

The Snow Always Melts with the Coming of Spring

by ArtemisofEphesus

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: Thank you to my wonderful betas [la_dissonance](#), [Jane Average](#) and [lupinsmoon12391](#) for their work. I was looking for one dedicated beta, and I found three! I would also like to point out that in order for this fic to make proper sense, readers should ignore any canon relationships relating to Hermione after Prisoner of Azkaban.

It's her last year at Hogwarts. The Dark Lord has been defeated and her friends are, miraculously, still there for her, alive and well, in spite of every nightmare she ever had during the war. Her family hadn't been as lucky. Wars didn't happen without losses, and Hermione's parents were the victims. Their deaths hurt her badly. She had come back to school tired and worn out, grieving for them now because she hadn't had the luxury before. There are more important things than mourning when your survival hangs in delicate balance.

Wearing her Head Girl badge with pride, she walks into the school grounds, and a sense of homecoming washes over her. It's been a long time since she set foot here, and the familiarity is comforting. At the start of term feast, Dumbledore's announcement that the Defense Against the Dark Arts position has been filled with someone many of them will already know causes Hermione to rack her brain; she simply can't think of anyone qualified and well-known who survived the war.

When he walks through the door, Hermione's face lights up. Remus Lupin is back at Hogwarts.

She thinks it's extremely brave of him to return to Hogwarts. Even though the laws and the regulations about Werewolves have changed, the attitudes remain the same in some Wizarding circles. She's happy that he's back; she's always liked him as a teacher. Apart from her sixth year with Snape, his classes were the only Defense classes in which she actually learned something useful. Even though she doesn't know him very well not at all, really she feels excited to see him again in a context that isn't Order meetings and battles.

After a week of her tightly packed schedule, she realises that everything seems so mundane now, after the war. Classes are easy and not at all challenging, book learning with no thinking-outside-the-box required. She finds herself bored easily and gazes outside, remembering the battles of the last year. Her work is flawless, as usual, but she isn't enjoying herself as much anymore.

Except in Remus's classes. His topics are interesting and his teaching compelling and beautiful. He is fascinating to watch, the way that his hands move passionately and expressions flit across his face at a thousand miles an hour. His enthusiasm is contagious, and his dedication to giving them as much understanding as possible is unparalleled. He's confronting: tackling important and controversial issues in a way that really make her head spin, but in a good way. Sometimes he bounces and bounds around the room like a small child. In her third year he was laid back and relaxed; now he teaches as if it was the only thing left in the world, as if surviving the war convinced him to live life to the fullest.

Hermione spends long hours in his classroom talking to him about the lessons, the weather, the complexities of magic, everyday life. He listens to her attentively and seems genuinely interested in what she has to say. He tells her stories of his youth and his travels without the other Marauders that she would never have imagined. He's been to India and South America, working anywhere and everywhere: in the Royal Gardens, in a Muggle bookshop, teaching at the Wizarding school in Chennai for a few months. He is full of stories and wisdom that she never expected because she'd never really gotten to know him.

It doesn't take her long to develop a firm friendship. She refers to him as a friend, but only to herself because in the social rule book for adolescents, adults aren't seen as friends. Calling a teacher a friend is even worse. Personally, she doesn't think it makes a difference. Remus and Hermione understand each other, are interested in the same topics and share opinions on important issues. Hermione feels that she still knows so little about him and wants to know him completely. She finds herself thinking about him all the time; he is constantly at the forefront of her mind. When she is in Hogsmeade buying a new set of robes, she catches herself wondering what Remus would think of them. She frets and works herself into a panic every time she has to hand in homework essays because she wants them to be perfect for him. She wants to spend more time with him, and she scavenges every spare moment she has to talk to him and drink tea and laugh.

Praise from Remus in class is rare, but when it comes it is genuine, and his smile lights up his entire face, and Hermione feels her insides jiggle around and her heart lift. She walks on clouds for the rest of the day. It happens every time he smiles at her in that genuinely caring and happy way. She can't control the giddiness.

She doesn't even notice that Harry and Ron roll their eyes and don't really pay attention anymore when her sentences start with 'Remus...'

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During the Christmas holidays, she finds herself missing him. The castle is cold and lonely when she is by herself. Harry and Ron have gone to the Weasleys for Christmas, of course, and she was invited, but turned it down on the premise that she needed some time to think. Which she did indeed need badly, but she suspects that the real reason was that she could be alone with Remus. Much to her disappointment, she doesn't see him for two months. He's spending his holiday away from Hogwarts, living with friends in Spain. She misses him badly.

