

Caged Bird Sings

by *LiteraryBeauty*

Hermione wakes up in a cell, held captive by none other than her former professor, Severus Snape. She's scared, alone, and confused about her feelings for her unwilling captor. How can she know what is real and what isn't when he won't tell her anything?

17-Jan

Chapter 1 of 17

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Betas: Lucianwolf, kallonista, snarkyscorp

Rating: Adult (NC-17)

Warnings: explicit sex, dubious consent due to questionable mental state, captor/captive

Author's Notes: This story is slightly AU from the end of the Order of the Phoenix and uses bits and pieces of canon, twisted to suit the story. Thank you so much to my betas! You were all really helpful and just amazing. I can't thank you enough.

I did some research on Stockholm Syndrome before writing this, and I hope that, despite the nature of the fic, it comes across as being a story of two desperate people in a maddening situation. Updates will be every Tuesday (the rest of the chapters are much longer than this one). Thank you for reading!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,

When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,

When he beats his bars and would be free;

It is not a carol of joy or glee,

But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,

But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings –

I know why the caged bird sings.

-Paul Laurence Dunbar, *Sympathy*

Chapter One

Day 17

I can't be certain that that is the real elapsed time. I did try to keep track, but I think Snape must have noticed, because the scratches I'd been leaving on the desk disappeared over a week ago. Maybe if I could see day turn into night, or if my meals came on a schedule, I'd be better able to count the days. But I'm obviously in a basement or dungeon of some sort—no light gets in. My meals are sometimes there when I wake up, and other times they don't arrive for hours. Sometimes I get three or four meals a day, hours apart, other times I wake up and go to sleep having only had one meal.

It will be easier, now that I have a quill and parchment.

I'd begged Snape for days for something to keep me from going mad. I pleaded for a copy of the Daily Prophet to see how Harry was fairs in the war against Voldemort, but he wouldn't be moved. He did say that everything was going according to plan, but I never know which plan he means: Voldemort's, Dumbledore's, or his own.

I don't know who he is or whose side he's on, but he's all I have. And he did bring me this parchment. It smells really good... reminds me of the library at Hogwarts. I wonder how everyone is doing there... I hope Harry isn't looking for me. I hope he and Ron have carried on with the plan.

I'm hungry. My food is very late today. It's all I have to look forward to, and it helps break the

The clang and clatter of the metal tray against the stone floors is familiar. Hermione couldn't help but feel like she'd been trained to salivate at the sound. It was food. That was all that mattered, really.

Turning, Hermione saw Snape standing there. The room was split in half by steel bars. In her half of the room was a bed, a desk, a small bookshelf, a chest of drawers, as well as a toilet, sink, and very basic shower. Snape had been considerate enough to give her a folding room divider to protect her modesty, but that had taken days of good behaviour.

Behaviour that was becoming second nature.

Hermione looked to Snape's hands. He'd brought a book for her today. That was better than food, though it was only when there was food that she thought this way. When she went without, she'd much rather have empty shelves than an empty stomach.

"Miss Granger," he said stiffly, gesturing toward the tray. She picked it up and carried it to her bed. There was stew, Snape's speciality—or perhaps the only thing he could cook. There were also thick slices of heavily buttered bread—her favourite—and a medley of vegetables. She stared at the vegetables for a long moment, marvelling at the colours.

"Thank you," she whispered, touching the vegetables with one fingertip.

Snape took a seat in his half of the room. He usually stayed while she ate, and sometimes they read together. He didn't read the same things she did, so they weren't able to discuss the subject matter. Hermione had asked him to bring her the same thing he was reading so they could talk, but then he'd left for almost an entire day, and she'd been so hungry that she knew asking for things meant pain, so she didn't ask again.

Except for the quill and parchment. But that had been important.

"Is the Dark Lord still alive?" she asked, the first of her daily recitation of questions.

"Yes," Snape said, looking pleased that she'd used the proper title. It wasn't worth the thirst to rebel and say *Voldemort*.

"Is Harry?"

Snape eyed her carefully. "Yes."

"What is happening out there?"

Snape never answered this question. He flicked a page in his book.

"Can I go home?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because you are safe here."

Hermione wanted to debate his understanding of the word 'safe.' She'd felt safer before. And what was he keeping her safe from? If she were so safe, why not explain why she was locked up?

"Can I go outside today?"

"No."

He'd never said yes to that, but she'd promised herself she'd ask every day.

"Will you come in here?"

"No."

"Will you open the door?"

"For an hour, when you finish eating."

Hermione sighed and returned to her food. She wanted Snape to come in; she was sure that if he only got a little closer, she'd be able to tell what he meant to do with her. She didn't remember leaving Hogwarts. She'd gone to bed one night and woke up in a foreign bed, chained down.

She'd hurt herself trying to escape those bonds. She'd been alone that entire day—no food, no water. She'd had to pee so badly she'd been in tears by the time she'd fallen asleep again. She'd been sure she was going to die, chained to a bed, eventually having to pass water, rotting in her own piss.

But sometime in the first night, the aroma of food had reached her nostrils, and when she'd reached for it, she'd realised she was no longer bound, nor did she have to use the loo. She'd eaten greedily, falling back asleep with a full stomach after exploring the cell that was now her home.

After she ate in the evenings, or what she assumed them to be as she'd been up for hours and hours, Snape would open the door to her cell for an hour. She wasn't allowed to pass through, but having the door open gave her a sense of peace and freedom. It was short-lived but worth it. When the cage was closed, she felt tight and sometimes it became hard to breathe.

"Professor Snape?" Hermione prompted, indicating her empty dish. She pushed it under the door to her cage, which had a gap just enough for the tray to fit through. She hurried back to the bed, grabbing her book on the way. She hadn't quite finished Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, but she probably would tonight. Snape always brought her Muggle books. She didn't know why.

Snape picked up the tray and set it on a small table. He watched her for a moment, and she remained perfectly still, not allowing any of that old challenge to rise to the surface. She was saving that.

Apparently not seeing anything to disconcert him, Snape slid a long key into the lock and opened the door. The actual door to the room was beyond Snape, so even if she ran through, she'd have to battle him and win before she could truly escape. And she didn't think she was quite capable of fighting Snape when he kept his wand drawn and almost always trained on her.

Although the bars on the cage didn't in any way restrict airflow, when the door was open, it felt like the atmosphere became lighter, the air fresher, easier to inhale. She laid back and linked her fingers behind her head, enjoying the only freedom she was permitted.

Snape cleared his throat and she looked at him. He held up the book in his hand and made as if to toss it to her. Even with the door open, he wouldn't come through. She nodded, and the book sailed through the air, landing with a thud on her abdomen. She coughed, but ignored the pain as she snatched up the book.

Tales of 1001 Nights.

At least he had a sense of humour.

17-Feb

Chapter 2 of 17

Hermione wakes up in a cell, held captive by none other than her former professor, Severus Snape. She's scared, alone, and confused about her feelings for her unwilling captor. How can she know what is real and what isn't when he won't tell her anything?

Chapter Two

Day 25

Snape took away my parchment last week. He let me keep what I'd already written and didn't try to read it, but whatever I had left, he asked for, forcing me to write on the backs of old sheets with the ink staining through. I had no choice but to give it to him.

I know why he did it.

I asked him if I could read to him. He said no. He says no so much I wonder if he's forgotten how to say yes. If he's ever said it. If he'll ever say it to me when I ask to go home.

But that wasn't all. That wouldn't be enough to make him angry enough to punish me. And taking my parchment was just the same as refusing to let me eat or drink. I felt like I was going mad!

I asked if there was any other way I could entertain him. I swear I didn't mean it the way it sounds. Well, maybe a little. He's ugly as sin and the meanest person I think I've ever met (having never met Voldemort), but I've never gone more than a few days without human contact. I once read that a person should be touched in a friendly way at least once a day to remain a balanced, healthy individual. I thought it rubbish when I read it, for there must be thousands of people who go days and days and maybe even years without contact.

But now I know what they mean.

I feel so

I can't help but

It just makes me

It hurts! I feel like my skin is yearning for touch. Just a hug, like Harry or Ron wouldn't think twice to give me. Or like my mum and dad were always so free with. But for some reason, I want more than just a hug from Snape. He seems really unhappy. If I could just... because Dumbledore trusted him! And I trust Dumbledore. He knew what he was doing. Snape just has to be on our side! But then why isn't Snape telling me anything?

I'm so confused. I feel like there are insects under my skin. Just one touch. I was good for the week after he took my parchment, never asked for anything else. But I have to ask again, today. It's better to have human touch than parchment.

I just hope Snape doesn't take away anyth

"Miss Granger," said Snape, soft tones sounding loud in the infinite silence of her underground cell.

"Yes, Professor Snape?" Hermione put away her sheaths of paper and cleaned her quill. It wouldn't do to ruin it and have to ask for another.

"I have news."

Hermione gasped and threw herself out of her chair to the floor in front of the wall of bars. Snape had never offered news before.

"Yes, yes?" she begged, hands gripping so tightly on the bars that she could see the outline of her bones.

"I know you are aware of the items for which Potter has been searching."

Hermione didn't know whether to confirm or deny. To confirm might bring her before Voldemort for torture, if Snape was a loyal Death Eater. To deny might make her useless and dispensable. Her breath was coming quickly as she tried to decide what to do.

"Just tell me the truth, girl! I already know."

"Yes, I know."

"Good. Potter has found another."

A tear rolled down her cheek before Hermione had even realised her eyes had watered. Another Horcrux. Closer and closer.

"Is he okay?" she whispered, thinking of the ring and Dumbledore's hand.

"He is fine."

"Does... does the Dark Lord know?"

"He does not."

Hermione couldn't help it. She screamed. It was born of pure happiness and the feeling of freedom. If Voldemort didn't know, Snape was on their side. ~~Her~~ side.

"Do control yourself!" he snapped.

Hermione was laughing and laughing, and then she was crying. She felt tired and hot and just mad with relief.

"Professor Snape," she said when she'd gotten herself back under control. "What am I doing here? I should be helping Harry!"

Snape sighed in that long-suffering way that he loved to do whenever she asked a question he deemed foolish.

"It was not I who captured you," he said.

That was the most information he'd ever given her about the night of her abduction.

"Who?" It didn't really matter, but he was being free with information, and she wanted to lead up to the more important questions.

"Rabastan Lestranger."

"How?"

Now Snape looked very tired. "I don't know. And I don't know if there have been others kidnapped the same way."

Hermione hadn't even thought of that. She thought she'd been targeted as Harry's friend, but it might have been random.

"How did I get here, then?"

Snape rose. "That's enough, Miss Granger. Behave yourself and you might make it through this."

Hermione knew he meant *we* might make it through.'

She watched him leave. She finished the journal entry she'd been making, hastily writing out his news.

After reading nearly half of the book she had been given the day before, Hermione stretched out on the bed. It really was very comfortable.

Why would Snape keep her here? Wouldn't it have made more sense to return her to Hogwarts? Or better yet, to wherever Harry was?

Hermione got under the covers. As she had for the last four nights, ever since Snape had come in wearing new, fitted robes, Hermione moved her hand inside her panties.

Her fingers moved light and quick, desperate to relieve the tension as quickly as possible. A kaleidoscope of images flashes before her eyes: her furtive fumbles with Ron, her intense kisses with Viktor Krum, the time she'd seen Harry wanking in the Burrow loo...but the predominate image was that of Snape, glaring at her, growling, even yelling at her.

Hermione bit her lip to stifle the moan, but it didn't help. She was gasping now, trying to draw out her pleasure. This was the only time that her strange feelings for Snape became less confused.

With two fingers deep inside, and two from her other hand working her clit, Hermione panted. So close, almost... Eyes closed tight, she pictured Snape looming over her, lip raised in a sneer...

"Miss Granger!"

But Hermione was over the precipice; there was no turning about. Crying out, Hermione's hands froze on her body as she was wracked with sensation.

She clenched her eyes closed and hoped that, just this once, his voice had been inside her head and not outside her cell.

"Well, that was illuminating."

Of course. Why would she have any luck? "Glad to provide enlightenment," she quipped with a levity she didn't really feel. She pulled the covers up, hiding her flushed body from his sight as she sat up. She could only be grateful that she'd been too needy to take her clothing off first.

"I see I have been remiss in tending to *all* your needs," Snape continued, seating himself in his chair beyond her cell bars.

Hermione stared. Was he suggesting...? Was he *offering*...?

But as quick as lightning, Snape's features became impassive, and Hermione watched the change with fascinated shock.

"Have you finished *Les Miserables*?" Snape asked as if he hadn't just witnessed her climax.

Hands trembling, Hermione reached for the book in question. She still had over a hundred pages left. "No," she whispered.

"Good. I am running out of Muggle literature for you. Do try to slow down your consumption."

"You could go to a bookstore," Hermione noted helpfully. She had a long list in her mind of books she wouldn't mind reading, again or for the first time. If she were to be trapped, she might as well make the best of it.

A part of Hermione knew she was being conditioned. She was well aware of psychological side effects of captivity. She was confusing Snape's meeting her basic needs with him being a good person. She wanted to please him, not because she *liked* him or because it was the right thing to do...as her brain convinced her more often and more easily...but because if she displeased him, she'd go hungry. Over the course of nearly a month, he'd made the perfect little prisoner out of her. She even begged for the 'freedom' of having her cell door opened, when nothing could be more of an illusion. She was no less free for the door being opened. In fact, she was even *more* trapped, because she knew she should at least make an effort to escape, but to do so would make Snape angry with her.

And when Snape was angry, Hermione was unhappy.

But despite knowing the mental repercussions of imprisonment, despite realising that her every reaction was calculated and duly noted, she still wanted to please Snape because *he was all she had*.

Was this how Snape had felt when he'd first joined Voldemort? Had he felt at home, safe, taken care of, despite the danger of the situation? Perhaps he'd thought Voldemort understood him, so he allowed himself to take part in atrocities because he couldn't believe that anyone else would care.

"What makes you think I would risk such a public venture just to entertain you?" he scoffed, leaning back in his armchair. Hermione watched, casting longing looks at his cup of tea...half a sugar, nothing else...and waited for him to speak again.

But he didn't. So she asked, "Is Harry okay?"

Snape looked confused. "I have already answered your questions today, Miss Granger. I am not a man to repeat myself."

Despite the panic that flared when he wouldn't answer the question, Hermione nodded. She hadn't realised it was the same day as when he'd been here last. Snape never visited twice in one day.

"Why are you here, then?" she demanded, her heart racing. Only bad things came of breaking the routine, very bad things. Horrible things. Harry must have failed. Harry was dead.

Hermione burst into tears. Gasping, she tried to rein in her emotion; she hadn't even felt sad, she had no idea where this sudden fit *dfistesse* had come from. But her little gasps weren't bringing her enough air. Her face felt tight, her lips swollen, her tongue too heavy and too far back in her throat. Her chest felt as though someone were sitting upon it. She fell back on the bed, thrashing, trying to draw in air.

"Miss Granger!" Snape was shouting through the bars, his wand drawn. But she couldn't hear any spells, and even if there were any, they weren't reaching her. Hermione clawed at her throat as if to make another pathway for air. She dimly felt a rush of warmth under fingers, but it didn't help her breathe.

Suddenly, the cell door was thrown open and Snape was beside her on the bed. He slapped her once across the face, and Hermione laughed inside her head...that only worked on the telly.

But then Snape's grim lips were whispering something, his wand at her throat, and all around her, the cell lost what little colour it had, and everything went black.

*

"What happened?" Hermione croaked. Her throat was swollen and sore, and she couldn't move her head. Snape was outside of her cell again, but the door was open, and that wasn't so bad.

"I believe you had a panic attack," he said, matter-of-factly.

"Oh," she whispered, nodding to herself. She'd never had one of those before, though on some nights before tests...especially practicals...she would feel lightheaded and rather strange, like she wanted to laugh but nothing was funny.

"Oh'?" Snape repeated incredulously. "That's all you have to say? You attempt to tear out your own throat, and all you can manage is 'Oh'?"

Hermione went to shrug, but a dull pain stopped her. "That's never happened to me before."

"I should think not," Snape said. "Had I not been here to intervene, you would likely have bled to death, had you actually succeeded in your intentions."

"Thank you, sir," Hermione said in a small voice. But all of a sudden an intense rage flooded her, like a swarm of locusts, clouding her vision and buzzing in her ear. "You shouldn't have kept me here!" she shouted, ignoring the pain that came along with her exclamation. "You should have returned me to Hogwarts! Or even to my parents! You have *no right* to keep me!"

Snape sighed and picked up his book. Hermione noted he was reading *Magical Drafts and Potions* and wondered if he would let her read it when he was done.

When he didn't respond, Hermione continued in a voice more conducive to her injuries. "Why can't you just let me go? I won't tell anyone that you're not really working for Vol...for the Dark Lord, I promise! Not even Harry! If you'd just let me go, I could help! You're causing more harm than good, keeping me here. I swear I can do something out there...be useful, help Harry, help the Order, help the cause! Please, Professor Snape, you can't keep me here. And why would you even want to? You hate me! You've never kept that a secret. You must detest my presence. If you'd let me go, I'd never breathe a word. I'd just say I had no memory! And why won't you answer me? Why won't you talk to me? Why won't you touch me? I'm dying in this cell, in this prison, in this *cage*! I can't live like this, and I don't want to! I don't want to!"

"Enough!" Snape roared, throwing his tea against the wall. Hermione snapped her mouth shut, watching the remnants of that lusted-after libation slide down the wall like so much refuse. Pieces of the shattered cup danced and stilled, and Hermione felt a kinship with them.

"Enough," he said again, sighing and dropping his head into his hand. When he looked up at her, his eyes were tired, the lines in his face more defined. He looked very old.

"Please let me go," she whispered, voice rasping. But Snape only flicked his wand at the tea, clearing up the mess and broken shards. Hermione could still see a drop of the tea, far-flung from the initial point of impact. It slid slowly down the wall. He hadn't seen it. She wouldn't tell him; he'd take that away, too.

He got to his feet, moving as if afraid that hasty movement might damage him. He left the room and shut the door behind him.

Hermione fingered the swathes of gauze at her throat. She wondered exactly how trussed-up she was, but there was no mirror in the cage. Curling up on the bed, she wondered how much longer he could possibly keep her. Three Horcruxes had been destroyed before she'd been captured. One since. Three left, and it was possible that Harry had found more than Snape knew about.

Hermione wished she could feel safe here. It was true that there was little chance of anything bad happening to her, and she was certainly at less risk here than out with Harry and Ron. But when she'd pictured her role in the war, she hadn't imagined staying inside a damp, claustrophobic cell, reading Muggle books and wanking to thoughts of Severus Snape.

Before sleep took her, Hermione cried bitter tears for the way her chance to help had been stolen and replaced with nothing.

17-Mar

Chapter 3 of 17

Hermione wakes up in a cell, held captive by none other than her former professor, Severus Snape. She's scared, alone, and confused about her feelings for her unwilling captor. How can she know what is real and what isn't when he won't tell her anything?

Chapter Three

Day 27

Despite all the things I said to Snape two days ago, he hasn't punished me. The first time my food arrived afterward, I stashed it away in case he was just teasing me. But the meals have been regular, and I felt safe in eating the food I'd hidden. He hasn't spoken to me much, but at least he doesn't seem angry. Just indifferent.

The wounds on my neck have been itching like crazy, and Snape promised he'd take the bandages off today. I almost don't want him to because I'm afraid I'll be tempted to scratch, and I don't want to do damage to myself... again.

I haven't had another attack like that, and I hope I never do. I've always prided myself on being in control of my emotions, and I've so little control these days that I need to cherish and hoard it whenever I do get it. That means being more resilient. One day I will get out. I can't doubt that. Hope is all I have to keep going.

Hermione heard Snape's footsteps outside the heavy wooden door to her room. She watched from her bed, pretending to be asleep, as he entered with another tray. This was her fourth meal today. She wondered why the schedule was so erratic. She hated it. Routine was safe. Eating four and five meals a day made her worry that her next one wouldn't be coming at all.

"I can tell that you are awake," Snape drawled, sending the tray across the stone under her cell door.

She opened her eyes, not even bothering to wonder *how* he knew, because he just seemed to know everything. Things even a Legilimens shouldn't know.

