he was really given a fair shake? When your father hung him from the tree? When Sirius led him to the Shrieking Shack? How about when Malfoy turned him to the Dark? Or when the Headmaster took him in so he could have a spy in the enemy's camp and used him mercilessly for more than twenty years? He's been used and put upon by more people than either of us will ever know. And still, despite everything that's happened to him, he was willing to give his life because he believed it was the right thing to do. It takes courage to admit you've made a mistake, Harry, especially one of that magnitude. And while I always thought he was a brave man, I think it must have taken tremendous courage not only to admit he was wrong but also to switch sides, to spy on Voldemort, knowing he was signing his own death warrant and doing it anyway because he believed it was the right thing to do. Kowtowing to that monster, playing the part of the dutiful minion, walking the knife's edge for so many years, not expecting to see past the last battle, but risking his life anyway, day after day after day while everyone around him continued to doubt and malign him.

"You want to know what a hero looks like; you want to meet someone truly exceptional? Hang around. Severus will be back shortly." Hermione rose and walked to the stairs. "If you'll excuse me, I'm a bit tired. I think I'll lie down for a while. Tell Ginny I'll Floo her next week."

"Hermione..."

"Goodbye, Harry."

She held herself in check as she moved woodenly up the stairs and down the hall. Her emotions remained closed off until she heard the outside door close behind him.

She didn't want to leave. She was happy here, but the truth was she didn't really belong here. She and Severus had become... friends of a sort. And while she had come to value his friendship, she was starting to feel a growing attraction for the man. There had been times she'd caught him watching her, causing her to think that maybe he felt something for her, too, but was too afraid to broach the subject, fearful of upsetting the delicate balance they had established. Frustration and anger overwhelmed her, and she cried into her pillow until sleep claimed her.

It was where Severus found her when he returned an hour later.

"Hermione?" Severus sat on the side of the bed. Tenderly, he brushed aside the mass of hair that shadowed the witch's face. He could see she'd been crying. "Are you all right? What's the matter?"

"Harry was here." She turned to look up at him, her expression woeful. "He said he missed me and wanted me to stay with him and Ginny for a while."

"I see."

"Do you?"

It was too tempting. She was too tempting. His dreams had been peppered with erotic images of Hermione in various stages of undress for the last few weeks. He'd awoken more than once to find himself hard with need, and on more than one occasion, he'd brought himself to completion thinking of her.

He watched as she chewed on her bottom lip, imagining how she would taste. He was fairly certain she would welcome his attentions. But he'd lived long enough to know nothing would come of it. He was not the type of man women looked for in a partner, and he had no desire to set himself up for failure.

Hastily, he rose from the bed and moved across the room, distancing himself from Hermione. "And your answer was?" His voice was husky with emotion as he watched her move off the bed and walk towards him.

"Does it matter?"

All reason fled as she closed the distance between them. He pulled her to him, his mouth seeking hers, his kiss demanding. Her response was immediate, her body molding to his as fire spread through her veins. Abruptly, he pushed her away. "This is madness. You can't mean it. I assume this is the result of one too many potions in your blood." He rubbed an errant hand across his face. "I can't do this." He turned and escaped the room.

"Severus?" Her voice followed him down the hallway and into the lounge. He could hear the confusion in her tone. A moment later, she entered.

Severus cleared his throat. "Miss Granger..."

"We're back to that, are we?" Defensively, she crossed her arms in front of her.

"Yes, we're back to that. Perhaps Potter is right? Don't you think it's about time you left? You finished the last round of potions two days ago. Your magic has returned en force. Your memories, well, I can't imagine you'll really miss the memory of Bellatrix hexing you. Your friends miss you. So..." He left the question hanging in the air between them.

Hermione studied the dour man through lowered lashes. They seemed to be walking a fine line around each other the last few days. It seemed it all came down to now. "What about you? Will you miss me?"

