

Voice Of Truth

by GinnyW

After years of living on the run for the murder of Albus Dumbledore, Severus Snape is captured by Aurors. Hermione must now try to convince Harry of Snape's innocence.

All This For Our Glory

Chapter 1 of 8

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This is a response to the HP Chapter Challenge issued by Southern_witch69 over at her Yahoo! Group, Potter_Place, and at The Petulant Poetess. Rules are at the end of the first chapter.

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Thanks go to Southern_Witch_69 for beta reading this story for me. She's been motivational and encouraging.

I hate attending these events. They are always ridiculous displays of false friendship and bravado. Don't get me wrong. I still have my friends. The Unstoppable Trio will always be friends; we don't need events such as these Ministry fiascos to force us to catch up. These events are for people like Lavender Brown, enabling her to coo for the *Daily Prophet* reporter and cameraman and say that she used to date Ron Weasley.

Ginny's still around, too. To hear her tell it, we should've been dubbed the Unstoppable Foursome, but Harry was right to not have her involved in the end. He would have lost his focus and been more intent on protecting her than in destroying the last of the Horcruxes and finally destroying *him*.

Thank God I didn't have that problem.

No one would ever have been able to accuse Ron of putting his girlfriend ahead of himself. Not that he's a selfish prat. (Well, he is... but he could be worse.) He ~~just~~*doesn't get it*, and I decided that I was not going to spend the rest of my life trying to teach him.

Don't feel sorry for me, and please don't hate Ronald Weasley for being who he is. I love him for who he is. He is sweet and caring. Unfortunately, he's just totally clueless when it comes to dealing with women. Harry likes to remind us that I once said that Ron had "the emotional range of a teaspoon." That's not quite true anymore. I'd say he's reached the capacity of a tablespoon now.

It certainly doesn't affect his love life, however. He is a Quidditch star, and he laps up the attention as if it were life-sustaining water. You should see those blue eyes light up every time some new star struck tart comes running up to ask him for his autograph. That fame coupled with his reputation from helping Harry to bring down the Dark Lord...well, you get the idea.

Personally, I am happy being in the background and letting the boys enjoy the limelight. Actually, let me rephrase that: Let Ron enjoy the limelight. Harry, too, is happy to hide out in the background. Though, he has a much more difficult time remaining back in the deep, dark depths than I do. Think about it: How would you like to get stuck

with a nickname as trite as *The Chosen One*? Poor Harry.

But I digress. I was discussing this bloody Ministry event. They happen on an annual basis, thankfully...any more often and I would go batty. I am eager for the day when they will occur at less frequent intervals, say every ten or twenty years. Tonight, however, they are supposed to make an announcement. I have every confidence that it will be the one that I've been waiting for.

I've spent the last three years of my life devoted to my latest cause and have been fighting tooth and nail for it. Just last week, I took my report to Harry at Auror Headquarters and presented the information to him. My friend assured me that he would take the time to sift through and read my report. I am very grateful to him for that. After promising that he would review the contents with the Head of the Department of Aurors and with the Minister of Magic, I left comforted in the knowledge that he would do what was right.

I was thankful that I would not have to deal with that mass of ruddy red tape on my own.

When I was discussing tonight's gala with Harry yesterday morning, he told me that my data had been the current hot topic amongst the Aurors. He also told me they were working on something and were hoping to announce the results by this evening. I am optimistic that this means that my work has been reviewed and that the Ministry has made a decision.

I'm tired of keeping secrets from my friends, and I'm tired of the lying. It gets old after awhile. They think I'm fighting for a new hopeless cause. Ron keeps joking about my failed attempts at S.P.E.W. I quip back that S.P.E.W. was nothing compared to my failed attempts at trying to get him to take his N.E.W.T.s. The lazy arse never even bothered taking them. As I said before, he was a lost cause.

"Hermione, would you like something else? How about you, Harry?"

I shake my head. If I have another drink, I know I'll be more than slightly tipsy. I need to keep my wits about me at such a time.

"Nah, I'm all right, thanks, Ron," comes Harry's reply.

"Sure, ignore me."

"Sorry, Gin. I figured your husband would take care of you," Ron answers her with a saucy grin as he walks off towards the bar.

He makes it back to our table...with a drink for Ginny, of course...just as Scrimgeour takes the podium. He's giving his usual spiel regarding how wonderful our world is now that You-Know-Who is gone...Cripes, they *still* can't say his bloody name!...how Harry, Ron, and I saved everyone from his evil reign of terror, and how we need to take another moment to remember those that lost their lives during the war.

It's time. I know what he'll get to next. An announcement about all of the work I've been doing. It will have paid off.

"It seems to be a fitting time to inform you all of the work that a member of the Unstoppable Trio has been working on," he begins. A smile appears on my face.

And then, my stomach seems to drop through the floor, the words that I hear next are not what I had anticipated. "After the very thorough investigation of Miss Granger, I am pleased to announce that we apprehended Albus Dumbledore's murderer this afternoon, and he is in Auror custody as we speak. There will be a brief trial, where we do not expect to have any complications, and he will be taken to Azkaban."

The hall breaks out in thunderous applause as I bury my face into my hands. Ron jumps up and claps me on the back. "Hermione! You didn't tell us that you'd found the git! How did you do it?"

I slowly bring up my face from my hands. The words that I need to say are stuck somewhere in the back of my throat as I stare at the jubilant faces of my friends *This afternoon? They apprehended him this afternoon?* As I slowly begin to process this information I find myself wondering if they waited until today to arrest him intentionally or if today was when they finally figured out where he was. Either way, what else do they know?

My gaze meets a green questioning stare. I'm not sure if he's surprised that I'm not jumping for joy like the rest of the crowd or not. He saw my report. He knew my opinion. What did Harry expect? His perplexed eyes are replaced by glittering triumph. For him, the search for Severus Snape had become personal the day Harry had chased him off of the Hogwarts' grounds to Disapparate to his freedom.

I no longer think of the events that occurred on top of the Astronomy Tower that fateful evening as a murder. I did at first. How could someone not think of it that way after hearing Harry's version of the events that took place? I was certain of Snape's guilt as much as the next person. Harry had finally convinced me of the evilness that was Severus Snape. However, since that time I've learned the pertinent information and saw Albus Dumbledore's death for what it truly was... a suicide.

More accurately, it was euthanasia...an assisted suicide for someone that was already on the brink of death.

That was what the data I spent the last three years of my life gathering stated. I had spent hours upon hours in research and miles upon miles in legwork to gather the information that I had presented to the Ministry of Magic.

No, I correct myself. *It was data that I had presented to Harry. Bloody hell.*

He took my information and somehow used that to find *him*. Obviously, Harry ignored all of the facts that I'd presented *on his* innocence.

How did they find him? I wonder as my stomach roils, the nausea bubbling slowly up my throat, threatening to overspill.

As I continue to stare into Harry's eyes, I begin to wonder how much he truly knows. Finally, I am able to form the words without fear of emptying my stomach for the entire room to see. My anguish is quickly replaced with anger as I continue to stare at *my friend*. "Harry, what did you do?" I ask, my voice barely able to be heard over the crowd.

He's smiling at me now. "We're not going to discuss this here, Hermione," he states firmly. I expect him to disengage from me and go up and give a bloody speech about the evilness that is Snape and how he, Harry Potter, had finally avenged Dumbledore's death. He may not enjoy the limelight, but this is a case where I fully expect Harry James Potter to gloat.

I am surprised when he doesn't make his way to the podium. Instead, Harry reaches over and grabs my hand, leading me out of my chair. The crowd is still excitedly chatting about this turn of events, and no one, save Ginny and Ron, even notices when we've left the room.

SS quote: "Nah, I'm all right, thanks, Ron."

A/N: This story will be 8 chapters long, and **is** complete. The remaining chapters are currently being beta read, so there will not be long lapses or waits in posting. So this story could be completed before the first chapter was posted, I had a few people look over it to spur me on to write more. I want to thank those gals for being patient and ignoring the slight changes in plot, minor details, and grammar errors that they had to wade through just so I could keep writing. :-)

This is a response to the HP Chapter Challenge issued by Southern_witch69 over at The Petulant Poetess and yahoo!group, Potter_Place. The rules are as follows:

This has been influenced by Doompark's 394 Challenge. The stories created from that have been amazing, so let's have a try again. I hope this doesn't sound complicated. I'll try my best to explain (A big thanks to NSS for the help with the wording).

Pairings? Choose one (Yes, there must be a love match between them.)Hermione/Severus, Draco/Ginny, Harry/Gabrielle, Ron/Luna

1. Take the month and day of your numerical birth date and add them together. (Example: My birthday is on July the fifth. 07 [seventh month] + 05 [fifth day] = 12)
2. Divide the sum by 2 to get a second number. (Example: I would divide 12/2 and get 6. Round all half numbers up to the higher number.)
3. Open up Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's (Philosopher's) Stone and use your SECOND number to figure out what chapter to open up to. (Example: I would open to chapter number 6.)
4. Use your FIRST number to find the sentence to use. (Example: I would scroll down to the 12th sentence of the chapter, even if the sentence is on the next page.)
5. The first chapter should include that sentence. ****Note**** In the case of an odd or two short sentence, you may use the one immediately before or after (include your sentence with it). I won't be going behind you to see if you have the correct quotes. If you'd like to include a cool sentence before or after your designated sentence, please do so. It's all about fun.

Example:

"Go on," he said.

This could become...

"Go, on," he said. Having said that, he stood and gathered his things.

6. Continue the process with Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets following the same formula and the second chapter will be formed around this sentence.
7. Continue with POA, GOF, OotP, and HBP in the same manner and in this order. *Each chapter must be 1000-2000 words long. No shorter and no longer*

BONUS:

An additional chapter or two chapters can be created from the two extra books that J.K. Rowling wrote: Quidditch Through the Ages and Fantastical Beasts & Where to Find Them. These aren't as lengthy as the others, so you'll have to find your sentence and page a bit different here.

Fantastical Beasts...