The tray contained buttered bread, cheese, and little cutlets of meat. Just a snack, then.

And there was tea.

Hermione's eyes widened, and she looked to Snape, but he was settling into his chair and opening a book. She couldn't see the cover, but it was thick and quite beaten.

She fell to her knees in front of the tray and picked up the cup of tea. She burned herself a little, drinking it, but that didn't matter. It was the best thing she'd ever tasted. She knew, just *knew*, that it was the stuff served at Hogwarts. She'd never had tea that tasted so strong and homey anywhere else.

When the tea was all gone, Hermione made a little whimpering noise. She didn't mean to, but thankfully Snape didn't look up from his reading.

It occurred to her, looking at the heavy cheese, salty meat, and thick bread, that she should have saved some of the tea to wash down the dry snack. But she wasn't really that hungry, anyway. She ate a little of the bread, a nibble of cheese, and a bite of salami before pushing the tray back through.

Snape looked with disapproval at the still-full tray, and Hermione looked down, feeling ashamed. He'd made her a nice snack and had even given her tea...had he noticed the desperate way she'd been staring at his, so carelessly tossed against the wall?...and she wasn't even good enough to finish the food.

"Was it not to your liking?" Snape asked in a voice that suggested he really didn't care.

"It was," she said slowly, fingering the hem of her shirt.

"Then why did you not finish it?"

Hermione bit her lip and looked into his face. He didn't seem angry. Emboldened, Hermione said, "Because I drank all my tea, and the food would have made me thirsty."

Snape's eyebrows furrowed together, and he watched her for a moment, but she didn't do anything to deserve or warrant such scrutiny.

Finally, he spoke. "You are capable of speech, yes?"

Hermione nodded. "Yes."

"And you are more than willing to beg and plead, barter and bribe for parchment and reading materials, are you not?"

That was obvious. She'd caved on the second day of her captivity and asked for a book. "Of course."

"And yet," Snape said, not breaking eye contact, "you are unable to so much as ask for something to quench your thirst? You would face my wrath to ask for a book, but not water or tea?"

Hermione suddenly felt very small.

"Sir," she began, breaking his gaze. She really didn't want to be punished for this, but he seemed to be inviting her honesty. "I could live without a book or parchment if you decided to deny me. But if I asked for water, and you said no, I wouldn't be able to survive."

"So you think me such a monster that I would essentially exsiccate you out of spite?"

Hermione gasped. "No, sir! I just didn't want to... I don't know!" She took a deep breath. "May I have some more tea, Professor Snape? Maybe with some milk and a little more sugar?"

Rolling his eyes, Snape waved his wand at her cup. It immediately filled to the brim with tea. Biting her lip, Hermione reached for the drink, but stopped herself, looking at

Snape as if for permission. He nodded at her, and she took a sip. As good as the last...better, even.

"I don't keep milk, but there is more sugar. Whenever you want more tea, tap the cup with your finger and say *Repleo*." I will bring you a glass, and when you want water, tap the cup and say the same."

Hermione couldn't help the way her heart was racing over this concession. Snape have never given her power before. She'd had to count on him for everything. With water, she'd be able to survive for about a week if something were to happen to him, whereas before, she would have died in a few days. He'd told her that the tap water was not potable, and she dared not risk it.

Giddy with her new sense of agency, Hermione tapped the delicate teacup and announced, *Repleo!* The already full cup filled and overflowed, soaking the tray and ruining her food. She'd thought it would only fill to the brim, not that it would try to put the volume of another cup on top of the first.

Her eyes began to water as she stared at the soggy food. She'd ruined it. Snape was going to be so angry.

But when she looked up, wincing, to meet his eyes, they weren't angry at all. In fact, the corners of his mouth were twitching as if to hold back a laugh.

"I-I'm sorry," she stuttered, not brave enough to be sure that he wasn't going to yell.

Snape waved his wand and the food mess disappeared, leaving only the battered metal tray. The tea in her cup was back at a normal level. She took it and drank deeply from it, watching him all the while. After a moment, he went back to reading, and Hermione gulped and gulped until there was no tea left.

Making sure he was ensconced in his reading, Hermione tapped the cup and whispered, *Repleo*, "inordinately gratified to see it fill up once more. It almost felt like getting a first paycheck, or coming home with the groceries...the pride and security of being able to provide for oneself.

Hermione stayed on the floor for a while longer, watching Snape. He seemed to read slowly, but then again, no one absorbed what they read as well as Snape did. He read every line like it was something he had to memorise, like there would be a test the very next day. She wondered if he had perfect recall.

Soon, her bladder was rather insistently urging her to use the loo. She'd never had to use it while Snape was right there. Shifting her weight, Hermione wondered how long she could last, and what that was in comparison to how long he would be sitting there.

He licked a finger and turned the page. Hermione surmised that he would be there a very long time.

"Er, sir?" she said, crossing her legs.

"Yes, Miss Granger?" he intoned without looking up.

"I need to use the loo," she admitted, cheeks flushing.

Snape looked at her as if she'd suggested she needed to swing from the ceiling. "And?"

She huffed. "I can't go with you here!" she exclaimed, whimpering at the pressure raising her voice put on her bladder.

Snape marked his page and stood. "I shall be back in an hour to remove those bandages and tend to your wounds. With dittany, you can be sure they will not scar, but you must not touch them as they are healing. They need air at this stage, so you need to control yourself."

Hermione thought managing not to piss her pants right then was a pretty good show of controlling herself, but she only nodded meekly. Snape left the room and Hermione lunged to the bathroom behind the folding curtain.

True to his word, Snape reappeared an hour later. Not that she knew he was exactly on time, having no way to measure, but she doubted he would ever allow himself to be anything less than perfectly punctual, even in his own home.

If this was his home.

"I'm going to open the door," he announced, his voice making Hermione shiver as she sat up on her bed, placing her book on the narrow bedside table. "You will not leave the bed the entire time I'm inside. If you attempt to escape, I will stun you. If you manage to evade that, which you will not, the door will not open to you. If you manage to bypass that, which you will not, a front door will not show itself to you, and you cannot Apparate within this house, which I'm sure you've noticed. If you somehow manage to get outside, *which you will not*, you will be captured and killed within hours of your escape. Do you understand this?"

Hermione's eyes had grown wide during his speech. She realised she was trembling and shook it off. "I understand," she said solemnly. Of course she'd tried to Disapparate. She'd tried to make a Portkey, as well. She'd tried everything.

Snape nodded and unlocked the cell door. She noticed that he waved his wand at it as well; for the first time, she wondered if there was a spell keeping the door shut as well as a key. She made a note to watch more closely next time.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, Snape pulled three vials from his inner pockets, as well as three handkerchiefs. None of the bottles were labelled, but the vials were different shapes, the potions different colours.

"Lie back," he ordered softly, arranging her pillows to prop her up as she did. She felt vulnerable in this position, but a part of her was excited that he was going to touch her. Besides the slap when she'd been hyperventilating, he hadn't laid a hand upon her. No human should go nearly a month without contact. It was a wonder she'd kept her mind at all.

Snape touched his wand against the bandages on her throat, and they parted as if he'd cut them. He pulled them away, whispering a spell when they'd stuck a little to her half-healed wound.

She felt strange without the bandages, naked and bared to him. She watched his face as he Banished the gauze and reached for the first potion bottle. It was squat with a thick cork, the potion itself a murky green.

"Disinfectant," he murmured, apparently having seen her looking.

She nodded as if approval had been sought. He poured a little on his fingertips, and with a look of intense concentration, began to smooth his fingers along her neck.

She cringed a little, because even though the touch was soft, her wounds were very sore, and sensitive from not being exposed for a few days. But warmth was spreading from his touch, and she wondered if the potion wasn't a little more than mere disinfectant.

Hermione found herself surprised at the amount of area he covered. She hadn't known she'd done so much damage with only her fingernails, but then again, they were quite ragged, what with living in a cell.

Snape cleared his throat, causing her to look to him, but he didn't speak. She wondered if touching her made him uncomfortable.

Wiping his hands on the first cloth, Snape reached for the second vial. The thin, test tube-like container held a very slippery-looking clear potion. Snape touched the skin on her neck, and apparently satisfied that the first potion had been absorbed properly, began to smooth the new potion in.

"What's this one?" she asked, feeling the pressure of his fingertips over her larynx.

Snape paused but didn't look away from her throat. "For healing," he said simply, continuing to rub it in. Hermione was sure this one was creating a warmth that hadn't been there before. Heat was radiating from his fingers, making her flush. She wriggled a little on the coverlet. The way he was leaning over her, touching her so softly... she hadn't known he was able to touch like that, without derision, without judgement.

He spread the healing potion farther than the last one, going as far as the area behind her ears and as low as the top of her shirt, getting the neckline a little wet. She would change it after he left; Snape had provided a few drawers full of clothing for her, and if she put them back into the drawers at the end of the day, they were clean when she took them out again. It had taken her days to realise that.

Snape's fingers on her chest made her shiver. His hand was moving more and more slowly, caressing, really. Hermione exhaled, knowing her breath would hit his hand. She couldn't deny that she wanted more, more touching, more contact. It was beautiful, to feel so real, so human. It was too easy to forget she even existed, for what are people but their connections to everyone else? If she was never touched, how could she be certain she was truly there?

After cleaning his hands on the second handkerchief, Snape dipped just a fingertip into the wide mouth of the third potion.

Bringing his finger to her neck, he smeared the sticky, pale blue potion directly onto a long cut. Hermione whimpered in her throat, not expecting the rather harsh contact. Looking at his face, Hermione saw that Snape appeared to be almost apologetic. He looked down at her, his eyes dark.

Again and again, he dipped his finger into the vial and drew it across her various cuts. Again, she hadn't realised there were so many. She hoped she didn't suffer another attack like that. She was so grateful he'd been there to save her...

An almost unfamiliar anger rose inside her. He hadn't saved her; he'd been the reason behind her attack! If she hadn't been trapped, she wouldn't have panicked like a coyote ready to chew off its own leg for survival!

But he was taking care of her now, she knew. He hadn't meant for her to get scared like that. She could blame him all she wanted...and she did...but it wouldn't change the fact that she was here. If she wanted to escape, she needed to keep her head.

"What's..." Hermione began, but her voice was only a breathy whisper. Snape pulled his fingers away as she cleared her throat. "What's this one?"

Snape peered at her neck critically. A final dab with a discerning finger, and he wiped his hands on the last cloth.

"For scarring," he said, putting a stopper to the potion. He took the first two and put them in his pocket. The last, he gestured to, saying, "Every evening for a week. You only need to apply it to the wound. There isn't enough to spread liberally. Make it last."

Hermione nodded, looking at the vial. "But I can't see the cuts, sir."

Sighing, Snape got up from the bed. "Stay," he ordered, though she hadn't made a move to get up.

He walked over to the wall above the bureau and waved his wand at it. He tapped the wall and murmured something. The stones where he tapped shimmered a moment and then faded back.

"If you want to see your reflection, tap the wall and say, *consulo*.' The spell will only last an hour, but is infinitely renewable."

Snape said no more as he swept out of the cell. Hermione watched as he twitched his wand just as he turned the key in the lock. There was definitely a spell involved.

Giving her another spell could mean he was beginning to trust that she wouldn't take advantage of his kindness. Hermione snorted. In reality, giving her another spell meant he knew she was defenceless with absolutely no hope of fight or flight. He wasn't afraid that she would get out.

But it was a kindness that he need not have given her. She could have just felt where the cuts were and applied the potion accordingly. Actually, he needn't have given her the anti-scarring potion at all. He had no concern for her appearance, and no need to appease her vanity. It wouldn't have made a damned difference to him if she was scarred, and at this point, Hermione herself couldn't have cared less. In the long list of things that mattered, a blemish-free form was significantly low on the list.

Still propped up on the pillows as Snape had commanded, Hermione looked at the stones where the spell was. She didn't need to apply more of the potion tonight. There was no reason for her to get up and see what she looked like.

She didn't want to know.

17-Apr

Chapter 4 of 17

Hermione wakes up in a cell, held captive by none other than her former professor, Severus Snape. She's scared, alone, and confused about her feelings for her unwilling captor. How can she know what is real and what isn't when he won't tell her anything?

Chapter Four

Day 31

The potion Snape gave me is working perfectly. In a few days, I doubt there will be any scarring at all. But it's getting harder to feel where the cuts are. I think I'll have to use the mirror spell today to make sure I'm getting them all. I don't know why I'm so afraid. A person can't change that much in a month, can they? Am I afraid I won't recognise myself?

Absolutely nothing has happened. Nothing ever happens.

My mum had this necklace once. It was a pendant. On one side, there was an image of a bird. On the other, a cage. Alone, the bird was free, the cage empty. But when you spun the cage and the pendant twirled, it looked like the bird was in the cage.

I hated it.

But I think I understand it. The thing is, the bird can't spin itself. The cage can't capture the bird. Someone else needs to come along and spin them. Someone else puts the bird in the cage. The bird doesn't do it to herself.

It's not her fault. All she...the bird...can do is wait out the spin until the person spinning it gets bored of seeing the bird in the cage. When he walks away, the bird will be free again, the cage empty.

But I understand something else. The person spinning the pendant doesn't necessarily understand that the bird rather likes being free. No, the man thinks he's only doing what he's meant to be doing, spinning the chain and watching the images meld together. An illusion. It's not really his fault, either. The bird can't tell him, can't explain how she hates the cage, and even if she could, maybe someone is forcing him to spin...

In any case, eventually I'll be free. When Snape is.

Snape hadn't visited that day. That is, he came in to give her the tray of food...stew, again...but he left immediately afterward. He hadn't answered her questions at all, but she didn't feel sick the way she had before. Maybe he didn't know, or maybe he just didn't want to talk. It didn't mean Harry was dead and the war was lost.

Hermione had just tossed aside Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (did Snape want her to get ideas?) and was now picking up Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (no, Snape was definitely not trying to say something with the books he gave her!).

All she ever did was read. And write. She'd taken to writing short stories instead of her daily reminiscences. There was rarely anything to say. Snape had told her, when she'd asked for more paper three times, to tap the pages and say, '*Charta*.' More parchment would appear.

There were many spells around her cell she could do without a wand. They were all keyed to Snape's own spells. He had to go around and set the spell first. The word she would say was simply a password to activating the always-ready spells. But it did make her feel like less of a prisoner.

Hermione considered all that she had done that day, realising she'd eaten at least three times. It was time for the scar potion. Sighing, Hermione brought her fingers to her neck, but she knew what she'd find. The scars were too faint to apply the potion by feel. She had to use the mirror.

It was silly, she knew, to be afraid of herself. Even if she'd changed somehow, it wasn't as though she'd been the type to obsess over her appearance in the first place. She could tell she hadn't lost weight while imprisoned. Snape fed her very well. In fact, she might have put on a couple pounds...at Hogwarts, she'd tended to skip meals in favour of research and studying, but here, eating really was the highlight of the day... because it brought Snape to her.

Standing in front of the bureau, Hermione whispered, "*Imago*," and tapped her fingers against the stone. They shimmered and flickered before turning into a large oval mirror.

Hermione sighed with relief. She hadn't changed all that much. Her hair was still the same; even Snape's potion-like shampoos hadn't changed that. It had lost a bit of its sheen, as had her cheeks. She no longer had that dewy, pink look she got when she spent a lot of time outdoors. She was very pale, so much so that the blue veins in her throat were visible. There were dark circles under her eyes, and despite her suspicions on her additional weight, her cheekbones were more prominent than before.

But in her eyes were the real change. Still brown, still a little wide. Red-rimmed as if she was a little ill, but the changes weren't exactly physical. She looked like she'd seen too much to bear, which was strange because, if she thought about it...and she often did...Snape treated her very well. He didn't abuse or even neglect her, except for a few days when her food hadn't come at all.

Hermione shrugged and applied the potion. It was wise that she did use the mirror, because some of the fainter cuts had been neglected and were beginning to scar. Now that she could see the extent of the scratches she'd inflicted upon herself, for the first time, she was truly grateful for Snape's intervention, both during the attack, and after.

"The potion is adequate?" came Snape's soft voice from behind her. She watched in the mirror as he settled in his chair. He had two books with him today. Maybe he planned to stay awhile. She couldn't help but shiver at the thought.

"You made it, didn't you?"

Snape appeared to be about to answer, but he must have realised she meant it as a compliment to his capability and not an actual question.

He nodded curtly. "I thought perhaps a book on wizarding history wouldn't go amiss."

"Not at all, sir. I'd very much like to read some wizarding work," Hermione said, walking forward to stand at the bars. "Though that isn't to say I don't enjoy your selection!" she hastened to add.

Snape got up and handed her the second book. It was a copy of *Olde and Forgotten Bewitchments and Charms*. Hermione hugged it to her chest. When he sat back down, she realised he was reading the same book.

"Sir?" she began tentatively.

"Mm?" He appeared to already be reading, but Hermione knew him well enough by now to know that he was listening.

"When I've finished the book, could we talk about it?" It had been so long since she'd been able to discuss literature with anyone, certainly longer than the month of her capture. At Hogwarts, no one ever wanted to hear her thoughts on books, even if the person had read the same text, which was very rare.

Without looking up, Snape said, "Perhaps."

Noting that he was about a quarter of the way through, Hermione opened the book and began to read. In a few hours, she was at the same place as he was. Though she hadn't absorbed the contents as thoroughly as she was sure he had, she had gleaned enough to be able to carry on a perfectly informed conversation. She could hardly wait.

"What did you think about the chapter on ancient Animagi?" Hermione asked, seeing he had just finished it.

"I thought the research was compelling, though not complete enough to form such a firm position."

Hermione took a few long, deep breaths. This was like eating after a fast, having chocolate after Lent, getting a pass to the Restricted Section. "I thought so, too. I also didn't think the author should have been so judgemental about the way Animagi used to train their acolytes. His writing is a little biased."

Snape chuckled, turning a page in his book. "He has earned the right to be biased. His work has provided the foundation for discoveries in magic for centuries."

Hermione scoffed, shutting her book. "No one can earn the right to be judgemental. If you ask me, the fact that he's so brilliant means that he should ~~be~~ less biased! People take his work very seriously, and if he doesn't provide a balanced argument, no one will know the other side of it!"

"And what, pray, is the 'other side' of depraved older Animagi teaching young, impressionable students the craft of self-transfiguration in return for sexual service?"

"Well," Hermione began, warming to the subject. "If the decision to enter into such an agreement was informed and consensual, who is Michealus Scatternino to question it? At sixteen and seventeen, a person knows himself or herself well enough to know what they can handle. The laws of majority aren't arbitrary, but they aren't an exact science, either. I mean, you can't tell me that me at sixteen and Lavender Brown at sixteen were the same!"

"Maybe so," Snape conceded, closing his book around a finger. "But we cannot have laws based on personality, intelligence, and maturity. Laws must apply to all people across the board. To do otherwise would be anarchy."

"Of course," Hermione said, moving to pace along the bars to her cell. "I'm not saying that. But when this book was written, not to mention when the practise of Animagus apprenticeship actually took place, no such laws existed. Cases *were* judged on an individual basis. And just because Scatternino at sixteen wasn't ready to enter into a mutually beneficial relationship, doesn't mean he should condemn those who know themselves well enough to weigh the benefits and liabilities!"

"But how many students were coerced or unaware of the total implications of such an arrangement? And how many Animagi took advantage of their positions of power to demand more than was rightfully theirs?"

Hermione stopped pacing and placed her hands on the bars. "Well, the author doesn't mention it, but I read elsewhere that there were tribunals to rectify that sort of problem. And in another book, I learned that the apprentices actually had sponsors, who were former apprentices themselves, who took on a role of protector."

Snape looked awfully smug when he said, "Exactly."

Hermione wasn't sure he had won that point. Looking at him quizzically, Hermione said, "But you just..."

"My point isn't about Animagi apprentices and the legality or morality of their traditions. I actually quite agree with you. My point was on the alleged biasness of Scatternino."

"And?" Hermione prompted, wishing she had been arguing the same debate as he had instead of wasting her time when he had obviously been playing devil's advocate.