Severus' face closed. He bowed grandly. "Of course, my dear. I shall miss your sparkling wit, our witty repartee. Your presence fills the house with such light. I shall know only darkness when you leave. Ah, but my heart shall wither and die without you near." His simpering words had the desired effect on the witch, anger flashing in her eyes.

"I sincerely doubt you have a heart. I'll be gone within the hour, *Mr* Snape." She turned and started back up the stairs, stopping suddenly halfway up to turn and look at him

again. "Why did you kiss me?"

She thought he wouldn't respond, silence her only answer.

"Because I could," he said quietly.

Sadly, she nodded. "I see."

He watched her climb the remaining stairs. It was better this way. She was young, headstrong; her life lay before her, the possibilities endless. He didn't want her to stay out of misplaced gratitude. Truth be told, he would miss her. Miss the sound of her voice. Her intelligence. The house *would be* cast back into shadow once she was gone, but he had no intention of telling the witch that. He disappeared into his lab, not willing to watch her leave. His wards alerted him to the event anyway.

He looked around the empty room, she was gone, and that was that.

But it really wasn't the end. Once you've seen something, you could never unsee it.

And he saw her everywhere.

Years before the house had fallen into a state of disrepair, a fact that had never bothered him until he found himself with a life he hadn't planned for after the final battle. He'd taken what savings he'd had, repaired and furnished the house to his liking, and gone about setting up The Prince's Moste Potente Potables. He took quiet refuge in his laboratory; his days were spent brewing rare and exotic potions that brought top dollar, earning him a comfortable living, and his nights were his to do as he pleased, either furthering his own research or simply enjoying a good book. It was a somewhat Spartan life, but it had suited him after so many years on the edge.

He could return to his solitary existence, but the next time he cut potion ingredients from the back garden, he would see her bending over a plant she didn't recognize. Hear the wonder in Hermione's voice as she asked endless questions about their uses and properties before laughingly apologizing for babbling on. The kitchen would echo with the sound of her voice as he recalled the meals they'd shared, her eyes sparkling with intelligence as they dissected the latest article the witch had cited. His lab had been the last bastion, and now he would have the memory of her sitting at the table preparing ingredients and bottling potions.

She was everywhere he turned, and he'd sent her away.

Sighing dramatically, he pulled a number twelve cauldron from below his workbench and set about preparing his ingredients. A glance at the desk in the corner showed a number of orders waiting to be filled. He'd spent too many hours caring for the witch. Time to get on with it.

He pushed all thoughts of Hermione out of his mind and lost himself in the process of brewing.

He'd lost track of the time, but it was dark outside the lab window when he looked up. He would have continued working until he dropped from sheer exhaustion, he supposed, if his wards hadn't alerted him to her presence.

He found her in the kitchen. Unbelievably, she was setting the table. Was that a Muggle pizza box open on the counter? Severus leaned against the doorframe and silently watched Hermione as she worked.

"I wasn't sure what type of pizza you'd like. Actually, I'm not sure if you even like pizza, but I did notice you like mushrooms, so the pizza is half mushroom and the other half today's special. I brought a nice burgundy with me that you can open, or is there something else you'd rather have?"

Severus didn't move. "What are you doing here?"

"You have to eat dinner. Come, have a seat." Nervously, she gestured to the chair next to her.

"Hermione..."

"I think we should talk, but it can wait until later."

"There is nothing to talk about." Nevertheless, he pushed off the doorframe and grabbed the bottle of wine. Lost in his stupor, he'd forgotten to stop for lunch. As the aroma of fresh garlic bread and pizza taunted his sensitive nose, his stomach chose to remind him his body needed sustenance.

Hermione breathed a sigh of relief as she cast a chilling charm on the two wineglasses she had set out. It was a bold move, showing up uninvited, or sheer stupidity, depending on how one looked at it. She couldn't be sure he still wouldn't hex her or throw her out or both, but at least he hadn't turned and walked away from her. That had to count for something.

