

While the Music Lasts

by *LiteraryBeauty*

In Paris, Hermione tries to escape her past, but it won't be left behind. In a beautiful city, surrounded by music, Hermione and Snape share a moment. But a moment is never enough...

Oneshot

Chapter 1 of 1

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By: literaryspell

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You are the music,

While the music lasts.

-T.S. Eliot

It was evenings like this that made Hermione wish she knew anything about violins.

Leaning over the balcony of her third floor hotel room, the light, lilting, but somehow *important* melody easily reached her, soothing and caressing her, reminding of her how much she had come to love Paris at night.

In the daytime, it was a different animal altogether. People didn't hurry in Paris, no matter the time, but they did walk with a purpose that Hermione knew was sorely lacking in her own gait. She didn't like to be among the Parisian Muggles during the day, their steps sure and determined while hers faltered.

They always seemed to falter.

The busker on the walkway beneath her played on, plying the passers-by with a talent that deserved richer adulation, naturally unaware of Hermione's musings, high above his head.

As she settled her forearms onto the balustrade, leaning over slightly to watch voyeuristically, Hermione made up his story. He was running from something, like her. His hair was short and well kept, so he either had a day job, which didn't fit with her running away theory, or he cared about his appearance enough to spend his meagre earnings on grooming.

Or perhaps he was in love with a woman, another musician, or maybe a painter. Yes, and she knew how to cut hair, because she'd been raised in a poor family with many young siblings. And the moment the last little sister left the house, she, too, ran. And together they live *la vie boheme*, as Hermione wished she were brave enough to do.

But instead, she did the next best thing. Running without tying her laces. Escaping without letting anyone down.

The Ministry was only too anxious to send her on assignments far and wide. Her politics had become dangerous, even for Shacklebolt, and he had no qualms allowing her superior to fling her to all corners of the globe for 'research.'

She liked to think it was because her boss had heard one too many proposals on house-elf liberation, and not that he had seen the desperation in her eyes every morning when she Floo'd in to work, another cog, a square peg trying to fit into round holes.

The first time she'd left had been for Cairo. It had been fascinating. Ron had wanted to come, but he'd been too proud to beg, luckily for them both. For upon her return, Hermione found herself a different woman. No longer the sidekick and certainly not the hero, she only wanted to just *be*. But Ron had been unable to content himself thus, following Harry into the Auror programme, and then into the department, first as Harry's partner, but very soon his subordinate. But it didn't matter to Ron, who didn't so much bask in the glory of the second-hand limelight as keep his options open for his own spotlight opportunity.

After Cairo, she'd returned to him.

After Istanbul, she had not.

The busker finished a particularly stunning piece, the strings seemingly directly connected to Hermione's weary heart. She turned to the small bistro table on her balcony and plucked a carnation from a vase. She didn't think dropping money from this height would be appreciated, but she had planned on going out later and would make her appreciation known further, then. She tossed the flower lightly and watched it spiral gently and land very near the open violin case.

The young man look around and then up, smiling broadly when he saw her. She couldn't help but smile in return; easy joy was rare.

"*Salut!*" he called, voice free and friendly.

She immediately murmured a translation charm on herself, wand hidden in a harness on her thigh.

"You play beautifully," she called down, the still air carrying her voice without trouble.

"And you listen beautifully!" he said back, taking a few steps away from the building so he could see her properly.

She blushed and smiled again. His grin became even broader, and Hermione waved her hand. "I'll let you get back to your music."

"It will inspire me to know you are listening, *cheri*," he said teasingly. The translation charm made him hear French and her English, but endearments often remained as intended.

"Then I will return to my duty, and you to yours," she rejoined, easily falling into a flirtation that would have been awkward and stilted in England. Hermione wasn't free there, but here, no one knew her.

He laughed and picked up his instrument, playing her a short, happy ditty before returning to his spot against the building.

Hermione went inside.

"I know you understand English, you charlatan. *Distillation of lasille*. Do not make me say it again."

The shopkeeper was eyeing Snape warily, shaking his head and pursing his lips. Snape snarled, enjoying the widening eyes of his quarry, but he cast the translation charm and repeated his request.

"Not for six days," the shopkeeper said, apparently taking perverse joy in denying Snape.