"Scatternino *is* biased and quite judgemental. I wouldn't presume to argue that. But any reader worth his salt will consult multiple sources. If a reader can be persuaded one way or the other by checking only one resource, then that person deserves to bask in ignorance. It is the reader's responsibility to gather information from all sides of the situation and make a logical conclusion based on various findings."

Hermione huffed. She hated being lead like that. Of course he was right. She'd defeated her own argument that the author shouldn't be so biased by having read so many additional texts on the subject and informing herself properly.

Walking over to her bedside table, Hermione tapped her teacup, smiling as it filled obligingly. She must be drinking Snape out of house and home at this point. She took a sip to rally herself, noting that it wasn't as bitter as usual.

Looking at her cup, she knew right away what had changed.

"There's milk in this!" she accused, gesturing with the cup and sloshing it onto the stone floor.

Snape cleared the mess and looked at her questioningly.

"I mean, I wanted milk, so this is good. But I thought you didn't keep milk. You said that."

Snape made a humming noise and picked up his book again. Hermione drank deeply of her tea.

When Hermione had read all she possibly could that day, she told Snape she was going to bed. He'd looked surprised, and for the first time in a month, Hermione was privy to the time. He'd cast the *Tempus* spell. It was 11:14 in the evening.

Hermione knew she'd remember that time for as long as she lived.

Without saying a word, Snape gathered his teacup and book and left the room.

"Goodnight," Hermione whispered to the closed door.

She crawled into the bed, placing the book on the bedside table. As much as it had annoyed her that Snape had used her sound arguments to prove his own point, she knew that she'd never had such an invigorating debate. When she spoke with Harry or Ron, bless them, she spent a quarter of the time explaining the words she used, another quarter trying to convince them that it was important, and a third quarter sighing heavily and wondering why she bothered.

That didn't leave much time left for actual discussion.

Lying on her stomach on the coverlet, Hermione snaked a hand beneath herself, fingers seeking out her clit. There was no question about it...debating with Snape had made her desperately hot. His low, soft voice making her strain to hear every word, the way his mouth formed around words like he was tasting them before offering them to her ears, the way his eyes blazed with triumph when he'd driven his point home.

Hermione moaned. She held her hand still and ground her body on top of it, pretending it was his hand, his thigh, his cock. She wondered what he'd think if she rubbed her wet pussy over his severe black slacks, getting them all slick as she found completion.

Her other hand held onto the headboard, and she used it as leverage to haul her body over he hand, pretending it was him moving her, him guiding her.

Finally, her climax was in sight. Abandoning the games, Hermione fucked herself with her fingers as her palm ground over her clit. She shouted into the pillow, trying to muffle her moans and soft cries.

Taking her head out of the pillow to face the bars, Hermione opened her eyes just in time to see the light from the hallway diminish as the heavy wooden door to her room swung closed.

17-May

Chapter 5 of 17

Hermione wakes up in a cell, held captive by none other than her former professor, Severus Snape. She's scared, alone, and confused about her feelings for her unwilling captor. How can she know what is real and what isn't when he

won't tell her anything?

Chapter Five

Day 42

I know he knows I know he's watching. He can't honestly think that I don't hear the door open, his heavy breathing, that I can't see the light of the hallway. I even saw the outline of his body last night.

I'm getting worn out from all this masturbating, but it's more important that he comes to me. At Hogwarts, I only touched myself once or twice a week, a relief from the stress of school and the war and everything else. When I could find the time.

Now, all I have is time. I think I'll have to stop using my fingers inside myself, because I'm feeling a little sore. If I asked him for a nail file, would he blush, knowing why? But he likes it when I pump my fingers in and out like that. His breathing changes. I've become attuned to it, even across the expanse of the room.

But if I hadn't seen him with my own eyes, I never would have believed he was watching. He acts exactly the same during the day, nonchalant and casual. As casual as Snape can be, anyway.

Enough of this. He hasn't so much as entered my cell since he put the potions on me. I don't want to have to resort to hurting myself to get attention... would I do that? Am I that desperate? But I think I am. When he touched me, I felt alive. It's like he was grounding me, keeping me tethered to this Earth. Without that, I feel like I'm floating around in the cosmos, unable to control my movement, lost and alone.

I have to do som

The door crashed open and Snape strode in. Hermione watched from her desk. There were days when he wouldn't speak to her at all, and if she pressed him, he would leave, returning only to bring her food.

Luckily, his behaviour seemed to reset the next day, so if she annoyed him, he would only torture her with silence for the rest of that day. The next morning would bring him back to her.

It seemed as though this was to be a quiet day. She wouldn't press him. She knew the value of his company, silent or otherwise.

Seeing that he'd opened his copy of *Important Modern Magical Discoveries*, Hermione grabbed hers off her small shelf, as well. These days, they read the same book more often than not. After, he would almost always treat her to a small discussion, which he invariably used to drive home some point or another, even if she didn't let him lead her at all. She liked the talks even with the annoying smugness.

Curling on her side on the bed, Hermione opened her book to approximately the same place as his, but instead of reading, she watched him.

Having seen her own rather dismal appearance, it was no wonder he looked the way he did, if this was his life. He was in the dungeons almost as often as she. His hair was lank, stringy, and greasy. On certain days, it looked almost clean, but that rarely lasted more than a day. He simply didn't seem to shower often enough, and combined with oily skin, the result was underwhelming.

His nose wasn't anything but huge. It dominated his face, truly, even when she looked objectively. But it was hard to do that these days. Having seen him nearly every day for so long, he just looked like Snape to her. Crooked teeth and black eyes and all. It didn't matter.

Snape looked up from his book. Hermione wasn't sure if she'd darted her own eyes back to her page quickly enough for him to have missed her staring, but he didn't say anything, and she didn't look up again for at least another hour.

Hermione put her book on the bed beside her. She glanced at Snape under lowered eyelashes, but he seemed deep in his reading. She squirmed a little, wondering what it said about her that watching him read made her wet. Her breath quickened as the thoughts she usually saved until after he was gone...or made her think he was gone...raced unbidden across the forefront of her mind: Snape's fingers on her throat, Snape's low voice directing her, Snape's mouth on her body...

Without even realising, Hermione was running her fingertips over her stomach, her shirt having bunched up from all her wriggling. Closing her eyes, she imagined Snape's voice reading the chapter on illicit dark magic in the fifteenth century. A low moan escaped her mouth, barely more than a breath, as her fingers slipped under the waistband of her trousers. She didn't open her eyes.

Using her other hand to unbutton her trousers so her hand had more room to move, Hermione then kicked out of them, leaving her in a shirt and knickers in the middle of her bed. Her hand was just venturing into her underwear when she heard Snape inhale sharply.

"Miss Granger, that is entirely inappropriate!"

A shockwave ran through her at his tone of voice. He was so... disapproving. It made her pussy clench. She wondered if he would talk like that in bed.

Panting a little, Hermione said, "This is my room; you're only a guest here." She couldn't quite bring herself to look at him, but her other hand sought out a taut nipple and she began to stroke it through her shirt.

"This is *my* house!" Snape said, voice dangerously low. "And *you* are, in fact, the guest."

Hermione laughed breathlessly, her hand finally delving inside her knickers, fingers playing lightly with her lower lips, not parting them, just teasing. She imagined Snape would love to tease her. "In that case, you're not very much of a host. I'd like to go home, if I'm only a guest."

"That is not possible," Snape ground out. From the clarity of his voice, she knew he was looking right at her as he spoke. "Now cease that at once!"

Hermione moaned, unable to hide her reaction to his voice. The angrier he got, the hotter it made her. She slid one finger within herself, wetting it before coming back to stroke her clit. Her hips were grinding against her hand, and Hermione wasn't ashamed that a lot of her movements were calculated to get a reaction.

"No one is telling you to watch, Professor," Hermione whispered, knowing he could hear her. "No one told you to watch all those other times. But I don't mind." Hermione slid two fingers inside herself and whimpered, "Promise."

Strange silence filled the room, broken only by her hitching breath and the angry inhalations of her audience. She'd thought for sure that he'd try to deny her allegations, but he obviously had no such intentions. Better for her; now she could concentrate on herself rather than trying to hold a conversation while wanking.

Hermione stopped both her hands to take a break and unbutton her shirt. She was sure she heard a sigh of relief before Snape must have realised she hadn't actually planned on stopping for good. When the shirt was parted, Hermione sat up to take it off. She saw Snape watching her intently. His face was partially cast in shadow. The lamps in the room were burning a little lower, and she wondered if he had turned them down, or if he'd been remiss in tending to their oil.

Hermione bit her lip and held his gaze as she drew the shirt off of her shoulders, baring her body to him. He valiantly kept his eyes on hers, but she remained still in

challenge, and eventually, he broke the eye contact to sweep over her bared breasts. His searching look was full of greed and possessiveness, and Hermione wondered if he thought he owned her, that she belonged to him. It didn't matter what he thought, though, because between the two of them in this lowlight room, there was no Dark Lord, no Order, no Horcruxes, no Hogwarts. There was only them, Hermione and Snape, desperate with longing and punishing themselves and each other.

When he stared at her, it was almost tangible. Hermione fell back onto the bed, imagining it was his hands pushing her, his body pressing into her. Her legs fell apart, one bending at the knee. Hermione toyed with the hem of her knickers, trying to reconcile the fact that she was actually about to bring herself off in front of Snape.

"Take those off as well, Miss Granger," came Snape's raspy voice, so low it was like whispers across her sensitised skin.

Hermione chuckled. It almost felt like sex, now that he was participating. Hermione squirmed out of her panties, tossing them to the floor beside her bed. She felt like a princess on a pedestal, a slave on an auction block.

She heard him hiss the word *yes*, and she was encouraged to continue. Now bared to him, there was no point in teasing. She inserted two fingers, moving them around to get herself slick. One hand played with her nipples, pinching them as she knew he would.

Her hands flew as she brought herself to the edge of orgasm faster than she could ever recall. It was as though the hours they spent reading had counted as foreplay. She couldn't ever remember being so worked up. Lowering her hand from her breasts, Hermione used one hand to pump her fingers into herself, and the other to dance across her clit. She was writhing and trembling, her legs moving restlessly as she played with herself for him. All for him.

"Three fingers," Snape directed. Hermione obeyed, and she heard his fingernails drag across the arms of the chair as she stretched herself around her fingers, mewling at the reaction of being so filled. She wished he was doing it.

She was right there, balanced right on the edge. "Tell me to come," she cried, knowing his voice, one more time, was enough to push her over into bliss.

Snape growled low in his throat, and Hermione waited, holding herself there, knowing he would do as she begged.

His voice was rasping when he snarled, "Come. Now!"

Hermione's pussy clamped down around her fingers, and she bit back her screams...ineffectually...as her body rocked and shook in climax. Her lips parted, Hermione drew in sucking breaths as she came back to herself. She was sweaty, the bed sheets were a mess, and her hair was disastrous, but she'd never felt so sated in her life.

Turning her head to the side, Hermione took in Snape. He looked almost as dishevelled as she did. But more than that, he looked furious. His lips were pulled back in a fearsome sneer, and Hermione trembled with something more than afterglow when his baleful gaze pinned her. He abruptly stood and left the room, but not before Hermione saw the immense bulge in the front of his robes. Despite his apparent anger, he was not unaffected.

And that was all she could really ask. For now.

*

"Is Harry okay?"

"Yes."

"Is the Dark Lord still alive?"

"Yes."

"Is everyone at Hogwarts all right?"

"...Yes."

"What?"

"What do you mean?"

"You paused after I asked that last question. What's wrong at Hogwarts?"

"Nothing is wrong, Miss Granger. I do not see why you must torment yourself with these infernal questions. You must know that even if I had the information you desired, it is very likely that I would not tell you the truth. You cannot possibly believe everything I say."

Hermione sighed. "What choice do I have? I have to believe you because there's no one else. You are everything I have."

When Snape had come into her room that morning, there had been no talk about what had occurred the night before, nor had he given any indication that he even remembered. Hermione herself couldn't stop blushing and stammering. She would not make a very good spy. Snape, on the other hand, was obviously well versed in the art of avoidance and detachment.

But she knew the truth. She knew how his eyes burned with desire, how his breath shuddered and hitched.

"You know it is very likely that I am feeding you lies in order to keep you docile."

Hermione laughed. "Do I seem *docile* to you, Professor Snape?" It was the closest she'd come to referring to the night before, but Snape didn't even bat an eyelash. Infuriating man.

Snape didn't answer, nor did he when she asked the unanswerable, "What is happening out there?"

Hermione sighed, curled up with her back against the bars so she was facing away from Snape. "When can I go home?"

Snape's pause was telling.

"What?" she asked, trying to quell her excitement. Maybe he was considering letting her go!

"You usually ask, 'Can I go home?'"

"Oh," Hermione said, disappointed. "Can I go home?"

"No."

"Because I'm *safe* here?" she scoffed, rolling her eyes, feeling bold because he couldn't see her face.

"Yes."

"I don't feel very safe!"

"Why ever not?" he queried. "You have everything you need, everything you could possibly want. Nothing unsavoury can get inside your cage. I am *thonly* one keyed to the wards on the bars, besides you, of course. If anyone were to try to get in, they would face spontaneous Disapparition followed by a series of painful hexes and Confunding."

"Oh," Hermione said. That did make her feel a little safer. If another Death Eater found out about her and began to question Snape's loyalties, and then got rid of Snape, the Death Eaters would come for her. Not that it mattered, if she couldn't escape. It would deter them, but she would still eventually die of starvation.

"Even if the door is open?" she asked.

Snape gave Hermione a withering look. "How else would someone attempt to get in, if not through the open door?"

"So, yes?" Hermione clarified, stifling a smirk.

"Yes," Snape snapped. "No one will ever get in."

"And no one will ever get out," she added sadly, fingering the bar. She turned so Snape could see her profile. "Can I go outside today?"

"Miss Granger, that is one question you can cease asking immediately. You will never be permitted to go outside. It is impossible for reasons so vast and varied that I could spend the day enlightening you. You understand why I do not find that appealing in the least."

Actually, Hermione suspected Snape would rather enjoy 'enlightening' her, but she wisely kept mum.

"Will you come inside today?"

"I don't think that would be wise."

"I really enjoyed last night, Professor Snape."

Snape visibly started. Hermione realised it wasn't very Slytherin to be so blunt, but there was a reason she'd been Sorted into Gryffindor.

"Last night was very imprudent. You would do well to forget about it."

Snape reached for his book, obviously having decided the conversation was over, but Hermione wasn't one to give up so easily. She'd ask her final question and then circle back to this conversation.

"Will you open the door?"

Snape almost growled. She did ask these questions every few days, so he must be getting sick of them, but the answers were changing as he grew more accustomed to her presence and began to suspect she wasn't much of a threat, so she had to continue asking. One day he would let her outside, she was sure. One day he would tell her what went on outside the walls.

"For one hour, after you eat dinner," he ground out.

Hermione pressed her warm cheek against the cool bars. It wasn't usually warm in the dungeon, and the heated air was almost unfamiliar to her, as if she'd forgotten what it was like to not have to fend off a chill. It wasn't dinnertime, so she wouldn't enjoy the open door any time soon. The bars weren't so bad, really. After her panic attack, Hermione had chosen a focus image, and whenever she felt scared or sad or angry or confused, she just pictured the image in her mind, throwing all her attention into it, imagining every detail and nuance, until the feelings went away.

"I don't mind that you watch me," Hermione said, fingers stroking the bars.

"Miss Granger, I will not have this conversation with you," Snape snapped, pointedly looking at his book and not at her.

"I'll just talk then," Hermione said agreeably. "I like it when you watch. It makes everything feel so much more real. When I did it alone, before you started to watch, sometimes it was really hard to, you know... *climax*. Like halfway through I would just lose motivation or inspiration. But now that you watch, it feels really good. I just lie back and think... would you like to know what I think about?"

Snape snapped a page on his book so hard she heard a small tearing noise. She shrugged. No one was forcing him to stay and listen. There was a reason he stayed in her room for hours on end. Even if it was just because he was lonely, that didn't matter. One way or another, he wanted to be with her, and that meant he had to put up with her when she worked through her own confused feelings. The door was always open... to *him*, anyway.

"I think about you."

Snape inhaled sharply, eyes going unfocused, even as he continued to stare at a page. He was obviously listening, and Hermione pretended she didn't know or care.

"I think about your hands on my neck from before, when you were putting the potions on me. Did you like that as much as I did? You have very gentle hands, Professor Snape. Did my skin feel soft to you? After, I would touch my neck and pretend it was you doing it, and not just because you have the best bedside manner, even if it was more impressive than I'd expected it to be."

Hermione stood, sliding her hands up the bars over her head, pressing the length of her body against them, moving her hips very slightly...he'd only notice if he looked right at her, and he seemed to be doing absolutely anything to avoid doing just that.

"I want you to watch me again," she said quietly, stilling all movement.

"No."

"Why not?"

Snape didn't answer, only flipped a page. With how slowly he tended to read in order to absorb, she knew there was no way he'd actually finished the page.

"Professor Snape, are you working for the Order of the Phoenix?"

Snape drew in a hissing breath. He finally looked at her. "Any information you have can and most assuredly will keep you in a state of danger. Even if no Death Eater can cross the threshold of your cell, do you not think they can throw curses at you from beyond the bars?"

Hermione hadn't thought that. The trouble with being a Muggle-born was that she still sometimes thought as a Muggle first, and a witch second. She'd be lying if she hadn't pictured herself pressed against the back wall of the cell, laughing at the Death Eaters who couldn't reach her. It hadn't occurred to her that with one simple spell, she'd be dead, protected cell or not.

"But if you were a Death Eater, I wouldn't be here. If you were loyal to the Dark Lord, you'd have turned me over ages ago!"

"Do you think the Dark Lord does not know of your presence?" Snape roared, throwing his book across the room. Hermione noticed with detached interest that it hit the

wall in almost the exact same place as the teacup had, the last time he'd lost his temper like this.

"Rabastan Lestrangle took you from your bed; did you think I had killed him for you, stolen you from him to keep you all to myself? For a girl who is so widely acclaimed to be clever, you seem to have a difficult time understanding the politics at work!"

"But if you were a true Death Eater," Hermione persisted, "you would be doing horrible things to me. Not bringing me books and keeping me safe!"

"You are delusional if you do not think that keeping a young woman in a cell for weeks on end is a 'horrible thing.' I've stolen much from you, and with your naïve seductions, you are offering more and more to my avarice."

Hermione held her hand out through the bar, beseechingly. "It isn't stolen if I offer it freely. The only time I feel real is when your eyes are on me."

Snape stood and began to pace, throwing angry glares at her from time to time.

"If you were a real Death Eater," Hermione started again, but Snape interjected. He came right up to the bars, so quickly she withdrew her hand in shock. She wasn't afraid of touch, but his quick movement had surprised her, and she didn't want him to take her hand in anger.

Snape ripped open the buttons on his cuff and yanked up his sleeve, exposing the Dark Mark in all its vile glory, burning edges looking fresh and painful. "I'm a real Death Eater, Miss Granger. I am not your hero. I am not your saviour. Leave that to Potter and his sycophants. I am going to come out on top no matter *who* wins this war. No spy does his job without knowing that if one side loses, he is still safe. I act according to a role that will ensure my survival regardless of the outcome. That is *worse* than a *real Death Eater*."

Hermione reached out to touch his hand, but Snape jerked it away and left the room in a flurry of rage and robes.

17-Jun

Chapter 6 of 17

Hermione wakes up in a cell, held captive by none other than her former professor, Severus Snape. She's scared, alone, and confused about her feelings for her unwilling captor. How can she know what is real and what isn't when he won't tell her anything?

Chapter Six

Day 48

I don't know how he does it. He acts as though nothing happened, not the fact that he watched me masturbate, or the fact that we had a huge fight over his loyalties.

I don't know if he realises that he admitted to working for the Order. I knew he was a spy, or at least, I knew we were to trust him, and from my time here, I knew he couldn't be a true servant of Voldemort. The war is weighing as heavily on him as it is on any of us.

Only the war doesn't really touch me here. I'm safe and secure against the horrors that are surely going on outside these walls. Snape might not think he's protecting me, and I certainly would have agreed with him not too long ago, but I've had enough time to realise that if Snape was working for Voldemort, I'd be long dead.

