

Coveted Persecution

by *Battle of Lissa*

EPILOGUE ADDED "A bitter Snape, irreparably damaged by his encounter with Nagini but still very much alive, sets in motion a plan to unbalance the lives of those who left him for dead."

DH compliant but very EWE. Darkfic.

One

Chapter 1 of 6

EPILOGUE ADDED "A bitter Snape, irreparably damaged by his encounter with Nagini but still very much alive, sets in motion a plan to unbalance the lives of those who left him for dead."

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Author's Notes: I send all of my gratitude to my talented and dedicated beta, **melusin**. I must warn that this will be a darkfic, containing violence and dubcon.

Hermione shot up in bed, grateful she had not been verbally mimicking the screaming of her dream.

Nightmare... memory.

She kicked away the covers, knowing a shower was sorely needed to wash away the stench of night sweats. These disturbances were one of the many reasons Ron hardly spent the night anymore.

Rising out of bed, Hermione pulled her bedroom curtain open with thoughtful precision. Some days, she would continue wallowing in her mussed sheets, weighing the consequences versus the benefits of not getting up.

Guilt was always the deciding factor. What on earth did she have to be sulky about? Her life was certainly satisfactory by most modest standards.

She had a fulfilling and high-ranking position at the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures. Her status and pay provided adequate means to maintain her comfy flat in a desirable neighborhood just outside Diagon Alley.

And she was weeks away from having a perfect wedding. 'The Wedding', as the tabloids favored dubbing it. Not since the famous 'Potter Wedding' had the wizarding world taken such an interest in celebrity nuptials.

"Celebrity." Hermione snorted in disgust.

Unlocking the patio door, Hermione welcomed the brisk September morning but quickly frowned at the state of her potted plants. The wizarding epidemic of negligence seemed unavoidable, even in her own home.

The wedding...

Hermione's stomach twisted just thinking about it.

She loved Ron; there was no doubt about that. So why shouldn't they get married?

It's just cold feet, Hermione convinced herself. She had spoken to Ginny about this...who had a full five years of marriage behind her...and the younger girl's arguments had made sense.

We've waited too long.

Hermione and Ron weren't madly in love anymore. Naturally, their relationship had cooled, and Hermione had no reservations about that. Therefore, she shouldn't have unrealistic expectations of how amazing and exciting their wedding *should* be if such sensations weren't even present in the relationship itself. But as logical as it all sounded, this rationalization hadn't calmed her nerves until she had heard it spoken aloud from another's mouth.

"Take the wedding out of the picture, Hermione. Would you still be with Ron tomorrow? Next week? Next year? If you can imagine yourself with him forever, why shouldn't you two be married?"

Hermione had to admit it made sense, but she knew Ginny's opinion was entirely subjective. Ginny and Harry had married barely a month after the redhead had sat her N.E.W.T.s. They believed themselves to be amazingly in love, which apparently was the only ingredient necessary to know destiny demanded they spend the rest of their lives together in marital bliss...so why wait?

Hermione smiled to herself with a slight shake of her head. Everything had been so exciting back then. Some days, the six years that had passed since Harry had defeated Voldemort felt like an entirely different life. Some days it felt like the blink of an eye.

Hermione was merely experiencing withdrawals, plain and simple. Unlike the rest of her friends, Hermione had been having trouble adapting to a life where she didn't have to constantly glance over her shoulder for fear of being attacked or followed.

For seven years straight, Hermione had tolerated the complications of war and prejudice. Like clockwork, each new school year had forced one turmoil on top of another, cumulating in some fierce battle or another until finally climaxing with the inevitable 'Final Battle'.

And then, one day the fighting had stopped. The life she had grown accustomed to, sometimes even enjoyed, was suddenly over.

No one even talked about it anymore.

Especially that last day. Even thinking about it left Hermione feeling uneasy and guilty, but she couldn't fully understand why.

A day never went by where Hermione didn't fidget restlessly over the choice of simply living and enjoying her satisfying life or abandoning everything in a search for answers. She comprehended this was her... problem, but Hermione wasn't used to keeping things in like this. Her chest ached almost daily, filled with remorse over the numerous instances where she had tried to coax Ron into a conversation about the last day...the day Harry had defeated Voldemort. She understood why he never wanted to talk about it, let alone analyze every little detail. The loss of Fred was still fresh for her as well.

She and Ron had left Hogwarts and had never gone back. The last memories she had of her school were smoke, debris, fires... and bodies.

All this had been the topic of the conversation with Ron last night. As per usual, nothing was resolved, and it unsettled her.

Hermione and Ron had been sitting outside on the patio, sharing a wool blanket her mum had knitted for her. She sipped at her tea slowly, gazing lazily at the clouded night sky.

"Where do you think our professors were buried?" she asked softly.

Ron stiffened next to her. Hermione allowed him to continue ignoring her question before she inclined her head.

"Ron..."

"We were having a good night, weren't we?" His voice was a little strained...and a little hurt.

"I just have questions, that's all. I'm not living in the past." Hermione said this last part with the conviction that she had recently been accused otherwise.

Ron tried to laugh away the tense atmosphere. "You always have questions."

"I just can't help but wonder. We never went back..."

"We shouldn't even be looking back. I just want us to be happy, Hermione. Can't you be happy with me?"

"Of course."

"Then please understand that I need to... forget."

"I know. But you need to understand that I can't do that." Negligence...everyday she was suffocating in willful negligence.

"Everyone else has."

"And it feels wrong, Ron."

She was losing him. Ron's face had relaxed. He had already entered that place in his mind that so many wizards and witches welcomed when memories and conversations touched upon the past. Some things were difficult for her to talk about as well, but unlike all of Hermione's friends and coworkers, at least she made an effort. She couldn't understand that spot in the back of their minds that said, 'What's the point? We won. It's over.'

"I'm going back."

"No!"

Hermione patted his knee, a tight smile on her face. "I'm not asking you to come with me. Besides, I can do this on my own."

He opened his mouth and shut it quickly. Ron sensed Hermione shake her head in disappointment before he asked carefully, "What are you looking for?"

"I have no idea. I have so many questions, it doesn't even begin to make sense in my mind. Like Snape..."

"What?"

"... What?"

"Why do you always randomly bringhim up?"

Hermione inhaled. "I don't... know."

"He was probably buried in Hagrid's pumpkin patch."

"Don't be disgusting."

To his credit, Ron genuinely looked alarmed at the idea that he had said something offensive. "I'm not trying to be cruel, Hermione. What I mean is, who else would have made the effort? Snape had no family... well, not that we knew of."

Yes, who indeed?

It was the little things that unsettled Hermione day to day. Odd, random sounds, smells, or items that would remind her of the war. In a way, she could understand the minds of her friends. She had no doubt that they were also taken aback by the little things, but unlike Hermione, they had put all of their efforts into blocking it out.

Yes, she understood the sentiment very well.

Hermione hated to be reminded of school. She used to love Hogwarts, which made her regret twice as bitter. Hermione had never been able to enjoy her seventh year. She didn't even get the opportunity to sit her N.E.W.Ts. She *possessed* them but hadn't taken pleasure in the simplicity of studying and the anticipation of waiting for her results.

That had been her reward for assisting Harry in fighting the vilest wizard who had ever lived...honorary N.E.W.Ts in every subject she had received an O.W.L.

How little they knew her.

Sighing, Hermione decided to relax her obsessive thoughts and do something with her pathetic plants. Picking up her watering-can, Hermione was about to go into the kitchen to fill it when she noticed her blanket was still on the chair. Frowning, Hermione chastised herself for not putting it back into her chest last night right after Ron had left.

Smoothing her palm affectionately over the warm material, she lifted the folded thickness, hugging it to her chest.

Her heart stopped. She clutched the blanket even tighter, too stunned to move.

Panting, the evidence of fear in her breathing felt so foreign that it escalated her speeding heart rate. The seconds dragged on, and Hermione still couldn't break her unblinking stare at the foreign object sitting on her chair.

Comprehending that there was no explanation for the presence of this item, Hermione nervously glanced around her patio and into her empty flat with the tentative movements of someone who believed they were being watched.

She reached out to touch it but cursed at the idiocy of such an action.

It was only a book.

It couldn't hurt her.

Or could it?

Making up her mind, Hermione went inside, locking her patio door against the threat on the other side of the thick glass. She quickly showered and changed, her decision already made on what her next move should be.

She was going back to her old school for a much needed conversation with the Headmistress.

Hermione had thought about taking the text with her, but until she was able to thoroughly check it for hexes, she refused to touch it. She hadn't wanted to just leave it either, but she hoped a few wards on her patio door would be adequate protection.

Someone had been in her home; there was no doubt about that.*That* book hadn't been there when she and Ron were lounging about last night, and she'd been alone in the flat since then.

At least, she hoped she had been alone... unless someone had deposited the book while she had been sleeping.

The back of her throat went dry at the thought. Spinning on the spot, Hermione Apparated to the gates outside Hogwarts castle.

Midway through her turn, Hermione resisted the urge to send one more quelling glance in the direction of the seventh-year Potions text that she had never needed and therefore had never purchased. Of all things, a *Hogwarts* text to remind Hermione of her least favorite subject with the word 'FRAUD' scorched into the cover.

Author's Notes: Written for the 2008 Winter SS/HG Exchange on LJ. Not only was this story enjoyable to write but it was also an added bonus that my recipient, **pennswoods**, had created some of my favorite HP fan art. Check out her stuff over on LJ!

Original Prompt: 5-10 years after the last battle, a bitter Snape, irreparably damaged by his encounter with Nagini but still very much alive, sets in motion a plan to unbalance the lives of those who left him for dead. His first target is Hermione, who is still haunted by the unfortunate life and violent death of her former teacher.

Two

EPILOGUE ADDED "A bitter Snape, irreparably damaged by his encounter with Nagini but still very much alive, sets in motion a plan to unbalance the lives of those who left him for dead."