1. Use your FIRST number to determine what page to turn to. (The highest sum would be 43. Since there are only 42 pages after the foreword, if your sum is 43, use the number 42.)
2. Use your SECOND number to determine which sentence to use on that page. If your number isn't found on the page, simply use the last sentence. (There are so many run-on sentences. You'll probably have to do this.)
3. Record the sentence AND the beast's name in which it falls under. (Example: I would pick sentence 6 from page 12 and note that my beast is the Common Welsh Green.)
4. Write the chapter using the sentence and the beast from that page. Use the same length requirements as above.

Quidditch Through The Ages...

1. Use your FIRST number to determine what page to turn to.
2. Use your second number to determine what sentence to use. Record the sentence and build the chapter around it. You may not have enough sentences on the page, so simply use the last sentence if this is the case. There are many run-on sentences there, and some pictures take up a lot of room.

Use the same length requirements for this chapter.

NOTES:

If you use the six current Harry Potter books plus the 2 extra books, you could have an 8 chapter story. The chapters won't be very taxing, as the length requirements are minimum. If you do not have all of these books, please ask me or anyone else who might own them. We will gladly give you the quote you need to get started. That should give people enough time to start up something and begin posting. I hope someone takes up this challenge. If you need anything, please post for help here or send an email to me.

Onto the Crashing Waves

Chapter 2 of 8

After years of living on the run for the murder of Albus Dumbledore, Severus Snape is captured by Aurors. Hermione must now try to convince Harry of Snape's innocence.

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Harry pulls me into a quiet room off of the main hall, and mutters, *"Muffliato,"* at the door. He has the courtesy to conjure me a chair and a glass of ice water before he begins his speech. Well, it's more like a string of accusing questions.

"How long have you known where he was? Where has he been hiding all this time? How close are you *tdim*? Don't you realize what he did? Hermione! Whose side are you on anyways?" The volume of his voice rose with each consecutive question until he was yelling. It was no more than what I expected. Harry has always been biased when it comes to Snape. I just wish that I'd realized that sooner. We all want to see the best in our friends, though.

As with Ron, I love Harry for who he is. I don't have any grand expectations for either of them. They grew into the men that they are now, and I doubt they'll ever change. Just as they love me for my faults, I love them for theirs.

I brush a stray wisp of hair, which had escaped from the tight twist, out of my face. I know better than to start arguing with Harry now. I need him to listen to reason, and that is best done when he is calm.

He seems to realize that I haven't even bothered trying to answer his questions, and he stops. "Hermione, I know you've been looking into Dumbledore's murder. You've never lied about that. What I want to know is why you *really* brought me the evidence. I want ... no ... *needed* to know why your report was written in such a way that made Snape look like some bloody martyr! You know my view on this. I will NOT do anything to help acquit that *murderer*."

"If it bothered you so much, Harry, why didn't you ask me this when I first brought you the file?" I ask calmly.

The growl that can be heard under his breath is unnerving, and the flicker of fire that I can see behind his glare is almost frightening. If I didn't know him so well, I'd be scared.

"Harry, he's blameless in this," I dare to assert. "And you have the final piece of evidence that can exonerate him."

"I don't have anything of the sort. Do you think that if I had evidence to clear him that I ... an Auror ... would withhold evidence? Do you honestly believe that I would have spent the last seven years looking for the man?" Harry brings up his hand and runs it through his hair, causing it to look more disheveled than normal. He is pacing about the room now and fidgeting with his hands.

With his reaction to this bit of information I find myself wondering what he truly would've done had he known that I suspected he held a final piece of evidence in Severus' defense. My report had been written as impartially as I could. It's painfully obvious, though, that Harry only saw the things in my statements as confirmation of Severus' guilt. Admittedly, this final bit of evidence even existing is just a theory that I have. I never wanted to have to rely on it if it wasn't truly there. I gave Harry my report hoping to first garner support for Severus and then search for more evidence *before* he was detained.

His eyes are now glittering with unshed tears. "You didn't see it, Hermione. I watched him raise his wand and kill Dumbledore. No hesitation. His face was contorted with pure evilness. You didn't see it! You don't know!"

I stand up to comfort my friend, this boy that had been forced to become a man in the blink of an eye. His life was filled with large stepping-stones, which made Harry into the man he is today. These ranged from the moment he grabbed the point of the hat and pulled it off...after it had pronounced him a Gryffindor...to the various adventures that no child should attempt to losing every person that became close to him. I could not imagine losing all of the people that he had, especially after he had grown so close to Sirius, Dumbledore, and Lupin. "I know what happened, Harry." My arm wraps around him as I continue, "But I also know the other half of the story."

"You are being ridiculous, Hermione. You can't possibly understand," Harry replies. He shrugs off my arm and moves away from me.

It's hurtful that he doesn't even want my comfort and understanding; he obviously feels betrayed. I expected it, and I only know that it'll get worse. He thinks he wants to hear everything, but in truth, Harry only wants to hear what *he* wants to hear. "You have to go back to your study, Harry, and pull out those accursed gadgets that Dumbledore left you. That is where the evidence is that will clear Severus."

"Severus? *Severus*? When the bloody hell did that man become *Severus*?" He is ranting now; that is never a good sign. I think he finally realizes that as well. Harry throws himself in the chair he'd conjured for me and audibly forces himself to take slow deep breaths. After several strained minutes, his anger is back under control. "Start at the beginning, Hermione."

I eye him warily. I know what I need to say to him, but I also know that this is going to be one of the hardest conversations that I've ever had with him. Before I start, I say a small prayer of thanks that Ron and Ginny aren't in here right now. I can only fend off one of these hot-tempered people at a time. Trust me. I've been doing this for over fourteen years.

It's true; Harry has spent the last seven years searching for Severus Snape. Though to say that he'd been searching consistently for that time would be a lie. There was the year when we were searching for the lost Horcruxes, and Severus just happened to be one of the other things that we were looking for. Then, Harry had to get through his three years of Auror training, and then he began work. Although, the Head of Aurors, at Harry's request, did turn the search of Snape over to Harry the moment that his training was complete.

I say that I've spent three years doing the research as to what really happened that night. That was how long I actively started on the project, though it wasn't how long I'd been thinking about it. There were so many pieces to the puzzle that never set right with me, and listening to Harry go on about his investigation and what he'd like to do to Dumbledore's murderer was enough to cause me to want to make sure that the man was truly guilty.

I pull out my wand to conjure another chair and sit down across from Harry. Sighing, I lean back and say, "All right, Harry. I'll start at the beginning."

This is not going to be easy for me to do. There are things that I know that he'll truly not want to hear. However, I owe it to him to tell him the truth.

"It all began shortly after Dumbledore was killed," I start.

Harry jumps at attention, unable to contain himself. "You've been plotting against me, your best friend, for that long?" he shouts.

"Harry, if you're not going to listen, I won't tell you a bloody thing!" I snap. His face doesn't relax, but he, thankfully, closes his mouth. "Yes, it was when I first told you about the information that I'd found about Eileen Prince and that how I figured out that Se-Snape was the Half-Blood Prince who you'd been taking all of your advice from during our sixth year."

Harry winced visibly at that. It always hurts him to be reminded of his folly.

"Well," I continue, "you had also told all of us the reason that Dumbledore had trusted Snape. I'm sorry, Harry, but the reasoning, even at that time, just didn't set right with me. I mean, when had we ever known Dumbledore to do something so shoddy. It didn't make any sense. McGonagall, the Weasleys, and Lupin...they were all stunned. We all trusted Dumbledore, and there was no reason to think that he'd ever let any of us down. So, why would Dumbledore expect everyone else to trust Severus Snape, if his reason wasn't truly a strong and valid one?"

"I told you, Dumbledore told me that trusted Snape because..."

Holding up my hand to stop him, I jump back in. "It was a rhetorical question, Harry. Now, quit interrupting." His eyes narrow, but he relents... for the moment at least. "No, Dumbledore did NOT specifically tell you that *that* was the reason that he trusted Snape. You inferred that all on your own based on information that you'd received. I realized that when I asked you to relate exactly what Dumbledore had said to you. The way that you worded things, again, set off a few alarms. Filing the information away for later use, I helped you.

"I stood by you. Please remember that. Ron, Ginny, and I stood by you through thick and thin, Mr. Potter. We love you. *wanted* to believe you whole-heartedly. But I couldn't deny my inner voice telling me that something was *off*."

That damn wisp of hair is back in my face, tickling my cheek. It's annoying as hell. I tuck it, once again, behind my ear and take another sip of my water before I continue.

"The following year, when we were finally going after Voldemort, it came up again. Severus saved our lives. You were too blind to see it, but he did. If it wasn't for the way that he distracted Voldemort and actually goaded Pettigrew into doing *something*... we would have all been killed, and Lord Voldemort would now be ruling supreme over the Wizarding world."

"He didn't do anything!" snapped Harry, as he stood up and began pacing. "Snape just spat out his nasty little insults at Wormtail. The fact that Wormtail owed me a life debt was the reason that he turned on his Master. It had nothing to do with that other turncoat!"

Jumping to my feet, I shout, "Don't you dare call him that! You have no idea what he went through! None! He may have his faults, but Severus is a good man!" It takes every ounce of self-control for me to calm myself down. The glass that I had been holding is now shattered in a thousand pieces on the floor. It is only then that I notice the icy water that had sloshed over the front of my dress robes. A muttered *Reparo* and a quick Warm Air Charm clears the mess.

Apparently, I caught Harry's attention with my last spirited remarks. I finally notice that he's watching me closely, almost as if he's figured something out. After several long minutes he asks, "Just how well do you know him, Hermione?"

COS quote: He grabbed the point of the hat and pulled it off.

Ginny's Notes: Next up: Hermione begins to tell her story.

Southern's Notes: Harry is such a prat so far. One can hope that he'll "lighten" up soon and see her side of things!

Do Not Be Afraid

Chapter 3 of 8

After years of living on the run for the murder of Albus Dumbledore, Severus Snape is captured by Aurors. Hermione must now try to convince Harry of Snape's innocence.