The last few days when I've asked about Harry, Snape's answers seemed strained. At first I thought I was imagining something, because surely a spy of Snape's calibre couldn't be given away by vocal inflections determinable by a teenager. But maybe he's been letting his guard down around me, and that's why I'm more aware, more attuned to his subtleties. Whatever the reason, I'm close to panicking thinking of Harry...if he's all right, if a Horcrux has damaged him the way it did Dumbledore, if he's even alive.

But I can't let myself think like that. I need to stay strong. Whenever I feel anxious, I think of my focus image. It's a cauldron. I picture a perfectly brewed potion, bubbling away inside a cauldron. I keep the cauldron from boiling over. I keep the flame from burning too high or too low. I control the potion, I control myself. It helps.

I've begun to see Snape the same way. I know exactly how to talk to him to make sure he doesn't boil over. I can keep him softly simmering, just within the confines of the curved lip of the cauldron. If I wanted, I could stir...say a few choice words...at the wrong moment and destroy the potion. Or I could let it brew, adding just the right mix at the proper time, until the potion is ready to be completed.

And then I'll consume it.

Frustrated, Hermione threw *Wuthering Heights* across the room. Her eyes were so tired that she just couldn't read any longer. She never would have thought she'd see the day that she'd rather lounge around and do nothing than sit back with a good book...one of her favourites, even...but that day was obviously today.

"Is the book not to your liking?" Snape asked sardonically, raising an eyebrow at her petulant behaviour. She managed not to stick her tongue out at him, but it was a near thing.

"Of course it's to my liking," she said, falling back against her pillows. "My eyes hurt. I think I've been reading too much."

Snape hummed. "It's possible that the light in your cell is too dim. I can exchange the oil with my modified version, which will make the light burn a little more brightly."

Hermione stared. A moment later, she said, "It's not just that, though. I don't think I've ever read so much in my entire life. I must read more than twelve hours a day!"

"So don't read," Snape said, going back to his book.

Hermione turned over onto her stomach. The position reminded her of her favourite position in which to masturbate. It was easiest to pretend it was Snape's hand getting her off in this position. She clenched her thighs together in reaction. She was pretty sure she was getting addicted to orgasms. She'd never felt so desperate all the time. And it was about more than relieving tension now, as it had been during school. She actually felt true desire now, true want.

She'd spend a lot less time reading if she had some toys to play with. Her wrist was sore from all the activity. But somehow, asking Snape for a vibrator was on a different level than asking him for parchment.

Which reminded her. "The *Charta* spell didn't work yesterday. I'm out of paper."

"Yes, I noticed that my personal stock had become quite low. I had no idea you would use so much. I will pick more up tomorrow. Will you manage until then?"

Hermione nodded. Her paper must come from his own stash, somewhere inside this house. She wondered if he'd gone to get some parchment to write something and found it low. For some reason, that made her smile. It sort of connected them, in a way.

She watched Snape as he read page after page. He was reading some potions journal. He had millions of these, it seemed. He sometimes took notes in a leather-bound notebook as he read, but today he was just reading, precisely as ever.

He licked a finger to turn the page. Hermione shifted her hips, the seam of her jeans becoming snug against her slit. She bit her knuckle. Snape's fingers rubbed the threadbare arm of the chair he always sat in. The fingers smoothed, tapped, clenched, and stroked. Hermione stretched her arms above her head to grip the headboard, rotating her hips to get more friction from the seam between her legs. She hadn't worn knickers that day, having hurried to dress once she'd heard him coming down the stairs.

Hermione never knew she could be so wanton. She was getting off on his mere presence. And he must have known. Her movements weren't silent, and her breath was audibly quickening.

"Professor Snape," Hermione said, schooling her voice to sound natural and failing.

"Miss Granger," he said ironically, without looking up.

"Read to me," she asked, watching him. As always, she could tell when he was listening and no longer reading. His body seemed to freeze, and his entire being was focused on her. "Please."

He looked at her. She must have looked a sight, stretched out on her belly, face flushed, hands gripping the headboard as if she'd fall off the bed otherwise.

Clearing his throat, Snape began to read. His tone was so low and melodious that it was more like a sweet droning than actual words. And for that she was grateful, as she wasn't sure his voice would be as affecting if she actually listened to the modern methods of distilling brentwad fibre.

For a long while, Hermione didn't move, only listened to him. It made her feel safe, hearing his voice. Being alone was the most difficult part of being imprisoned, except, perhaps, not being able to help Harry. Having Snape here and reading meant he was alive, and as long as he was alive, she would be, too. She was sure of that. He would do everything in his power to keep her alive. If he died, well, her life was forfeit. But he wouldn't die. He'd said so a week ago. He'd come out on top, no matter what.

But after about fifteen minutes of just letting his voice wash over her, the sense of peace she'd been deriving from his soft voice turned into a low-burning frenzy. Her hips circled as the seam of her jeans rubbed her clit. She had to do a lot of manoeuvring to get the position right, but once she had, it was *very* right.

When she heard him turn a page, a new sensation would flow over her body, like his fingers were turning her, instead. Her nipples were rubbing against the inside of her shirt, the additional touch making her more desperate. She knew her jeans must have been drenched on the inside.

Snape continued to read, oblivious to her need. She was grinding faster and faster, gasping softly whenever he put a special emphasis on a certain word. His voice strummed cords deep within her body, plucking professionally until she only needed one more word, just one more... she recalled the way he'd ordered her to come the last time, and her body tightened, waiting for that little... bit... more...

"Miss Granger, that is enough!"

It certainly was enough. His voice crashed through her body like a tsunami, destroying her. Hermione screamed as she came, not bothering to muffle her cries. He should know what he did to her. Coming down, Hermione unclenched her hands from the headboard and let them fall. She was panting, her pussy clamping down, frantic for something to fill her.

"Sorry," she whispered, though she wasn't, really. She was only sorry that he would probably never read to her again.

"You must learn better impulse control, you stupid child," he snapped. But at least he wasn't leaving.

Hermione nodded agreeably. "Teach me?"

Snape sneered at her and brought his journal close to his face, no longer reading aloud.

Hermione sighed happily, not even bothering to wonder when her life had become so fucked up. She fell asleep to the sound of pages turning.

*

When Hermione looked through her drawers the next day, she noticed her jeans were missing. She'd put them in at the end of the day to be cleaned, as she always did with her clothing, but now they were gone.

She'd thought it was a magic bureau or something, but that had obviously been naïve. Snape was cleaning her clothes. Or maybe he had a house-elf.

But if it was Snape, he had her come-covered jeans. The very thought made Hermione feel dirty and horny all at once. She wondered if he'd touched them... smelled them... wanked into them.

Groaning, Hermione picked a skirt, instead. She was glad Snape decided to outfit her with Muggle clothing. She wouldn't be comfortable lounging around all day wearing full robes. It was warmer in the dungeons, so maybe she could ask for some more summery clothes. But Snape would probably think she was just trying to seduce him, and he wouldn't be wrong.

She'd never felt more alive in the weeks since she'd been captured as she had the two times Snape's voice had made her come.

Snape only came down to bring her food in the morning, and she didn't see him again all day. Her eyes felt much better than they had the day before, so she decided to give herself breaks from reading throughout the day. She still wanted that new oil to lessen the strain.

When dinnertime finally arrived, Snape told her to get on her bed and stay there. Not even bothering to stifle her moan at his orders, Hermione obeyed.

He opened the cage door with a key and spell and put her tray on her bed beside her. It was a quarter chicken with mashed potatoes and carrots. Snape wasn't the best cook, but his food sometimes reminded her of the way her parents had cooked. Meat, some variety of potato, some manner of vegetable. Every single night. The only thing missing was pudding, but Snape obviously wasn't big on dessert.

She watched him as she ate. He went around her cell and switched out all the old oil for the new kind. Already the room was lit with a softer, whiter glow, less harsh on the eyes, but brighter, overall.

When he came to the last lamp, the one affixed to the wall above her bed, he glared at her. She stared back, not sure what she'd done to deserve his wrath.

"Get off the bed. Go stand in that corner, and don't move," he commanded, watching her as she did as he bade.

Snape leaned over the bed and changed the last of the oil. He steadied himself on her headboard, but he seemed to notice where he'd placed his hand and jerked it away as if burnt. It was the same place Hermione had gripped in the throes of passion.

Shooting another glare her way, Snape left the cell and locked it twice over.

*

The next morning, Hermione was finishing up Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (just when she'd begun to suspect Snape wouldn't have any book written after the nineteenth century), when Snape came in.

"Come to the bars," he ordered, walking up to them on his side. Hermione raised an eyebrow but complied, standing before him. She hadn't really been this close to him in a long while. She noticed that he smelled especially good today...it must have been a shower day, because his hair was clean and soft, as well.

He thrust out his hand, holding a leather-bound journal. Usually when he gave her books, they were on her food tray. He didn't normally bother to hand them to her.

Hermione reached a hand through the bars and took it, wondering what it was. It didn't have a title.

"Thanks," she said, opening it. Its pages were blank. *Oh!* It was a journal; it didn't just look like one. She raised her eyes to his.

He waved a hand dismissively. "I imagine your little stories or what have you are getting rather messy. This way, you can keep your pages all together and not have to worry about them getting out of order."

Hermione decided not to say she had a fairly simple system...number the pages...and pressed the book against her chest. Snape's eyes rabidly followed the action. "Thank you so much," she said, noting and disregarding the almost-reverent tone of her voice.

"Hmm," was his only reply. He went to sit in his chair with a journal in his lap. He tapped his teacup and it filled the room with a homey aroma, making her mouth water for her own tea. Settling on the ground beside the bars with her cup, her new journal, and a quill, Hermione sighed. "*Repleo*," she said, touching the cup. Milk and sugar, just as always.

Snape kept milk for her, just so she could have her tea the way she preferred. He changed the oil in her lamps so her eyes wouldn't hurt. He'd given her a mirror. Endless parchment. A journal. Snape might think he was a monster, but she happened to disagree. Maybe she didn't like being trapped...or maybe there was no maybe about it...but he made it easier for her to forget.

Sitting like this, sipping tea together and sometimes talking about what one or the other was reading, Hermione could almost imagine they were a married couple.

But instead of making her smile, the thought only made her sad. Her life was very lonely, and she felt useless.

But he wouldn't keep her here forever. One way or another, she'd get out of this cage. She only hoped she would be alive to experience it.

After asking her by-now familiar questions, Hermione said the one she'd saved for last. Perhaps Snape had noted the change of sequence in her interrogation, because he sat up a little straighter, putting his potions journal aside to actually give her his full attention.

"Is Harry alive?"

"Yes." No hesitation, no inflection, no twist of the lips or twitch of the cheek. Harry really was okay.

Hermione let out a shaky breath, releasing the tension she'd been holding when she'd thought something horrible had happened to her friend. She wouldn't have been able to bear it if he'd died while she was in here, unable to save him or help him or just be there when it happened.

"Before, you would hesitate. Did something happen?"

Snape didn't answer, only taking a sip of tea. His refusal to answer questions was infuriating. He didn't even bother to pretend he hadn't heard her asking. In a room this size, there was no way he couldn't have. He just sat there and looked at her, making her want to smack him.

"Did something happen to Harry, Professor Snape?"

"...No."

"You hesitated!" she shouted accusingly. Her hands clenched on the bars as she watched his face. The hesitation was barely a millisecond, not something anyone else would be able to pick up on, but she could. She heard it a mile away, and even if she'd been deaf, she would have known he was lying. His eyes went a fraction darker, like he'd actually pulled a shield down behind them. What was the point of Occlumency when it was so obvious that you were using it, proving you had something to hide? Was Voldemort really so trusting that he didn't just feed Snape Veritaserum and be done with it? Or maybe Snape could beat that like Harry could throw off *Imperio*. Or maybe he'd made an antidote to it, or built up an immunity.

Cursing herself for getting sidetracked, Hermione slapped the bar with her hand. "What's happened? Please tell me *please*. I can't live like this."

"Nothing unfortunate has happened to Potter, Miss Granger. Please try to control yourself in my presence."

His words were an unobtrusive reminder to her recent lascivious actions in front of him, but she didn't rise to the bait.

"Something fortunate, then?" Hermione pressed.

"Mr. Potter has eliminated another Horcrux," Snape said very slowly, as if he thought her dim, but she suspected he just enjoyed saying it, relishing the power of the words and their import.

"My gods," she breathed. That was four. Harry was so close. She tried not to feel left out, but as juvenile as the feeling was, Hermione knew Harry was out there, most likely with Ron, searching for and destroying the Horcruxes. Maybe they hadn't needed her, after all. Hermione sometimes had the feeling that the only reason she'd been Sorted into Gryffindor was to help Harry. Now it appeared that wasn't true at all; Harry was coping just fine without her.

But that was good. It was good that Harry was doing this without her, of course it was. It needed to be done, and the world didn't stop just because she was no longer a part of it.

"And he's okay?" she confirmed.

"He is no worse for the wear," Snape answered. Hermione had to take that to mean that he was fine. Destroying Horcruxes was nasty and difficult work; of course Harry would run into *some* difficulty. But she didn't actually think Snape would lie to her. He had no reason to. Devastation at Harry's demise would only make *her* pliable and docile, and she was already pretty compliant at this point.

"Thank you," she whispered, fingers curling around the bars. "Thank you for telling me, and thank you for being honest. And thank you for the journal. It's lovely."

Snape cleared his throat, picking up the potions journal once again. He waved his wand to warm his tea, and, as an afterthought, waved it again to warm hers. She didn't want to repeat her words of gratitude yet again, so she smiled at him, taking a deep drink of her tea.

His eyes widened at her smile as if no one had ever done such a thing in his direction, let alone on his behalf, and the look was so comical she almost wondered if her teeth were covered in green stuff or something. But of course they weren't. Snape had provided a toothbrush, after all.

Again, though, he just waved his hands as if to shoo her away (or maybe her thanks) and went back to reading. Hermione got up from the cool floor, stretching out her back and limbs. As much as it hurt to sit there, she felt closer to him that way. She'd even tried to push her bed against the bars, but she wasn't able to move anything in her cell.

Once on the bed, Hermione opened her new journal and began to write. But she wasn't unaware of the fact that Snape regularly glanced over to the bed to check on her. He thought she couldn't see him. Sometimes he looked very quickly, but other times, his eyes settled on her for long moments.

She wondered if he was waiting for her to get off in front of him again.

17-Jul

Chapter 7 of 17

Hermione wakes up in a cell, held captive by none other than her former professor, Severus Snape. She's scared, alone, and confused about her feelings for her unwilling captor. How can she know what is real and what isn't when he won't tell her anything?

Chapter Seven

Day 52

Everything starts to take on a dreamlike quality when your days all blend together. At first I thought it would help keep me sane to make note of how many days had passed, but now I'm beginning to think I was wrong. It just reminds me of how much time I've lost, how much I'm missing.

If I hadn't been keeping track, it might be easier to pretend I haven't been here for almost two months. Two long months of doing absolutely nothing but reading and sleeping. I have been trying to get exercise, but I can only run in place for so long before I just want to run straight into a wall.

Snape isn't making things any easier. I've tried to entice him to stick around while I pleasure myself, but he leaves at the first sign of my arousal. Which is frustrating because as soon as he leaves, my arousal leaves with him!

I don't know why I've suddenly become so attached to the idea of being with Snape sexually. It isn't that he's attractive or that I think he's a good person. I have my doubts on that. But even though I'm the one with the bars around me, I can't help but think that he's in a cage, as well.

I wouldn't go so far as to say that I'm the happiness he deserves, but at this point, I just want to know what it feels like to touch and be touched. The romps I had with Ron were great, but he isn't here now. I just need to know what I am in relation to the world, and Snape is the only one who can provide that.

If only he saw it the same way.

Snape passed the tray under the door of the cell. Instead of grabbing the food, Hermione snatched up the book. *Of Human Bondage*.

And was that a blush? Was Snape blushing as he watched her read the title?

This was one of the few books she'd never read before. It would be a nice treat to read something for the first time. She always read too quickly when she already knew the ending, trying to get there as soon as possible to get that fleeting sense of satisfaction when one reads the final words of a long novel.

Was he blushing because of the sexual connotations of the word *bondage*? Possibly. But maybe he was blushing because it was something of a gaffe to give a book thus entitled to a person in a cage.

But the likeliest cause of his blush was the warmth of the room. If Hermione couldn't clearly see every corner, she'd swear there was a fireplace blazing in the room. It seemed to get warmer and warmer, and yet, whenever she said anything, Snape acted as though he didn't know what she was talking about, even though he'd long since stopped wearing his heavier robes when he came down to read.

"Will you read to me today?" Hermione asked, taking the tray to her bed and settling in to eat. Sandwiches today, with crisp veggies on the side. Hermione tapped both her water glass and her teacup for refills.

"I think not," Snape said in a low voice, opening his version of the same book he'd given her. That was a good sign, at least. It meant he'd be willing to talk about it with her after they'd finished, or, if she was lucky, as they read.

"I'll behave," she vowed, meaning it. Feeling the cadence of his voice soothe over her nerves was almost as good as climaxing to his words, and she felt she could control herself, at least until he left. She suspected that once he did, she'd be ripping off her trousers and plunging a desperate hand between her thighs to relieve the tension.

But Snape didn't answer, only took a long sip of tea. Hermione tried to keep her anger in check. She hated it when he blatantly ignored her like that. Picturing that bubbling cauldron, Hermione calmed down.

"Will you open the door now?" she asked a few long moments later, indicating that she was finished eating.

Snape opened the cage, key and spell, and entered, taking the tray from her bed without even looking at her. He left the cage and placed the tray on a sideboard before settling back into his chair.

Hermione basked a little in the illusory freedom of the open door, letting the sensation wash over her in waves. Such a small thing, but it was her favourite part of the day.

Though she could see Snape through the bars, having the door opened made her feel closer to him. Like she was a guest instead of a prisoner.

Her thoughts were ridiculous, she knew. And yet, they didn't want to be banished.

"Professor Snape, could you please read to me? My eyes are hurting again. I didn't give myself enough of a break yesterday, but I'd very much like to read with you."

It was a lie. Her eyes hadn't hurt since he'd switched the oil in the lamps.

He looked at her sceptically. She smiled back, trying to convey that she really did intend to be good. Snape must have believed her, for he sighed and began to read from the beginning.

As he read, Hermione was lying on her back, looking up at the ceiling. It was stone, just like the floor. Just like the wall. Just like the heart of the man whose voice destroyed her.

She had no concept of the amount of time that had passed. She was listening with half an ear, enough to get an idea of what was happening so that she could converse with him when he finished. It wouldn't do to ignore what he was saying completely, for if he knew she wasn't absorbing it, no doubt he'd stop reading to her altogether, and then she'd really be lost.

But she went into a strange headspace where she couldn't even feel the bed beneath her. It was like his voice was cradling her, carrying her. She was floating along in the blackness on a wave of Snape's words. When she closed her eyes, words danced before them, pulsing in tandem with the highs and lows of his voice. She could almost taste them, taste them as they left his mouth and fluttered into hers, bonding them together through language.

Her arousal was a mere side effect to everything else that was happening to her. There was no sight, no sound but for his voice, no smell, no taste, no touch. There was only Snape, enveloping her, keeping her safe and cocooned, not letting anything in, not letting anyone out.

But Hermione's blissful reverie was shattered by two loud cracks. Gasping, she sat up, looking around for the source of the noise.

Snape put his book down quickly, his face white and expression blank.

He spared Hermione one single glance before he left the room, closing the wooden door behind him. She heard him tramp up the stairs, but she could hear nothing else.

The cracks had sounded like Apparition. There were Death Eaters in the house *right now*. They might come down here and find her. Snape wouldn't be able to protect her because to do so would be to give away his cover.

She might be tortured and killed right in front of him, right in this cell. She might be taken away and given to Voldemort as an enticement to make Harry come to him.

Flashes of torture scenes from her worst nightmares blinked in front of her eyes. Hermione didn't know how much torture she would be able to bear...she had a moderate threshold for pain and a stubbornness that was unmatched...but eventually, she would succumb to the pain and tell Voldemort everything. And the minute she did, he would know they knew about the Horcruxes, and he would make more. And all their work would be for nothing. They would lose the war.