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The moment a twinge of trepidation spread in Hermione's gut at the sight of the castle, she raised her head, willing it away. She chastised herself for Apparating to Hogwarts without calming her mind or emotions. It had been only by chance that she had arrived in one piece.

This place made Hermione anxious, now. She hated that she couldn't fully understand why.

The walk across Hogwarts' lawn hadn't been as difficult as she had expected it to be... but the castle...

Seven flights of stairs was a long walk. Long enough for Hermione to compose herself. There was no possibility that she was going to succumb to full-blown panic before reaching the Headmaster's...Head *mistress'* office.

She wiped her sweating palms against her thighs, cursing herself as she rose with the winding stairs. All of these reactions she had been experiencing reinforced her belief that she should have confronted her past long before today. Once she reached the top, Hermione knocked on the door without hesitation.

"Enter," Minerva McGonagall called from the other side.

Carelessly throwing open the door, all color drained from Hermione's face, unprepared for the sight of Albus Dumbledore smiling down at her.

"Is everything all right, Hermione? I received your message just this very moment. I haven't seen your Patronus in so long that it..."

Of course his portrait would be on the wall. Hermione had always known that, but with the anxiety she had felt about returning to Hogwarts, Hermione hadn't prepared herself for the sight.

"I don't know. Nothing life-threatening...I hope... I mean, good day. How are you? Excuse me..."

Hermione couldn't greet Minerva sincerely because she couldn't take her eyes off the portraits. Spinning on the spot, Hermione eyed every photo with a growing sense of dread.

"Hermione?"

It was all finally starting to come together.

Hermione muttered a few intelligible words, sinking into one of the chairs with a hand clutched at her chest.

"I didn't catch that, dear?"

"Where is Professor Snape?"

The question visibly staggered Minerva, who whipped around to follow Hermione's glare at the wall.

"You're scaring me..."

"He was headmaster," Hermione croaked, at last meeting Minerva's eye. "Maybe not a very good one, but it was official. He should have a portrait."

"I don't know what to tell you, Hermione. You look ill." It was clear the Headmistress wasn't too concerned about this revelation. She rummaged in her drawer for a second before walking around her desk to sit by Hermione and force a chocolate bar into her hand.

Hermione absent-mindedly peeled away the foil wrapping. "What happened to him?"

"Did something occur before you came here? You must be working too hard again... Why are you looking at me like that? You know the answer to your own question, dear. You told me the story yourself. You know what happened to Snape. You saw him die."

"What happened to his body?"

Concerned, Minerva continued to inspect Hermione's stricken expression before her own mind finally processed the young woman's question. Minerva paled, sending a searching glance to Dumbledore's portrait...a portrait that was suddenly empty.

When Hermione couldn't take the silence any longer, she blurted out, "You don't know?"

Minerva swallowed uncomfortably before rising out of her seat.

"How can you not know!" Hermione accused the older woman once her back had turned. "Why didn't you go back?"

Minerva was appalled at her tone. She slammed her hand on the desk and snapped, "I wasn't the one who watched him die! Why didn't you?"

... Why didn't she?

Hermione's psyche had already collected the various excuses the second she had noticed Snape didn't have a headmaster's portrait. Excuses and justifications for her actions...or *lack* of actions to be more exact.

So many had died in such a short space of time... Fred... Tonks and Remus, she told herself.

Her stomach rolled as she quickly remembered things she hadn't acknowledged for the last six years.

An endless sea of black-cloaked mourners and the sickening scent of decaying flowers. While the rest of the wizarding world had been more than eager to enter the carefree existence of post-war opulence, Hermione and her friends had spent their time preparing funerals from the very day of Voldemort's demise.

That was a justified reason to forget about Snape... right?

And then there had been that horrid custody trial over Teddy. Anyone with a fraction of blood belonging to either Remus' or Tonk's bloodlines fought for the chance to legally own the child who was to be the famous Harry Potter's godson.

But that's all it was. Excuses. Repulsive excuses.

"I think I should go..."

"Wait, Hermione. Let's talk about this."

"Later. I'll Floo. I really need some air."

Hermione left the castle feeling worse than when she had entered. Coming back to this part of her past was a day in the park compared to where she was going next.

Lifting her face in the air, Hermione concentrated on the reviving breeze as she willed her nausea to run its course.

What did this mean? Was Snape still alive? Or had his death been so horrid that his soul was too cursed to warrant a Hogwarts portrait?

Maybe without a proper burial, his soul had never rested. Such tales might have been considered myths in the Muggle world, but Hermione knew it to be a wizarding fact.

Hermione dreaded the idea of finding out, but she needed to. The need for answers to these questions pulled her; somehow, she knew she would find them at the Shrieking Shack.

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The old tales of ghosts and ghouls may have kept the Muggles away from the Shrieking Shack, but it had effectively scared witches and wizards as well.

As long as Hermione had lived with such creatures within the walls of Hogwarts, she still couldn't prevent the hair on the back of her neck from rising at the idea of being alone with one.

Slowly walking through the deteriorating building, Hermione wished her agitated thoughts would silence for a moment.

What if Snape was a ghost?

It was a solid possibility. Not one single portrait in the Headmistress' office also existed as a ghost.

If Snape was a ghost, was she prepared to confront it?

Hermione clenched her eyes, bracing her back against the decaying-papered wall. The room where she had watched Nagini attack Snape was only two doors down. Was she prepared to see this?

I had forgotten him.

A heart-wrenching sob began to strain the breathing in her chest. Even after learning about everything he had sacrificed thanks to the memories he had given Harry... she... they all had forgotten him. Could she face an accusatory ghost?

Worst of all, could she stand to see the wretched remains of his body?

"I'm so sorry... Forgive me," Hermione whispered to herself. She didn't fully believe that he could hear her from... wherever he was now. But simply feeling it wasn't enough; it had to be said.

Pushing herself away from the wall, Hermione paused right before the door. Her arm hesitated in the air. There was something wet smeared across the door frame and handle.

Blood.

Wrapping her robes around her fist, Hermione carefully turned the slick doorknob.

A wet, foul carcass fell from above the door. It swung violently from a rope tied around its neck. She screamed, unable to keep the gutted cat from hitting her in the face.

Hermione threw herself further into the room to put distance between herself and the stench. Her hands patted everywhere, wiping hysterically at the wetness on her neck and chest...until she finally remembered where she was.

A relieved exhale burst out of her chest when she noticed the absence of a ghost or any evidence of a skeleton on the floor.

It appeared totally abandoned, even more so for a dilapidated structure. No one had entered this room in years. The realization of that weighed on her heart. She hadn't wanted to see such things, but at least it would have given her the answers she yearned for.

That was when she noticed *two* trails of blood on the floor. One that led to her, and one... Hermione followed the sporadic drops until it ended a few steps from where she was standing against the wall.

A strong wind gusted through the exposed rafters, sending an unspeakably familiar piece of black cloth fluttering over her shoulder.

"No..." she cried.

Hermione carefully turned around... She had forgotten how to breathe.

An old cloak had been spread out and pinned to the wall. It was black... and the neck-line was ripped savagely. It was smeared with old stains and fresh blood.

Hermione had never been a weak witch, but the stress of the day had been too much, even for her. Before her knees buckled and everything went black, she wished she hadn't seen the words smeared with blood that read, "WELCOME BACK!"

Author's Notes: Poor Hermione... Much more to come.

Three - Interlude

Chapter 3 of 6

EPILOGUE ADDED "A bitter Snape, irreparably damaged by his encounter with Nagini but still very much alive, sets in motion a plan to unbalance the lives of those who left him for dead."

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Author's Notes: I thought it important to note that unlike my other monster of a fic that I am updating here **this one is not a WIP**. It's a short tale completed at just under 15,000 words.

Two Weeks Previously:

"Still kicking, then?" Lucius called in an upbeat cheer. The pleasure in his voice surprised even him.

He had entered the dingy pub in Knockturn Alley for a much needed drink before heading back to his job at the Ministry. His name might have been cleared after the war, but his previous status would never be reinstated. So, sometimes he needed a little...incentive...during his lunch break to calm his nerves enough to tolerate the actual workload he had never experienced before.

It hadn't taken him very long to recognize the body of his long lost... friend... hidden underneath an ominous black cloak. He couldn't believe his eyes when he had first run into Snape a few days ago. His pleasure at the chance encounter had been genuine, even if it was one-sided.

Not expecting an invitation, Lucius settled himself in the unoccupied seat across from Severus Snape.

"For the last bloody time, Lucius, I am NOT suicidal," Snape snarled, eyeing his uninvited company with disdain.

Lucius calmly took a sip of his wine before drawing, "Your mouth may be saying one thing... but you still haven't joined the land of the living."

"I haven't been invited."

Lucius flipped his hand with an air of exasperation. "For fucks sake, not this again. If you didn't want everyone to assume you were dead, then you shouldn't have disappeared for so long."

"Don't presume to think I pity myself, Lucius. I actually prefer things this way." Snape slowly lowered his hood over his brow before glancing around the bar suspiciously. Foolish wizards and witches were so willfully blind to everything around them that Snape's 'Do Not Notice' glamour was practically unnecessary. "My account at Gringotts has been endowed with a very satisfying legacy for my troubles, and I *do* enjoy living in complete obscurity. Things could be much worse. My face could be on the cover of that rag, for instance."

Lucius glanced down at the rolled up trashy magazine sticking out of his cloak pocket. "Nope, not yours. Just the usual nonsense." Snatching it from his robes, Lucius threw the magazine onto the table with a turn of his wrist. It spun in a swirl of color before pausing directly under Severus' nose.

Snape's facial muscles tensed at the familiar figures looking up at him in the photograph.

"*War Heroes to Wed!*" the caption read.