"That's ridiculous," Snape snapped, pulling out his almanac. He found the page and pointed to the entry 'Distillation of Lasille,' specifically drawing the old man's attention to the little blurb that said, *Harvested on the spring equinox, Lasille is traditionally prepared the next evening and can be made available for purchase as soon as a week after harvesting.*

The shopkeeper read the line very slowly and then tapped the word *traditionally* with a stained fingertip. "Herbologists will not begin the process if it rains on the day after the equinox. They must wait until the first rain-free day. Which would have been... three days ago. This means you have four days to wait, yes?"

Snape leaned on the counter. "If they treated the root with an infusion of capiscul, they would be able to distil come rain, sleet, or snow."

"Ah, yes, perhaps. But not all the world is impatient enough to forgo tradition for expediency."

"Then all the world is a fool," Snape said, more tiredly than with vitriol. He hated Paris.

"Four days, *Monsieur*, and my apologies for your disappointment."

Ignoring the fact that the old man did not appear apologetic in the least, Snape grabbed up his almanac, gathered and purchased some ingredients that were more expensive in Britain, and left the shop.

As he walked down the street, he glared at everyone he saw. He was in an exceptionally bad mood. Delaying his trip for four days meant four more days of expenses, and this area of Paris was not cheap.

Snape spotted a street performer playing a melancholy tune on a violin. His case was full of foreign exchange, and Snape sneered at the offerings and walked by without slowing.

He wondered what sort of business a street-side potions laboratory would drum up. *Aphrodisiacs while you wait.*

As he was contemplating his ridiculous business venture, Snape spotted a tiny bistro with outdoor seating. These places were everywhere in Paris, it seemed, but some of them brewed a very nice Darjeeling, and he could use the reminiscence after his disappointment.

He was about to cross the street when he saw a sight he never would have thought to see in Paris. Though, he thought as he took in the all too familiar brown hair, he had heard that Granger was doing a magnificent job of running away. Not that he blamed her.

The problem with being a hero, he'd realised, was that they were public property.

She looked good...he could admit that much. She was wearing a smart business suit, the trousers fitted and very flattering. A black high-heeled boot rocked slowly on her crossed leg, and an emerald green blouse flattered her form. Her jacket rested casually over the back of her chair. She was leaning forward over the table, writing quickly with a Muggle pen. Every now and then she would pause, flip her pages or open her cell phone...and wasn't *that* an annoyingly convenient contraption...and chew on the end of her pen. If she wasn't careful, she'd end up with a mouthful of ink.

Pretending to consider the wares of a street merchant, Snape continued to watch her. He'd always thought she'd make herself known after the war, implementing change and demanding reparations for one thing or another. But he hadn't heard anything...either from the few people he was in contact with or in the *Daily Prophet*...about her daily life, other than the fact that she travelled a lot...too much for it to be anything but escapism.

After about twenty minutes, she began to pack up her items in an efficient little briefcase, left a tip hefty enough to make Snape think she might not understand the exchange, and began to walk away.

Well, not away. Right toward him, actually.

Snape hastily picked up a used book from the table, which encouraged the seller to launch into his spiel. He chastised himself for being so obvious...hadn't he been a spy? Where was his stealth?

But she didn't seem to have seen him. She quickly crossed the street, waving her thanks to a motorist who slowed down for her. And then he watched with heavy resignation as she tripped on the curb, stumbling and losing her briefcase.

She would have pitched right onto her face if Snape hadn't leapt forward to catch her and set her upright, having done so instinctively and without a moment's thought. He probably should have let her fall. Magic would have fixed her teeth after a face plant, after all. She'd had them fixed before.

"Professor Snape!" she gasped, shocked. She was still holding his arms for support, and he didn't throw her away from himself.

"As I no longer teach, you might want to try out a new honorific," he said dryly, his hand on her waist to steady her, though she was very clearly on her own two feet at that point.

"What are you doing in Paris?" she asked softly, pulling away and pushing her hair down to fix it. It didn't work, and she seemed to know that. She picked up her briefcase and brushed it off.

"Procuring ingredients." He held up the paper sack as if it were proof of his legitimacy.

"Ah." She shifted, wincing a little as she put her weight on her right foot.

"Are you injured?" he asked, glancing to her foot. "If so, you brought it upon yourself, wearing those ridiculous boots." Snape wasn't entirely sure where that admonition had come from. What business was it of his if the chit wanted to walk around wearing death spikes that lengthened her legs to about two metres long and made her arse high and biteable.

"I just turned my ankle, I think. I'm fine. And they are ridiculous, aren't they? But when in Rome... or Paris, as the case may be."

Snape was surprised to see, as he glanced around, that most women were wearing similar contraptions. He'd never noticed anyone else's footwear until he'd seen hers.