As the holidays draw to a close and the first day back looms imminent, she gets excited at the thought of seeing him again. When the day arrives, she scans the head table excitedly, her stomach twitching nervously. She doesn't want to think about why.

He isn't there. And he isn't there for the next day either. When Hermione asks Professor McGonagall if she knows when he is coming back, the professor tells her that Remus will be taking a few weeks off from teaching due to personal reasons, someone close to him passing away. Her heart falls and inside she cries for Remus. Now missing him is even worse because she worries about him being all right, worries that he won't be back. Strangely, she finds out what happened from Professor Snape one afternoon after Potions. He asks her to stay behind and quietly tells her what Remus wrote to him in his last letter: that he didn't want Hermione to worry and that she was old enough and he trusted her to know that his friend had hung himself. Hermione is shocked by the discovery as if it had been Harry or Ron who had died.

She writes to him once to express her sorrow about his loss, and he seems his usual self in his reply, warm and cheery. It doesn't fool her for a second. He tells her that he's okay, just having a break from school, and that he'll be back in a while. She secretly keeps his letter under her pillow, disguised with a concealing charm so no one could find it. Anything of his is precious to her.

It's during this time that she begins to think about the nature of their friendship. Was it normal to think and talk this much about someone who was your teacher? Lavender and Parvati certainly don't seem to think so, judging by the way they roll their eyes whenever Hermione mentions 'Professor Lupin' in a conversation. Why is it that every time he smiles at her she feels all bubbly and warm inside?

There are so many questions that Hermione doesn't know the answer to, for once in her life. She's confused and it makes her brain spin. She isn't used to being confused about life. She's always had such a capable and firm grasp on her life, but now she's floundering in deep water. Could it be that she has a crush on her Defense teacher? Could it be more than a crush? Could it be that she is in love? She has never been in love. She doesn't know how it feels to be in love; she has nothing to compare the feelings she is experiencing to. The volume of complicated thoughts running through her head at night keeps her from sleeping that night.

When he's finally back, he looks his usual cheerful self, though there are subtle marks of stress written on his face. Even though Hermione feels like she has interminable energy coursing through her, she doesn't go and see him straight away, but hides in the library. She can't think of a logical reason for this, or for the fact that her stomach twitches nervously every time she thinks she has the courage to go and see him. She doesn't understand it, really. Shouldn't she be happy about his return?

After classes have finished for the day, she finally plucks up the courage to see him. After knocking tentatively on the door to his office, she slips inside. He's already sitting at his desk, marking essays, but when he looks up to see who it is that knocked, he breaks out into a wide smile. He speaks before she has the chance to.

"Hermione. How wonderful to see you!"

She can tell he means it. There's that brilliant, genuine tone to his voice, and his smile is so vibrant. She feels as if there's a flower inside her that just spread out its petals and burst into full bloom: a warm, giddy happiness fills her.

"It's wonderful to see you too, Remus," she manages.

He starts talking to her about school, life, how she's been, everything, not stopping once. She just stands there gazing at him in happiness and admiration and pride and a million feelings that she can't even begin to describe. Somewhere in the middle of his talking, he breaks off and looks her straight in the eyes, somehow sensing that there's something on her mind.

"I'm all right, you know," he says simply, and she knows it's true. A weight falls off her heart, and she feels like she can breathe easier again.

* * *

Over the next few months, the intensity of Hermione's feelings about Remus fluctuates. There are days when she thinks that it was just a silly schoolgirl crush that she had. Then there are days where she wants to scream and shout and cry all at once. The little things he says and does make her want to dance on the cloud tops. She slowly admits to the fact that she has a *little* more than a crush on Remus. Everything just feels so wonderful and amazing and brilliant. Some days she's on top of the world.

On other days, she spends hours berating herself, frustrated, miserable and confused. He's her teacher, and he would be breaking every rule in the hypothetical book about student-teacher relationships. He couldn't possibly love her back; it's something she's known from the start. He's not even into women; *everyone* knows that. He's been open about the fact that he prefers men from the moment he started teaching all those years ago. What on earth did she think she was doing to herself, falling in love with her forty-year-old, gay, Defense teacher?