Hermione had moved without having realised it. She was standing before the open door of her cage. It was the first time she'd stood there, so close to freedom. It was strange to see the other half of the room without the bars marring her vision. She wondered what Snape looked like without bars superimposed over his face. Which was stupid, because she'd seen him without them for six years at school, not to mention the few times he'd come inside the cell. But she'd never stared at him like she did through the bars.

She hated the bars.

Feeling sick to her stomach, Hermione took a step forward. She was now standing directly in the doorway to her cell. Not quite out. If Snape came back right now, she might not be in too much trouble.

Hermione took another step.

She was out. She was free! She was outside of her cage for the first time in seven weeks. She could run, she could leave right now! She could hide in another part of the house and wait for the Death Eaters to leave, and when Snape came back to check on her, she'd run up the stairs and out of his house. Forget the traps he'd set for her, she knew, she just *knew* she'd be able to make it out.

Hermione began to shake and tremble. Her hands felt slick and clammy, and her eyesight was blurred with tears. Her breath was short and her lungs didn't seem to be able to draw sufficient oxygen. She was dizzy. She let out a hoarse sob, horrified at the noise. She clamped her hands over her mouth. Snape would be so angry if she made a noise. She couldn't make a noise, not now.

Hermione fell to her knees, ignoring the angry collision with the stone floor. She could still run... there was still hope. Desperately, she looked behind her to the cell. It looked different from the outside. She'd never seen it from anywhere but within. It looked even smaller than it had from her perspective, and she hated Snape for a moment for forcing her to stay there, but making her feel so sick and wrong, just for wanting to leave. It was completely normal to hate her captor! She shouldn't feel desire at the sound of his voice; she shouldn't be desperate for his cock when he kept her in captivity!

But how could she know which of her feelings were real and which were wrong?

Snape's chair was right there. It probably smelled like him, especially at the headrest where his greasy hair always rested. It probably even felt greasy. She wanted to walk toward it and find out, sit in his chair and run her fingers over the arm where his hands had clenched as he'd watched her masturbate.

She shuffled a few inches toward it, but she just couldn't go any farther. She needed the cell to stay within reach. She needed to have the option, to be able to touch the bars and make sure she was still here. In Snape came back, and he saw her outside the cage, maybe it wouldn't be so bad if she stayed close to the cell.

But as much as she didn't want to leave, she just couldn't make herself go back inside. If she did, it meant that she made a choice, a choice to stay captive, to allow Snape to control and rule her. She'd never be able to forgive herself if she turned and crawled back into her cell like a beaten animal. She wasn't beaten.

Hermione lay down on the floor, curling up into a foetal position, holding her knees as tightly as possible to her chest. With one hand, she touched the door of the cell where it was swung open into the room. With the other hand, she covered her mouth to muffle her sobs until she simply couldn't breathe any longer.

*

"Miss Granger!"

Hermione heard the voice, that hated, loved voice, but she couldn't move. She wished she was back in the cell. She was safe there. Here outside the bars, she was nothing; she was floating free, trying to grab hold but slipping, always slipping.

Hands were touching her. She wanted to arch into the touches but she was too stiff, too cold. Fingers were prying hers off the icy cell bar. The room was freezing again, and it made Hermione think of the time before, before the room had become warm and Snape had started fucking her with his voice.

Those same fingers were moving over her face, brushing her hair away. She was dimly aware that her eyes were open, but her mind didn't process anything that was happening in front of them.

A hand rested on her neck, too fully to simply be checking for a pulse, and she was sure Snape didn't think she was dead.

Suddenly her body was being hauled into an embrace that was so warm and encompassing, she wanted to stay within it forever. She might have even said so, but she couldn't hear her own voice. Her arms wanted to go around his neck, but they were unwilling to obey the orders her brain was trying to send, so all she could do remain still and hope that he never put her down.

But nothing Hermione hoped was coming true these days. Snape brought her back into the cell, and the moment she passed the bars, almost like a tangible switch being flicked, her body relaxed and her mind settled. Her sight came into focus, and she stared at Snape for a long moment before he very gently deposited her onto her bed. She'd never known him to be gentle, not with words or actions. Except that time with the healing potions, but other than that, Snape had never been truly kind.

She wondered what sort of person it made her to love him anyway.

Snape very carefully pulled the blankets over her. She was alone for a few interminable minutes, but she took the time to look out the open cage door, hoping she never had to see it open again. The freedom wasn't just an illusion; it was impossible. She vowed to never ask Snape to open the door again.

He came back with potions and a tall glass of water. She sneered at the glass. That wasn't her glass. She looked up at Snape with pleading eyes and gestured toward her own water glass, which was sitting on her desk. He started blankly for a moment before getting up to retrieve it, tapping it to fill it.

She let him feed her potion after potion. The room grew warmer, while the potions warmed her inside, as well. She felt safe. She could close her eyes.

Snape made her drink the water, and she did it to make him happy. Only he didn't look very happy.

He left the cage and locked the door behind him. Hermione felt much better. She snuggled deep into the covers.

The only thing she regretted was that she hadn't had the guts to go to his chair and sit in it, smell him in it, just that once.

For she knew she'd never get another chance, and that didn't hurt nearly as much as it should.

17-Aug

Chapter 8 of 17

Hermione wakes up in a cell, held captive by none other than her former professor, Severus Snape. She's scared, alone, and confused about her feelings for her unwilling captor. How can she know what is real and what isn't when he won't tell her anything?

Chapter Eight

Day 54

I feel like I've been sleeping so long that days could have passed without me knowing it. Snape could have knocked me out for a week with all those potions and I wouldn't know the difference.

All I am is what he tells me.

It's strange to be forced to define myself by the parameters of another person's existence. If Snape doesn't exist, neither do I. If Snape ceases to exist, so will I. It's inevitable, unavoidable, and yet somehow comforting. There are no expectations, no judgements made on me. There are only me and these bars and without these bars there is no me.

I haven't decided how I feel about my pathetic escape attempt. I am, apparently, a willing victim. Even though I hadn't thought of escape in so many words in quite some time, there was always that underlying idea that I would, of course, get out, be free. But if I can't even make it past the fucking door to the room, how can I ever expect to go home?

I even asked Snape if there's some sort of compulsion spell on the bars that would make me feel weak and panicked if I tried to pass through. He almost looked sad when he told me there was nothing like that.

I don't know what to think anymore. I don't know if I can think. Who am I? Where am I? Besides the obvious, Snape's dungeon, where am I in conjunction to everyone else in the universe? Am I less of a person because I exist to only one man? Are people more real according to the amount of people who know them?

I am Schrödinger's cat. I am neither dead nor alive. I am both. I am nothing. I am in a box. I don't exist outside the box because there is no outside the box. There is only the box.

There is no box.

When Snape came in and began to read, Hermione didn't try to pretend, try to hide what she was doing. She threw the coverlet off herself and plunged her hand into her panties. Her other hand went to tease her nipple, snaking under the tank top she was wearing. Her clothes weren't meant to be seductive; the room was just ridiculously hot.

Snape started at her with undisguised incredulity. Hermione stared back, challenging him. She quirked an eyebrow in the same way she'd seen him do a thousand times.

He looked torn between raging at her and letting his eyes slide down the length of her body to where her fingers were very, very slowly moving over her clit.

Apparently not one to be predictable, Snape began to read out loud.

Hermione sighed in relief, thankful that she would have this pleasure amid all the turmoil that was roiling her thoughts. She closed her eyes and let the melodic tones take her away. Rather than going into subspace on his voice, Hermione focused on each and every word, making sure she heard the story. She'd never be able to read it again without getting wet...just another facet of her conditioning. Snape probably didn't even realise how much he was training her to be an obedient reading and wanking

machine.

But then again, judging by the way his mouth seemed to be fucking the words rather than simply forming them, maybe he did have an idea. He was speaking even lower than usual, so soft that it was like an actual caress.

It had become harder and harder to get off without him at least watching her. She almost couldn't do it by herself any longer. She'd get closer and closer to that point, but it would remain elusive, and it took more and more stimulation, mental and physical, to get that desperately needed release.

But now, with his voice like hands on her body, and the knowledge that whenever he stopped reading for a moment, it was because he was watching her, Hermione felt that peak approach her more quickly than it usually did. It wouldn't take much more, she knew, just another few minutes of him talking, reading to her, another few minutes of her hands dancing so knowledgeably around her body, and she would be free, soaring so high for a few blissful moments, never wanting to come down.

But Snape had capitulated so easily this time, it was true. Maybe he wanted to help her. Maybe he wanted to make her feel good.

Maybe he wished it were his hands instead of his words pressing into her flesh.

Hermione watched him avidly, his mouth taking shape and forming around words that before had had no meaning other than that which they represented. But with him speaking, the words were so much more. They were sex.

Hermione moaned as Snape's voice dropped another decibel, forcing her to strain just to hear, to bring him into herself. If she could bear to move, she'd stand against the bars and rub herself all over them as he watched, letting the cold metal stain her heated flesh, rubbing her clit all over the steel, his eyes heavy on her body, until she fell. Maybe he would come up to the bars and touch her, her cheek, her throat, her waist, her pussy. She knew his hands would make her scream.

Her heels digging into the bed, her fingers pumping fiercely, Hermione reached for the memory, the time he'd told her to come. She shaped the words in her head, creating the tone and texture from what he was saying now. Her toes curled, and she tossed her head back to let out a primal scream of climax...

Snape stopped reading.

Hermione shrieked with frustration, her orgasm dying as quickly as it had risen. She launched herself out of the bed and at the bars, gripping them high above her head as she pleaded.

"Please, Professor Snape, why did you stop? Just one more word... or you can tell me to come like last time! That wasn't so bad, was it? It's not like you're touching me, though if you wanted to, I'd like that."

Snape was staring at her, his face almost frighteningly blank. She slid to her knees and reached her hands through the bars in supplication. She'd have kissed his robes if they'd been near enough.

"Why are you doing this, Miss Granger?"

Hermione moaned. Her body was still throbbing with denied orgasm, her head dizzy, her fingertips twitching. She could smell herself on the hand she was reaching out to him.

"Because you wouldn't finish!" she cried, lips parted and air straggled in past her parched tongue.

"I meant, why are you acting so wantonly? I've never known you to be so reckless."

Hermione couldn't bear it any longer. He dared to call her reckless, when she couldn't even leave the damned cell? *He'd* made her this way! *He'd* done this to her!

"Can you see me?" she demanded, mind racing with connections that didn't quite make sense.

"I can see you, Miss Granger," Snape confirmed, looking puzzled.

"Can you touch me?"

"I don't think that would be wise..."

"That's not what I asked! I didn't ask you to touch me! *Can* you touch me?"

Snape looked at her, considering his words. "I am physically able to touch you, yes. Are you doubting your tangibility?"

Hermione snorted. "Who wouldn't? If no one knows I'm here, I'm not really here, am I?"

"I know you're here."

"But who are you? Nothing. Nobody. I only exist because of you, and when you're dead, I'll be dead whether I've actually died or not!"

Snape sighed and stood, pacing a little, just beyond her reach. "Now is hardly the time for an existential crisis, Miss Granger."

Hermione laughed mirthlessly. "No? When is the time? Can you schedule it in between feedings and readings?"

Snape didn't pause in his pacing. "And what would you have me do?"

"Touch me!" Hermione screamed, slapping a bar and not even cringing at the sharp pain that followed. "Make me real!"

"Even if I do touch you, you still only exist for me," Snape reasoned, though she could see he was thinking very deeply.

"So I'll exist for you, at least that's something. At least I'll exist at all, Professor Snape. This is nothing but an unending dream, I'm sure of it. Maybe I'm in a coma somewhere, or maybe I'm dead. But I'm not real. I'm not here."

Hermione could feel tears slicking her cheeks, and she angrily rubbed them away. Pressing her cheek against the bars, she watched Snape walked back and forth, seven paces, spin, seven paces, spin.

"I cannot help you," Snape said, and he even sounded a little disturbed at that.

"You don't want to," she corrected.

And now it was Snape who laughed without joy. "You have no idea..."

"Tell me," she demanded. "If I have no idea, if I'm so clueless, tell me. Show me how wrong I am, how silly, how foolish. But just... come in here and say it to me."

Snape's steps slowed, and he glanced at her. "I can open the cell door."

"No!" Hermione gasped, jumping to her feet. Anything but that. The cell door being open was *die*.

"Why not?"

"Because it's like... a picture of a pipe is not a pipe, you know? An open door is not freedom. I'd rather have the door be closed and not have to face my own cowardice."

Snape paused. "You are not a coward."

"I could have run. I might have escaped."

"You wouldn't have escaped. The Death Eaters who'd stopped in would have killed you without a second thought. I might have been forced to kill you. You never would have escaped."

"But I wouldn't be here," she whispered. "I wouldn't be trapped."

"Miss Granger," Snape said, and it sounded like pleading. "I don't know what you expect..."

"Nothing." She shook her head sadly. "I miss it. Being touched. You never think about how many people a day touch you, in greeting, in excitement, carelessly, casually. To never have that again... it means I'm not real. We are who we are based on other people. If they don't hear you, see you, touch you, you aren't there." Hermione swallowed. "I'm not really here. That's why you won't do it. Because you know it's true."

"It isn't true!" Snape snapped, stepping closer to the cell. "I can see and hear you."

"Illusions," she said. "Like the open door. I could pass right through these bars if I were brave enough, I'm sure of it."

"No," Snape denied. "You couldn't. You are not an apparition, you are real, alive."

"How do you know?" she demanded.

"Because I..." Snape broke off with a snarl. "Because you're *right there!* For Merlin's sake, you're *right there*."

"You're a wizard, Professor Snape. Tell me you've never conjured something that wasn't there before. Tell me you've never glamoured something or transfigured something. Maybe I'm nothing but a matchstick, or a thimble."

"You are trying my patience, girl!" Snape said, voice rising.

"Good!" she laughed. "Some reaction is better than none at all!" And then she was laughing harder, not finding it the least bit strange that her lips tasted of salt and wetness was smeared all over her cheeks. She dashed the tears away, but they were replaced, and Hermione laughed harder, clutching her stomach and she doubled over. Then all of a sudden it wasn't funny anymore, and great, wracking sobs tore through her body, making the laughter seem like a tickle in comparison to the sting of what she was feeling now.

"Enough," Snape said, taking a half-step forward before hesitating.

And then Hermione was screaming at the top of her lungs, and it felt *good* to make such a racket, it felt *good* to be heard, even if she wasn't saying anything.

"That's *enough!*" Snape shouted, his features twisting when Hermione turned to look at him. But she couldn't spare a second's thought for his discomfort at her hysteria, because she was much too happy letting herself go.

Another strident scream echoed off the stone walls in the room, and Hermione wondered if it were possible to rupture a Silencing Spell.

Then Snape was at her cell door, thrusting the key into the lock, and Hermione's pussy really shouldn't have contracted at that sight, but she was helpless, and it did.

She watched his lips form the spell to the door, and she sat motionlessly as he opened the door.

Seeing it open made her stomach clench, but he wasn't expecting her to leave, so maybe it wasn't so bad. Snape stepped into the room, and Hermione stopped making any noise at all.

Snape inside her cell made the room seem much smaller. His tall, imposing presence made her feel two feet tall in his Potions class again, trying her hardest and getting nowhere.

"Please," she whispered, but even she didn't know exactly for what she was asking.

Snape did, though.

He stalked toward and grabbed her upper arm in an impossible grip. She only noticed how cold she was when the heat of his hand spread over her arm like a fire. It felt like he was branding her.

"See?" he hissed, shaking her. "I can touch you. You are real. Now, I have had *enough*..."

Hermione threw herself against him, wrapped her arms around his neck, and pressed her lips against his. His entire being was frozen, unyielding, but Hermione kissed him anyway, uncaring. He wanted it, she knew; why else would he always watch her, and even verbally participate, when she got herself off?

Snape's lips were thin, his mouth wide, and there was absolutely no way, even under pressure of her tongue, that she could make him open to her. So she just pressed her body against his, hips rolling, trying to get that beautiful friction. He was hard. Maybe he didn't like her kisses, but he certainly seemed to be enjoying the contact.

She broke the kiss for a split second to inhale, and Snape went into action. Using his grip on her arm, he tossed her against the bars of the cell, the metal jarring her body, sure to leave bruises. Snape followed her and pinned her there, his entire body holding her in place. Hermione panted as shockwaves of pain and desire flitted through her, making her feel twitchy, eager to escape and yet wanting to stay in place.

"Does this feel real?" Snape demanded before his mouth crashed onto hers. Hermione gasped, stealing his breath as he punished her, for there could be no other word for it. His body was as unforgiving as the bars behind her; her back was icy cold from being exposed and pressed against the bars, but her front was on fire, the heat of Snape scorching her even through his multiple layers of clothing.

Now that he was ruling the kiss, Hermione let herself become lost in it. All of Hermione's other kisses had been soft lips and silky tongues, but Snape was all teeth and anger and retribution. One hand bruised her arm while the other held her jaw in place, as if she'd wanted to escape.

Her mouth opened to him, Snape took advantage, and that was more like the man she knew. His tongue slid in beside hers, taking from her, but giving back more than he'd probably appreciate. He tasted every inch of her mouth, exploring her carefully and leaving nothing untouched. Hermione could only tilt her head back and accept the ravishment, her body flowing with renewed desire as it remembered that it was *this* man who'd caused her orgasm to get away.

When Hermione lifted her hand to touch Snape softly, softly, on the side of his neck, the instant her fingers made contact, his kiss gentled. Suddenly, his mouth was

coaxing a reaction instead of demanding one. Hermione responded just as eagerly, accepting whatever touch he deigned to give her. She hadn't felt so alive in all the time she'd been here, and the horrible tenseness that had settled in her stomach after she'd tried to escape and found herself unable shifted into something more manageable.

Pressing herself against his hardness, Hermione wanted more. She took that hand that was cutting off the circulation to her arm, encouraging it to let her go. Snape snarled a little into the kiss, and Hermione had the impression of dealing with some sort of wild animal, a lion, and she was merely the prey, expendable but still desirable.

However, his fingers did loosen. Hermione took his hand and placed it between her thighs. His hand was cool and soothed her fiery flesh, but Snape froze all over, pulling back from the kiss.

"Please," she said, aware that she begged him a lot more than she liked. "What's the difference if it's your voice or your touch? It's *you*, it's always you."

Snape looked torn, staring down at his hand, touching her skin but only just. Neither moved as Snape exhaled harshly, his eyebrows drawn together. Hermione could feel her pussy throbbing in reaction to having his hand so close, and her hips twitched a little, beyond her accord, to entice him.

After an eternity seemed to have passed, Snape's fingers touched her panties, stroking lightly, barely more than a tickle. Hermione watched his face, but he gave nothing away. After a moment, her eyes fell closed as he began to touch her more firmly. She spread her legs a little, arching into the touch. He already thought her completely wanton, so why not meet his expectations?

"Feels so good," she whispered, pulling his face down for another kiss. She was almost surprised that he let her, but then his mouth was moving on hers and she no longer cared about his motivations.

She wanted his fingers inside her knickers, inside her, but he was only pressing them into her folds, running the slick fabric over her clit. The stimulation was almost too much, but his fingers were gentle and sure, sliding between her lips and rubbing.

Moaning into his mouth and deepening the kiss, Hermione's hips circled and rolled, wishing there was something inside her to fill her. But she didn't dare ask, in case he stopped this as he had done with his reading not long ago.

Snape's mouth moved to her shoulder, mouthing the skin and nipping it. He was worrying it with his teeth, but instead of distracting her, the additional touch made her desperate for more.

And then he was biting her in earnest, and Hermione thrust into his hand, bracing it with her own and forcing him harder against herself. She came with a shout, right beside his ear, but he didn't reprimand her.

Her body wanted to slump to the floor with the excess of emotion and sensation flooding her, but Snape kept her pinned against the bars with his body. He was breathing evenly, but his entire body was stiff.

All at once he pulled away, and Hermione staggered forward, having lost her grounding agent. He stared at her for a long moment, and Hermione did nothing but stare back, wanting him to say something to make her think he wasn't going to pretend this hadn't happened. Even if she knew that was too much to ask, it wasn't too much to hope for.