"And if the women of Paris jumped off a bridge?" Snape drawled, a quirk of his lips revealing his humour.

Hermione looked surprised to see him make a joke, but she recovered quickly. "What can I say, I'm a slave to fashion." She laughed self-deprecatingly, but Snape didn't join her. She did look lovely in her designer clothes. He wondered if she had any wizarding robes that looked as nice. He realised he'd very much like to see her in them.

It truly was a day of discoveries.

"Well," she said a moment later, glancing at her watch and biting her lip. "I should be heading back to my hotel. I wasn't really able to get any work done for the last half hour or so." She smiled brightly at him, but there was gleam in her eye that he recognised from her school days. "I had the strangest feeling that someone was watching me."

Snape glared at her. "What a narcissistic notion."

Hermione made a humming noise, and Snape pursed his lips. "Do you mind walking me to my hotel? It isn't far, and my ankle does feel a little weak."

"My ingredients must be refrigerated," he lied with decidedly less skill than was his wont.

"No, they don't," Hermione corrected in a low voice stepping closer. "Or else you wouldn't have spent so much time watching me."

His hand tightened on the bag. "Very well. But only because I wouldn't want you to fall into traffic. I've enough on my conscience."

"You and me, both," she said quietly, taking his proffered arm and limping in a way he was sure was exaggerated.

"On the sofa, please," Hermione said. She was practically in his arms by now, the walk having made her ankle swollen and unable to hold her weight.

He dropped her there less unceremoniously than she would have expected, but the movement still jarred her. She groaned softly, and he looked almost apologetic before he scowled at her.

"Have you tea?" he asked, sounding almost cross, as if he hoped she didn't.

"On the counter." She pointed, and Snape found it quickly.

Her hotel room was large enough for one person, with a sofa, and desk, a tiny kitchenette, and a doorway that led to a bedroom. However, the room felt tiny with Snape in it.

She watched him as he made the tea, his movements precise and frugal. It had been a shock unlike any other to find herself in his arms after stumbling. She'd almost forgotten for a moment that she wasn't in Britain, wasn't in the halls of Hogwarts.

It had been a complete and utter hunch that made her say she'd felt him watching her. In fact, she hadn't felt any such thing. It was only the lack of surprise on his face when he'd seen her and the fact that he'd been positioned facing the café that made her think he'd seen her already. So she'd had twice the shock when he hadn't denied it.

"How long are you in Paris?" she asked as he set the tea down on the coffee table and sat stiffly beside her.

"Four days, according to an inept clerk."

Hermione didn't ask for clarification. "How do you like it?"

"I don't."

"Right, then," she said, rolling her eyes and sipping her tea. "Oh, gods," she whispered. "This is so good! Just like Hogwarts!"

He nodded his thanks. "Let's see that ankle, then."

"Oh!" Hermione said, the pain returning at the mention of it. She unzipped her boot but paled as she tried to pull it off. "Shit."

"What's the problem?" he asked, pulling her leg into his lap and pulling the boot open at the zipper. He gave an experimental tug, and she cried out.

"How much do you like these boots?" he asked softly, his hand resting on her shin.

"Not at all, now!" she said, her eyes prickling at the pain. She glared at the boot for good measure.

"Excellent." He whispered a spell and the entire boot disappeared, along with her sock. Her ankle immediately throbbed as blood rushed to the area, making her whimper. It was discoloured and swollen.

"I don't believe it's broken," Snape murmured. He pressed lightly on a few sore areas, but the pain wasn't unbearable. "Do you have any objections to my healing it?"

"Er, no?" she said, confused that he would even ask.

Nodding, he ran the tip of his wand along her instep, around her anklebone, and halfway up her calf. The sensation made her shiver, and she bit her lip. How sad was it that she was so rarely touched, a healing spell made her aroused?

She clenched her fists as the healing finished, a grinding noise making her cringe. But in seconds her foot was back to normal, and she smiled gratefully. "Thank you, Pro...er, Mr. Snape."

"Severus," he said shortly. His hand was still resting on her shin, and she didn't try to pull away.

"Severus," she repeated, trying the word out. She found that she liked it. She placed her hand over his, pressing his long, pale fingers lightly. "Would you like to stay for dinner?"

He looked at her, half hiding under his lank hair. His face was such a picture of suspicion that she almost wanted to laugh...did he think her capable of poisoning him, he who wouldn't even be felled by a vicious and venomous snake?