Snape had only been back in London for a few weeks but wasn't wholly prepared as he had hoped to have been in seeing their faces. Snape knew in time, it would be inevitable. But he had expected a more...personal...confrontation. The last time he had laid eyes on those two, he had been lying flat on his back, the severed artery in his neck squirting blood with the rhythm of his failing heartbeat. Their faces had been appropriately masked in the horror demanded for such a sight.

Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley, the latter pressing his lips to her cheek as she faced the camera with a very convincing expression of surprise.

The wizarding world had indeed changed so much...so quickly, and Snape wanted to believe he had been prepared for it.

"Don't look so surprised," Lucius sumptuously droned.

"She has always been an irritating little swot," Snape agreed dismissively, "*but* she's a blubbering idiot."

"He's a pureblood. I would say she couldn't do any..."

"Oh, let go of that shit, Lucius. No one cares anymore."

Lucius appeared unsettled for a moment at Snape's words. He glanced around the bar thoughtfully, spotting a few individuals who would never have entered such an establishment in his day. He wouldn't have been surprised if the two Gryffindors in question had popped in for a drink, either. "Indeed."

Snape slowly closed his eyes, leaning further back into the booth. He seemed to concentrate very hard on his breathing before he made an effort to speak. "This has all been very enjoyable, but I've had my fill. Go away."

Lucius chuckled darkly. "Whenever you finally decide on 'coming out,' do let me know. I would be very disappointed if I missed it and was forced to read about the revelation in here." Extending an elegant finger, he rhythmically tapped the magazine on the table.

Snape's lip curled. It wasn't difficult for him to refrain from wishing Lucius good day.

He hadn't been surprised that Lucius was able to recognize him again. Only those who wanted to see him, it seemed, could. Snape hadn't changed his appearance at all. He might be a bit skinnier, and decidedly more sallow, but he only wore that one glamour. It was easier for him to go unnoticed in the wizarding world if everyone had already made up their minds against acknowledging his existence.

Denial was more potent than any glamour.

Little did Snape know that he had done himself a disservice by vanishing to North America for so long. If he had remained in society, he could have adjusted with the changes. He knew he would never have accepted the ridiculousness of this forcefully blind Utopia, but at least it wouldn't have been such a shock.

Except for the word 'war' in the caption of the magazine, one would have thought it had never happened.

Snape wasn't so morbid as to believe that all who had experienced the war should be perpetually depressed. Nor did he think life should exist without the enjoyments of simplicities such as marriage...

... but them.

They didn't deserve it.

There were many reasons why Snape had stayed away these past six years.

One of which was the necessity to recuperate from his physical injuries. His nerves had been permanently damaged from the poisoning of Nagini's venom. His body had been so loaded up on various potions that last week at Hogwarts that now he understood why the venom had failed to absorb properly in his bloodstream. Snape's body had certainly improved compared with when his wounds were still fresh, but some damage appeared to be permanent.

Whenever Snape allowed his emotions to get the best of him, his muscles tended to lock up. There had even been a few instances of seizures, but Snape felt confident that the range of potions he was ingesting daily would adequately control them.

'Come Out,' my arse, Snape thought darkly. Lucius would certainly enjoy that.

Snape *had* returned with the intention of finally making his presence known, but he'd been researching the state of the wizarding world for the past couple of weeks continuously hidden behind his glamour.

What he had learned was that some assumed he was dead while many didn't think of him at all. Surprisingly, he preferred it this way. Snape truly wanted to be left alone.

At the very least, Snape was... satisfied... that Potter had cleared his name soon after the boy had both feet in a high position at the Ministry. The number of black-listed Death Eaters was staggering. The trials had taken place the same week as Voldemort's fall with all potential threats swept neatly under the rug. Azkaban's rug, to be more exact.

Out of sight, out of mind...in its very lowest form.

Snape had also learned that some people couldn't say his name. In those rare, hushed conversations, he was only referred to as 'Dumbledore's killer.'

That discovery hadn't been surprising, at all. To be frank, Snape couldn't blame them.

But them. Even the act of clearing his name wasn't enough to remove Potter from his list of enemies.

They were some of the handful he despised with fervor...Minerva and her golden Gryffindors.

Snape's bitterness hadn't been fueled by the knowledge that the wizarding world still loathed him. He had never dreamed of surviving the war, never mind becoming a hero. And he certainly didn't expect the four of them to spend their lives recounting his many sacrifices to all who would listen. Snape really couldn't care less if the four of them liked him or not. He would have enjoyed mocking them if they'd claimed affection.

Yet, there was one thing, one measly little thing, he had expected of Minerva, Potter, Weasley, and Granger.

One final act that had been his only expectation for as long as he had been a professor at Hogwarts, and which certainly was his due after the war.

Respect. More importantly, respect in death.

When Snape had given his memories to Potter with what should have been his last, dying breath, he had expected them to bestow the final honor that was his due for the twenty long years of service to Dumbledore and to the Order.

And not in the way Potter had attempted at the Ministry.

Snape had never anticipated that he would survive the war. That potentially fatal bite in the neck wasn't terribly surprising the moment Snape realized he was alone with Voldemort in the Shrieking Shack. He had even unquestionably prayed for his end to arrive swiftly.

Snape had lain on that disgusting floor for hours, immobile, bleeding in his own piss... but he hadn't died.

The only explanation Snape could come up with was an odd reaction between Nagini's venom and the multitude of potions he took daily to keep his mind sharp and awake.

His bleeding had eventually stopped; his heart rate had steadied... but the pain. The pain kept Snape from feeling any measure of gratitude for his life. He had ultimately lost consciousness from the extent of it.

To his own disbelief, Snape had awoken hours later to the sounds of birds chirping.

As his strength slowly built to the point where he had been able to roll off his back, his resentment against the four of them had solidified.

They knew. Potter, Weasley, Granger... and probably Minerva. They all knew where he was and had never come back. He would never have survived if it hadn't rained on the second day when much needed water had dripped through the dilapidated Shrieking Shack.

Snape wasn't resentful that they hadn't attempted to save him. They probably and rightfully assumed he was dead. But the one thing they could have done, the only 'reward' he had ever wanted, was to be honored in death.

They should have come back to claim his body.

It would have been swollen with three full days of rot.

So Snape left, without any intentions of returning. Snape hadn't been tempted to come back until rumors of Potter's success in rebuilding the economy and society had reached his unwilling ears in Alaska.

Such hatred as he hadn't felt in a very long time flared anew at the sight of their picture on the cover of this magazine.

Thank you, Lucius.

Snape curled the paper into a wad, tucking it into his cloak pocket. He fled from Knockturn Alley only to walk the short distance to the flat he knew was located nearby.

Ten years ago, reporters would have been very careful about leaking personal information like the address of Hermione Granger for fear of madmen abusing such knowledge.

Snape smirked evilly, wrapping his robes tighter around his shoulders. He appeared to be the only madman loose at the moment.

Snape proceeded to spend the next two weeks standing vigil outside Hermione's building.

He watched her, memorizing her daily routine. More importantly, he listened. He listened to Hermione's fears and worries, and he heard much more than her fiancé was willing to absorb.

Whenever he spied Weasley coming and going, Snape was sorely tempted to confront the gangly young man in a dark alley. He wouldn't physically harm the little bugger, but how Snape yearned to see the arrogant git scared out of his senses once he was finally confronted with a sight from the past.

That had been when Snape had made up his mind to actually *do something* instead of just watching.

Perhaps others deserved contentment after the war but not them.

It was all so disgustingly normal with Snape himself having helped make it all possible. And none of them gave two seconds out of their day to remember it.

Snape had given up a life of normalcy since Potter had been one-year-old. He had wasted his existence protecting him and his friends with nothing to show for it.

If they wanted to remember Snape as the bastard of Hogwarts, he would really show them just how much of a bastard he could be.

Every night, Snape had waited until it was dark before flying silently to her window... and watching. The size of her flat, the quality of her furniture, even the way she sighed when she combed her hair, it all grated on Snape's nerves, serving as crucial fuel to his escalating rage.

He hated everything they had now and yet couldn't stop watching.

Snape especially couldn't stop watching her.

Vengeance burned a hole in chest so hot, he thrilled at the prospect of finally achieving his chance to settle scores.

Starting with Hermione.

Author's Notes: Story bet'ed by the brilliant **melusin**.

Four

Chapter 4 of 6

EPILOGUE ADDED "A bitter Snape, irreparably damaged by his encounter with Nagini but still very much alive, sets in motion a plan to unbalance the lives of those who left him for dead."

DH compliant but very EWE. Darkfic.

Disclaimer: Anything you recognize belongs to JKR. I do not profit from writing this story.

Author's Notes: Story beta'ed by the brilliant **melusin**.

A strong wind gusted through the exposed rafters, sending an unspeakably familiar piece of black cloth fluttering over her shoulder.

"No..." she cried.

Hermione carefully turned around... She had forgotten how to breathe.

An old cloak had been spread out and pinned to the wall. It was black... and the neck-line was ripped savagely. It was smeared with old stains and fresh blood.

Hermione had never been a weak witch, but the stress of the day had been too much, even for her. Before her knees buckled and everything went black, she wished she hadn't seen the words smeared with blood that read, "WELCOME BACK!"

*** **

Severus had been waiting in the shadows of the school hospital wing for hours.

He had expected Hermione to have woken up by now, regardless of the strong dose of Dreamless Sleep that had been forced down the young woman's throat.

Despite how much time had passed, he would gladly wait a few hours longer just to observe any additional dismayed reactions she could gift him with.

Reactions like the beautiful pitch her screams had reached when she had found his gift at the Shrieking Shack.

Snape hadn't been surprised when Hermione had decided to return to Hogwarts the moment she'd discovered the book he had left on her patio chair. Given everything he had heard her say to Weasley the night before, her desire to seek answers at her old school was predictable.