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*Just how well do you know him, Hermione?*The question is ringing in my head.

"Sit down, Harry," I say calmly, preparing to answer.

"Hermione," he says with clear warning in his voice.

"I'll tell you. Just please sit down." He reluctantly complies. I wish that there were an easier way to tell this story. Part of me is afraid to tell Harry everything, and the other part of me is relieved that this will all be brought out into the open. I carefully sit down again. "After you destroyed the last remnants of Voldemort, Harry, I really began thinking about all of those things that I mentioned. It was as if they were haunting me. I saw him at the first Victims of War Remembrance Service. The one that was about two months after they declared the ruddy war finally over."

"He was there? Why didn't you say anything?"

"Because I didn't know for certain! I caught a glimpse of him, but as soon as it registered to me who it was, he was gone," I snap. Once again, I need to calm myself before I can continue. He's still glaring daggers at me. I know he loves me, but it's frustrating to know that he's this upset with me.

"I saw him again at the one year anniversary." Holding up my hand, for what seemed like the hundredth time, I continue. "I've usually been late to the celebration dinner, but that year I was horribly late..."

Hermione was dabbing her eyes. It had only been a year since they were all, finally, allowed to grieve. During the war many people died in service to the Order and to the Wizarding community at large. They had been very dark days, and there had been little time to mourn those that were lost.

Scrimgeour had commissioned famous Wizarding sculptor, Blake Barstow, to create a monument in the Hogwarts' cemetery where people could pay their respects to all that were lost during those dark times. This year, the monument was being christened, and Scrimgeour was telling everyone that there would be an annual memorial service to remember the fallen, followed by a victory celebration. Hermione dreaded the idea of attending the celebrations... She'd never been one for parties. She was glad that they had won, that Voldemort was gone forever; however, she was not looking forward to attending the annual victory parties for the next hundred years or so.

They had finally finished reading the list of names and giving short speeches. Those that had gathered were dismissed to attend the celebrations. Standing from her seat, Hermione walked quietly away from the crowd of people. The day was drizzly and gloomy. Ministry employees had cast a sphere over the area where the service was to be held in order to keep the attendees from getting wet by the rain.

Hermione wasn't sure where she was walking. Everyone else was leaving through the gates so they could quickly Disapparate to a happier and drier location. They couldn't leave fast enough. Solemn, Hermione was not in the mood to join her friends just yet. She exited the sphere with a soft pop to walk among the dead. Instantly, she began feeling drops of water on her hair and body.

It took about ten minutes of slowly treading through the grass and reading the epitaphs of those that she remembered when she stopped. Hermione was no more than ten feet away from Dumbledore's grave when she saw him.

The black cloak hanging over his shoulders was flapping in the breeze. His hands were tucked into the pockets of his plain black robes, and his stringy hair was blowing across his face as he stood at a respectable distance in front of Albus Dumbledore's burial site. Hermione could not see his face, but she found herself wondering why the man's murderer would be standing, as if paying his respects.

"Snape was standing over Dumbledore's grave?" Harry interrupts.

"Yes, he was," I reply. "Now, hush!"

Carefully, quietly, she dared to walk closer, her curiosity getting the better of her. "Professor?" she asked tentatively.

The man whipped around with his wand drawn on her. Hermione jumped at his quick movements. She instantly showed her hands, but she did not step back. Instead, she met his fierce gaze, a determined look on her face. "I'm not holding my wand. I..." She began to falter with the words she suddenly wanted to say.

"Out with it, girl," he snarled at her.

"I...I just wanted to say thank you for everything that you did for us," she said quietly.

There was obvious doubt in his eyes, though his stance relaxed, if ever so slightly. The silence stretched between them.

She knew that she could scream, and providing that there was anyone still left from the memorial service, this man would not be able to escape quick enough. They were, after all, still on Hogwarts' grounds. However, a strong part of her did not wish to do that. She also knew that there was a chance that he could hurt her, but she doubted that he actually would. There was no rhyme or reason to it...just something in her gut told her to trust him.

Thus, it caught her completely off-guard when she was hit with a silent hex. Her body stiffened and began to fall towards the hard, wet ground. Before her body hit, however, he waved his wand yet again, slowing her fall so that she reached the grass gently.

"I don't know what you're playing at, Miss Granger," he hissed, stooping over her. "However, regardless of your intentions, I cannot have you preventing me from leaving." He stood back up. "Accio Firebolt," he said. Moments later, a broom slapped into his hand. Mounting the broom, he kicked off the ground and quickly left.

"...it took about five minutes more for the Petrificus Spell to wear off, and I was able to move. I was soaked to the bone from lying on the ground, so I had to go home, clean up, and change. That's why I was so late that evening."

"A Firebolt? Snape had a Firebolt?" Harry mutters.

"I tell you about seeing the man after a remembrance service, and all you can mention is his ruddy broom?" I ask in undisguised disgust.

"Actually, Hermione, I can't believe that you were so stupid as to approach the git. You should've called for help, detained him, something... ANYTHING!"

I roll my eyes at him. It was that or get riled up again, and I honestly think that one of us needs to stay calm right now. Sure, it may have been a tad foolish to approach a murderer that way, but I didn't see it that way. Where I typically stick with my brains and logic, I am a woman... and there had been something telling me that Severus Snape could truly be trusted.

"That wasn't the only time that you saw him, was it?" Harry accuses.

"No, it wasn't," I say firmly.

After that first meeting, Hermione began visiting the cemetery often. Something about Severus Snape began fascinating her. She began wondering about his motives, intentions, and true allegiances. Her attempts to see the man proved to be futile, she never saw him there.

As the year wore on, her visits became less and less frequent. Face it; visiting a graveyard on a near weekly basis can begin to take its toll and become rather depressing. With only three months to go until the next remembrance service, Hermione gave up going all together.

When the next Victims of War Remembrance Service finally rolled around, she again decided to wander amongst the tombstones after the speeches. All of the other guests could not leave the grounds soon enough, but Hermione was finding something peaceful about it. Walking the same path that she had the following year, she forced herself to stay calm as she neared Dumbledore's final resting place.

There was no one there.

What did catch her eye was a bench that had been placed near the gravesite. Hermione sat on the cold stone. She was grateful that it wasn't as dreary this year as it had been last time. Gingerly, she sat back against the bench and lost herself in thoughts and memories. The time slipped by.

After nearly an hour of sitting, she finally pulled herself up and left. She'd realized that their prior meeting had been a nothing more than coincidence.

Hermione only made a few visits until the next year's service. Once again she found herself making the familiar trek through the grave markers towards the stone bench and the remains of Hogwarts' former headmaster. Seating herself, she again lost herself in thought.

Hermione was no longer determined to find her former professor. She only wanted to be among the stillness and quiet. The air here was refreshing, especially when compared to the air in London where she lived and worked. The smells brought back memories of youth and...despite the location...life.

Hermione jumped when she suddenly felt a cold piece of wood up against her throat and hot breath in her ear. "Interesting. One might think that you were waiting for someone, Miss Granger," came the familiar drawl.

Not daring to move, she replied, "Professor Snape." She was surprised at how calm the words sounded.

"What do you want?" he hissed in a deadly tone, pushing the wand firmly against her neck.

"The ruddy git had you at wandpoint? Bloody hell, Hermione! What did you think you were doing going there if you thought he'd show up?" Harry chastises.

"By that point, I really didn't think that Severus would appear," I reply, noticing Harry shudder at Snape's given name. "I just found it relaxing to be there. However, I was hoping to learn the *truth*... not some cobbled version of everyone else's assumptions," I spit back at him before going back to my story.

"I just came by to visit. I honestly didn't expect for you to be here."

"Really now? Do you expect me to believe that? I know how often you've been here. Do you think that I'm not aware of the number of times that you've visited since our impromptu meeting two years ago?"

"How do you know? Have you been spying on me?"

"You interrupted my meeting, Miss Granger. I had come back a few times to try to finish my time here and found that every time I tried you were here. After a while, however, I must admit that I became intrigued." He relaxed the pressure that his wand was pressing into her skin. "Last year, I was hiding just beyond that tree over there. I had expected you to arrive with a team of Aurors. I must admit that you surprise me, Miss Granger. Haven't you told Potter or Weasley about your trips here?"

"No," she replied. "I did come several times, hoping to run into you. However, when it became apparent that you were not going to be back, I began coming here for the quiet."

"What do you want from me?"

"I suppose I want to know what really happened."

The wand that had been sticking into her neck was removed, though she didn't dare turn around. After several minutes, Hermione was sure that he'd left until she heard him take a breath to speak.

"If you truly wish to know the truth, Miss Granger, begin by looking carefully at the headmaster's memoirs. Be back here next year, come alone, and if you truly wish to have your questions answered, we will talk." His voice was quiet and surprisingly calm in her ears. That is until he hissed, "Do NOT double-cross me, Miss Granger."

POA quote: "A Firebolt?"

Author's Notes: I hope that this starts to answer some of the questions. I spoke with several people regarding the way that Hermione retold her story. I believe that the styles that I've used here, tell the story the best way.

Southern's Notes: I'm really enjoying this Hermione and am intrigued with the tale of how she came to "know" Snape so well. Muahahaha!

The Realm of the Unknown

Chapter 4 of 8

After years of living on the run for the murder of Albus Dumbledore, Severus Snape is captured by Aurors. Hermione must now try to convince Harry of Snape's innocence.

This is a response to the HP Chapter Challenge issued by Southern_witch_69 over at her Yahoo! Group: Potter Place and at The Petulant Poetess. Rules are at the end of the first chapter.

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Thanks go to Southern_Witch_69 for beta reading this story for me; she's been motivational and encouraging.

"Oh, and don't tell me," Harry mockingly says. "You went back the next year. I'm surprised that you're still among the living or have I been friends with nothing more than an apparition these last two years."