"I have no other plans for the evening," he said slowly, still watching her. He moved his hand from beneath hers and gently moved her foot to the floor. He stood and walked to the balcony, and she quickly rose, tripping a second time when she tried to walk with one bare foot and one four inch heeled boot.

Snape chuckled...really chuckled...and gave her his hand as she tore the boot off. "A pair of flats would be a worthy investment," he said, leading her to the balcony where they both leaned over and regarded the busker below. Snape narrowed his eyes at the young man, but he seemed to enjoy the music.

It shouldn't be that he was having such a good time with Hermione Granger. Things like that simply didn't happen to men like him. By all rights, Hermione should have politely thanked him for his timely assistance and hightailed it away from him without a backward glance.

And he should not have cared one iota.

Yet, for some reason, he found himself grateful that she hadn't just gone on her way. He didn't have much opportunity for casual discussion in his line of work...his clients maintained a professional distance that was, admittedly, enforced by his own acrimony.

Hermione was surprisingly well-informed on a number of subjects, though she was still not very amenable to correction, a fact which he exploited at nearly every turn, just to watch her eyes narrow.

After dinner, which was take-away from the corner restaurant, Hermione insisted they return to the balcony to listen to the music.

Snape could admit that the violinist was good, though he wasn't exactly a connoisseur of music. The haunting melody was too depressing for people to give the young man his due in donations. If the musician would play more popular, upbeat music, he would certainly make more money.

He said as much to Hermione, who laughed softly. He tried not to be enchanted by the sound.

"It isn't about money," she said quietly. "If it were, he'd be playing professionally. You must know he's good enough."

Snape nodded his assent. There was true talent there.

"It's about his passion for the music, the freedom of *not* doing it for the money. I envy him."

"Getting paid for your work is validation for being good at what you do," he said, saying the thing he always said to himself when he wanted nothing more than to quit selling his talent for money and live in poverty as he experimented.

"Maybe," she said, shrugging delicately. "But for some of us, it's a bribe to keep our mouths shut and not make a fuss."

"I never would have expected you to be the bitter one between us," he said, smiling at her a little before looking away to the busker. He wished now that he'd dropped a few coins into his case, and he couldn't account for that feeling.

"I'd say we're equals in that regard."

Of course she was right. He was bitter. Having expected for nigh on twenty years to die after doing his duty and paying his penance, living through the war had surprised and dismayed him. This happy world with nothing to fight for made no sense to him.

Hermione plucked a carnation from table and tossed it down to the violinist. He heard her whisper the translation charm as the man turned to smile up at her.

"Ah, my Juliet!" he cried, picking up the flower and smelling it dramatically.

Snape glared at him.

"You are sad tonight," she said compassionately, smiling down at him.

"Ah," he said, shaking his head. "It is a night for looking within. We cannot do that to show tunes!"

Hermione laughed. "Speak for yourself!"

"I shall play a song for lovers, then, yes?" He placed the bow to the strings. Hermione blushed but said nothing.

A sweet but hopeful melody filled the air, and for the first time since he'd come into Hermione's room, Snape realised Hermione had come to love Paris.

"Dance?" she said daringly to Snape, who was leaning over the balustrade and watching the Parisians go about their lives.

"I don't dance," Snape said, feeling predictable.

"Please, Severus?" She put her hand on his arm and softly turned him. When he allowed it, she wrapped her arms around his neck and smiled when his hands automatically found her hips.

For a moment they just stood there, but then Snape took a step forward, and Hermione quickly took one back. Then before either really knew it, they were dancing.

Snape wasn't the best dancer; he danced like he did everything else: stiffly and reluctantly. But he suspected his eyes revealed that he wasn't having as horrible a time as his dour face suggested.

"I don't like Paris," he said suddenly. He belatedly realised Hermione might take that as a personal insult, and he wondered why he cared that she didn't. "That is to say, I prefer Britain."

"You prefer familiarity," she said. She was gradually slowing her steps until they were simply swaying, not really dancing at all.

"Perhaps," he allowed, though he knew she was right. After all, he'd spent the vast majority of his life at Hogwarts, and once he was no longer needed there, he'd settled into a job doing the same thing he'd done at the school. There had been no great changes in his life, and he assumed he liked it that way. He'd certainly never sought out any change, though being here was something different. And he liked it.

Looking down, Snape noticed that Hermione was watching him. Or rather, she was watching his mouth. Her eyes were trained on his lips, and Snape frowned at her, but she didn't seem to notice.