After all these years, Snape finally had a justification for saving his old 'death' robes. He knew he would find a use for them one day.

Severus scowled, suddenly remembering her pathetic apology before she had entered the room.

You haven't even begun to feel sorry yet...

A long, rasping groan issued from the bed in question.

Snape stilled his breathing, pressing his face against the warded curtain he had been hiding behind. Leaning back, he allowed one eye to peak around the charmed cloth.

"She's waking..." Madam Pomfrey breathed loudly to herself.

The nurse fled from the hospital wing only to return minutes later with McGonagall on her heels.

Snape scoffed at the sight of his ex-fellow Order member fussing about the girl's bed.

"Hermione..."

The girl hummed bizarrely in response, her sweat-drenched brow furrowed in confusion.

"Can you understand me? Open your eyes for me, dear, and look at me."

"She needs to sleep it off some more, Minerva."

"It's been nine hours, already... Hermione, focus now."

Hermione's curly head shook from side to side before she finally managed to blink a few times. "What... where am I?"

"You're in the hospital wing, dear."

"Mungos?"

"Er... no. Hogwarts."

The corner of Snape's mouth twitched at the young woman's immediate response. She sharply pushed herself to sit up in bed and glanced around with obvious disbelief. "Impossible..."

"Do you remember how you got here?"

"No. The last thing I remember was the robes... Shrieking Shack..."

Both older ladies exchanged worried glances, and Snape was very pleased to already know why.

"How did I end up in the hospital wing?"

"We were hoping you could tell us how you ended up on the floor of the Entrance Hall."

Hermione blinked once before demanding, "What?"

"You had banged your head pretty badly, but it wasn't serious. Poppy took your vitals, and it appeared you'd only suffered a minor concussion... and stress."

"I was in the Shrieking Shack. I found..."

Minerva was quick to pat Hermione's blanket, talking loudly over her words with smoothing shushing noises. "Yes, yes, dear. We... heard."

"I don't understand." Hermione wasn't concerned with masking her impatience.

Madam Pomfrey promptly followed the Headmistress' lead and tentatively added, "I think Mr. Ron Weasley wanted to be notified when she came to. I'll go and Floo him now."

"Ron..." Hermione breathed to herself.

Minerva drew herself to her full height, turning in the direction of the exit. "I'll give you two some time to... talk. I believe Madam Pomfrey would be pleased if you could at least stay here 'till morning. If you still want to discuss things after you speak to him... Well, come and see me tomorrow morning in my office, either way."

Severus thrived at the sight of Hermione shooting irritated glances at the backs of both women...whose uneasiness had been utterly apparent. The nurse rose from the hearth, ducking her head to avoid the girl's questioning expression, and disappeared into her office.

"Hermione?" Weasley called from the flames.

"Ron!" Hermione scampered out of bed, flinging herself onto the rug in front of the fire.

Snape raised an eyebrow, devilishly amused. Rearranging her hospital gown had not been one of the young woman's foremost concerns, gifting Snape with an eyeful of navy blue knickers.

"Are you all right? You had me scared shitless."

"Yes... I believe so. Oh, Ron, you won't believe what happened..."

Ron sighed loudly. "You'll only have to stay the night. You can go back home tomorrow, and then we can talk."

"Wait... Don't you want to know...?"

"Minerva's already told me."

"Minerva?"

"You were hysterical as they carried you to the hospital wing. Shouting something about... well..."

"Snape's robes, Ron," Hermione answered calmly, as if she finally understood what everyone had been skirting around. "I found the robes he died in..."

"There was nothing there, Hermione."

Snape closed his eyes, relishing the silence that passed before she slowly asked, "What do you mean 'nothing'?"

"Nothing. No robes. No blood or cat. There were no other footprints in the dust beside your own."

"I know what I saw," Hermione responded confidently.

"Please don't get upset. I'm just telling you what the Aurors found... didn't find."

"I know what I saw," she repeated with even more conviction.

"You're tired, love. This is exactly why I didn't want you to go back to Hogwarts! And the Shrieking Shack! What were you thinking?"

"Look, Ron, I can understand why you can't come back, but I'm actually glad I did."

Ron erred on the side of caution, his tone admitting defeat. "I just want you to feel better. *I'm* worried, but aside from all that, I'm relieved you're not seriously hurt. We'll talk about this later."

Hermione tsked under her breath. Averting her gaze, she shook her head slightly. Snape could see she wasn't anywhere near crying, but her grief was undeniable. "No, we won't," she whispered. It wasn't a reprimand to Weasley but more of a sudden revelation to herself.

"I love you... bye."

His face impassive, Snape drew the collar of his cloak higher around his neck while he intently watched Hermione drag her body back onto the bed.

Snape could see it all on her face. Hermione was certain, without a doubt, that she had seen exactly what everyone else thought to be unfeasible.

But Snape had been very effective in destroying any and all evidence soon after he had silently deposited her unconscious body on the steps of the castle.

The effort, time, and planning had been worth it. She had certainly been giving him a fill of all the emotions Snape had wanted to see from her. Fear, guilt, despair... now loneliness.

It was obvious she needed comfort, but her friends and fiancé had been too uncomfortable to stay around long enough for fear of her speaking the improvable. There was no evidence that the disgusting things Hermione had found ever took place, and with the emotional blindness that was running rampant within the wizarding community, no one would take her word for it.

As Hermione clutched the pillow to her chest, Snape barely caught her faint whisper to herself. "That can only mean the book is gone, too."

Snape's unresponsiveness to her grief altered into amusement at her words.

Yes, it does.

*** ** *

Hermione had been having one of those horrid, half-conscious dreams again. She knew she was in the Hogwarts hospital wing, and she knew her senses had been heavily dosed with Dreamless Sleep.

It must have been brewed wrong, Hermione reasoned, because she had been dreaming very vividly.

What does it all mean? She couldn't stop asking herself that question, awake or asleep.

Did Snape have a family member or an old flame who was targeting Hermione for the hideous act she had carelessly committed?

Or was Snape still alive and tormenting her?

"Impossible." She continuously muttered to herself throughout the night, stirring restlessly against the bed, painfully tangling her limbs within the sheets. "I'm sorry... I'm so, so sorry..."

Hermione couldn't stop saying it. She somehow believed the more it was spoken, somehow... Snape would hear.

A cool finger brushed her sweaty hair away from her ear. Hermione felt no fear; it was only a dream. She exhaled in relief at the comfort of human contact. "Please," she begged, unsure of what exactly she wanted.

Hot air blew against her temple. A deep voice whispered with measured precision, "I don't forgive you." It was soft but very clear.

Hermione cried, willing her mind to fight the sedative effects of the potion. She knew he wasn't really there. Either way, she thrilled at the sound of a voice she hadn't heard in so long. "Professor..." his title hissed out of her mouth, her speech pained with the realization of how she actually missed addressing him. "Professor Snape..."

What felt like seconds later...but it could have been hours...Hermione had finally been able to wake clear-minded.

His voice...

"Professor?" Hermione called, searching the hospital wing with desperate eyes.

His voice had sounded so *real*. But the very idea of it could not be feasible...

"I'm here, Hermione," Minerva called, voice alarmed. "Everything's going to be all right."

Hermione sagged back against the bed, suddenly feeling empty.

*** ** *

"Harry Potter, please," Hermione commanded to the Ministry receptionist manning a small desk right outside a door that led to the various offices within.

The slightly older witch glanced back and forth between the young woman dressed in smart robes standing before her and the cover of the magazine in her hand.

Hermione sighed, rolling her eyes. She unceremoniously snatched the magazine from the witch's limp grasp while reaching over to pluck one of the quills littering her teased hair. Scratching a signature over her own picture, Hermione drawled, "Mr. Potter, please... Miss?"

"Miss Creevey!" the woman shrieked in excitement.

Hermione cringed.

"I'm sorry. I'm new. Sure thing. Just one moment!"

The receptionist never got her chance. Just at that instant, the lift opened, and Harry stepped out surrounded by his usual gaggle of simpering minions.

"Hermione!" He greeted her warmly, wrapping one arm around her shoulder and urging her to walk with them.

"Did you get my message?"

"Ah, yes. I did. How are you feeling by the way? I heard what happened yesterday. I wanted to come and visit you but..."

"No, it's fine. I'm fine. But this is really important."

"Mr. Potter, please!" A squat man under an obscenely long hat whined. "The Mesopotamia Goblins have already put in their bid, and if we don't"

Harry sighed, waving his hand irritably. "Yes, yes. I've already spoken to Gringotts." Turning to Hermione, Harry grabbed both of her hands in his, squeezing them tightly. "I'm sorry, Hermione, but I must attend to this. Why don't you call Ginny and arrange a dinner date, hmm?"

Hermione's only response was an emotionless stare. As Harry was about to turn away from her, she called after him in mock casualness. "Dinner sounds lovely, Harry, but I don't think it would be a proper atmosphere to discuss the matter of *Severus Snape*."

The numerous appalled expressions sent in her direction served their purpose. Harry excused himself from his underlings and motioned Hermione to a nearby office.

"What are you doing?" he demanded once the door closed. "Are you crazy?"

"According to you and Ron, that's the only explanation, isn't it?"

"They found nothing, okay? Nothing!"

Hermione smirked slightly, throwing up her hands in surrender. "That's fine. I wasn't planning on proving anything or telling anyone about it, either. I'm willing to let it go."

"Thank goodness." Harry exhaled, relaxing against the desk.

"I just want you to do one thing."

"What?" he asked slowly. Harry's sense of foreboding had been justified.

"I want a memorial erected at Hogwarts that specifically states Severus Snape's many deeds and the circumstances leading to and causing his death."

"WHAT?"

Hermione calmly folded her arms across her chest. "We both know he deserves it." She edged her back against the door, making it clear she wasn't about to let him leave until this issue had been resolved.