"Of course I went back! By that point, it was becoming a compulsion. I knew that there was something to be learned, and by God, I wanted to learn it," I say with fierce determination. I'm surprised that Harry doesn't jump up and begin another string of rants, but he shows an amazing amount of self-control. *It's about bloody time*, I think.

"Fine, Hermione. What did you learn?" He almost sounds resigned now. I'm happy about that. It means that he'll likely be able to accept the rest of my story.

"Well, I did what he said," I reply. "I went to the headmistress and requested to look at Dumbledore's memoirs..."

Hermione left the graveyard that afternoon more perplexed than she'd ever been before. She made her way to the victory celebration and left as soon as was socially acceptable, feigning a touch of a bellyache to aid her excuse.

Once home, she began writing down everything that she remembered about Severus Snape. She wrote everything from the spells that Harry learned in their sixth year book, Advanced Potion-Making, to the information that she'd dug up on his family. Hermione also wrote down, in as much detail as possible, every pertinent encounter that she could recall about the man...what he looked like, smelled like, and his surly attitude. No matter how hard she tried, things just weren't adding up in her mind.

It was a couple of months later before the school was opened again, and she had a few days off in a row to allow the time to stay there. She ventured back to Hogsmeade and up towards her alma mater. Hermione had owled Headmistress McGonagall and informed the headmistress of her desire to visit. So when Hermione arrived at the gates to the grounds, she found Neville Longbottom there to greet her.

Neville was now the Herbology professor at Hogwarts, though Hermione was surprised to see that it was him that came to greet her at the gates.

"Neville, it's so good to see you," Hermione said with a smile.

He gave her a lopsided grin. "Good morning, Hermione. Classes haven't started yet, and when Professor McGonagall told me you were due to visit this morning, I asked to be the one to welcome you."

Hermione preferred Neville coming to greet her as opposed to Charlie Weasley, the current Care of Magical Creatures professor and Keeper of the Keys. Charlie looked quite a bit like Ron, and he was just as flirtatious. At the Remembrance Celebration, Charlie had asked Hermione out. Their date had been extremely awkward, and Hermione later vowed to never date a former boyfriend's brother.

Neville carried on a one-sided conversation with her. He discussed his latest plants, experiments, and tales involving the joys of teaching. For a brief period, after school, Hermione had entertained the idea of teaching. However, listening to her friend go on, she was very glad that she'd not followed through with that. She was quite happy in her current position. The day-to-day drama of hormonal teenagers would be more than she could handle, at least at this point in her life. Perhaps a few years down the road she would change her mind.

They entered the main doors.

"I'm warning you, Peeves..." came the snappish voice of Professor McGonagall.

The poltergeist was floating above the doors to the Great Hall, and it appeared he had just doused a group of first years with ink. Hermione gave another silent prayer of thanks for her foresight at choosing another career, as she walked over to the cranky headmistress.

Peeves blew raspberries at the headmistress and took off to wreck havoc on another part of the castle. It was then that Professor McGonagall noticed her former student. "Oh, Miss Granger! Good morning," she said. "Come along, I have tea waiting for us up in my office."

Hermione turned, thanked Neville for walking her in, and followed the older witch up to her office.

Once they were settled in the headmistress' office, drinking tea, and the pleasant chatter was done with, Hermione broached the subject that she'd come there for.

"Professor," she began. "I actually had an ulterior motive for coming."

"I would be surprised if it were otherwise," came McGonagall's reply, though there was sly smile playing about her lips.

"Of course," Hermione replied with a grin. "I actually wanted to know if you had a copy of Professor Dumbledore's memoirs, journal, or whatever it was that he kept."

"I do, but why ever would you need them, Miss Granger?"

"I'm doing some research on Dark curses and hexes. I believe that there may be some information in the old headmaster's writings that may help me with a particular puzzle that I'm working on now," she supplied easily.

"You lied!" shouts Harry.

"I did not," I counter. "If you didn't know, Harry, I'm always doing research on Dark curses and hexes...seeing as that's my job! And I never said that it was Dumbledore's memoirs that would help me in that research."

I smile smugly as Harry sits back in his chair, defeated.

Professor McGonagall eyed the younger witch carefully before she slowly rose from her chair and walked over to the bookcase, pulling out a tattered leather bound book. "I will let you look it over, Miss Granger, but I ask that you not remove it from the school. It's rather particular, you see. When I first found it, I tried to take it with me to the cemetery. I thought it would be comforting to read it while sitting at Albus' grave. As soon as I tried to leave through the doors, the ruddy book began screaming as if it were a Mandrake. Since then, I've tried several things, and it refuses to leave the school via any conventional method: Floo and Portkey. I even tried having a house-elf attempt to Apparate with it."

Hermione gave her a curious look. "I understand, Professor. As I told you in my letter, I'm actually planning on staying for a day or two. I'd like to make use of the library as well."

"Of course, of course. I had Argus air out one of the guest rooms for you. I hope that you find what you're looking for."

"Me too," Hermione replied softly.

"I spent three days at Hogwarts. Most of the time I was copying Dumbledore's writings, but I also looked up a few hexes and curses in the Restricted Section. It may interest you to know that I went to the Room of Requirement, too," I say pointedly.

Harry's eyes narrow, and he shakes his head in disgust. It's obvious that he knows what I'm going to say. "It sounds to me, Hermione, that you were becoming quite obsessed with the greasy bastard. What good would *his* book be?"

"I was looking for breadcrumbs that would lead me to Severus' true allegiances. I felt that I needed both Dumbledore's memoirs and Severus' old schoolbook to help me." I sigh softly. "I knew it was doubtful, but a small part of me was hoping that I'd find the words, *Snape is innocent*, written down. I wasn't foolish enough to think that was exactly possible, especially since McGonagall had already read them. What I did find was details on the curse that affected him when he retrieved the first Horcrux. Dumbledore had outlined everything that happened from the Dark Magic and how Severus had saved his life." I pause and glare at my *friend* now. "Cripes! You'd think I was saying Voldemort. Severus, Severus, SEVERUS! Bloody hell, Harry, get over yourself!"

I don't remember getting to my feet, but I'm now standing directly in front of Harry's chair and leaning towards him. I fight back a growl as I step back. Losing my temper is something that I don't do often, but it truly can be volatile when I do. I force myself to mutter an apology and plop back into my chair.

His eyes narrow, as his glare intensifies. "Just how well do you know *Severus*?" he spits at me.

The words, *You don't really want to know*, flash through my head, but I think better of saying them. I rub my face with my hands. I finally decide that it's best to go back to telling my story.

When Snape had first told Hermione that he'd not meet with her until the following year, she'd wondered what she'd do with her questions and information in that timeframe. She was surprised then to find that she spent the first several months just trying to make sense of Dumbledore's writings and double entendre. When she'd been at the school, she'd used a sort of Dicta-Quill that copied his journal directly to her own parchments. Thankfully, the copies she'd made did not object to leaving the school grounds.

She now had reams of notes from the Dark Magic that had been coursing through the former headmaster's veins for their entire sixth year. The headmaster had indeed been quite ill during their sixth year. The dead arm that hung limply from his body was but a small fraction of the Dark Magic was eating away at the rest of his body. He had described pains in his chest, abdomen, legs, and had gone so far as to wear a glamour to keep the appearance that he still had a full head of hair at the time of his death. Apparently Dumbledore had worried that if the Order of the Phoenix thought that he was so deathly ill, then they would not have as much faith in him, and consequently, not have the faith in Harry.

Of course, Dumbledore never came out and directly said any of this. It was all written in small pieces here and there, scattered throughout the year. He would have a page that spoke about what he'd told specific Order members at a meeting, and then at the bottom of the page, he would write something like: My heart continues to ache for my foolishness of visiting the House of Gaunt.

It took Hermione a long time to figure out what Dumbledore was saying. She doubted it was something that Minerva would ever pick up on either. It was never indicated that Dumbledore mentioned anything about the Horcruxes to anyone other than Harry. And then, the Horcruxes were only mentioned as artifacts that belonged to Voldemort, nothing more. Harry never divulged their existence either. They were all afraid that others may be demented enough to try to create them themselves. She shuddered at the idea of Lucius Malfoy creating himself a Horcrux.

Hermione did, however, suspect that Snape had learned of them. Something in the writings suggested that Snape had helped Dumbledore destroy the soul trapped within the ring. But Hermione decided she'd need to speak with her old professor before she decided if that was a fact.

On the desk that she'd set aside for this research project sat the Half-blood Prince's copy of Advanced Potion-Making. Hermione had remembered Harry detailing where he'd stashed it when Snape had caught him after hexing Draco back in school. She wasn't sure what, but she was hoping that she'd find some clue to the man's personality hidden within its pages.

Between work and researching for Snape, Hermione had very little free time. Before she knew it, the war's anniversary was upon her. The bundle of nerves within her belly refused to calm as she prepared herself for her meeting. Making pat excuses to her friends and carrying an oversized handbag stuffed full with her notes, Hermione sat anxiously through the service. Once everyone began to make their way to the celebratory feast, she forced herself to calmly walk among the tombstones towards Albus Dumbledore's grave.

Ginny's Notes: Another evil ending. Sorry about that. Well... not really. ;-)

Southern's Notes: I wonder if anyone would pay me to give clues as to what happens next. Hmmm....

GOF quote: "I'm warning you, Peeves..."

Having the Strength to Stand

Chapter 5 of 8

After years of living on the run for the murder of Albus Dumbledore, Severus Snape is captured by Aurors. Hermione must now try to convince Harry of Snape's innocence.

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"Oi, what's going on in here?" came a voice near the doorway. Harry and I both look up to see Ron and Ginny standing there. "You all right, Harry? You look really angry about something."

I can't help but to roll my eyes at the obvious statement. I'm not surprised that the pair have found their way into this room. I was certain that they had seen Harry and I leave, and if anyone could break through my wards, it would be one of them. They know me so well.

Opening my mouth to comment, I am cut-off by Harry before I can utter a sound.

"Ron, Ginny, come in and have a seat. Hermione, here, is getting ready to tell us *exactly* how well she knows our old Potions professor, Severus Snape."