"That was a mistake," he spat, turning to leave her cell. Hermione reached out to grab his sleeve, but it slid through his fingers as he left through the open door, locking it once, twice, and turning to face her again. "You have to control yourself better, Miss Granger. I am not made of stone. Your behaviour puts us both in danger. I doubt Mr. Potter would be pleased to learn his efforts were for naught because his friend couldn't keep her hormones in control."

And with a swirl of robes that, at any other time, would have made Hermione flush with desire, he left the room, the heavy wooden door resounding as it hit the doorjamb.

Hermione slumped to her bed and fell face first onto the covers. She cried, less hysterically than before, but with tears for what she had become, what she had lost, and the damage she might have done them all with her weakness.

17-Sep

Chapter 9 of 17

Hermione wakes up in a cell, held captive by none other than her former professor, Severus Snape. She's scared, alone, and confused about her feelings for her unwilling captor. How can she know what is real and what isn't when he won't tell her anything?

Chapter Nine

Day 57

Strange, now, the peace.

It wasn't something I ever thought I'd get back. And after what happened three days ago, I certainly didn't think Snape would ever be the bearer of it.

But even though he's acting like nothing happened, there has been a shift. Things have changed. When we talk, it's not him trying to prove point after point, drilling them all home until I want to throw tea in his face or kiss him to shut him up. It's almost as though we're equals.

How such a thing can happen on two sides of cell bars, I'll never understand, but it has.

I've been thinking of Harry a lot. And Ron. I wonder if they would think me a coward for wanting Snape the way I do. I've always been adaptable. How else could I be thrown into the wizarding world and become the top of my class every year, even over wizards like Malfoy, who were born with silver wand in hand? No, I've had to become some sort of situational chameleon. But I don't mind, not when it means I don't want to try to shatter that mirror and drive shards into my throat.

Survival is the first priority. Sanity... somewhat farther down the list.

I wonder if that's what Snape always thought. Come out on top, no matter what. I almost feel like I understand him better. Do I still want out? More than anything...except

to live. I don't know what it says about me to choose trapped life rather than free death. What would Harry have done?

Harry would have done what needed to be done.

And that's what I will do. There is always a way out.

Hermione's stomach growled. She looked up from her copy of *Robinson Crusoe*, surprised at the noise. What time was it?

The day before, she'd asked Snape for a clock or a time spell like the mirror spell, but he'd refused, saying she'd grow obsessed with it. Knowing he was right, she hadn't pushed the issue. But now she wished she could tell if he really was late with the food, or if she was so desperate for his company that her body was creating psychosomatic, hysterical symptoms, trying to get him to come to her.

She wouldn't put it past her body. It tended to do some very strange things these days.

Hermione settled back into her book, mindlessly absorbing hundreds of words without really getting anything out of them. Snape said he wasn't planning on reading this book, so Hermione wasn't giving it her full attention, knowing that she wouldn't be sharing.

These days, it wasn't very often that they didn't read the same book. Hermione wondered what else Snape did with himself, but there were times that he'd come into the room just reeking of potions ingredients, hair greasy and face tight with potions fumes. Obviously he had a laboratory, a well-used one, if she were to guess.

Other than that, Hermione had no indication of what he did with his time. He didn't seem to leave the house very often at all, and she heard very few cracks of Apparition or whooshes of the Floo to suggest visitors, and where that did happen, an echo of the noise happened only minutes later; apparently, his guests never stayed long.

Then again, if he just used the door like anyone else might, she would have no way of knowing. When she assumed he was sleeping or spending time upstairs, he could really be out torturing Muggles. She would never know.

Hermione rolled over on her stomach, the position immediately sending a flare through her body, echoed by the sound of Snape's voice *Come, Miss Granger!*

Her stomach growled again. She drank two cups of tea to quell the pangs. Snape's milk tasted a little sour. If it was used only for her tea, it was possible that it had gone bad. She'd have to remember to let him know. She drank a glass of water to wash away the taste.

Two hours later, Hermione was bored. This book wasn't her style at all, and she no longer wondered that Snape hadn't wanted to read it with her, though why he gave it to her, she had no idea. She'd long ago stopped trying to infer what Snape was suggesting, if anything, which his choice of books. It was possible he'd just picked up a boxful at a garage sale.

Did they have garage sales in the wizarding world? Was she even in the wizarding world?

Hermione decided a shower would do the trick to get her mind off of her hunger. Stripping, she stepped behind the folding curtain. The shower was nothing more than a spout on the wall, a tap with *one* setting (tepid) and a drain in the stone floor, possibly magical. But it was familiar, even if the less-than-hot water made her feel as though she were never quite clean enough. She made up for it with scrubbing herself viciously with the flannels provided.

The towels Snape provided were rather small, and Hermione thought they were better suited to a man, who had less surface area to cover. Because Snape was sure to enter at any minute with her food, Hermione dried behind the curtain, wrapped the towel around her hair, and donned the dressing gown she'd discovered in her bureau a few weeks before.

Very slowly, her cell was becoming more comfortable, more like a home. Hermione hated that, but appreciated the effort. So much about her life these days gave her confused feelings.

An hour later, Hermione took the towel off her head and brushed the swirling little knots out of her hair. That alone took a quarter of an hour.

By the time Hermione had padded around the room four or five times, checking the stones for weaknesses or triggers or anything at all, really, her stomach was making its displeasure known with some nausea and subtle cramping.

Fuck.

Snape hadn't been this late with food for ages.

Another unsatisfactory cup of tea had Hermione's stomach in knots.

I don't know what he's on about. Everything's been fine for days...is he punishing me? Was he lulling me into a false sense of security just to tear me down? As much as that does sound like Snape, I just don't think that's it.

He can't have forgotten I'm down here! I mean, I'm a living, breathing, real person! He showed me that. He gave me that. He can't just take it away!

I think all these multiple meals a day have trained my stomach to expect food. In the beginning, food wasn't nearly so regular. Sometimes I'd get one meal, sometimes four a day. But in the past weeks, it's been four decent-sized meals a day, every day, at what I believe to be the same time.

I don't want to be worried.

Hermione threw the quill. Her hand was shaking. It was ridiculous to think she was actually starving to death after having only missed a couple meals, but she felt weak and her mind wouldn't focus properly.

Thinking over the day and trying to gauge the time, Hermione thought it was probably evening. Maybe seven or eight o'clock. She'd been up probably about twelve hours. She hadn't eaten for more than twenty-four. Tea was making her sick, and there was no longer any doubt that the milk had gone sour.

Hermione crawled under the covers on her bed. There was no point trying to read when she felt so poorly. When she woke up, Snape would be there with a new book and a bland stew, making her wonder, not for the first time, how a master with potions ingredients could destroy a stew so easily.

Something's wrong.

I just know it. Snape's never left me an entire day without food unless he was trying to teach me something, and then I knew what he was doing, because he'd delight in eating in front of me.

Now he's the Schrödinger's cat. I don't know if he's dead or alive; he's neither, he's both. And without him... I'm nothing.

I wonder if the longer he stays away, the more I fade. Am I becoming translucent as I sit here? I'm almost afraid to check the mirror, and if I do check it, I'll know I'm truly becoming mad, thinking I'm see-through just because my keeper isn't keeping.

He could be anywhere. Voldemort could have killed him. He could have been taken in by the Order. Would he tell them I'm here? He could use me as a bargaining

chip...ask for clemency in return for my location. What was more important to the Ministry...capturing Severus Snape, or rescuing Hermione Granger?

I don't want to think about it.

It was now evening of the second day without food. The day before, it had been a little easier to force herself not to think about what it might be like to starve to death, but those thoughts were more difficult to avoid when she felt too ill to even read. All she could do was think.

Her stomach had stopped making noises, and was now tormenting her with an aching, hollow feeling that was painful at times. She'd been drinking water to feel full, and even that rancid tea for the calories, but it didn't help. She tried to remember how long a person could live without food, but she couldn't. It wasn't very long, though, she was sure.

Hermione went back to sleep, trying not to expend energy crying as she thought about being found in five years, nothing left but hunger and regret.

*

A crack like a car backfiring threw Hermione out of a restless slumber. She shot forward on her bed, head swimming and vision greying before she could place the noise.

It had sounded as though someone had Apparated upstairs...

Oh, gods. *Please be Snape.*

Hermione waited quietly for more noise, but nothing happened. Her stomach decided now was the time for renewed vocalisations, and she clamped her hand over it, as if that would quiet it.

A few moments later, Hermione heard a loud crash, followed by a thump. Familiar cursing made her heart race with joy.

"Snape!" she shouted, at this point not even caring if he wasn't alone. Dying by Killing Curse was better than starvation, and if they didn't kill her, she'd have a chance to fight.

"Snape!" she cried again, louder. A wracking cough reached her ears, but Snape didn't answer.

Hermione struggled not to cry. If Snape was upstairs, half-dead or more, he wouldn't be able to make it down the stairs. What if she starved to death while he was recuperating? Recovery from extended Cruciatius could take days, and he could have suffered more and worse.

"Professor Snape, please!" she yelled, her voice failing and hitching on the final word. She didn't have the energy to repeat herself.

Only a moment later, Hermione, eyes trained carefully on the wooden door, desperate for it to open, saw a glint of silver as something wriggled its way beneath the door.

The key.

It was her cell key, floating to her. Hermione's palms were sweating and her mouth went completely dry. The key wavered merrily just inside the cell before dropping to the ground. As it did, Hermione heard Snape groan upstairs. He was obviously hurt.

Hermione picked up the key with shaking hands. It might look like freedom, but she knew it was a lie. There was still a spell on the door. But Snape wouldn't have sent the key if he didn't need help, if there weren't some way she could use it to get him. Snape needed her.

She reached her hand through the bars and inserted the key in the lock. It made a satisfying snick, and she turned it all the way around. A shudder passed through her body as the lock tumbled and the door opened a tiny crack.

Sweat was building at her hairline. Hermione knew that this was different than last time. She needn't be afraid of Snape's wrath.

But was that really what had held her back?

Hermione took a steadying breath and strode through the cell door. She immediately felt like she'd be much more comfortable falling to her knees and waiting for Snape to put her back in her cage, but she knew he wasn't capable of that.

The thought of him on the floor, writhing in agony, waiting for the relief that could only come at her hands, propelled her forward. She had her hand on the doorknob, but she keenly remembered Snape's 'You can never escape' speech, which had included the fact that this door wouldn't open to her.

But the cage had.

Hermione turned the knob and the door creaked open. Funny, it had never creaked for Snape.

To her left were the stairs that must lead to Snape. There was little else in the dungeon. To her right was a long hallway with doors. Hermione wondered if she was the only captive, and if not, why she was so deserving of his time.

The sound of Snape retching above tore Hermione away from her thoughts. She should just take these stairs and get to him. Help him. Save him.

Just the stairs.

Only stairs.

One step.

Hermione was panting as if she'd run fifty laps of her cell. The compulsion to turn around and hide under her covers was strong. Upstairs was Snape. Her cell was certain death at this point. Snape wouldn't have sent the key unless there was *no other way*.

Forcing her feet into action, Hermione quickly ascended the stairs; the door at the top was open, and she could see a light bright enough to be from the sun. The real world still existed. The sun still shone. Snape needed her. Certainties.

When the last stair was behind her, Hermione trembled. She couldn't see Snape right away, so she passed through an archway into the next room. The house was cosily small and very open. Not the sort of home she'd ever imagined for Snape.

Snape.

Hermione ran toward his supine body, falling to her knees beside him. His skin was clammy and tinged blue, his lips tight and grey. His entire body was twitching, but his eyes were alert as they fell upon her.

"Brave girl," he whispered hoarsely, his eyes falling closed.

"What do I do?" she asked in a voice much stronger than she felt.

Snape coughed and a speck of blood flew out and tainted her shirt. She stared at it with wide eyes.

"Three... potions. Cabinet in bedroom. Numbers one and seven. Under sink. Number eleven. In that order. Water... in between."

Hermione pushed his lank hair away from his face, ignoring the way the grease made her hand feel dirty.

It occurred to her to run out the front door, but Snape had mentioned that she wouldn't be able to see it. Still, there were windows...

But she was already on her way down the hallway, looking for the bedroom. Hermione looked in one room that seemed to be a spare room and kept looking. But there were no other rooms. Cursing herself for wasting time, she returned to the spare room. It was sparsely furnished and contained only the barest of necessities.

Snape's frock coat was hanging on the back of the closet door, and Hermione knew this must be the room, despite its unlivable appearance.

Looking around, she immediately spotted a tall, rich cherry wood cabinet. She opened the door, perusing the shelves. A line of nine potions bottles stood out. They were pushed to the front of the shelf, as if they were the most used. They were labelled only with scrawling numbers; she hastily grabbed the ones marked 1 and 7.

Hermione began to open the doors in the bedroom, looking for the bathroom. Snape had only said under the sink, but that could mean any sink.

The sink in the en suite was a pedestal...no potion. Beneath the sink in the bathroom, which doubled as a laundry room, there was absolutely nothing.

She sprinted to the kitchen, passing Snape's quivering body, and scooped up the potion labelled 1 under the kitchen sink. With shaking hands, Hermione poured a tall glass of water, feeling calmed that this glass was obviously the matching one to her own.

"Are you doing all right?" she asked breathlessly, sinking down beside him.

Snape didn't answer but he did try to sit up. Knowing he had to swallow the potions, Hermione helped him into an upright position.

"One," he croaked. Hermione waved him off. She remembered what he said about the order. Same as he'd said. One, seven, eleven.

She uncorked the vial and pressed it into his hand. He took a great draught and immediately grabbed up the water. Only a slight tick in his jaw denoted the atrocious taste, which made Hermione's eyes water just to smell.

After unscrewing the lid to seven, she gave it to him. He only took a small sip, maybe a teaspoon's worth. More water. A hacking cough, after which Snape wiped a blood-covered hand on his robes.

His Death Eater robes. Hermione shook her head. She'd think about that, care about that, later.

Eleven. He drank the entire thing and the bottle rolled across the floor. Snape downed the rest of the water and asking for more in a croaking voice.

Hermione filled it. There was a window over the kitchen sink; it didn't even have a latch. She could easily fit through.

She returned the water to Snape, who drank it gratefully, though he said nothing.

Hermione didn't know what to do, now that the crisis was apparently averted.

"Can you walk?" she asked quietly.

"Yes."

"Do you want to go lie down or something?" Hermione thought he should definitely be in bed, but she knew enough about stubborn men not to actually tell him to do that.

"And while I'm sleeping, let you destroy my house looking for a way out? And by the way, the kitchen window isn't a true window, and even if it were, the wards wouldn't let you out."

"I wasn't going to escape. I didn't even try," she said softly, half to convince him and half to say it out loud to herself. She didn't even try.

"Yes, well, I think it's best that I return you to your cage."

Hermione stood and held out a hand for him. It didn't matter, anyway. If he'd left her out while he slept, and she'd just sat there, waiting for him to wake up, she'd never be able to forgive herself for not trying harder. Having him lock the door behind her made her feel like she really was an involuntary prisoner, even if things looked a little differently inside her head. This way she wouldn't be able to say for certain that she didn't make a break for it.

Snape ignored her proffered hand and stood unsteadily without her help. Stubborn git. He held an arm out toward the archway that led to the door to the basement, just as chivalric as if he were holding the door open for her on a date. Hermione shuddered.

He didn't seem to want or even need her help, so Hermione quickly stepped down the stairs and stood in front of the heavy wooden door as he made his way down a little more cautiously.

"It isn't your fault, you realise," Snape said as he preceded her into the room with her cell.

"That you got hurt?" she asked, confused. She followed him in. The cell looked very strange and foreign from this perspective, reminding her of how sadly willing she was to return to it. But even in his weakened state, Hermione wouldn't have been able to overpower Snape for his wand. That was little comfort to her now, however.

"That you're here. That you're scared."

Hermione snorted. "I know that. It's *your* fault."

Surprisingly, Snape only nodded. Hermione stomped into her cell and waited impatiently for him to lock the door on her again. She hoped he was planning on getting her some fucking food...she hadn't even thought to grab some while she'd been in the kitchen.

Snape wavered where he was standing, but walked to the cell. He stumbled, and Hermione couldn't catch him on time as he fell to his knees, his head in his hands.

"You shouldn't have come down here!" she admonished, rushing to his side yet again.

"What would you have had me do? Let you go?"

Hermione sighed. What she was about to do would change things forever.

That is, if things weren't already so very obviously changed.

"Trust me," she said insistently. "I won't leave."

"Do you think I got where I am today by *trusting* people?" he snapped half-heartedly. His didn't lift his head to look at her.

"And where are you today, Professor Snape? Half dead in your own dungeon because you have to lock up a prisoner! Obviously, whatever got you *where you are today* isn't working very well anymore!"

Snape let out a moan and rocked a little on his knees. Hermione reached out an arm to steady him, but he jerked away.

"You know," she said conversationally, "I haven't eaten in about two days. I can't help you back up the stairs, and you obviously won't make it. Stay here, let me get some food, and then you can rest in my bed. You can lock us both in, I don't care."

"I am not so foolish as to..."

"Oh, shut up!" Hermione cried, having had enough. "Whatever. I'm hungry."

And with that, Hermione got up and left the room. It was infinitely easier this time. It didn't even hurt. She'd be coming back, back to her cell, back to Snape. But this was a choice *she* was making. No one needed her, no one was forcing her...it was all Hermione.

Snape yelled after her, but it was weak, and he didn't try to follow. He must have gotten down the stairs on determination alone. Hermione knew he had a lot of that. But determination wouldn't get him back up the stairs.

The kitchen was disgusting. A quick look in the fridge told her that the milk wasn't the only thing that had long since waved a good-bye to the expiry date. She gathered crackers, peanut butter, bread, crisps (salt and vinegar, how fitting for Snape); the only produce that wasn't rancid: a couple of apples. It wouldn't win any awards for a balanced diet, but it would keep her from fainting. Which reminded her...she needed to get back downstairs before she did. All this activity was making her feel weak and strained.

Hermione traversed the stairs more carefully this time...Snape was counting on her. He was still in the same position she'd left him in. She passed him and dumped her quarry onto her desk before going back to him.

"I'm going to help you up, all right?"

Snape immediately went to stand, and Hermione had to bolt forward in order to assist him. Once he was dubiously on his feet, Hermione led him into her cell. He came without protest and let her push him onto her bed. She hadn't put the sheets into the bureau for cleaning for a few days, but she didn't think he'd mind.

He weakly took out his wand and cast a spell at the cell door. There was some sort of password, but Hermione didn't hear, nor did she try to. He glared at her as he slipped the wand under his pillow, obviously warning her. Hermione laughed out loud. If she wanted it, the wand would be hers. He knew she could take it. He was trusting her.

He was snoring before Hermione bit into the first cracker.

When Hermione had devoured nearly everything she'd brought down, even using her fingers to scoop out as much peanut butter as possible, knowing the calories would help set her to rights, she finally turned to Snape.

She'd always heard that people tended to look peaceful and younger in repose. Snape managed to maintain his scowl. He looked exactly the same, only with his eyes closed. Hermione chuckled to herself. It was almost funny, the way he slept so stiffly, and she wondered that he'd ever had a good night's sleep in his life.

Hermione unbuttoned his robes as much as she dared, wanting him to be able to get some air. Even his shirt was buttoned to his chin. There was some blood on the front of his white shirt, but she thought it was probably from when he'd been coughing up blood. That seemed to have stopped with the potions, but she turned him on his side anyway, in case he vomited in his sleep.

She took a moment to wash his face, knowing she always felt better with clean skin. Quite a bit of grime came back, making Hermione wonder exactly what he'd been doing while he wasn't here with her.

Though the bed was large enough for two people, Snape was in the very middle. Hermione didn't care. She was exhausted, despite her full belly. She climbed into the bed beside him, pressed closely against him. He moaned a little in his sleep, putting his arm around her shoulders as she rested her head against his chest. He'd be absolutely livid when he awoke.

But he owed her this much.

Author's Note: check out the lovely fanart by Na'reh Dawn! Be sure to leave her a comment to let her know what you think. Thank you so much, sweetie!
<http://narehdawn.deviantart.com/gallery/>

17-Oct

Chapter 10 of 17

Hermione wakes up in a cell, held captive by none other than her former professor, Severus Snape. She's scared, alone, and confused about her feelings for her unwilling captor. How can she know what is real and what isn't when he won't tell her anything?