"It's too late," Harry hissed through clenched teeth. "No one wants to reminisce about the war. You know that."

"Who cares what everyone else wants or what they think! We forgot about him, Harry. After everything we knew about Snape in the end, doesn't the very idea that we could do such a thing disgust you?"

"I don't even have the power to force such a thing. I'm not the Minister. I'm not even head of the Auror Office."

"Everyone listens to you, and you know it... Please, Harry."

"Giving him a memorial after all this time will raise far too many questions." Harry turned from her as he said this, unable to stomach her accusing glare.

"Fine. He needs to be remembered one way or the other. I'll just contact the Quibbler and let them know that Harry Potter and his two side-kicks never bothered to recover the body of a man who had been The-Boy-Who-Lived's constant ally against Voldemort!"

Harry took a step back, stung. "Don't you see? That's going to be revealed either way."

"At least you'd get credit for the memorial," Hermione hissed over her shoulder before exiting the office and slamming the door with all her might.

*** **

"I waited for over an hour."

Hermione jumped back at the unexpected outraged voice. She had been digging in her bag for her keys, unaware that Ron had been standing by the entrance to her flat.

He leaned against the mail boxes, glaring with fists stabbed into his pockets.

"Sorry?" Hermione blinked.

"I said, I've been waiting at the assembly hall for over an hour. We had an appointment, remember? To meet the band?"

Hermione furrowed her brow.

"For our wedding!"

"Merlin! Goodness, I'm so sorry, Ron! It slipped my mind." Hermione clutched at his arm, sincerely appalled by her behavior.

"You've been doing a lot of that lately."

"Oh, love, I don't want to argue. Today has been horrid."

Ron closed his mouth, following her into the flat before resuming the conversation. Inhaling deeply, Ron removed his cloak and turned to her with an expectant expression.

"Wait here," Hermione whispered, tapping her hand against his chest.

"What?"

Hermione shushed him with unrestrained exasperation. "Just wait by the door while I look around for a bit."

She left a gaping Ron as she went from room to room, searching for any other surprises that might have been waiting for her. When Hermione had come home from Hogwarts, a part of her hadn't been surprised to discover that the Potions text was no longer sitting on her patio chair.

Her initial reaction had been relief; she really hadn't wanted to touch it. But then followed the recognition that someone or something had been in her flat again in order to remove it.

This obviously wasn't over, yet.

"Hermione! This is the third time you've done this. We need to talk."

"Not now, Ron," she called from her bedroom. As soon as the words left her mouth, she cringed.

"Excuse me? What is going on with you, lately?"

Hermione didn't answer.

"Fine. Call me when you *do* want to talk."

Hermione closed the patio door, running back into the room. "No, Ron don't..." The front door slammed before she could reach it. "... leave."

She sighed, rightfully feeling guilty for the way she had just handled that. Her relationship with Ron wasn't doing very well, and they both knew it. But her personal struggles were just as crucial, if not more so. She was being harassed in the most disgusting way possible, and no one had been willing to believe her, never mind help.

The wedding could wait.

Hermione took her time in the shower. After shaving her legs, she rinsed the conditioner out of her hair, groaning while massaging her scalp. She had lingered under the hot water longer than necessary, obsessed with the goings on of the last couple of days.

An unruly sound vibrated in her bedroom.

Hermione stood painfully still under the water, her ears burning for any additional sounds, but her limbs were too nervous to turn off the water. She wished her heart rate would steady, clearing her mind enough to think. *Not possible...*

She had warded every inch of her flat. No one could enter without express permission. Ron's key wouldn't even work if he had tried.

Turning off the shower, Hermione cursed at the realization that her wand wasn't in the bathroom. She had left it in the bedroom after warding the patio door.

Something was wrong. She could sense it. Thrusting open the bathroom door, Hermione jumped back quickly in anticipation of a potential attack. When no foreign sights or sounds reached Hermione from where she was standing, she tentatively edged into the bedroom, clutching a towel tight against her body.

This time, Hermione was better prepared for the sight of *those* robes again. There was no question that these were the exact same set... the faded black... the tearing around the collar.

Except, thankfully, this time they were clean.

And spread out on her bed.

Hermione refused to take her eyes off them while she blindly fumbled for her wand on the bedside table. With a few flicks of her wrist, Hermione gathered that the robes were harmless...at least physically.

Tears had begun to well in her eyes, catching her off guard. That feeling she had experienced at the Shack rushed back with such intensity. Just the sight of his robes filled her with poignant heaviness. It distracted her from the important question of *why*.

Cautiously placing her knee on the bed, Hermione released the grip on her towel and gathered the tattered cloak and robes to her chest. The peculiarity of her impulse was already palpable to Hermione, but it hadn't restricted her from pressing her nose into the frayed collar.

An uneven exhale burst from her lungs. It still smelled richly of the Potions lab.

As she pressed this forbidden and yet beautifully friendly material against her bare skin, Hermione finally understood what had been so troubling, and why she'd been reacting the way she had to these harassments. More importantly, why she'd welcomed the bitter-sweet reminders more than she had feared the unknown perpetrator.

"I never mourned you," Hermione whispered wretchedly into the robes.

A strange uproar pulled Hermione from her grief; every light in her house went out simultaneously. With the sun already setting outside and her eyes ill-adjusted, Hermione's flat was thrown into total darkness.

Hermione's nerves were on fire. That had been the moment when she noticed the heavy breathing issuing from a chair in the corner of the room.

The shadowed outline of a... man quietly watched her in uneasy silence.

"That wasn't the reaction I wanted. Make the next one better..."

Before Hermione could comprehend the horrifying statement, the figure lunged at her.

*** **

Author's Notes: Yikes! Only one chapter left...

Five

Chapter 5 of 6

EPILOGUE ADDED "A bitter Snape, irreparably damaged by his encounter with Nagini but still very much alive, sets in motion a plan to unbalance the lives of those who left him for dead."

DH compliant but very EWE. Darkfic.

Disclaimer: Anything you recognize belongs to JKR. I do not profit from writing this story.

Author's Notes: This story isn't labeled a darkfic with a dubcon warning for nothing. There are no gooeey professions of love ahead.

-**Melusin** has been a godsend, and we should all bow at the altar of her abilities.

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*** **

To Snape's absolute bafflement...and disappointment...Hermione hadn't screamed.

He crossed her immaculate bedroom within seconds, but the only words that came out of her mouth were a weak, "It's you..."

She was in shock. That had been the only explanation he could come up with for her behavior.

Snape threw himself over the foot of the bed. Snatching her wand from the mattress, he hurled it over his shoulder, unconcerned with where it landed so long as it wasn't within arm's reach.

Hermione hadn't lunged for it in reaction... Which left him sorely dissatisfied.

By the time Snape was upon her, pressing her down into the mattress, her expression still hadn't changed. Her brown eyes stared up at him, widened with disbelief and something else he couldn't quiet comprehend.

One hand slowly closed around her throat as another braced his weight against the bed.

And yet, Hermione hadn't attempted to scream. She wasn't resisting in the least, and it was unsettling for him.

Snape's vision had at last adjusted to the darkness. He was finally able to understand her expression. Those wide eyes stared up at him, hungrily drinking in his features as her logic fought against the revelation before her.

"It is you..." Her voice was near hysterical, eyes on the verge of tears.

Snape jerked his face closer. At the last second, feeling her alarmed exhale brush against the skin of his face, he sharply turned his mouth towards her ear. "No thanks to you," were his only words.

Hermione cringed in his arms. Then she did something that was beyond all of his comprehension.

Her arms came around him... and she pressed her face into the crook of his neck. Her moist hair burned his neck with the shock of its coldness.

"I had always thought it was the lab..." Hermione stole another breath, inhaling raggedly. "It wasn't the Potions classroom, was it? It was you..."

Snape concluded that the sight of him had driven the woman mad. Little did he know that it had, but not in the way he assumed.

Only his old teaching robes separated them. Hermione had lost her towel when she had found the faded black garment on her bed...which Snape had attentively observed with growing pleasure. Severus had had an erection from the moment Hermione came out of the shower. Lying on top of her, he reveled in pressing it against her inner thigh.

He might have enjoyed the sight of her bare skin, but he meant his words. She hadn't shown enough fear to satisfy him.

"Wake up, little girl," Snape cooed disturbingly. He knew the supple skin and rounded flesh underneath his body were anything but little...or girlish. But Snape also recognized some recesses of her mind nonetheless viewed him as the authoritative teacher from her schooldays.

Snape's words, tone of voice, and especially his actions brought Hermione back to the present. Hand tightening around her neck, Snape callously pressed himself against her.

Hermione's expression had finally started to clear. She was beginning to comprehend the danger of her situation.

The delicate hands on his back sharply slid around to his chest.

She pushed against him. "No..."

"I take it you don't feel so sorry, anymore?" Snape purred nastily against her neck. Fingering a sleeve of his old robes, his nose brushed against her collar bone. "I knew you would enjoy seeing these again, but I must admit... I never thought you would enjoy it *that* much."

Hermione's eyeline had been continuously glued to his every move. His dark pupils bore into hers, willing her to look away while he edged his hand between her knees.

Hermione muttered to herself.

"What was that?" Snape asked in mock disquiet.

"I said, I know you won't hurt me." She tried to relax her struggle against him to stress the point.

"You don't know anything!" In his anger, Snape's hand slid up her thigh forcefully. Hermione jerked her hips away before he reached her heat, pushing at his chest again in earnest. "Ah, I see I *can* scare you."

"I'm sorry..."

His lips pulled over clenched teeth at her words. Snape let go of her neck, driving both hands between their bodies. His old robes still covered the majority of her nakedness, but nothing was left to the imagination under his palms. At the sound of her frightened whimpering, Snape pushed her thighs apart, forcing her to feel his hardness straining through his robes.