Of course, both redheads are slightly taken aback by Harry's announcement, but they quickly conjure their own chairs, perch themselves on the edge of their cushions, and wait for me to continue my story. While I mentally adjust to telling my other two friends the rest of my tale, Harry brings them up-to-date.

Carefully thinking about my word choice, I wait until Harry tells them everything. There is no reason for me to divulge that once I had Severus' book and the information from Dumbledore I soon began obsessing about the man. He was no longer the slimy git that I knew in school. He was a living, breathing individual with his own story to tell. I wanted to know what made him who he was and what lay beneath the surly exterior.

I'm surprised that Harry isn't shouting when he tells our friends that I first spoke with Snape four years ago. Once Ron and Ginny are duly surprised at the secrets I've been keeping, I continue on.

"Miss Granger," a silky voice drawled in her ears.

Hermione struggled to keep her breathing under control. Expecting a wand to be pointed at her, she carefully turned around.

"Give me your wand," the dark-haired man demanded. This request was not unexpected; Hermione had thought that if she were in his position she'd demand the same thing. She fumbled through her robes for her wand and quickly handed it over to him. "Are you ready to leave?" he asked.

"We're going someplace else?" Hermione asked, surprised.

"This is hardly the place to carry on an in-depth conversation, Miss Granger." He paused, looking at her intently. "You have no reason to fear me, unless you intend to double-cross me," he hissed.

"No, of course not," she asserted.

Nodding curtly, Snape lifted his wand and cracked it soundly over her head. The Disillusionment Charm ran down the length of her body before he cast the charm on himself. While they were standing still, Hermione could tell that someone was standing there, as soon as he moved, he was nothing more than a blur. If anyone was still

around they would simply think that any movement they saw was nothing more than wind.

She startled as she felt his hand grasp her elbow. "So you don't get lost," he said quietly. "Now, come."

They walked quickly and silently through the cemetery towards the gates. Hermione had to force herself to hold her tongue. She desperately wanted to ask where they were going. They passed a few stragglers, though most were lost in conversations with others to even notice the Disillusioned figures. However, Hermione caught a glimpse of Hogwarts' Headmistress and could've sworn that the older witch nodded slightly to them.

Once outside the gates of Hogwarts, he kept a firm hold on her arm, and they Disapparated.

"You make it sound like Professor McGonagall knew that you both were there," Ginny interrupted.

I nod. "I think she did. Ever since that afternoon, she's given me a few odd looks and has made comments likelt's a pity what happened to Severus. I think that if someone just took the time they may be able to help him."

"She's actually said that?" asked Ron in disbelief.

"Yes, she has... on more than one occasion."

I look to Harry who seems to be lost in thought. He finally meets my gaze and asks, "Where did he take you?"

"To his childhood home."

Harry nods. "I've been there," he acknowledges. "We thought we picked up his trail a while back, and we went to that house. He wasn't there, though. There wasn't any evidence that he had been there for quite some time."

"He doesn't live there," I admit. "At the time, he wasn't about to take me to where he was hiding."

Harry nods again. "What happened while you were there?" he prods.

"Simple. I pulled out all of the notes that I'd taken, and the research that I'd done over the last year. We discussed my findings, he answered my questions, and filled in the gaps that I'd had." Leaning forward in my chair, I eye Harry again. "Everything that I wrote in my report to you, Harry, all came from that meeting with him. Well, most of it, anyhow. There was still the evidence to gather. However, everything that I turned in to you a few weeks ago was carefully written, obtained, and verified."

"Hermione, that's not the sort of information that can solely be verified in an afternoon," Harry states.

"No, it isn't. After that afternoon, we made arrangements to meet again in two weeks. By the fifth meeting, I think it was, he began to trust me."

"Good morning. Shall we go?" a deep, smooth voice asked.

Hermione turned abruptly around and faced the dark-haired man. His skin was still rather pale, but not nearly as much as it had been when she'd been a student. Instead of his normal black cloak and billowing robes, he was wearing a long Muggle trench coat.

She gave him a soft smile. The walls that they both had built around themselves slowly began to slip away, as they began to build an awkward friendship.

"What? You're not going to take my wand?" Hermione replied. She was standing close to the water in front of Peter Pan's statue in Kensington Gardens when he had approached her.

"No, I am not," he answered simply, matching her grin with a sly smirk. "Are you ready?"

Eagerly, she placed her hand in his, and they walked towards the shelter of trees so that they could freely Disapparate.

"Where did you go?" asked Ginny. She seemed almost as giddy and excited as she had as an adolescent.

"We went to the Gaunt home where Dumbledore had found that first Horcrux," I reply. "I needed to find the traces of magic that had affected Dumbledore. He wasn't lying, Harry, when he'd told you that he was on death's doorstep when he'd returned from that trip. Severus had worked very hard and was barely able to save him."

"Yeah, just so he could kill him a few months later," came the sardonic reply.

"Did you even bother to read my report, Harry?" I finally ask, silently cursing myself as my eyes begin to water. "Or did you just skim and look for damning evidence to help you in your hunt? I went to painstaking efforts to ensure that everything... EVERYTHING in there was researched and accurate. Did you send the report on for anyone else to read? Or were you afraid that someone else would see the thoroughness of the documents and be forced to acknowledge that it was strong evidence to acquit Professor Snape!" I rail. "I know how much you lost, Harry. I'm your *friend*, remember? Dumbledore was that last thread that you had to hold on to... that last link to your parents, but you can't go on blaming an innocent man."

"An innocent man's face does not contort with hatred and rage. An innocent man does not mean it when he shouts an Unforgivable," Harry scathes.

"How do you know what he meant when he cast the Killing Curse, Harry? Can't even the smallest part of your brain comprehend that maybe the thing that he hated was that Dumbledore was forcing him to kill him? That Severus hated the role that he had to play and wanted nothing more than to back out of it?" I counter. "I know he's innocent. I TRUST him."

"He killed him!" Harry shouts.

"Dumbledore was already dead! The curses that his body was afflicted with were eating away at him during our entire sixth year. The poison that he drank that night was the final straw. He wasn't calling for Snape to save him. He knew that no one could. He was calling for Snape to kill him, to fulfill a vow. All of this, so that Snape could stick around and save your bloody hide when you went after Voldemort!"

Both redheads are entranced by the rally that Harry and I now have going on. Though rightfully so, both seem to be somewhat cautious, for fear that one of us may hex them.

Harry asks with his voice laden with hurt and disgust, "Just how many meetings did it take before you started shagging him?"

He's caught me off guard with that question, and I stammer. "I...I... erm..."

"You... erm... what?" Harry mocks.

"It wasn't like that, Harry," I assert. "We became friends. The two of us were working together, spending our free time together. Severus and I..." My voice trails off as I begin to wonder if they would ever be able to comprehend my decisions. Tears were again threatening to spill.

I jump slightly when I feel someone's arms come around me, pulling me into a fierce hug. Ginny rubs my back soothingly and mutters soft words of comfort. Sniffing to hold

back the tears, I pull back from my friend. She gives me a soft smile before sitting back in her seat next to me. Her strong show of support is enough to help me to say what I need to say.

"I love him," I mutter softly, but firmly. "I have spent the last three years trying to help him. I had hoped that I could get that final bit of evidence from you, Harry, so I could ensure his acquittal."

Harry glares at his wife, obviously upset with her because she'd offer me comfort...especially after such a startling confession. "There is nothing in Dumbledore's gadgets that could possibly clear Professor Snape," he responds. "They are nothing but odd, spurting, twirling knick-knacks. What could there possibly among them that I haven't yet seen?"

"A Pensieve memory," I reply confidently.

OotP quote: "You look really angry about something."

A/N: I'm sorry that took so long. Everything became rather hectic with the holidays. Thank you to everyone that has read and reviewed this so far. I really appreciate it.

Holding Out His Hand

Chapter 6 of 8

After years of living on the run for the murder of Albus Dumbledore, Severus Snape is captured by Aurors. Hermione must now try to convince Harry of Snape's innocence.

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For just over a year, Hermione had been meeting with Snape whenever possible and trying to help him. Her biggest regret was that she couldn't spend more time working on the project, as her own job interfered. Being a Curse-Breaker at St. Mungo's meant that she spent more hours than most working. She wasn't an actual Healer, but she was the consultant that the Healers called upon when they were dealing with an obscure or unusual case.

This was the reason that she was so useful in analyzing the data regarding the curse that had infected Albus Dumbledore.

She had a roll of parchment in her lap and three books open and spread on the floor. Her fingers were blackened with ink, and her quill lay somewhere on the floor. Looking up, she caught him gazing at her from the armchair. His black eyes were focused intently, catching Hermione by surprise. "What?" she asked.

He seemed to ponder his words before he spoke. "You have spent a great deal of time and effort on this. It was not what I had expected."

Hermione recognized the words for what they were. "You're welcome. I think that everyone needs someone in their corner."

This was apparently the wrong thing to say, as she instantly saw anger flare behind his eyes. "I'm not a ruddy house-elf," he snapped.

After months of getting to know him, Hermione knew how best to deal with his anger. He was a prideful man that didn't want to be looked upon as a charity case. "I never said that you were," she snipped back. "I happen to trust you and believe in you... That is the reason that I'm doing this. I gave up championing for house-elves a long time ago."

Disbelief shadowed his face, though she was surprised when another string of scathing remarks didn't leave his lips. Most often when they quarreled, it would end with him storming out. Hermione rarely got the last word. This caused her to pause and wonder what he was really upset about, and it came to her very quickly.

Pity.

Severus Snape did not want to be pitied. He was not a cause. Hermione didn't feel sorry for him. She admired him. His strength of will and character were things to respect.

Tossing her parchment haphazardly, she pulled herself up from the floor and walked over to where he was still sitting. Hermione brought her hand up to his face, unsurprised when he flinched at her touch. Stilling herself for the nasty remarks that were sure to come, she forged on, brushing her fingers along his jaw and cupping his cheek. When no caustic retorts came, she felt emboldened and leaned down to kiss his pale, thin lips.