The answers were only too easy to find. He's clever and intelligent. There's something warm and caring about him. He always looks out for his students. He's approachable and he makes her laugh so easily. Their minds and their sense of humour are perfect for each other. And yes, she admits to herself, he is quite handsome. But that isn't all there is to him. She doesn't moon about wishing that he would ravish her on the spot because of his looks like some girls had been known to. In fact, she isn't sure if she's quite ready for the idea of anything sexual. But she really cares about him. She wants to comfort him and hold him and curl up to him during the full moon or whenever he is feeling down; she wants to spend forever with him, travelling, enjoying his humour and his conversation and never leaving his side.

In spite of everything, the thought of acting, of saying something, of admitting her feelings doesn't even occur to her as a choice. She knows that she can't, for her own

sanity. Sometimes scenarios of Remus finding out run through her mind, but she pushes them aside, berating herself for being paranoid. At the moment, all she can do is live with it. That's all there possibly is to do. Perhaps one day her feelings will wane.

And then, one day in late May, it happens. It's scrawled across the chalkboard in the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom, the handwriting unidentifiable. She is the first one to see it, hateful words permanently spelled in place. Hands close over her mouth in horror and tears prickle the corners of her eyes. She stands there, dumbstruck, until she runs out of the classroom, along the corridors, through the entrance hall and out into the grounds. She doesn't stop until she finds herself behind the greenhouses, where she drops down and cries.

When she has calmed down enough to regain control, she re-enters the castle, heading up to her room. Before she even sets foot in the hall, Professor McGonagall touches her lightly on the shoulder, and she finds herself being steered towards Professor Dumbledore's office. She hasn't got the energy to object. The reason is clear enough.

* * *

Dumbledore's office is filled with strange and rare objects that buzz and whirl on the slightest movement. She hasn't been up here often; it's always Harry that's called up to see the Headmaster, not her. She isn't special enough, or in trouble enough. Usually, Hermione would be entranced, fascinated, tinkering with various artifacts like a child in a toy shop. Today, the office feels cold and hostile. Wiping the remnants of tears from her eyes, which she hopes aren't too bloodshot, Hermione enters behind Professor McGonagall. She takes a deep breath and raises her eyes off the floor for a moment.

Dumbledore sits behind his desk and looks at her pensively. There is no twinkle in his eyes today and he seems older and wearier. Professor McGonagall sits in an armchair next to him, her usual severity present, though as Hermione meets her eyes, she detects a hint of sympathy and warmth. She is glad for that. Across the room next to the fire sits Snape, brooding and dark, not even looking up at her as she enters. She feels uncomfortable and exposed in his presence not because she shares Harry and Ron's blind hatred, but because he is a Legilimens, and a powerful one at that. She is infinitely glad that Remus isn't here, because if he were, she would die of mortification.

Dumbledore beckons for her to sit and she does so, folding her hands neatly in her lap to hide their shaking.

"I trust you know why you have been called here, Miss Granger?" Dumbledore's voice pierces the heavy air.

"I assume I do, Headmaster," Hermione answers quietly, not looking up.

"Miss Granger, what happened today was unacceptable for a student of Hogwarts. You can rest assured that the student or students responsible will be caught and dealt with appropriately." He pauses for a moment before continuing. "However, any relationship between a teacher and a student that is not that of a student and mentor is against Wizarding law and the Hogwarts code of conduct."

Hermione looked up. "Why are you telling me this? I know it all..." She trailed off, suddenly understanding. "You think that it's true? You think that I slept with him in order to get an Outstanding in Defense? How... how... How could you even think that? Of course it's not true!" She feels a hot lump form in her throat, and tears begin to form in her eyes, but more than that, she's angry. "How could you believe such an ugly rumour?" She fights to keep in control of her emotions.

McGonagall answers. "Miss Granger, we don't think that it's true, not in the least. You are far too intelligent and moral a witch to involve yourself in something like that." Her voice is soft and comforting. "But we need to be absolutely sure if we want to keep the Board of Directors off our backs." She glances over at Albus.

"Professor Snape, as you know, is an accomplished Legilimens. With your permission, he can determine whether you are telling the truth or not," Dumbledore continues gently. "However, if you don't agree, I'll feel forced to Owl the Auror Department and get permission to use Veritaserum. It's the only way I can stave off the Board." At Hermione's outraged look, he sighs. "You know who has influence on the Board, Miss Granger," he adds. "The war may be over, but some old enemies are not easily defeated. It is in your best interests to allow Professor Snape access to your mind. You have my word he will only look for what is pertinent to this discussion."