His mind was in a frenzy, but all the same he enjoyed taking his time.

She shivered under him, tears welling in her eyes as the heaviness of his body weight intensified. Turning her face away, Hermione's mouth fell open. "... I don't understand... This isn't fair..."

Stupid girl, Snape thought. "Your intelligence should have told you by now that life isn't fair," he hissed.

He ignored her resisting hands yanking at his hair. A wounded voice breathed, "You don't understand... how relieved I am that you're alive, Severus."

Snape paused, his face startling at the sound of his first name coming out of her mouth. He growled, wrenching his hand out from under the robes to grab her neck once more. "Don't you dare address me so familiarly. You, of all people, have no right to."

Hermione dared to raise her hands to clutch at his wrist. "I know..." she hiccupped.

"My life, or what is left of it, exists as it is... and with absolutely *no help* from you."

Snape had stopped touching her, and his hardness was much less prominent. Nonetheless, Hermione's body resumed her stimulating shivering underneath him.

"Trust me..." she breathed. Her eyes relaxed, gazing almost drunkenly at him. "I'll never forget what I've done."

To Snape's horror, she placed her hands on his back again.

*** **

"NO!" Hermione screamed. She wasn't mirroring anything being said in her dreams. Seconds before Hermione sat up in bed, she suddenly realized that everything that had happened last night had ended hours ago.

Her scream was one of disappointment, disgust... and protest. Protest that Snape wasn't here anymore... disgust at herself for feeling such disappointment at the thought. And doubt that it all could have been a dream.

It was a dream, the logical part of her mind insisted. *Snape is dead; you know that. There is no proof that he survived.*

But Hermione also knew there was no proof that Snape was dead. She had seen that first hand.

Why?

Why was he doing this to her? Okay, Hermione was enlightened as to why Snape was targeting her specifically. But why had he been going about it the way he had?

That is, if it's even him doing these things. It could have been a dream her logical self corrected.

But there was no denying this. Not anymore. Not after everything she had seen and heard, regardless of what Harry and Ron might think...or not think...about these exact same occurrences.

Hermione shakily exhaled, remembering his presence... the exact feel of his presence. She should be angry, horrified even... no?

... *No.*

Hermione closed her eyes, sliding deeper under her covers. Her nose tickled, and her mind clicked something into place.

... These weren't her covers.

And she could still smell him. Very vividly.

Hermione took a few deep breaths before opening her eyes, finally taking in her current state. She was completely naked... except for an old, black cloak wrapped around her torso.

*** **

The same instant, Hermione heard the wail of her wards being breached; she recognized the cursing of Ron on her doorstep.

"Why doesn't my key work!" he whined out in the corridor.

Hermione tightly wrapped her dressing gown around her body before running to open the door for him.

It had been two days since she had seen him. Hermione sadly admitted to herself that she hadn't felt a pain of loss until he was within arm's reach. She did love this man, and the idea of being held in his embrace appealed to her at the moment.

"Ron," she said with a smile, yanking open her front door.

Her smile faded as the newest edition of *The Quibbler* was thrust into her unsuspecting face.

Ron dropped his hand, revealing his stricken expression. "I don't even know what to say."

Hermione didn't either.

"Come in," she said softly, eyes downcast. Hermione blew a drawn out sigh, preparing herself for their inescapable row.

Wringing the paper in his hands, Ron stomped into the living room and plopped down on the sofa. At the sight of Hermione following calmly into the room, he jumped back up in agitation.

"Couldn't you have at least talked to me about this first?" he demanded. "I knew you had... some issues on your mind, but I never thought things had grown this serious!"

He threw the paper onto the coffee table with repugnance. Yanking his hands through his hair, Ron insisted, "Well?"

Hermione ached at the knowledge that he'd been hurt by her actions. Standing very still, her back straight, she evenly replied, "I'm sorry, but it needed to be done."

"Needed? It *needed* to be done?" Ron laughed miserably before saying, "For who? Him? Or your own sense of pride and conscience... no matter who you took down with you?"

Angry tears welled in her eyes at his accusation, but she couldn't deny it had merit. "That's not fair! You don't understand what I've been feeling... He is alive, Ron, and tormenting me!"

"You could have talked to me about it!"

"Would you have believed me?"

Ron clenched his eyes shut, finally sitting down in defeat. "No, I wouldn't. I still don't want to. But this..." He snatched the paper off the table, waving it desolately in the air. "It didn't need to be like this."

"Harry wouldn't listen to me, either. He wouldn't even try..."

"If you believe he's alive...and thank GOD you at least didn't tell that part of your story to the papers...what's the point of a memorial?"

"The same reason you are relieved that I haven't said anything about him returning is the same reason I didn't bother. No one would believe me, and it wasn't a battle I am prepared to fight... yet. But this..." Hermione pointed to the paper to stress her point "... the public might be more willing to believe and... empathize towards his plight, if they couldn't feel threatened by the idea of his being alive and forced to face his judgment."

Ron paused in thought after her speech. "You never called me," he said miserably. In a sense, not really changing the subject.

Hermione audibly cleared her throat. "If I had, it would only have been to explain the reasons behind my insensitive actions... and you wouldn't have believed me."

"We're not getting married." His words hadn't come out as a threat or even a statement made in anger. Ron seemed to have known this for some time, but the act of verbally stating it, as well as his anguished disbelief in the statement, made it an unavoidable reality.

Hermione knew she would always love him. That was what fueled her incessant tears. But she needed to stop the perpetual routine of denial that had invaded their lives. "No... we're not."

Ron nodded once, not looking at her, and rose from his seat. He walked straight towards the front door. Hermione closed her eyes but didn't try to stop him.

She prayed he wasn't harboring the longing that she would.

This was inevitable, she reasoned. It had only been a matter of time.

In that moment, the last thirteen years of Hermione's life rushed through her mind. The delightful and unpleasant times she had shared with Ron were worth remembering. It hurt to think she'd ever had such a friend to whom she might never speak again.

But Hermione was more than willing. She had never wanted to marry him and had always known they just weren't meant to be together... in that way. In time, she prayed Ron would forgive her and understand the reasons regarding why she had gone to *The Quibbler* with Severus Snape's untold story of life and 'death.'

More importantly, she prayed the elusive wizard in question would forgive her as well.

*** **

Hermione awoke sometime in the middle of the night but kept her eyes closed. It wasn't her dreams that had disturbed her sleep but her senses.

Every inch of her skin was tingling with awareness of her surroundings, alarming her that a potential threat was very near. Her hand itched to reach for her wand under the pillow, but she needed to know the danger first.

"Don't bother faking sleep," a harsh voice rasped. "Your breathing has already changed."

Eyes widening, Hermione tried to jump out of bed, but her uninvited guest was too quick. Severus Snape was sprawled out on the mattress beside her... Who knew how long he had been watching her sleep?

A large, rough hand clamped tightly around her mouth, forcing her upper body back down against the pillows.

But Snape hadn't restrained her limbs. Hermione thrust her hand under the pillow, promptly snatching her wand and within a fraction of a second hexing the arm struggling to subdue her.

"Bloody hell!" Snape groaned at the pain of his wrist and in shock at her unexpected response. His expression startled at the sight of Hermione braced on all fours.

Snape attempted to sit up with a jerk, charging at her.

Hermione was already prepared. At the sight of his face coming nearer, Hermione closed her hands into a ten-fingered fist and threw her arm through the air with an enraged bellow. Snape's neck jerked back at the blow to his jaw, forcing him to sag against the bed.

The only sound in the room was her labored panting. Hermione crawled backwards off the mattress until her feet touched the floor. She had expected Snape to retaliate, but he was still lying motionless on his back.

Practically motionless. He wasn't unconscious or else he wouldn't be able to maintain the harsh clench of his eyes. It took Hermione a moment to realize that his entire body was jerking repeatedly; his muscles twitched in protest.

What's wrong with him?

"Professor?" Hermione called warily. She pointed her wand at his limbs, binding him in case this was a ruse.

"Professor Snape... Are you hurt?" Hermione dared to place her knee on the bed. Eyeing his chest, she gathered that he was breathing relatively normally.

Well, if he wasn't on the verge of death, then she needn't be very sympathetic. Jaw set and thin lipped, Hermione lifted her nightshirt above her knees to give her better mobility. Before she could doubt the action, Hermione crawled up the length of his legs and sat on top of his immobile body.

She grinned at his appalled expression. "So... this is what has become of the illustrious Snape?"

"GET. OFF." Snape appeared to exert great effort to speak, but his anger was apparent.

Hermione crossed her arms, looking down at him. Her curly mane fell over her shoulders, shrouding both sides of their faces. He had nowhere else to look other than directly at her. "Right... I'll be sure to do that. Because you were so quick to respond to my requests."

"I still don't..."

"Forgive me?" Hermione finished with a laugh. She couldn't hold onto the fake amusement as long as she wished. His words still managed to cut her deep. "I know, and I don't blame you for it. You're not the type of man who would enjoy pity, so I'm also not surprised you have expressed your anger... the way you have."

With great exertion, Snape managed to turn his head, obviously wanting to avoid her unguarded expression.

Not knowing how long her bind would last, Hermione quickly began to undo the buttons around his neck.

His eyes widened, mortified.

"Please," she said in apology, "I need to see."

Drawing away the cloth, Hermione was surprised she had succeeded in not revealing how shaken she felt. Raised scars littered down from the base of his throat and passed along his collarbone. Fingers trembling, Hermione continued to undo his robes, following a trail of scars that she soon realized had nothing to do with Nagini's bite.

Just the simple act of touching him was making Hermione feel heady. Her fingers lingered on his cold flesh, trailing every inch in memorization. Who knew when would be the next time she would see him, especially like this.

By the time Hermione reached his chest, exposing one nipple, the reality of what she was doing struck her.