"Hermione," he said, trying to sound admonishing, which couldn't account for the husky tone of his voice.

But instead of snapping her eyes away and blushing, Hermione licked her (full, soft, red) lower lip and leaned up to press them against his.

Saying he was frozen in shock would have been too easy. He wasn't frozen at all, but he felt that if he moved, everything would be lost. And it was very important for him not to lose everything.

Her mouth was encouraging, and then he was kissing her back, awkwardly at first. It had been some time since he'd kissed anyone, and though it wasn't the sort of thing one normally forgot, Snape needed this kiss to be good because it was imperative that there be more.

When Hermione pulled away, her eyes were dark and her mouth a little swollen. Snape felt a primal pride at marking her and suddenly wanted to make his presence known all over her body so that when she returned to Britain, she would be indelibly branded with his presence. Would no other man touch her? That was too much to hope for. Probably.

"I think the song for lovers has done some good!" called the cheeky violinist, though he couldn't see them from where he stood.

Hermione laughed and Snape reached into his pocket, pulling out a handful of Muggle change and dollar bills and tossing over the side without looking. The musician cried out but laughed.

"Want to come in?" Hermione asked, walked backward to the doors.

"Yes," Snape said, willing to take whatever was offered.

He followed her through the door into the hotel room, and then through another set. Her bedroom.

"I don't usually do this," she said, looking nervous in the dim light of the room.

Without meaning to, Snape snorted. It just seemed like the type of thing a woman who *did* do this would say. "Nor I," he said, admitting it easily.

"I want you to know that... I didn't have a crush on you in school or anything. I mean, it's not about that."

Though awkwardly put, Snape was grateful for that. He didn't want to go up against an adolescent fantasy. It was much better that only adult hearts and bodies were on the line.

"And I never thought of you as anything but..."

"You don't have to tell me," Hermione interrupted, laughing. "I already know what you thought of me during school."

"But I never denied your brilliance," Snape reminded her, wanting her to know that despite everything, her mind was unparalleled and always had been.

"No one could," she said, smiling wryly. She ran her hands over his shoulders and down his chest, a trail of fire running behind her light fingertips.

As she worked on his buttons, her brow drawn in concentration, Snape slowly undressed her as well, pulling her hands away to remove her shirt and bra. Snape's mouth went a little dry at the sight of her small, firm body, and he moved his hands to help her with his shirt, eager to feel her against him.

"Do all these buttons keep the monsters out?" Hermione asked, smiling softly but with real curiosity in her eyes.

"Only if you believe in it," Snape retorted, rolling his eyes. He let his trousers fall and watched as hers did the same. She stepped out of them and closer to him, and he felt suddenly embarrassed. His body was not art; it was damaged and beaten, though never destroyed. He didn't want to feel inadequate next to her, but she was beautiful, if not conventional.

And then she was in his arms and he forgot about his misgivings. For some reason she wanted him, and he was no fool.

He led her to the bed and pushed her back onto it, watching admiringly as her small breasts bounced a little when she shifted into the centre.

"I didn't think you would be so lovely," Snape said, his mind not entirely thinking through the words he spoke.

Hermione smiled. "I thought you didn't think about me."

And for some reason, that made Snape blush. "I meant when I thought about it earlier." He laid the length of his body beside hers, his cock straining to reach her as she pressed herself against him. He felt chilled, but her body was fiery.

"When you were healing my ankle?" she prompted, kissing his neck. Snape shivered at the shy touch but covered it by running his hand flatly over her back and sides. Her skin was really too smooth and much too hot.

"Yes," he whispered, closing his eyes as she pushed him onto his back. Her arse pressed against his prick as she straddled him, and Snape had to quell the urge to just thrust against her to completion.

"I didn't think you'd be so willing," she said, leaning over him to kiss him. Her hips rolled lightly against his groin, and he glared, thinking of her knickers and his pants still between them.

"Nor did I," Snape said. Hermione shifted once and her knickers were gone, twice and his pants were gone. Then she was back over him, and the heat from between her

thighs was infinitely more scorching than the general heat of the rest of her body.

Hermione reached between them and gripped his cock. He moaned without meaning to, but her tight fist around him made him forget his embarrassment. She rose up a little and slid his head along her folds, slicking him with her wetness. Snape's hands clutched at her thighs, bruisingly tight, but she didn't make a sound.

"So big," she whispered, guiding him into her. Snape barely heard her through the rush of blood in his ears.