Snape remained still, and only when Hermione pulled away, did he seem to respond. She pulled back, a mixture of shame and embarrassment, but she forced herself to say the next words. "I could never pity you," she whispered.

Standing upright, she hastily made her way towards to bedroom, certain that he could find his own way out of her flat. She was surprised when he appeared in her doorway only a few minutes later. "I'm so..." she started to say, but she wasn't able to get the words out, as he quickly made his way to her, his lips descending onto hers.

The kiss was more than the simple, tentative buss that she had given him. Behind it, there was obvious passion. He gently bit her lower lip, causing her to gasp and part her lips, and he began exploring and tasting her mouth.

I pause in my story and look at Ginny, who now has silly grin on her face. We are now at her home. Well, hers and Harry's. The hour was growing late, and I'd known that the sooner I was able to get to their house, the sooner I'd be able to look for Dumbledore's memories. Ron is in the other room talking to Harry. Both boys...sorry, I still can't think of them as men...are still upset with me, but they aren't shouting. I had been quite surprised with the fact that Ron hadn't actually shouted at all. Typically, he'd let his feelings be known vocally. In this case, however, I think that he realizes that someone needed to help calm Harry.

"Do you really love him?" Ginny asks.

I think that my smile answers her question, but I still say the words. "Yes, I do."

"I'm happy for you, I think," she replies.

"Erm... thanks."

"Well, that didn't come out right. I mean that I'm glad that you're happy. I'm surprised at who it is, and despite the fact that I'm defending you, I really am upset that you didn't tell any of us about this before," she chides. "We all knew that you were looking into Snape's case, and when you showed your files to Harry last week, I knew that you were serious." Ginny pauses to study the carpeting. "I caught a glimpse of the report that you gave him. I think that you should know that Harry didn't show anyone. He wasn't trying to betray you," she adds quickly. "Harry was just worried. I mean, I read some of the report, and yes... it could refute Harry's allegations. However, there was nothing substantial that proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that Snape was innocent either. If there is more evidence among those gadgets, why didn't you put that in there?"

"I had hoped that Harry would see what Dumbledore was saying in his journal. I was hoping that he'd ask me questions! I knew that there was a chance that he'd be upset with me and ignore everything that I'd written. No matter how much I want to trust him, I was afraid that if I told Harry about the Pensieve memories, then he'd make sure that they no longer existed," I admit.

"You really think that little of me?" comes Harry's voice from the doorway.

"I'm sorry," I mutter. "But look at what you did with the files I'd spent the last three years working on. You promised me that you'd show it to others. You told me that *everyone* was talking about it! What did you do with it, burn it?"

Harry has the grace to look abashed. "You're right. I didn't show anyone. I didn't want anyone to think that there was a chance of the man's innocence." Before I can interject, he goes on. "Also, I was worried that if anyone saw that you'd done all of that work that they might put together the same pieces that I did... that you knew where he was. You do realize that harboring a criminal is an offense worthy of Azkaban, do you not?"

"I never knew where he was living," I counter.

He shoots me a disbelieving glance.

"We both knew that if I knew where he was hiding that the information could be detrimental to me. You could get the information by Legilimency or Veritaserum. I'm not an Occlumens, Harry. We both felt that it was safer this way."

"Fine," he concedes. "But he touched the files. You see him. You can get in contact with him. At any time, you could've contacted me or any other Auror, and we could've arrested him."

"So, now you're telling me that I'm a criminal, Harry? How is this case any different than Sirius'? How many people knew where Sirius was after he escaped from Azkaban? How many Aurors knew where to find him and said nothing?" I challenge.

"Sirius was innocent!"

"So is Severus," I state simply.

"I won't believe that until I see these memories that you've been going on about, Hermione."

"Then give me leave to go into your study, and I'll find it for you!" Ginny places a reassuring hand on my shoulder in an obvious attempt to calm me while I notice that Ron is over doing the same for Harry.

"We're going to wait until morning," Harry announces.

"What?"

"I've contacted Kingsley. He will be here in the morning with a few other Aurors. You can help us find the memories then."

"Why do we have to wait? You've locked Severus up, and now, you're going to force him to stay in that wretched prison overnight just so we can wait for more people to arrive?"

"Hermione," Harry warns. He blows out an exasperated breath. "Trust me on this. If there are more people here, then if there really are memories to be found, it is less likely to be disputed that you planted them or that I tampered with them. Besides, it's not like there are still dementors in Azkaban. It's not as horrid as it used to be."

Resigned, I slump my shoulders and collapse back into the settee. "Fine. You're right," I mumble. "We all stay in here, then," I say more firmly.

Harry looks at both Ron and Ginny, and after a few moments of thought, he replies, "Agreed."

Ron, Ginny, and Harry all take seats: Ron, sitting with his long legs stretched out in front of him on the floor in front of the fire, Harry in an armchair, and Ginny next to me.

The uncomfortable silence between us stretches out, and eventually both Weasley's fall asleep. I look to Harry, who is staring into the fire. It's obvious that he's struggling with his emotions now. Maybe my comment comparing the false accusations against Sirius and my assertions about Severus, have struck a chord. Either that or he's just horribly disappointed in me. "Harry," I say to get his attention. "How did you find him?"

He doesn't move his gaze from the fire. "I guessed that he had handled the documents. I used a specialized spell that picks up magical traces and then locates the person with those specific traces," he admits.

"That borders on Dark magic, Harry," I tell him.

After several long minutes, I hear his soft reply, "I know."

It occurs to me to what lengths Harry will go. I see, yet again, how much his life has been affected by the actions of Voldemort and his Death Eaters. When I can think of nothing to say to ease his pain or my own, I close my eyes and think about what is going through Severus' mind now. My last thought before I slip into a restless sleep is that I hope that he doesn't think that after all this time I have finally betrayed him.

Sometime later, a quick succession of events has caused me to stir.

"Aaaaaaaargh!"

There was a flash of light and the room was full of voices: Everyone had woken up as Ron had let out a yell.

"Bloody hell!" I hear someone say.

My eyes are still adjusting to the daylight, but I notice three figures have made their way into the room and were talking rather loudly. It's obvious that Tonks had stepped on Ron's sleeping form, as she was now profusely apologizing to him.

Harry all but jumps up as I rub my eyes.

"Good morning," comes the rich baritone of Kingsley Shacklebolt. "I understand that we're here to find a memory that once belonged to Dumbledore."

A/N: Now, THAT was the quote that I hated most out of this challenge. (Sorry, Ms. Rowling.) I hope that the little bit that Hermione shared with Ginny was enough to answer some questions. Sorry it wasn't more... erm... detailed, but Hermione and Snape are rather private people. ;-)

In the next chapter, we'll see if Hermione was right about there being any hidden Pensieve memories.

HBP quote: There was a flash of light and the room was full of voices: Everyone had woken up as Ron had let out a yell.

To Stand Before a Giant

Chapter 7 of 8

After years of living on the run for the murder of Albus Dumbledore, Severus Snape is captured by Aurors. Hermione must now try to convince Harry of Snape's innocence.

This is a response to the HP Chapter Challenge issued by Southern_witch_69 over at her Yahoo! Group: Potter Place and at The Petulant Poetess. Rules are at the end of the first chapter.

Disclaimer: I own nothing that you see here. All characters belong to the wonderful and talented Ms. J K Rowling.

Harry informed the Aurors of only the pertinent details of the investigation. Because I'd been looking into Severus' case on my own, he is careful to only mention that I am certain there is a memory of Dumbledore's in Harry's home.

Kingsley, Tonks, and another Auror named Morgan follow Harry into the study, with Ron, Ginny, and me close on their heels. Harry kept locked up in a cabinet at least twenty humming and whirling gadgets of Dumbledore's.

I would like to say that it only takes a couple of minutes to find what we are looking for. It doesn't. The Aurors insist on looking through everything first. All I can do is wait for them to finish.

Of course, they come up empty-handed.

It is only then that they allow me to go through each item with them. After I go over what seems like every little silver and obnoxious knick-knack, I finally come across a small, solid-looking silver box with a runic symbol on one side. Running through my knowledge from school, I recognize it as "merkstave," meaning mistrust and betrayal. I pick it up, and carefully turn it over to "ehwaz," which represents trust and loyalty. At that moment a small puff of silvery mist comes out of the runic symbol, swirls around, and re-enters the box.

"Harry, this is it," I say, a smile growing on my lips.

Kingsley comes forward with a phial, and I turn the box back to "merkstave" and flip it to "ehwaz" again. Once more, the silvery mist comes out of the seemingly solid box, and Shacklebolt collects the Pensieve memory so that it can be viewed.

I truly have no idea what the memories will contain, and I worry that there may be something there that Severus won't appreciate other people seeing. I look over at Harry; he's not happy, I can tell from the glares that he is shooting at the phial encased in the dark Auror's hands. I hear the Aurors talking amongst themselves. They want to take the memory back to Auror Headquarters and view it there, and then take it to Severus' trial, which is to be held on Monday morning.

"I want to see the memory now," I interrupt.

The four Aurors turn to look at me. Auror Morgan gives me a rather odd look. "This is possible evidence in an ongoing investigation, Miss Granger. I'm afraid that we cannot allow civilians to interfere."

Before I can retort angrily, Ginny places a hand on my shoulder and shoots a pleading glance at Harry. I am surprised at the resigned look Harry gives me. He turns to the other three Aurors and then looks back at me, as if he's having a silent debate.

It is Tonks who finally speaks up in my defense. "All right, Hermione."