"Will you stop staring at me!" Snape finally sneered in earnest. With his limbs still bound, the only evidence that his tremors had stopped was the return of the ferocity in his voice.

The volume of his baritone was jarring. Hermione jerked out of her trance and quickly remembered herself.

"Will you say goodbye before you leave?" she responded confidently. Conveniently forgetting that she had half-undressed this man, she dared to send him an accusing glare. "Or will you resort to Dark magic again to render me unconscious so you can slip out of my flat as uninvited as you came?"

"Goodbye?" Snape barked. "After everything you have seen me capable of, your main worry is that I won't say *goodbye*?"

"Severus... it doesn't need to be like this."

His eyes flashed. "Really? How exactly should it be?"

"I knew the whole time, you know," she breathed sadly. "I gave an interview to *The Quibbler* for your honor, and yet I knew. It was what you had planned all along. Any way possible you could seek your revenge... my guilt, Harry's popularity, and Ron's love for me. All of that will go to shit now... That is, if anyone still reads that rubbish."

He didn't say anything. Hermione yearned for him to say something, even yell. In her sorrow, Hermione failed to notice the bonds evaporate from his body.

Snape grabbed Hermione by the waist, flipping her onto her back. She squeaked in protest.

"How dare you..." Snape's face was red, his limbs shaking once more, but this time with fury. "After everything that you have... you dare to bind me..."

No more. She couldn't hear him abuse her past actions anymore. If she could only take them back, she gladly would. But he didn't believe her sincerity. He couldn't unless he knew her heart.

Her words would *never* have an effect on him.

Hermione succeeded in rendering Severus dumbfounded once more. Placing both hands on his back, she thrust her face up to his, pressing her mouth against his sneer.

Snape froze on top of her.

Before he comprehended what was happening, Hermione had dragged his bottom lip between her teeth while her thighs relaxed against his hips.

He yanked away.

"Why did you do it?"

Somehow, Hermione knew he wasn't questioning her kiss. This was the softest pitch she had ever heard his voice lowered to, so she was more than eager to answer his question. "You know that already... You knew I would contact the papers...no matter the consequences in store for myself."

"You're such a fool..."

Hermione's body was shivering. He hadn't attempted to lift himself off her, but his current weight wasn't violent, either. With the firmness pressing insistently between her legs, Hermione's abdomen throbbed at the realization that her nightshirt was in total disarray, revealing much of her body.

"I'd rather be only covered in your robes," Hermione whispered shakily to herself before realizing he'd probably heard. Reality crashed around her. She tensed, taking in the possible danger of her situation once again.

Snape quirked an eyebrow at all this, his pupils dilated with excitement. Relaxing his braced elbows on the mattress, he slowly lowered himself ever further against her.

By the time he had initiated a second contact between their lips, Severus' intensity had returned in earnest. He grabbed at the nightshirt, ripping the thin material vertically from the collar and exposing her breasts. Hermione released a cry at the action, but he didn't stop to inspect if it was from protest or excitement.

Snape didn't care.

Her knickers suffered a similar fate.

Snape's hands and tongue ravaged her body, lifting her by the bum for a better position. With two quick movements of his fingers, his trousers were unzipped, his throbbing cock eagerly positioned by his hand.

Frustrated with impatience, Severus couldn't suppress the temptation to release his length and extend his fingers against her warmth. Hermione thrust her hips against his touch.

Eyes snapping open, Snape groaned loud and deep once he realized Hermione's clutch at his lank hair was one of fervor. This wasn't what he wanted, but he'd take it. There was a niggling voice at the back of his mind that insisted this way was preferable.

"Please..."

"Please, what?" His hot breath brushed against her nipples.

"Just promise me one thing..." Hermione's sudden hesitation was seen in the tensing of her muscles, obviously wishing she hadn't just said anything to begin with.

"Tell me," Snape commanded, looming over her.

When Hermione failed to respond, Snape finally sank into her wetness, deep and slow.

She threw her head back, eyes closing languidly as her mouth feel open *Anything...*

"Promise..." Hermione mewled unexpectedly when his movements reached a steady rhythm. "Promise you'll say goodbye before you leave." Her arms flailed above her

until she located a solid corner of the headboard for her clenched fists.

Severus breathed heavily against her ear. His words issued out of his mouth stiffly, syllables exaggerated with each thrust against her. "Yes... I... pro..." It had been far too long for him. "...I will..."

End

Author's Notes: This story is complete! It feels so good to finally say that about something I've written. My SSHG recipient, Pennswoods, has asked for a follow up, and one actually is in the making, but it's at the bottom of a long list of things I need to finish. Thanks for reading!

-Those who are familiar with my review replies **know** I enjoy blunt, raw honesty. Of course I like the squee reviews, but I also love critique. Even if you hated it, feel free to tell me why and I won't flag you to the admins.

Epilogue

Chapter 6 of 6

EPILOGUE ADDED "A bitter Snape, irreparably damaged by his encounter with Nagini but still very much alive, sets in motion a plan to unbalance the lives of those who left him for dead."

DH compliant but very EWE. Darkfic.

Disclaimer: Anything you recognize belongs to JKR. I do not profit from writing this story.

Author's Notes: As I said before, this is NOT a story of romance. Full Dubcon ahead.

Snape grasped Hermione's headboard with a groan, alleviating the weight off his shaking knees.

They'd been at this awhile, and his joints were beginning to protest. Breathing heavily, Snape looked down, taking in the sight of the exhausted woman beneath him. Perspiration drenched every inch of her skin, saturating her hairline. Hermione's neck and chest were flushed, no doubt from the combination of pleasure and ever increasing pain.

She had expected him to reach release long before now; Snape hadn't. He'd merely wanted to observe how long she'd continue before asking him to stop.

A sardonic laugh rumbled in his throat at the realization that Hermione probably never would.

Brushing his face against her ear, Severus rasped, "I take it this meets your approval?" He pushed into her hard and steady, dragging his pelvis against her sensitivity each time he pulled out.

Throwing her head back, Hermione released a guttural sound bursting with frustration.

She was so very close... And Snape knew it too. That mocking laugh returned with intensity, strange and frightening.

"This has been fun, but I think I've had enough."

Hermione tensed under him, her satisfaction rapidly decreasing. But despite Snape's words, his onslaught upon her, within her, around her... he was reinvigorated.

Snape groaned even louder, face reddening.

"You're...are you leaving?" she asked, her voice insecure.

"Eventually... ah, but I have a promise to keep, don't I?"

"What...?"

Snape grasped her around the throat and squeezed, forcing her into silence. He kissed her hard and without emotion before whispering against her lips, "... Goodbye."

*** ** *

Hours later, Hermione woke up screaming.

Unlike all the other times she had done so, this wasn't from a realistic nightmare or reliving memories of the war.

Naked and filthy, she shot up in bed...only to keel over just as quickly in pain.

Face down upon her mattress, Hermione clutched at her throbbing abdomen, and her screaming began anew.

*** ** *

Days turned into weeks with no sign of Severus Snape, forcing Hermione into combat with her emotions.

She feared her own home. Knowing that the wizard could easily come and go as he pleased, Hermione couldn't find sleep.

Some nights, when she realized she had been staring into the darkness for hours, she'd rise from bed and go out into her patio. Leaning upon the railing, she'd stare down into the quiet, peaceful streets of Diagon Alley until her mind began to play tricks with her.

Shadowy figures stepped out of alleys and looked back at her, wrapped in long black robes. Every time she blinked, they were gone.

Day after day, week after week, Hermione would return to work and greet the same smiling faces.

She'd complete the same tedious work.

Walking home each night, Hermione'd pass by familiar shops, the very ones she used to look forward to visiting when she was a student. After entering into small talk with the invariable clerks, she'd purchase her favorite foods and wine.

And each night, shopping bags in each hand, Hermione would pause in front of her building and just look at it.

Why didn't she move? Why didn't she make a report to the Aurors? Or in the very least, ask Harry for help or a place to stay?

Hermione already knew the answer...

She feared her home.

*** ** *

"The memorial thing is finally scheduled. Last weekend of the month," Ron offered cautiously. He held his cup of tea in front of him, looking at it more often than he drank.

"I'm aware," Hermione replied.

It had been months since the two of them had broken off their engagement. Neither nurtured the hope they'd ever achieve an absolute reconciliation, but they couldn't ignore each other for the rest of their lives. They'd shared far too much. As much as seeing one another hurt the two of them, staying completely away had hurt more.

"Hermione..."

"Don't."

Ron leaned forward, glancing around the restaurant for prying faces. "Don't you shush me! I wouldn't ask if I wasn't concerned."

"Please, Ron..."

"What's been going on with you? You told me...once...that Snape's alive...*that he was stalking you*. And now you act like none of it happened, going along with the plans for the memorial! Why hasn't he come forward? Why haven't *you*...?"

Hermione was so determined not to hear anymore, she kicked at the table in her dismayed attempt not to yell, turning over the tea service. Yanking on her cloak with violent movements, she left the restaurant without a word.

By the time she reached her building, Ron had finally caught up to her.

He didn't ask any more questions. Not one sound was uttered. He permitted Hermione to fight his grip upon her elbow until she finally allowed his arms to wrap around her.

Ron knew her so well; he would have been frightened if she hadn't started crying the way she did. He also knew the right questions to ask now, but couldn't imagine putting such things into words.

Arms still tightly around her, he walked Hermione to her door. He had yet to return her key; she had yet to ask for it.

Thinking she needed a lie down, Ron ushered her into the bedroom. Hermione finally pulled out of his arms, turning towards the bed. A distressed sound tore out of her. Hermione fled to the bathroom, slamming and locking the door.

Dumbfounded, Ron stood in place in the middle of the room, unaware as to a proper reaction. The high keening issuing from behind the bathroom door was a sound he had never heard before.

Sitting upon her bed, Ron found what must have been the catalyst to this breakdown.