She sank over him slowly, and it took all his effort not to grab her hips and slam her down, thrusting up from below. Instead, he let her take her time, and soon enough she was rocking over him, her hands braced on the bed on either side of his head, and her entire body moving.

Snape couldn't stop touching her. She made sounds that rivalled the beauty of the violinist they could still hear, and his hands explored her, finding new places to stroke and caress to make more music for him.

Her tightness was sublime, and he almost couldn't believe that he was here, now, inside Hermione Granger in Paris. It didn't seem real.

"Let go," she said, smiling down over him, kissing him as she moved her hips. Snape immediately let go of her, and she laughed.

"No, I mean... let yourself go. You're holding back..." Hermione's breath was coming short, and Snape watched with greedy eyes as she bit her lip and *moaned*.

Snape held her hips and rose up, turning them so she was on her back and he was between her legs, which immediately wrapped around him.

"Yesss..." she hissed, encouraging him with her legs.

He thrust into her, pulling her hips against him, slamming her body down onto the bed. Hermione gripped his hair and he almost pulled away, but instead let her tug him down for a kiss. It was hard and sweet, and he slowed his thrusts to match it.

She broke the kiss to groan, "Oh, gods," and just hearing that from her lips made Snape's balls draw up.

She cried out and tightened around him, and Snape couldn't quell his gasp. Her nails drew down his back, and that was enough impetus to send him over the edge. Sinking into her one more time, Snape came with a stifled shout, kissing her again without even thinking on it. There was nothing more natural than their mouths together, and Snape almost regretted the time it had taken to get to this place, even if it was only hours. It felt like eons.

When Snape moved off of her, ready to leave the bed, her hotel room, and possibly even Paris, distillation of lasille notwithstanding, Hermione tugged him back, curling around him like some sort of cephalopod, and he found he didn't entirely mind.

"Tired, now," she said with a sleepy smile.

Snape immediately felt protective, even though he very much didn't want to. "Sleep, then," he whispered.

"And you'll be here?"

"I will be here."

But he wasn't.

Hermione awoke with the unforgiving sound of the street cleaner, and, not entirely awake, she hoped that the violinist was gone or else he'd get wet.

When her eyes cracked open, she realised it wasn't the violinist she should be worrying about. Snape was gone, no traces of his presence on the bed. He must have beaten the shape of his head out of the pillow, because it was perfectly fluffed and undented.

Hermione supposed she shouldn't be surprised. She probably shouldn't be hurt, either. But she was. She didn't share nights like that with very many men (that is, any men), and for him to leave made her feel a little... used.

But she had work to do, and even if Paris was for lovers, a job was a job, and as much as she hated hers, she did need it.

Still, she couldn't bring herself to venture onto the balcony when the violinist began a lilting tune.

Two Years Later...

"You cannot be serious. Last year you said the same thing, and the year before. Can you honestly say that you make every Potions master in the *world* wait around in this godsforsaken hellhole with you sitting on your arse while there is perfectly good lasille waiting to be distilled? It's atrociously poor business sense, that's what it is. I ought to complain to the Board of Potions Control. Unbelievable."

Snape didn't bother waiting for a response. He stormed out of the shop, his feet automatically taking him along the same path it had two years ago, and the year before.

The violinist was no longer playing on people's sympathies in front of that hotel. Snape was sure he'd seen the boy's face in the paper playing for a symphony orchestra, but he was surely mistaken.

Things like that do not happen in real life, and Snape was a believer in reality.

He hesitated in front of the bistro, his mind's eye supplying Hermione's death trap boots tapping beneath a table as her jacket hung cleanly over the back of her chair. But like the year before, she wasn't there. It was madness to think she would have been, of course.

It was madness his being here, really. He could have sent his assistant. He hated Paris. Hated it.

Snape looked at the curled missive yet again, though he knew the address by heart. Potter had eventually proved himself good for something other than saving the world, though the threats that had accompanied the information had been most unwelcomed.

He continued to walk. His destination wasn't far; trust a Gryffindor to plant roots in the one spot she'd ever visited.

Everyone but Snape had been surprised when Hermione Granger had declined to return to Britain after her work in Paris had concluded. Snape had seen the unrest in her eyes, and he'd known that night... that night he never, ever thought of... he'd known then that she didn't belong in London any longer, and she knew it, too.

Snape walked up to the door of a charming brownstone, an unusual style for Paris, but it likely made Hermione reminiscent of home. Or of what used to be home.

Paris was home now. Snape could live with that.

And so he knocked.

Fin.