Harry reluctantly removes the old Pensieve from the same cabinet in which the gadgets were held, and the seven of us gather around it.

~~~~~  
We all fall into the ancient Pensieve in turn and find ourselves, unsurprisingly, in the Headmaster's office at Hogwarts. The current resident is seated at his desk, his fingers steepled, and he is staring intently at his guest sitting across from him: a greasy, dark-haired young man, with coal black eyes.

"I need help, Professor Dumbledore," comes the waspish voice of a young Severus Snape. I hear a snort and look up as Harry rolls his eyes in disgust.

"I see," replies Dumbledore.

"I don't know where else to turn, sir," Severus continues. I'm not sure if the others recognize the near-pleading tone in his voice.

The Headmaster looks at him carefully over his half-moon spectacles and asks, "Why don't you turn to your master, Severus?"

He swallows thickly. "I did, sir." Severus pauses and closes his eyes; whatever it is that he wishes to tell Dumbledore, it is obviously causing him great pain to recount it.

When it seems that he has composed himself again, he opens his eyes and meets the Headmaster's gaze. "I did not realize what he was going to do with the information, or how he would interpret it. You must believe me," the young man begs. He took another breath before stating, "The Dark Lord has promised me that he will do everything

in his power to not harm her."

My mind starts to spin. *Her? Who is it that he so desperately wishes to protect?* Not that I'm jealous, mind you. These events occurred well over twenty years ago, but whoever she was, her welfare had a great impact on Severus' allegiances.

"Then why are you here?" Dumbledore prods him.

"I do not trust him."

"I cannot promise you that no harm will come to Lily Potter, Severus," Dumbledore warns.

My own surprise is outweighed by that of Harry's and my eyes instinctively shoot up to his face to see the look of horror in his eyes. He looks as if someone has just kicked him in the chest. His wife takes a step towards him and reaches a hand out to him, but he jerks away. Instantly Ginny recoils, and knowing Harry's temper, we all leave him be for now.

"I know that," the younger wizard says defeatedly.

The old man sighs. "And what will you do if I am also unable to save her, Severus?"

There is a long contemplative pause, and I hold my breath, awaiting a reply that was given when I was only a year old.

"I was wrong, sir," I hear him softly utter. "If I ... whatever happens, the blame lies with me. Had I known that he would interpret... that he would..." My heart wrenches within my chest for the young man before me; I long to wrap my arms around him and cradle him to my chest as I've done so many times in the past, though it is the distant future of this memory.

Severus looks openly into Dumbledore's face, their gazes locking. It is apparent to all of us what is happening. As the Headmaster sifts through Severus' thoughts, the sadness in his eyes deepens. I drop to my knees beside the chair in which the younger version of my lover sits. After several long minutes the silence is broken by Albus, who says, "You realize what you are asking, Severus?"

A silent nod is his reply.

"The only other to try to leave was Regulus Black; he came to me... I did what I could, but I was unable to save him."

"I understand, sir."

"What you are considering what you are proposing is even more dangerous, but an offer which I am afraid I cannot refuse. If you are truly willing to pose as a spy for Riddle..." Dumbledore's voice trails off as he runs his hands thoughtfully through his beard.

The room fades. I rise and walk towards Ginny, who offers me a comforting arm as the surroundings change. The pain in my chest grips and tightens around my heart. I silently thank God for giving Severus the strength to turn to Dumbledore at such a time in his life, and I pray that we find enough information here to help release him from Azkaban.

The new setting is not familiar to me, although we are obviously in a bedroom. Dumbledore is once again present. He is lying upon a bed with the covers drawn up tightly around him.

"Thank you, Severus," he says, and my head whips around to look for the other man. I spy him near the door, carrying an empty goblet.

"Of course," is the simple reply.

Poppy Pomfrey brushes past him and enters the room as the dark-haired man leaves. She approaches the bed and pulls back the duvet to reveal the blackened arm that Albus Dumbledore had been cursed with for much of our sixth year. "How are you feeling, Albus?" she asks.

"I'll live, Madam Pomfrey," he answers.

"Only thanks to Professor Snape. You owe that man your life," she reprimands.

"I am well aware of that fact, Poppy," he says with a small smile.

The hospital matron waves her wand over him, casting numerous diagnostic charms. "I'm afraid that the news is not good, Albus," she finally announces.

"I did not expect it to be," he replies gently.

"With the potions that Severus is giving you, I think that we can hold off the full effects of the curse for upwards of a year," she continues.

"I do not wish anyone to know the full repercussions of the curse..." As Madam Pomfrey opens her mouth to protest, he raises his good hand. "Not even Professor Snape, though I'm sure that he has a pretty good idea already."

The witch nods her head reluctantly as the room fades away again.

I feel Ginny squeeze my hand as Tonks' gaze meets my own. My theory is at least confirmed. It's too bad that Poppy hadn't told anyone her findings; it would've made some of my research so much easier. However, she was obviously sworn to confidentiality. It doesn't help that she died during the peak of the war, either.

I see that the furnishings of the bedroom are now replaced by trees, rocks, and underbrush. Looking up to the sky, I can tell by placement of the stars that it is mid-February.

Dumbledore is sitting alone on a rock when a figure dressed in black Death Eater robes approaches him quietly.

"I wasn't expecting you so soon, Severus."

"Neither was I."

"How did things go this evening?"

"The same way that they always go, Headmaster," he replies with an exasperated sneer.

Dumbledore stands up from the stone and joins the younger man. "You know that it must be done, Severus."

"No, I don't know, Albus," he snaps in reply. "You take too many things for granted! You expect all of us to blindly do your bidding, for all of us to be able to fulfill your every whim! Well, there are some things that I cannot do for you, sir. I cannot and I will not."

"There are things that you promised to do, Severus, things that you agreed to, and you will hold to your promises to me," the Headmaster tells him firmly.

Severus huffs in exasperation. "You don't realize what you are asking of me."

"Yes, I do, Severus. I know exactly what I'm asking of you, and I am telling you that it must be done this way. You must trust me on this." He puts his hand on the younger man's shoulder. "It is not the right time yet, but when it *is*, you will know, and you *must* complete this task that I have set for you. Trust me when I say that everything depends on it, Severus. *Everything!* Remember what you promised me. Remember why," Dumbledore finishes softly, looking the younger wizard in the eyes.

Severus sighs, resigned, and bows his head. "Yes, sir."

The pair slowly begin making their way back towards the castle. "Now, have you finished with your investigations?" the Headmaster asks, as the memory begins to fade and we find ourselves back in Harry's study.

~~~~~

It had been a very long weekend. Between the events of Saturday night, and Sunday morning, I barely had three hours of sleep. Ginny had to physically drag me through the Floo back to my flat after we all viewed the memories. She is a good friend; she sat with me, kept me company, and never once judged me for the things that I've done over the last few years.

Harry had refused to allow me to go to Azkaban to see Severus, insisting that it was best that others not know how close we are in case Severus is still convicted. It's nice to know that despite how angry Harry is with me, he still wants to protect me.

Now, outside of Courtroom Ten in the lowest level of the Ministry of Magic, I can barely sit still. Ginny and Ron are both here to keep me company, but I am finding it difficult to concentrate. I want to know what is going on behind the closed doors. The fact that people aren't allowed to witness the proceedings is very unnerving. I would like to at least see the witnesses they've found, both for and against him; I saw a gentleman with auburn hair and blue eyes who looked vaguely familiar as he checked in his wand this morning.

I smooth the non-existent wrinkles out of the fabric of my robes, just for something to do to ease my anxiety. Ginny reaches over and squeezes my hand for support. It is sweet, but it doesn't calm me at all.

"It will be all right, Hermione," she reassures me.

I give her a tight smile.

Ron has not been able to sit still since we arrived, so he has been walking around. I'd like to think that he's nervous, but the truth is that he's tired. Sleeping on the floor is never comfortable and never equates to a restful night. Last night he stayed on the floor of my flat. That is two nights of no sleep for him.

He comes up to me and hands me a stack of pamphlets. I think that he's hoping they will entertain me and get my mind to something else.

Yes, I like to read, but this is a tad ridiculous.

The correct means to overcome a kelpie is to get a bridle over its head with a Placement Charm, which renders it docile and unthreatening.

I give Ron a small smile, then hand the stack of pamphlets over to Ginny. "Thanks, Ron, but I don't think that I can read at the moment," I politely say.

"Oh, right," he answers.

The three of us continue onto wait in silence for another hour: Ron walking and avoiding having to think, me unable to do anything but think about the possibilities, and Ginny watching the both of us, trying to decide if she should do something and if so... what?

Just when I'm feeling like I cannot take any more, the courtroom doors open and a multitude of voices are heard... all excitedly talking at once. I jump to my feet in an instant and rush over to stand near the doors.

The members of the Wizengamot begin filing out first and my heart leaps. *Surely, if he was found guilty, he'd be escorted out in custody before the others* tell myself.

Harry makes his way out of the room. He's not smiling, though I imagine he would be smiling if Severus were actually convicted. I finally tire of waiting to hear something, and I admit, I'd rather not ask Harry, so I enter the courtroom. In the center of the room, I see Severus standing and speaking with Headmistress McGonagall. Even if I wanted to, I cannot hide the smile growing on my face, nor can I slow down my pace.

As I'm quickly walking towards the pair of old colleagues, Minerva spies me and smiles genuinely. This causes Severus to look my way as well. Of course he doesn't smile ... he never does ... but I can see his eyes shining, even from this distance. He closes the gap between us and takes me into his arms.

This is more than I had expected from him. Though most of our time together has been spent in privacy, I know him well enough to understand that he is not one for public displays of affection. I suppose that being acquitted on charges murder are enough to cause one to forget such a small detail.

Holding me tightly against his chest, he kisses the top of my head. I barely hear him whisper, "Thank you."

Tears are now flowing freely from my eyes. I am so overwhelmed with emotion that I'm not sure what to do next. All I can think of is how much I want to take him home.

Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them Quote: The correct means to overcome a kelpie is to get a bridle over its head with a Placement Charm, which renders it docile and unthreatening.

GinnyW's Note's: Huge thanks go out to JuneW and SnarkyRoxxy for beta reading the remaining chapters for me. Thank you, ladies! :-) I'm sorry that this chapter took a bit longer to get out. I added in a scene that I had originally not written and I feel that it is better with it there. *cough, cough the Pensieve memories were only recapped in a paragraph before* It took me longer than expected, I broke my arm about 1 1/2wks ago and it's been horrid trying to write. Thanks for your patience! Cheers!