A single, long-stemmed rose lay upon the pillow. He would have jealously wondered as to the romantic insinuations behind the gift... if it wasn't dried up. What must have once been a beautiful, deep-red bud was now black and shriveled. The image was awful, made worse by a note that read:

"I will not allow you to forget about me... for I haven't you."

The bathroom door finally opened.

Ron turned to the body braced in the doorframe, his expression masked with horror. In his innocence and genuine worry, Ron's assumption of the worst was not the same as hers.

"It's not from... I would never..."

Hermione wiped at her face before speaking. Not until he saw the emotion behind her eyes did Ron realize her wild tears weren't ones of sorrow.

"I know," she said with a smile.

*** ** *

A middling number of witches and wizards had attended the memorial at Hogwarts. Hermione wasn't surprised in the least.

What had surprised her was that all of the surviving Order members attended. While many had never and would never refer to Severus Snape as a friend, they were still appalled by how much of the man's life had been kept in the dark. Such as the memories he had given Harry. No one had known how long Snape had spied for Dumbledore, nor the treatment he had received at the hands of Voldemort. But because the wizard was no longer here to judge them, righteous anger lay heavily upon Harry, Hermione, and Ron for the circumstances surrounding Snape's death.

For the first time in nearly seven years, Harry's name was once again in the papers, painted in a critical light.

Hermione thought the three of them deserved this and more despite what had happened a few months ago.

She no longer possessed quixotic illusions of Severus Snape. Hermione had finally separated his sacrificial actions from the disturbed man he truly was.

He'd been watching her sleep. Of this, she was certain. There was no doubt he followed her comings and goings because every time Hermione shared her lunch hour with Ron, she'd find a new... *gift*... on her pillow.

Except now, he would leave them in the middle of night where she'd find them in the morning.

The last one had been an antique diary. Based on the numerous shelves of books in her room, Snape knew Hermione collected diaries for their workmanship, not for her

desire to fill them. Like the rose and a few other items, she would have thought the sentiment behind the gift attentive...if it wasn't for that *one thing* that made Snape's intentions perverse.

This diary, for example, was already full. From the few pages she had read, Hermione gathered that it used to belong to the young daughter of a Death Eater in the late '60s. The witch detailed the various wizards she was forced to 'entertain' during the parties her family threw in honor of Voldemort.

Disgusted, Hermione slammed the book closed, possessing half a mind to throw it away.

She smoothed her hand over the leather surface, eyes glazed in contemplation.

Forgetting...dismissing...ignoring her previous thoughts, Hermione arose from the desk and crossed her bedroom. She placed the diary with the rest of her collection, one shelf below a dry, black rose.

After a lengthy shower, Hermione combed out her hair and stood before the mirror. She gazed at her reflection for a long time until her chin ultimately dropped in defeat.

The image before her was terrible. She could not continue working these long hours on so little sleep.

Opening her personal cabinet, Hermione reached for one of the dozens of potions she had brewed herself. Her hand hesitated in the air. After opening and closing her fist, Hermione glanced at her reflection one more time and finally retrieved a small vial.

With one movement, Hermione clenched her eyes, yanking the cork from the vial, and downing the contents in one quick gulp.

The sound of her personal cabinet closing on its own accord forced Hermione to look up.

There was a second pair of eyes gazing at her in the mirror, shrouded between two curtains of long, greasy hair.

Hermione couldn't move.

Her mouth opened, inhaling sharply as if to scream, yell, cry... she did not know what. But before she had the chance, Snape completely pressed himself against her backside. One arm came around her, sliding along her collarbone and into her dressing gown. He held her left breast with delicate fingers, stimulating her nipple against his calloused palm.

His other hand squeezed her thigh, grinding her bum against his hardness already pressed there. Leaning down, cold nose pressed behind her ear, Snape inhaled deep and whispered, "... Missed this."

Hermione looked at the vial in her palm and cried, "Gods... no!"

"No?" Snape laughed. "You've been waiting for me, don't deny it. Every night, you stand on your balcony, hoping to catch one glimpse... My tokens of ardor are strewn about your room. You've been waiting for me."

"I'd expected this long before now." The last words squeaked out of Hermione's mouth on a high note when the hand massaging her thigh slipped between her legs.

"That pathetic little stunt you pulled with *The Quibbler* has made things difficult for me. But... you at least managed to keep my existence to yourself. Why is that? Why haven't you reported me to the Aurors?"

"I don't... know."

Severus growled through clenched teeth, grasping her wrist and forcing her to turn around and face him.

Looking up at his tall, imposing figure, Hermione forced herself to sound stern. "I want you to leave. Now."

He smirked to himself, trailing his index finger along her jaw, down her neck... By the time he reached her chest, the dressing gown was ripped open by his impatient hands.

Hermione fought against him, half pushing, half pulling, but crying uncontrollably.

Snape grasped her by the wrists, forcing her bum to sit upon the sink. Realizing she was clutching something, he opened her palm and held the tiny vial in his own.

He looked at the vial, then at her, then back to the vial. His eyes were wild. Pulling her wrist up to his face, Snape peppered her skin with soft kisses and murmured, "This is twenty times the gift I could ever dream of giving you."

Dreamless Sleep...

The effects were already taking hold of her senses. Hermione was truly afraid now. "This isn't fair."

"Don't start with that rubbish again."

Before Hermione could sluggishly protest again, her mouth was seized. Snape practically wrapped his entire being around her. Devouring her lips and tongue, his arms held her firmly, hands trailing past her hips and along her thighs to wrap them tightly around his waist.

Hermione whimpered continuously. There was no violence in the way he touched her. Not like the other times. Everything in this encounter was so breathtakingly passionate and sensuous, it hurt. Snape groaned against her ear like he couldn't get enough of her.

Her heart would have truly melted in this man's hands if it wasn't for that one thing that ruined it.

Hermione's limbs felt like lead.

There was always one thing with Snape...

Hermione was freely crying now. Snape issued soft sounds of comfort against her ear. Wrapping his arms around her immobile body, he picked her up and carried her to the bed.

The last thing she remembered before falling into a comatose sleep was the image of her right leg raised in the air. Snape braced her calf upon his bare shoulder, repeatedly kissing the inside of her knee as he stroked himself above her.

*** ** *

Hermione did not wake up screaming the next morning.

She wasn't in the least bit of pain.

Birds chirped outside her window, forcing her eyes to snap open. She lay there without moving, body as numb as her emotions.

After a length of time passed, she finally dragged herself into the bathroom to wash the crust out of her hair.

*** **

Snape disappeared for another stretch of time. Time Hermione could have used to report him to the Aurors.

But she never did.

Except to go to work, Hermione rarely left her flat now, so determined was she to catch Snape as he left his little 'gifts.'

Ron had finally bullied her into dinner. He had grown so worried at her change in demeanor that he refused to leave her alone until they had a frank talk. Hermione refused to go to a restaurant, instead insisting she do the cooking.

Chopping away at a head of lettuce, Hermione suddenly froze. Knife in hand, from the corner of her eye she noticed the shadows upon her tile floor shift slightly.

"Please... don't," was all she said, voice hard.

Hermione knew he was standing right behind her. The seconds passed painfully. She had expected Snape to snatch her by now, but he didn't.

Knife raised, Hermione turned around very slowly. Snape was in fact standing directly behind her, but far enough away that he couldn't reach her.

His arms were crossed, head cocked to one side, hiding half of his face with his hair. He stared at Hermione long and hard, his expression impassive. After glancing at the knife in her hand, he shrugged his shoulders dismissively and turned around to leave.

His arm was seized.

"Don't leave!" The knife dropped to the floor with a heavy thud.

Back facing her, Snape spoke through gritted teeth. "You cannot have it both ways."

"It doesn't need to be like this." She'd said these words to him before, but not with as much pleading in her voice.

Rotating on the spot, Snape smirked mockingly, laughter rumbling in his chest. But it died off just as suddenly as his hands grabbed her about the arms. "I don't enjoy repeating myself. You don't know me. Never have, never will. Has it ever crossed your mind that I thoroughly enjoy it *like this?*"

"Re-release me."

He shook her hard.

"Let go, don't leave, stop, harder'... Everything that comes out of your mouth is bliss. I wouldn't enjoy you so thoroughly if you weren't as insane as I am..."

"I am not insane!"

Snape roughly grasped her around the waist, throwing her upon the table while ripping her robes up around her thighs. Dinnerware crashed around them, shattering upon the floor. Screaming, Hermione kicked and scratched at any part of Snape she could reach, but suddenly stilled when his hand shoved between her thighs.

His fingers easily slid into her wetness.

"Say those words again. But this time, try to convince yourself... not me."

Eyes clenched tight, mouth falling open, her entire body seemed to curl against him. Hermione couldn't think or breathe. The pleasure was insanity itself. That realization struck her when her thighs slowly began to open with each stroke of his hand.

She fell back against the table with a loud, drawn out groan.

Snape pinched her where he knew it would hurt the most.

Hermione turned her face to the side, biting her lip to keep from screaming. That rumbling laugh of his...and the soothing touch of his fingers...told her it had been a good move.

It was difficult for Hermione to see Snape in this position. But from the clinking sounds of metal upon metal, she knew he was unbuckling his trousers.

Hermione held her breath, lying absolutely still, not displaying any emotion that might resemble pleasure or pain.

With one severe movement he was atop her. Within her. He licked at the tears trailing down her cheeks, and with a voice full of heady approval, he said, "Good girl... you're learning."

End

Author's Notes: That's it! No mas. This fic is officially and completely DONE. I had this ending in mind when I had first written it, but decided to tame it down for LJ. Please tell me which ending you prefer.

-Chapter beta'ed by my good friend, Norman. He's only active in the Buffy fandom, but was kind (and excited) enough to look this over for me. Please check out his film work here>>> <http://www.myspace.com/16thhour>