She knows that it is futile to refuse, but she feels mortified at the idea of having Snape inside her private thoughts. He would find out everything. But what could she do? She took a deep breath.

"I agree, Headmaster." She looks at Snape with a mix of fear and hesitation in her eyes as he stands and makes his way over to her chair. Conjuring a stool out of the air, he sits down directly in front of her, an ominous figure in his black robes. She bites her lip.

"Look into my eyes, Miss Granger," he commands. She can't help but think that his voice seems only half as menacing and spiteful as usual. She grips the seat of her chair with her fingers and looks up into his black eyes. She hears him hiss the spell that will allow him access to her thoughts.

He picks up on her fear and mortification immediately as she feels him enter her mind. His voice surprisingly gentle; she hears him speak in her mind *need you to relax, Miss Granger*. She tries to obey him, but she tenses up with every memory of Remus that surfaces. He flicks through them as if he is thumbing through a book, picking them up and discarding them one by one. She's mortified as he picks up on her feelings for her Professor, how she missed him and how happy she was when he returned from his holiday, how confused and miserable and brilliantly joyful he makes her feel. She cringes with every thought. *Please don't tell anyone, please don't tell anyone, please don't tell anyone* is the only thought that runs through her mind. She is surprised when she hears his voice in her mind again *won't*.

After what seems like an eternity, he withdraws from her head, and she reels with nausea for a moment. Having someone poke around in your thoughts is draining. She is exhausted.

Snape turns to the Headmaster. "She's telling the truth, Headmaster," is all he says. Hermione is eternally grateful for those simple words. At least now she will only have to avoid one professor.

Dumbledore nods. "Thank you, Severus. You may leave." Turning his eyes back on Hermione, he sighs again. "I'm sorry you had to endure that, Miss Granger. Please know how sorry I am that this has happened to you."

Hermione closes her eyes. "That's okay, Professor Dumbledore. I understand."

He smiles at her sadly. "Now, Professor McGonagall will escort you back to your room. I think you need some rest."

Hermione nods and rises to follow her Head of House out of the office.

* * *

Later that evening Hermione hears a knock on her door. She calls for them to enter, hiding her tear-soaked tissues under her pillow before her visitor pokes his head around the door. It's Harry. Wordlessly, he walks over to her and pulls her into a hug. She cries into his shoulder.

"I'm going to kill whoever wrote that, Hermione," Harry tells her. "That was the lowest of the low. I bet it was Malfoy, that swine." He hesitantly adds, "Remus asks if you'd come down to his office after dinner. If you feel okay, that is."

Hermione puts on a brave face and wipes away her tears. "I think I'll be okay, Harry." She gives him a small smile. "Thanks."

* * *

When she knocks on Remus's door later that evening, he's standing at the window looking out into the darkness. She takes a deep breath to calm her nerves.

"You wanted to see me, Professor Lupin?" She thinks it is better to use his title in the current circumstances.

He looks over at her and smiles sadly. He seems more haggard than ever at the moment, with deep lines etched into his face. Hermione's heart aches for him as well as for herself. "Hermione. Thank you for coming. I... I didn't think you would, given the, well, situation."

She feels herself tense slightly. Remus walks over to her and sits on the edge of his desk opposite her, his hand briefly resting on her shoulder comfortingly. "I'm so sorry about what happened, Hermione. I had no idea there were students in this school as spiteful as this. If it's any consolation, know that when I find out who wrote it, I'll make sure they get suspended from Hogwarts at least." He tries to smile at her more brightly, but she can see that he's also had a rough time dealing with the hate of someone else.

"It's okay, Professor. It's not your fault," she says quietly.

Remus admires her for her ability to remain calm. She's strong. She'll survive. He continues. "Hermione... Please know that I would like to continue being your friend. I value your company in the evenings and our discussions together. You're such a bright, intelligent and mature witch that I'd hate for something as nasty and spiteful as this to get in the way of a friendship." His eyes meet hers with a hopeful expression. "What do you think?"

Hermione smiles at him, feeling a little more cheerful for the first time that day. "Whoever said anything about not being friends, Remus?" she asks. "Of course we are."

* * *

Does he know of her feelings for him? Has he figured it out? Hermione knows the answers to neither of those questions. She only knows that life has to go on, and that she had to make the best of it, to go with it. She still loves him, more than anything. But perhaps, like the snow always melts with the coming of spring, her feelings would slowly diminish and she would move on.

Whatever did happen, friendship would always be there.