"I still haven't finished Nester's article in this month's *Potion's Gazette*, but did you know he's speaking at a symposium in London next month? Maybe we can get tickets? It might be interesting to see if he's progressed with his theory." From somewhere she had produced a tossed green salad that she proceeded to serve to the two of them.

He sat back in his seat and watched the witch. "Why are you here?"

"What does it look like? We both have to eat." The smile disappeared from her face as she slumped dejectedly in her chair. "You're not going to make this easy for me, are you?"

"What is it you want?"

"I want to be here... with you." Her voice was barely audible in the quiet of the room.

"You have a home, friends, and a life. Go live it. I didn't save your life to have you bury yourself here with me."

"Then why did you save me? I know that kiss meant something to you; I could feel it. Don't I mean something to you?"

He could see the hope shining in her eyes. "What's on the other half of that pizza?" he asked, ignoring her question.

"A little bit of everything. Sausage, ham, green and red peppers..."

He listened with half an ear, marveling that the object of his earlier ruminations was sitting and having dinner with him by choice. He had done the right thing, his actions noble and selfless in their execution. Was he to blame if she couldn't take no for an answer?

They talked about Nester's theory, the symposium (yes, he did know about it; he'd turned down their invitation to lecture on Dark potions), and a host of other topics that crossed their minds, all the while ignoring the elephant in the room.

Dinner finished, the two cast a series of simple cleaning charms, leaving the kitchen spotless once more. Severus turned from the counter and regarded the witch standing in front of him.

"Are you going to send me away?"

"I should." Casually, he reached out to her, a half smile gracing his lips as she moved but a breath away from him. She was wearing a Muggle top, her arms bare, the slightest trace of lace above the line of buttons that ran down the front. Slowly, he stroked her arm, his fingers skimming lightly against the soft skin. He watched with barely

Looking into her eyes, he could see the want and desire she felt. His own desire spiraling out of control as his eyes glittered with barely contained lust. The hell with it! He no longer cared what her reasons were for being there. He'd tried to do the right thing, he'd really tried, but it seemed she wanted him just as much as he wanted her.

With the barest of touches, he brushed his lips across hers before claiming her mouth in a searing kiss. His tongue plundered her mouth; his hands roamed her body as he delighted in the feel of her pressed against him.

"Take me to bed, Severus. Make love to me."

"I do mean something to you."

A smile lit her face. "Yes, very happy." She rose up on her knees and quickly pulled off her blouse. The black lace bra she wore cut low across her full breasts. She released the front clasp, allowing her breasts to spill forth. The scrap of lace sailed through the air and joined her shirt on the floor at the foot of the bed.

"You talk too much, do you know that?"

[illegible]

"Severus?"

"Hmm?"

A quiet chortle escaped. "I appreciate the compliment, but really, even I need more than five minutes to recover. Sleep. We can have another go when we wake up." He tightened his grip on the witch, his hand coming to rest on her hip.

Hermione smiled. "That's not what I meant. I mean what do we do now or tomorrow?"

The dark man watched her through hooded eyes. His voice was quiet, but carried in the stillroom. "What do you want to happen?"

Chewing on her lip, she stalled for time, weighing her answers as to which one he might agree to. "I want to stay here. With you."

"So stay."

"That's it?"

"I'm sure we can come to some sort of an agreement."

"An agreement?" she asked, frowning.

"I would expect you to give up your room across the hall."

"And where would I sleep?" she grinned, playing along.

The look he gave her would have burned varnish off wood.

"So, I'd move in here? I suppose you would expect me to continue making love to you on a regular basis?"

"Perhaps we should draw up a contract so you'll know just what your duties are?"

Her expression turned serious. "Do you really want me here?"

Gryffindors! Or should he just curse women in general? Tenderly, he cupped the side of her face, looking deep into her eyes. He closed the distance between them, the last word spoken against her lips. "I never want you to leave," he whispered before deepening the kiss.

It seemed he didn't need as much time to recover as he thought he did.

~Fini~

Pearle 2007