The information on Runes were found at: <http://www.sunnyway.com/runes/meanings.html>

Tell a Different Story

After years of living on the run for the murder of Albus Dumbledore, Severus Snape is captured by Aurors. Hermione must now try to convince Harry of Snape's innocence.

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Huge thanks go out to JuneW and SnarkyRox for beta reading this chapter for me. Thank you, ladies! :-)

Winning Streak Over For the Chudley Cannons

The Cannons lost to the Wigtown Wanderers Friday night, breaking their twenty-game winning streak and dropping them from a slot in this year's Quidditch World Cup. The loss was largely blamed on the Cannons' Keeper, Ron Weasley, who allowed through an unprecedented forty goals from the tenth-placed Wanderers.

'I haven't seen him play this bad since his first year of Quidditch back in school,' says Fred Weasley, brother to the Cannons' Keeper.

Weasley spent most of his time during the game absently flying towards the middle of the pitch. After the fifteenth goal was scored, the Cannons' captain had Mr. Weasley examined to ensure that he was not cursed. When play resumed, he seemed to be back on form until halfway through the game when he became distracted again. As any Quidditch fan knows, the Keeper should beware of straying too far towards the other end of the pitch, in case his baskets come under threat in his absence. There is much speculation that Mr. Weasley's distraction was related to the Victims of War Remembrance Service set to take place today, and his obvious concerns about his former girlfriend's reported wedding to ex-Death Eater Severus Snape. (See scheduled events for the Victims of War Remembrance Service and the reported Granger-Snape Wedding on page 2.)

I turn to page 2 and skim the article.

War Remembrance Will Be Graced with a Wedding

Last year at this time, we published that following the Victims of War Remembrance Service at the Hogwarts cemetery, ex-Death Eater Severus Snape was captured by Auror and long-time adversary Harry Potter. Severus Snape was later released and all charges dropped when evidence proving his innocence was brought to light by a long-time friend of Mr. Potter's ... Miss Hermione Granger.

Today, following the memorial service at Hogwarts cemetery, Miss Granger and Mr. Snape will be wed near the lake on Hogwarts grounds. The ceremony is by invitation only and will be heavily warded against intrusion. Those reported to be on the guest list include: Hogwarts Headmistress Minerva McGonagall, Professor Filius Flitwick, Professor Rubeus Hagrid, Auror Nymphadora Tonks, Auror Kingsley Shacklebolt, Auror Harry Potter and wife Ginny Weasley-Potter, and Keeper for the Chudley Cannons, Ron Weasley (for more information on Mr. Weasley and his performance at Friday's game, see page 1).

I toss the copy of the *Daily Prophet* aside. "How dare they print that without our permission?" I bite out with disgust.

I can feel my tension starting to build, and I slowly begin to massage my temples. It's obviously going to be a long day, if the *Prophet* is blaming yesterday's Quidditch match on me.

"You actually sound surprised by this, Hermione," come the silky tones of my soon-to-be husband.

"They didn't even mention that Draco would be in attendance today," I say, ignoring Severus' snide reply.

"Did you honestly expect them to?"

"Well, I guess that I foolishly thought that they would mention it. I mean, they seem to think that everything else that we do is news," I answer honestly. "Draco was acquitted after you were. He helped the war effort, in his own way. He's news, isn't he?"

"Hermione, the wizarding world doesn't even see me that way. Why would they see Mr. Malfoy as some *unsung* hero?" comes the sardonic reply.

"Well, at least they accept you." At the quizzical quirk of his one dark eyebrow I add, "...now."

"That took time," Severus mutters as he takes a sip of his coffee.

He's right, I must admit; it did take time. I was grateful for how the information came out at his trial. Apparently, when I released the memories from the runic box, it also opened another box that was in the possession of Aberforth Dumbledore's son, releasing another memory. When Severus had devoted his life to Dumbledore all those years ago, he had made an Unbreakable Vow and pledged to do anything that Albus had asked of him in service to the Order of the Phoenix. Albus had called upon the only person available as their Bonded brother, Aberforth, who had later been killed during Voldemort's final downfall.

Unfortunately, when everything finally came out after his trial, Severus had not been welcomed back with open arms ... quite the opposite, in fact.

When my involvement in Severus' acquittal was made public knowledge, I received quite a bit of flack as well. For starters, I lost my job at St. Mungo's. They were not happy that I had spent my free time using their lab equipment to analyze the poison Albus Dumbledore had drunk when he attempted to retrieve the locket Horcrux with Harry in that cave, or to examine the curses that had riddled Albus' body for months after retrieving the ring Horcrux.

Next, the *Daily Prophet* began publishing every nasty story about me that they could. The stories ranged from how I had turned to Severus to make Harry jealous in order to win Harry away from Ginny, to me being Lord Voldemort's long-lost daughter now out seeking followers so I could take over the wizarding world.

To say that it was easy to find another job after all of that would be a huge lie.

As a result, I was forced to give up my flat. I had a choice of going to live with my mum and dad, or coming here to live with Severus. It was an easy decision; I came to live with Severus at his childhood home. It isn't much, but it's comfortable; and after some cleaning, it is now surprisingly homey.

My Gringotts account became depleted as I continued to look for work. Severus hunted as well, and we were both becoming frustrated in our search until one morning an owl dropped off two letters from the Hogwarts Headmistress. She had offers for both of us. Slughorn couldn't get out of the school quick enough for his tastes, and Severus was able to begin teaching mid-term. I was actually surprised that he didn't complain about not being offered the Defence Against the Dark Arts job, but he assures me that he wants nothing to do with the Dark Arts position, as long as it's being held by a competent professor.

I will be taking over Arithmancy from Professor Vector when the new school year begins in September. She had wished to finish out the school-year, but tendered her resignation back in January when she was offered a position as a Ministry of Magic Member of the Wizarding Examinations Authority.

I've been meeting with her, going over lesson plans, and familiarizing myself with old O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. tests. I believe that I will be more than ready to take over classes when they resume.

Fine, I admit it; I really didn't want to teach. I think that if I have to do it for years to come I will go quite mad. However, for now, it will do. I truly believe that it won't be forever. I just need time for the rest of the wizarding world to see that I'm not an awful person who betrayed her friends and society as a whole. I'm grateful that Minerva stands up to the school board the same way that Dumbledore always did, and is prepared to stand by us. She's already taken quite a bit of guff for bringing back the dreaded Potions master.

Things between Harry and me have gotten better. It was a tough blow for him when he learned of the relationship that Severus and Lily shared.

No, no, no... It was nothing like that.

They were friends good friends nothing more. However, theirs was a strong friendship, the kind that one never forgets. Severus betrayed it once when he called Lily a Mudblood, and he regretted it from that very moment on, swearing he would never betray her again.

It was all very hard for Harry to accept.

Harry and Severus have spoken and attempted to clear the air, so to speak. Harry explained his feelings of how he had felt betrayed by Severus. I could understand it, I suppose. Every person that Harry ever saw as a parental figure was taken away from him. He blamed Snape for those losses even for the loss of Lupin. Although in regards to Lupin's death, Severus had simply been associated with the man who killed the werewolf; he hadn't even been present... he was just the face and the name that Harry could put behind the killing.

In the last year, Harry has let go of some of his anger. There is still friction, however. I would like to believe that in time Severus will be relating stories of Lily to Harry... well, one can always hope, at least. It will definitely be a good day when I can say that young Harry Potter has finally grown up and put his past behind him.

I can say now that it has been Harry's gradual acceptance of Severus that has stemmed the tide of letters demanding Severus' resignation. Before that, Minerva was receiving at least four letters a day demanding that she fire Severus and rescind the offer for my employment. She said she could handle until the a few nutters began sending cursed letters and Howlers. By the third time Minerva had to replace her desk she started having her mail screened by the post office in Hogsmeade. Then, a good word from *The Chosen One*, and the letters have nearly stopped.

"Hermione!" Severus snaps. My eyes shoot up to meet his. "I've been trying to get your attention for several minutes. What are you doing?"

"I was just thinking about what I would say if I were to write my memoirs," I say with a cheeky smile.

His eyes narrow, causing my smile to grow. He stands from his chair and reaches out a hand for me. "Come."

I take his hand, nod my head, and reply, "Yes, we need to get ready. It's going to be a long day."

He pulls me close to him. "Yes, it will be a long day. However, I do not wish to get ready ... just yet. I had something else in mind," he whispers in my ear.

A shudder runs down my spine as his words wash over me.

He pulls away and leads me out of the kitchen and upstairs. His long fingers are still loosely in my hands. It still amazes me that even after all this time he can cause my cheeks to flush, my chest to tighten, and my stomach to flutter the way that he does ... all by his simple touch. We reach the top of the stairs and he turns to look into my eyes. I swear that I could get lost forever in those inky depths.

I will be forever grateful for whatever force it was that sent me to Dumbledore's grave that day, all those years ago. For whatever it was that gave me the compulsion to go back ... it made me seek the truth and gave Severus his freedom.

His mouth slowly descends and his lips brush across mine, sending a shock directly to my stomach. Twining my hands in the back of his head, I moan in his mouth and deepen the kiss.

I have a feeling that we will be running a tad late for the memorial service this morning.

~fin~

Quidditch Through the Ages quote: *The Keeper should beware of straying too far towards the other end of the pitch, in case his baskets come under threat in his absence.*

A/N: Thanks so much for all the kind reviews and thoughts. I appreciate all of those that have taken the time to read through this story. I also love when someone has been able to take the time to let me know what you think.

For those that are interested, the story title was inspired by a song "Voice of Truth," from a group called "Casting Crowns". All of the chapter titles are lyrics that are either directly or slightly modified from that same song. The story was not written around the song. The titles were chosen afterwards.

Thank you, Southern_witch_69, for all of the hard work and friendship. I do appreciate all of it.