Chapter Ten

Day 60

Two months.

It's almost hard to believe Snape is so difficult to find. I wonder if Harry even suspects him. He must. He always has, really.

I've been busy. Ha. When Snape awoke in my bed two days ago, I thought for sure I'd be murdered. People don't just cuddle Severus Snape, especially not without his

express permission, which he would assuredly never give. But I did.

And it was nice.

He was hard and soft in all the right places, although I barely got to admire his... condition (the one all men wake up in) before he bolted from the bed as quick as if I'd had dragon pox. More quickly, even.

He shouted. I smirked. He snarled. I smiled. It was the ol' Hermione and Snape show. Hard to believe we were both close to death only the evening before.

As it is, he's stuffing me so full of food that I feel almost as sick as I did when I was hungry! It's possible he thinks making me quite fat will increase my chances of living if he's ever taken away again...though he'd never say as much...but I don't think it works that way. I haven't the heart to tell him. He even brought me a small box of non-perishables, though I almost wish he hadn't. For one, it means that it's likely he'll disappear like that again, and two, if I'm to die, I'd rather not spend the last of my days eating saltines and delaying the inevitable.

Hermione decided that the best position for listening to Snape read was on her back.

She didn't wonder what that said about her. Maybe it was the acoustics. Maybe it was because she couldn't stare at him this way. He tended to balk and read more quickly when he knew she was looking.

Maybe it was because she would stare at the ceiling and imagine the sky. It was one of her favourite games...wondering what the weather was like outside. She tried to guess based on the heaviness of the air or the dampness of the room, but the nuances of change in the dungeon were probably her imagination. Still, as she never could find out what the weather was really like, she was never wrong. And *that* was a fun game.

"Are you even listening?" Snape demanded, setting the book in his lap and looking grouchy.

"Of course," she said, and it was true. Not that she no longer got off on his reading (or rather, she certainly still did, but she didn't do anything about it. Snape apparently had tender sensibilities), she was forced to listen to every single word. "Antigone was just talking about burying her brother." Easy.

Snape sighed dramatically and continued to read. Hermione drifted in and out, but always came back.

After the fourth time Snape cleared his throat, Hermione realised he wasn't doing it just because he thought her attention was elsewhere.

"Are you sick, sir?" she asked, concerned. She'd thought he'd recovered from his illness, whatever the cause, but he did tread a little lightly, not quite sweeping in and out as he once had. And his throat was sounding a little scratchy.

"Not at all. Why do you ask?"

"Your throat, you sound like you're getting a cold or something."

Snape scoffed. "Wizards don't get *colds*."

Hermione was pretty sure they did, but she didn't want to quarrel. "Still, you don't sound very good."

"Are you trying to say you'd like me to discontinue the reading? I'd be more than happy to, both on account of the subject matter, and due to the tediousness of the chore."

Hmm. It seemed that Snape didn't much like reading to her. How shocking.

"I don't want you to stop. I love listening to you read. I'm just worried about you."

"You must have an idea of the sheer absurdity of that statement."

Hermione nodded slowly. "I have an idea of the absurdity of everything I do these days, especially things I should be thanked for and haven't yet been."

Snape pretended he didn't know what she was talking about, but she didn't care. The fact that he was here, reading, when she hadn't even asked him to was proof enough of his gratitude. She might never hear the words, but Snape spoke through action, loud and clear.

"I've a sore throat," Snape admitted, and Hermione nearly fell of the bed. Snape, admitting weakness? Snape, offering information?

But she kept her voice calm when she said, "Maybe you shouldn't be reading so much, then." She immediately wanted to take back her words...his reading was one of the only things keeping her sane.

"I don't mind."

And Hermione struggled again, not to roll off the bed in shock. He didn't mind? He complained nearly constantly! If fact, the complaints and the reading were just about equal, both in quantity and in eloquence.

"Maybe it's because you're reading more loudly than you're used to. Perhaps if you moved your chair closer, you wouldn't have to strain your voice."

Snape hummed in a manner that Hermione knew meant he was thinking. A moment later, the armchair hovered over to the floor near her cell, and Snape resettled. He was only a metre and a half closer, but Hermione had a plan.

Sure enough, his voice faltered not five minutes later, and he coughed to cover it.

"Professor Snape?" Hermione said in her best innocent voice.

"What is it now?"

"Maybe if you read from in here..."

"In your cage?"

"Mmhmm."

"With you?"

"Well, where else would I be?"

"Indeed. And you think this would be a good idea, because...?"

"Because you wouldn't be straining your throat, sir."

"What are you planning?"

"Nothing! Really. Nothing. I swear. Not this time."

"There is hardly room for my chair within your cell."

"True... you could sit on the bed."

"With... you."

"Where else would I be?"

Snape pursed his lips. Hermione hurriedly added, "Or I could sit on the floor by the bed. I don't mind." It was true. She sat on the ground a lot. The bed hurt her back after a while, and a numb arse was better than a pinched nerve.

"That won't be necessary," Snape relented. "I will sit by the headboard, and you by the foot."

Hermione scrambled into position, drawing up her knees and making herself as small as possible to seem like less of an imposition. Snape unlocked and unwarded the cell door and entered. He looked a little lost for a moment, as if Hermione had asked him to bed her instead of read to her. But he sat stiffly on the edge of the bed before swinging his legs up, stretching them out and settling the book on his lap.

"This bed is... satisfactory?" he asked, pressing into it with his hands.

Hermione shrugged. Was anything in her cell more than satisfactory? Should she expect any more than that? "It does the trick," she answered honestly, gesturing for him to start reading.

Now that he wasn't trying to make his voice carry, he no longer cleared his throat and coughed half as often. And the intimacy of the situation and the lower tones of his voice made her shiver all over, but she'd promised herself she'd behave. If she was good, he might do this again. If she started to finger herself, she was pretty sure he wouldn't be persuaded to return, despite the fact that last time in her cell, he'd seemed to enjoy her desperation.

Snape read for some time, and Hermione slowly let her limbs stretch out. He didn't seem to notice. He was wearing black socks. She wondered what his feet looked like. She was sure he'd have ugly feet, all pale and skinny with pronounced arches and yellow toenails and little black hairs. For some reason, the idea made her giggle. Snape glared at her, and she stopped immediately. There was a certain softness in his face when he was reading, and sometimes when he looked at her between pages, he gave the softness to her.

When his voice began to get raspy, Hermione very slowly shifted so that she was against the headboard as well. The bed was wide enough that they didn't have to touch, but Hermione shifted so that she was pressed lightly against him, under the pretence of looking at what he was reading. He paused at length while she got comfortable, looking as though he very much wanted to say something, but he just kept reading.

Eventually, Hermione's head rested on his shoulder. She liked looking at the words and matching them to his voice. She'd look a few paragraphs ahead and find a word she liked...like *inside*, *pleading*, or, *always*...and wait for him to say it. The anticipation made her feel as though he was saying those words to her from his own mind.

"Professor Snape?" Hermione said quietly when he paused between acts.

"Yes, Miss Granger."

"Do you like me?"

Snape sighed and dropped his head against the headboard. Hermione wondered if he remembered how she'd gripped it when he'd ordered her to come.

"You are a capable witch and a tolerable conversationalist."

Hermione was bowled over by the compliment, but it wasn't quite what she'd been going after. "I mean, do you want me?"

Snape didn't say anything. He stared at the words on the page, fingers clenched on the book.

"Because I think you might. And I want you. And I'm wondering what sort of sense it makes to deny ourselves. Or rather, why you're denying yourself. I'm on offer, here. And I don't much care if it's because I'm starved for affection or because you're the only person who exists in my world. I just think you're brilliant and funny and mean as hell, and you saved me when you didn't have to, and no matter what you say or anyone thinks, you're a *good* man."

"Are you quite through?" Snape said acerbically.

"No, I'm not," she said. She turned to face him and took the book from his hands, placing it gently on the bedspread behind her. He watched her carefully, but didn't make a move to stop her.

Leaning forward, Hermione pressed a chaste kiss to Snape's thin lips. He didn't react, though she hadn't much expected him to. Even without his participation, it just felt so good to be kissing someone, to be kissing Snape. She'd thought about their last kiss near constantly, and the expert way his fingers had brought her to climax.

Pulling out of the kiss, she gamely met his eyes. They were dark and mute, not revealing any of his thoughts. Hermione sighed, but she didn't move. He wouldn't run away, not this time. She wouldn't let him. He'd just have to face whatever was happening between them, because something very obviously was, and it wasn't one-sided. Something kept him coming back to read to her every single day.

"It's a kiss," Hermione said simply, willing him to understand. "It doesn't have to mean anything."

"I do not do things that mean nothing," he said slowly, his eyes searching her face, though for what, she suspected she'd never really know.

"Then let it mean something. I want it to. It already does, for me."

"You don't have enough information to make an informed decision."

"So, tell me!" she said quietly, placing her hand on his wrist. He didn't shake her off, so she squeezed lightly for emphasis. "Tell me what I don't know. Tell me what happened, what's happening now."

Snape shook her hand off, but he didn't move, and she knew that was a good sign.

"You were a boon," he spat. He looked away as she processed this.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, Rabastan Lestrangle captured you, and he asked the Dark Lord to... keep you. But I told the Dark Lord that Lestrangle's foray into Hogwarts had resulted in increased security, which in turn made Potter even more out of reach. I suggested that if Lestrangle had been in Hogwarts, he should have made an attempt to bring Potter to him, not you. Neither the Dark Lord nor Lestrangle knew that it was my intelligence, based on what Lestrangle bragged about, that led to the increased safety measures at

the school. They also did not know that Potter wasn't even at the school at the time, but with Dumbledore."

Hermione shuddered to think of what Lestrage would have done to her, had she been given to him. She might have been mistaken about Snape's allegiances, but the Lestrage brothers were true Death Eaters. She most likely would not be alive right now. Hermione rested her hand on Snape's in gratitude.

"Do not think me noble, Miss Granger. I did what I had to do. Your death would have destroyed Potter, making him unable to continue in the fight against the Dark Lord. I did it for me."

"But Harry doesn't know if I'm alive or dead right now! How is that helping the cause?"

Snape grimaced. "Potter knows that you are alive and relatively well."

"*What?*" she shrieked, jerking back as if struck. "Why didn't you tell me, I've been...*devastated*, thinking he was looking for me or thought I was dead!"

"I will not apologise for the decisions I've made in the best interest of..."

"*Yourself*," she hissed, drawing herself farther back.

"I did not want you to think he would come strolling in to take you away."

"Why hasn't he?" she asked, deflating slightly.

"He neither knows where you are nor who has you."

"Then how..."

"I've sent him a memory. I know that he received it."

"Oh, Harry," Hermione sighed, dropping her face into his hands. How frustrated and impotent he must feel, knowing that she was alive in a cell somewhere, with no hints as to where or why. "He probably thought you were sending it to torment him."

"I cannot help what he thinks."

"Would it really have hurt me to tell me?"

"Miss Granger, you must understand that the less you know, the safer you are. I took a huge risk in sending Potter a memory, and I will not do it again. You must trust my choices as the right ones, for you truly have no choice."

Of course, Hermione knew it, but that didn't make it any less frustrating.

"So, what happened after you made Lestrage look bad in front of the Dark Lord?" she asked, determined to find out as much as possible while Snape was in a sharing mood. Going over why he didn't tell her Harry knew she was safe would only make him withdraw, and she might never be able to get any additional information from him.

"He tortured Lestrage for nigh an hour before allowing him to return home. He then asked those assembled who would do an admiral job in... keeping you in line. Several stepped forward. My services were most impressive, and I had never asked for anything before."

"Doesn't he want to know what you're doing with me?"

"Regularly. I've been able to create impressions from the memories I do have, and I offer those to him in lieu of what is really happening."

"What..." Hermione began, though she wasn't sure she really wanted to know. "What sorts of impressions?"

Snape looked away. "That is not important."

Hermione nodded, her suspicions confirmed. She could only imagine how gleeful Voldemort must be to see Hermione Granger of the Golden Trio begging for Snape to fuck her. How pathetic she must look. But as she thought that, she realised her own behaviour was what was likely saving both their lives. If she'd spat and fought and rebelled every single day, Voldemort would wonder why Snape didn't just torture her into submission, or worse.

She shifted closer, placing the book back into his hands. "I might not think you've done the right thing in not telling me that Harry knows I'm alive, but I know you have to do what you think is best. I do hope you know you can tell me more than just enough to keep me from killing myself."

"Miss Granger, I never for a moment believed that was a possibility."

Hermione shrugged one shoulder, remembering all too clearly how many times she'd wondered if the mirror spell was a real mirror, one that would shatter, providing her with many implements of self-destruction, or how she'd thought about just not eating or drinking until she went to sleep and didn't wake up. That was when her captivity had seemed interminable. Now, she knew she'd one day be free.

When she pressed her lips against Snape's once more, they moved beneath hers. She didn't feel triumphant, however; it didn't feel like a victory. It only felt like something that should have happened long ago.

Her hand was on his cheek, her thumb caressing his rather sharp cheekbone. He only clutched the book white knuckled, but Hermione didn't mind if he needed time to work himself up to the idea that she could offer comfort. He at least knew where to find her, should he need it.

They kissed, closemouthed, for some time, Hermione wanting to coax him to take the next step and part his lips first, and Snape perhaps feeling that that was one capitulation he wouldn't give. But all Hermione had was time. She could wait.

She dropped her head back down to his shoulder, and he cleared his throat, his vibrato tones shivering through her and making her wish they were reading in front of a fire after a long day at work. No bars.

No cage.

Hermione wakes up in a cell, held captive by none other than her former professor, Severus Snape. She's scared, alone, and confused about her feelings for her unwilling captor. How can she know what is real and what isn't when he won't tell her anything?

Chapter Eleven

Day 63

Finally Snape is no longer ignoring what's happened between us. Every other time it's as though I've imagined everything, but after our talk and that first kiss (that's what I count as the first kiss...it wasn't under duress or forced upon him. He was a willing participant), I know he's acknowledging what we did.

I didn't even have to beg him to come into the cell to read. I asked him politely, and he acquiesced, though with such high drama that one would think I'd asked him to donate a vital organ instead of sit on a comfy bed with a willing girl.

To read.

Snape has morals. Who would have guessed it? But he does. He won't say much about it, but I think he's uncomfortable with the idea of having sex with someone he's got locked up in his cellar. I'll admit, it's not the most appealing way of going about things...I'd very much prefer some flowers and chocolates to a new showerhead (complete with 'hot' option) and a Repleo plate that provides cheese and crackers.

Still, being close to him helps me forget about everything that's happening, or is likely happening, though I haven't really a clue if it's happening or not. Snape is back to being tight-lipped...except in one area. He kisses me now. He kisses me. I might encourage him a little, sure, but I don't outright force myself on him. He's definitely doing it because he wants to, wants me.

The first time he leaned over and pressed his lips against mine, I thought I might faint. We were just talking quietly, I think I was asking my questions, and he asked why I didn't want the cell door open anymore, like I used to. I told him that I couldn't afford illusions of freedom. And he seemed so... regretful. I knew he wanted to say something, something shattering and traumatic or maybe just something dismissive, but he didn't. He turned to me and placed a hand on my neck (I can still feel it) and leaned in. His lips were soft, looking for something, something I'll never know if he found.

Of course he broke the kiss first. I could have easily gone on for days kissing him. I think I'm learning a lot about kissing, though I thought I knew before. But I was approaching sex like something to conquer, get under my belt, and now I wish I hadn't. It would have been nice to offer that part of myself to Snape, to know only him in that intimate, carnal way.

Who knew I was so old-fashioned?

But there's no point in having regrets, and really, I don't. If I hadn't had sex with Ron, I'd be totally at a loss as to how to seduce Snape...though I'm starting to doubt I'm not totally clueless despite my 'experience.' Snape doesn't seem to want to be seduced. I know he feels guilty, and I have a simple solution to that: let me go. I know I could be helping Harry. I know that if I were free, we'd be closer to winning the war. I just know I'd be able to help.

"How is Harry doing?" Hermione asked, slouching down on the bed beside Snape, who put the book down in his lap as if he'd expected the question.

"As far as I know, Potter is fine."

"As far as you know? Why don't you know?"

Snape rolled his eyes dramatically. Hermione tried not to snicker. "I am not privy to his comings and goings in excruciating detail, thank Merlin for small favours. I have a number of eyes and ears on him as often as possible, and as of the last update, he is fine."

"What's he doing?"

"I have no idea. Searching for Horcruxes, one would hope."

"You know," she said musingly, "if you bring me some books to research, I might be able to help, and you could send him the information."

"Potter already has a number of helpers in that arena."

Yeah, but they're not me, she mentally grouched. "So what's one more?"

"No." And that was final, Hermione knew. The tone was easy to recognise, but Hermione wasn't finished.

"Why not?"

"I just told you why," he countered, shifting on the bed. That meant he was going to leave any second.

"No, you said why it wasn't necessary, but not why *couldn't*. What difference would it make? What could it hurt?"

"Miss Granger," Snape began in that voice that was preparing to rip her to shreds, if she'd let it. Which she never did anymore. "How would it look for me to go perusing libraries looking for information on the destruction of Horcruxes? Not only is the practise almost completely foreign to most wizards and witches, those to whom it is *not* unfamiliar would report me to the Ministry sooner than I could get the book home."

"Oh," she said, startled both by the reasonable explanation and the willingness with which it was offered.

"Oh," indeed. Shall we keep on with this farce, or can I continue to read? I hadn't even gotten to the end of a chapter, you know, you impatient wretch."

"Right. So, er, the Dark Lord is still alive, right?"

He stared at her. She shrugged. Asking the questions in order gave her a sense of routine, which made her feel secure.

"How is Hogwarts faring?"

"No better, no worse. No further kidnappings."

"That's good," she said, nodding slowly. "What's happening with the war? Are we any further than before? Has there been any headway?"

Snape settled back onto the bed. His familiar heat and smell made Hermione curl in a little closer, and he stiffened but didn't turn away.

"Any headway has been equalled by the headway made by the other side. No one is gaining any significant ground. The war rests almost solely on the narrow shoulders of our unlikely saviour."

"You know," Hermione said, suddenly angry. "He didn't choose any of this. He *hates* it, all the expectations, all the limelight. It wasn't fair of you...*any* of you...to put that kind of pressure on an eleven-year-old boy. Didn't you ever stop to think that resting all your hopes on him is selfish and cruel?"

Snape didn't answer her. He just looked at her in that considering way of his, as though she'd said neither anything interesting nor new, but that he was curious as to how she believed she had.

"Whatever," she snapped, out of sorts. "Can I go home?"

Snape shook his head, and that fleeting look of regret passed his features again.

"Can I go outside today?"

"Miss Granger," he said, obviously exasperated. "How do you expect me to let you outside? Just how would that work? I should let you wander up and down the street, ready to scream any moment or help? Or perhaps I should take you to the market, where you can buy whatever milk you prefer, as what I purchase is obviously not to your liking, judging by the grimace on your face whenever you drink it!"

Hermione's eyes bulged a little at all that information. "I like the tea," she said slowly. "I can't help what it reminds me of!"

"And what is that?" he asked tiredly.

"Hogwarts. Home. Christmas. Friends. Freedom."

A muscle clenched in Snape's jaw. Hermione looked away.

"You wouldn't have to take me out on your street, Snape. Apparate us to the middle of a desert somewhere, throw up wards and barriers, I don't care. When I ask to go outside, I'm not asking to be freed, I just want to see the sky and know that it's real, that I still exist in relation to the universe, insignificant and yet somehow precious."

"Next question."

Hermione swallowed hard. Maybe she shouldn't care so much that he ignored her like that, and she certainly shouldn't have expected him to actually do as she suggested, but when it seemed he didn't even care, it made her feel sick, especially when she still wanted to kiss the bastard so badly.

"That was my last question, Professor Snape," she said in a small voice. She didn't ask for him to open the cell door, and now that he was in the cage with her, it didn't bother her as much. He was trapped, too. Symbolically, maybe, but still trapped.

"You're certain?" he prompted, and Hermione wondered what he was getting at. He was usually anxious to finish the question-asking portion of the day.

