

Steps

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After the war, life still isn't easy for Snape and Hermione.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Loosely based on the "Adopt a Wizard"-challenge at GrangerSnape100. Hugs and kudos to AnnieTalbot for beta'ing.

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"This is ludicrous, Granger!" Wheezing. "Completely insane."

"Professor, please, you need to calm down."

"Don't –" Cough. "Don't tell me what I –" Cough. "– need, girl."

Sad, hazel eyes dropped to slender hands, raw from being kneaded nervously.

"The... guardianship would place you in my care, sir. "

"I refuse to even consider –" More wheezing. "– this option."

Abruptly, the girl stood up, hugging herself as she faced the disgusting white wall of the hospital room.

Slowly, small shoulders heaved.

"You will not survive Azkaban, not even for one day."

"I know."

She spun around, her eyes blazing. "Don't you want to live?"

"No."

"This is your room," she told him, drawing back the curtains, "you will find everything there, Professor: a davenport, bookshelves, a desk. Kreacher even brought your personal things from Hogwarts yesterday."

Silently, he placed a supporting hand against the doorframe of her childhood home, his senses overwhelmed by the warm, bright atmosphere.

"Whose – whose room was this before?" he asked, struggling for breath.

Shadows crossed her face, darkening her usual spirited features

"My mother's. It was her study."

Eyes locked, meeting in silent understanding.

"Dinner will be ready at seven, Professor."

"Thank you, Miss Granger," he rasped and she smiled.

He woke to her desperate screams. Again.

Silently, he crossed the hallway and let himself into her bedroom.

She was still asleep, her lovely young features contorted with fear.

Foolish Gryffindor. He shook his head. Showing her friends a brave face, while every night the memories curled like cold claws around her heart.

Sitting down on the edge of her bed, as he had done so many times before, he gently smoothed the damp curls from her brow.

"Shh... all is well," he murmured, caressing her cheek, "You can sleep now, Hermione. You are safe with me."

And she slept.

She had been too quiet these days, her kisses too desperate tonight.

Gently, he pulled her close, his lips trailing along her bare shoulder.

"Something on your mind?"

"Hmhm."

"I see."

Time passed until she turned to him, burying her face in the hollow of his neck.

"You will be a free man from tomorrow on, you know."

"And?" Alarmed, he moved to face her.

She averted her eyes. "I – Well, you won't need me anymore, Severus."

Grasping her chin, he brought her mouth close to his, brushing her lips softly.

"Foolish woman," he murmured, "I shall always need you."