"There's nothing else I need to know, sir." And he knew and she knew her response was about more than questions.

"Come, then," he said, standing. He straightened his robes while Hermione watched in incredulity.

"Where?" she breathed, hating the way her heart was racing.

"Trust me."

And with those simple words, Hermione's entire existence these past months came together to create a swirling, snarling supernova. Like with so much else between them, he was saying more than he said. If she stayed on this bed, everything would change. He'd go back to bringing her food and reading to himself, or worse, not staying at all. If she agreed, she was consenting to this imprisonment in a way. She didn't want to be here. She didn't deserve to be in a cage. But she *did* trust him, which was why it hurt so much to think it was his dungeon she was locked in.

She stood. There really was no other option; there never had been, for Hermione. From the moment she'd been stolen from her bed at Hogwarts, circumstances had been carried forward inevitably. There was nothing between them that had not been predestined. Everything was going according to some plan, much larger than Hermione knew how to step back from.

Even though Snape might have known her thoughts, her struggle, he gave no indication.

He casually spelled the door open as if he gave her freedom every single day. After stepping through, he turned and held an arm out, some ugly and strange form of etiquette that left her mouth tasting of sick. She stepped through the door.

It was easier when she wasn't alone.

She dutifully followed him up the stairs, stomach clenching at the fear she'd felt the last time she'd made this walk, both from the paralysing inability to actually leave the security of her home for the past weeks, and because of what she'd feared to find: Snape, dead.

"This will change nothing, you understand," Snape said, stopping in the middle of the sitting room.

Hermione knew that denial would change his mind, and affirmation would be too obviously false. So she said nothing and only looked at him curiously.

Sighing heavily, as he was so very wont to do these days, Snape took her arm, raising an eyebrow at her. She nodded in response. She was ready.

She knew from the intensity of the discomfort that they had Apparated over a long distance. Until this moment, she'd been too afraid to actually think he would go through with taking her away, but now, she was only gratitude.

The first thing she noticed when they popped up in the middle of a huge, empty field was that it wasn't a very nice day. The sky was overcast, the air heavy on her tongue.

It was the best day of her life.

She closed her eyes and turned her face to the sky. Even without the sun bearing down on her, she could feel the warmth of the day. It must have been around the beginning of April, but the field was dry, no puddles to fill her shoes.

Looking at Snape, she was sure she had never seen him quite so uncomfortable. He was busy casting spells in a circle around them, and she knew that to try to run away would result in something likely more unpleasant than an immediate Disapparition back to Snape's house. When he was satisfied, he crossed his arms over his chest and started at her, eyebrows raised as if in challenge. She wasn't sure what he expected her to do, but from the look on his face, plopping down onto her arse in the neatly trimmed grass wasn't it.

"Where are we?" she asked quietly, afraid to break the spell that had brought her here.

"Prince land." Snape took out a handkerchief and transfigured it into a large blanket, his initials still serpentine in the corner. Hermione traced them with a finger.

"Is there a Manor around here, then?"

"We are a generation too late to see the Manor," Snape drawled, sitting on the blanket with one knee bent, his arms resting on it. It was possibly the most casual pose she'd ever seen him adopt, the only possible exception being the way he slid down the bed after having read for a long time.

"What happened to it?"

"It burned down." He shrugged an eloquent shoulder, and Hermione didn't press. It didn't matter, anyway. He'd taken her to his own land. He could have taken her anywhere in the world, even a clearing in the Forbidden Forest at Hogwarts (though she was very grateful he hadn't, she was nostalgic enough as it was right now), but he'd taken her here. Maybe it didn't mean a thing. Maybe it did.

"I'm sorry," she said truthfully.

"It wasn't my home."

"And where we came from, that was your home?" Hermione didn't want to pry, but she felt she deserved some answers after everything she'd been through at his hands.

"It is a house that I own," Snape said evasively, making Hermione laugh. He glanced at her quickly, his lip quirking only just a little.

Hermione fell back onto the blanket. It was strange to sit with Snape like this, so similar to how they sat together on her bed, and yet so different. He seemed smaller outside, not physically, just less overpowering, now that his presence didn't take up the entirety of her small space.

"Do you think we'll win the war?" Hermione asked, plucking a few pieces of grass and tossing them aside.

"We will." And he said it with such conviction that Hermione really had no choice but to believe him, or at least believe that he believed it. She didn't often let herself think about what would happen if they lost. Her ideology had been centred on the idea that good always triumphed over evil, but as Sirius had once said, the world just wasn't divided so cleanly. Did Death Eaters know they were evil? *Were* they all evil? Was it possible for an entire faction of people to be without redeeming qualities?

"What happens if we don't?" For some reason, she felt suspiciously close to tears.

Snape was quiet for a moment. "Then we wait, and fight again."

She shifted closer to him. He allowed it.

"And what if we lose again?" she asked, her voice barely a whisper.

"Then we wait," he said slowly, "and fight *again*."

Hermione felt her eyes get itchy, and she swallowed. "And what if..."

"Hermione," Snape hissed insistently, and she started with surprise at hearing her first name for the first time in months. "*We fight again*."

And suddenly the itchy feeling went away. She managed a weak smile. "We fight again," she confirmed, and it was like a promise.

"Good girl," Snape said, and she lightly smacked his arm. He caught her hand in his, and she froze. He seemed to be studying her fingernails, then the palm of her hand. She watched his face as he did. His brows were drawn a little...it was his thinking face. She held her breath as he raised her hand to his mouth and pressed a kiss to the centre, over the lifeline.

There was that damn itchiness in her eyes again. Hermione moved in to kiss Snape, something she'd been desperate to do since he'd landed them here, and Snape made a low noise in his throat and pushed her back onto the blanket. He leaned over her, so close, hovering for a moment as if to decide whether this would change things. Hermione already knew that everything they did these days changed things between them. If he kissed her, if he took the first step and the dominant position and actually kissed her like this, then of course things would change. He could no longer pretend that he was acting the way he was because it was convenient, and she couldn't escape the fact that she *wanted* this so badly it hurt.

When his mouth fell on hers, it was the sort of moment that she would look back on and say *That was it*.

She moaned into his mouth and his lips moved over hers. His kisses were always so demanding, almost oppressive. He wouldn't break the kiss until she was ready, no matter that she'd be panting and gasping by the end. He was skilled at kissing, but there was a sort of innocence there as well, as though the kisses he was used to giving weren't the same as the ones he gave her.

His tongue flitted into her mouth, and she met it eagerly, sliding along it as his hand moved from her cheek to her neck, angling her face to meet his more fully. She allowed him to move her the way he wanted...she was his to guide. Her arms were loosely clasped around his neck, not holding him, just making sure he knew she was involved, aware, present.

He pulled back from the kiss to nibble on her lower lip, biting it a little, sending sparking shocks down her body.

"You're mad to want this," Snape said into her ear, licking the shell and making her shiver.

"Why?" She knew *her* reasons, but she couldn't begin to fathom his.

"Because I'm a Death Eater, your captor, a murderer."

Hermione sighed. "You can list your deficiencies as long as you like, but it doesn't change how I feel, what I want. You don't want to be those things, do you?"

"But I *am*."

"But don't you see? Are you so blind? You *want* to change; you're doing your damndest to make it so. Didn't Professor Dumbledore always say it is our choices that make us who we are?"

A pained look settled on Snape's face, and for the first time, he didn't try to mask it. Hermione wrapped her arms more tightly around him, hoping he took it for the acceptance and forgiveness it was. Dumbledore was dead at his hand, but that had been the Headmaster's doing. Snape was just as much a victim, if not more.

"Maybe I could have brought you back to the castle," he said in a scratchy voice.

"And maybe I would have been taken again, or worse. And if you had, we'd have lost our only spy, and Vol...the Dark Lord might have killed you for freeing me. I don't like it, Professor Snape, but I understand it."

"But there are things you don't understand, the Dark Lord, he grows restless..."

"You don't have to tell me," she reassured when his face lost all colour. "Just do your best to keep me safe, keep Harry and Ron safe, and the Order. It's a lot to put on your shoulders, but if ever there was an Atlas so capable, it is you."

"You are such a Gryffindor," Snape said in a scathing voice, and Hermione smiled because he thought he was insulting her.

"I want you," she said simply, bringing his head down for a kiss.

And then Snape's hands were everywhere, as though what she'd said had punctured the dam, and everything he wanted was freely flowing with the water.

His mouth on her throat, Hermione squirmed as he marked her. She could feel the blood rising to the surface beneath his lips, and she let him place a claim, if that's what he felt he needed to do. She didn't mind being his.

When his hand slipped under her shirt, Hermione shifted so she could pull it off. He stared down at her, a blank expression on his face, but she knew by the bulge in his trousers and the pumping of the vein in his neck that he wasn't unaffected. She slowly, a little awkwardly, reached beneath herself to unclip her bra and remove it.

Snape had been watching her face, and now it seemed that he needed permission to look away, to look at her. Hermione smiled gently and took one of his hands, placing it on her breast.

The action seemed to spur Snape into moving again. He kissed her, roughly and harshly, his fingers moving expertly over her breast, teasing and tweaking the nipple. Hermione whimpered a little as pain entered the fold, but her body transmuted it into pleasure, and she was grateful.

Then his mouth was on her nipple, and her back arched, desperate for more of that. His teeth were sharp and crooked, giving her a sensation she wasn't used to, but that was no less desirable for its unfamiliarity. Her hands were running over his body, but when one trailed down his midsection to try to reach the front of his trousers, Snape shifted between her legs and knelt.

"I have to taste you," he told her, his face perfect in its flaws against the similarly imperfect afternoon sky, the pallor of his skin, blackness of his hair and the grey of the sky making her think her world had gone greyscale.

"Please," she whispered, wantonly spreading her legs to give him more room, though she had to close them again to allow him to slip her jeans down and off her body. She wriggled a little under his intense scrutiny, only her knickers shielding her from his critical gaze.

And to show him she didn't care that he stared at her so seamlessly, Hermione lowered her underpants, completely nude before him, spread out like lunch on his oversized handkerchief. She raised her hands over her head, her entire body arching and stretching to entice him. She wasn't sure where she'd learned such behaviour, only that it was certainly working, if his lust-filled eyes and impressive arousal were any indication.

Her belly was quivering; she could see that as she looked down her body at him. Desire thrummed through her as he held himself still, and she knew he did it only to infuriate her, as he did so many things.

"Lovely," he said as he drew a hand down her pale shin, lifting it so he could trace kisses along the side of her leg. She'd begged for weeks for a razor for her legs and underarms, but he hadn't given in until he'd actually begun to allow her kisses. Not quite altruistic, but pragmatic to the extreme. That was how she knew him, though; she didn't want him to be anything but the way he was.

Snape's mouth was on the inside of her thigh. She knew he'd be able to smell her arousal, and a deep flush spread over her body, though she tried not to show her embarrassment. That became impossible when, watching her face instead of his hand, he drew a long finger between her folds, immediately mired in her slickness. Hermione moaned. The only other time he'd touched her like that, it had been through her knickers. Having his hand directly on her body was enough to make her tremble.

Two fingers slid inside her, and her hips rolled. She couldn't remember ever feeling so sexual, like she was nothing more than the passion in her blood, and he was only the ability to please her.

"Sir, more," she said huskily, needing his fingers to move more firmly, deeply, inside her, the teasing akin to torture.

The Snape lowered his body to the blanket and spread her open with two slender fingers. Hermione blushed again, unaccountably embarrassed but heady with desire at the same time.

The first swipe of his tongue on her slit made her cry out. He chuckled a little, and the vibration made her moan. She couldn't stop making noise as his mouth moved over her, playing her like an instrument, her body completely open to him.

When his fingers re-entered her, her back arched completely off the blanket. When Ron had done this to her, there'd been a lot of directions on her part, even though she barely knew her own body well enough to be able to tell him what she needed. It had ended in frustration on both their parts, causing Hermione to give the most lacklustre reciprocal blowjob in the history of blowjobs.

But this... this was something entirely new. Hermione didn't need to direct, she didn't need to take charge, and she certainly didn't need to make false noises in order to feed Snape's ego; Snape knew exactly what he was doing, and he did it like he loved it.

And even though he led her to that precipice again and again before backing off and starting over, soon there was no chance of going back. Her climax built and built until her fingers were devoid of blood, and her mind a pleasant buzzing beside tightly clenched eyes.

She almost wished Snape could order her to come, but that would have involved removing that sinful mouth, and there was no way she could allow that to happen. She cried out his surname, the word escaping her lips before she could censor herself, and as pulsing waves of pleasure caressed, she found she didn't care. His name tasted good on her lips, a word she wouldn't mind saying in the throes of passion for the rest of her life, if only he'd let her.

Hermione was still panting as Snape settled back on the blanket beside her. She saw him unobtrusively readjust his erection, and she licked her lips.

She moved over him to kiss him, and he jerked a little, as if he didn't want that, but she pressed on. She knew by now that most of his hesitation was born from a misguided sense of right and wrong, and most of what he wanted was right, anyway. At least with her.

She tasted herself on his lips, and while the taste itself wasn't completely foreign to her, the underlying taste of him that added to her own flavour made her moan as she pressed harder for more.

"You're very good at that," she said, smiling, brushing a lank strand of pitch hair out of his face.

"From someone with no comparative experience, I shan't take your word on that," Snape said, but his eyes held a smug gleam, and she allowed it, not denying his words except with refusal to respond to them.

"Now I want to taste you," she purred, her hand moving his cup him. She felt him twitch against her hand, and she squeezed in return. She'd rather sink herself onto his cock and take from him again, but she didn't want to lose this, whatever it was.

Here she was, under the greyest of skies, free for the first time in two months, and all she wanted was so taste her captor's come. There should have been a problem in there, somewhere, but it all felt fine to her.

"You are not obligated," Snape said, swallowing hard, eyes unreadable. Hermione realised how very little he'd given her to fall for, how few his smiles had been, how

seldom his kindness. And yet she cared about him, wanted him, needed him in a way she'd never experienced with anyone else. It didn't seem to matter that he didn't explicitly tell her he wanted her back. She got enough from his actions, minute though they may be.

"I want to, though. Very much. Have for ages," she admitted, moving down his body to unbutton and part his robes, leaving him in shirtsleeves and trousers. Hermione trailed longing fingers over the outline of his cock, her mouth watering in a way that was completely unfamiliar. She'd never wanted to put her mouth on a man before, not like this. She knew that sucking him would bring her as much pleasure as she hoped it gave him.

She nudged at his knee to encourage him to part his thighs. He did, and Hermione moved between them, kneeling. She then opened the placket and reached into his pants, drawing him out carefully. The weight of him in her hand, the heat, and texture, it all built together to make her pussy clench, and again, she wished she could just ravish him. But she wanted him to make the first move for that, if nothing else.

His cock was large and rather foreboding. Ron's had been more... manageable. It seemed there was too much of Snape for her to handle without fumbling. She tightened her grip, feeling an answering throb in the vein on the underside.

Hermione spared a moment to look at Snape's face. He was reclined on his elbows, watching her. She blushed at the scrutiny, but he didn't seem to be mocking her in any way. His face was perfectly serious, his eyes bottomless. Hermione, not wanting to fall in, turned her attention back to her task.

She shifted a little and lowered her mouth on him. His breath hitched, and she became a little less tentative in her actions. Guarding her teeth, she slicked as much of his cock as she could manage, stroking the shaft with her hand. Hermione tongued under the foreskin, tickling that spot that Ron had liked so much. Apparently, he hadn't been the only one. Snape dropped flat onto his back, groaning low in his throat.

Hermione gained confidence, moving her mouth and tongue faster, learning what he liked from his reactions. Her other hand gripped his thigh as she took as much as she could into her mouth. Ron had always asked her to take more, but Snape seemed perfectly content with what she was doing.

His fingers laced in her hair, not pressing down, just resting there. She suckled on the upstroke and was rewarded with a stream of pre-come. Hermione repeated that action again, pairing it with her tightening hand and flicking tongue, and suddenly Snape was pulling on her hair. She didn't move though...he'd tasted her, this was only fair.

His come flooded her mouth, and she tried her best to swallow around him as he continued to spurt. The taste was bitter and made her mouth water, but she still wanted more.

When the flow stopped, she pulled back and gently licked him clean. His cock wasn't nearly so intimidating now that it was losing hardness, but it was still foreign to her. She tucked him back into his pants and buttoned his trousers.

"An admirable job," Snape said in a rusty voice, "for a novice."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Maybe not as novice as you think," she retorted, not quite liking the condescension in his voice.

"Oh, no?" he asked, raising himself up slowly. He took her chin in his hand, his thumb moving over her lip, and she felt the slickness there, indicating that she hadn't cleaned herself as thoroughly as she had him. Her tongue darted out to catch the stray emission, and Snape groaned.

"This is, quite possibly, the most foolish thing I've ever done," Snape drawled, staring at her. Hermione met his eyes for as long as possible and was almost shocked when he looked away. She couldn't ever remember winning a staring contest with the great master Occlumens himself. It was an empty victory because of what he'd just said.

"Don't you think I feel stupid, too?" she demanded quietly, adjusting her clothing and staring up at the sky. "Falling for the man who has me chained in his dungeon. I couldn't possibly be more messed up." But even as she said it, she realised she didn't care. Sure, this would probably end horribly, with one or both of them dying, possibly even because of the weakness they felt for one another, but with the threat of a full-scale war imminent, what else could they do? She wouldn't be the first person in history to fall for absolutely the wrong man.

"Then you're... 'falling'?" Snape said a little stiltedly, making Hermione almost laugh at the absurdity of it all.

"I hate to say it, but it sure looks like it, Professor."

Snape was quite a long time, leaning back on his hands and staring up at the seamless grey skies. There was absolutely nothing to indicate that anything of import had occurred, and yet she felt as though things all around her were changing.

"It's time to return, Miss Granger."

Hermione sighed and lurched to her feet. She was still a little wobbly, and she lost her balance, reaching out wildly for support. Snape grabbed her roughly around the middle, and her face was planted against his chest. Hermione had the feeling that she could stay there forever. She reached up to wrap her arms around his neck, and when he held her firmly and actually hugged her, Hermione cried.

For everything she'd lost, for everything she'd found, she cried.

Author's Note: I managed to not post this chapter last week, so you guys get two chapters today. My sincerest apologies.

17-Dec

Chapter 12 of 17

Hermione wakes up in a cell, held captive by none other than her former professor, Severus Snape. She's scared, alone, and confused about her feelings for her unwilling captor. How can she know what is real and what isn't when he won't tell her anything?

I must be absolutely fucking mad. I can't believe I've found myself in this position. For someone so clever, so swotty, so quick, I'm definitely the dumbest witch around.

I've completely fallen in love with Severus Snape.

And worse yet, I think he can tell. Oh, I definitely didn't help matters when I confessed to him that I was falling for him, but I don't think that really gave me away. That really only means that I had the potential to possibly, in the future, find him agreeable enough to consider beginning a romantic liaison with him.

At least, that's what I meant by it.

But then came that day in the field, that day when he didn't need to help me and he did, the day that proved that even if he isn't a good man, he's a good man.

And I really want him to love me, as well. How much of that is because he's my bloody sun and moon in this cell? I've no bloody clue. Would there be anything between us if he hadn't, say, locked me in a cage for over two months? Who can know these things? What I do know is that he doesn't have to do all that he does for me. In fact, if he wanted a warrior, a fighter, a soldier, he would have been better off giving me nothing. I would have stayed strong, kept fighting, hated him, and one day, I would have escaped, angry enough to kill.

I don't want to live in a cell anymore, but he doesn't trust me enough to set me free. Even though I... love him.

What is happening here?

"Can we go back to the field today?" Hermione asked the minute Snape walked in through the wooden door.

"No, Miss Granger. I have news."

Hermione hated the way he announced that every time, as though waiting for her to beg or break. Which she always did.

"What? What news? Tell me!"

Snape opened the cell door at a leisurely pace, shutting it behind him and waiting for her to scramble out of bed to face him. He didn't seem to want to tell her his news while she was still in bed.

He eyed her critically, and she shrieked in frustration, grabbing her dressing robe and throwing it on. Apparently he also didn't want to tell her the news unless she was clothed. He truly was the most infuriating man she'd ever met.

"Potter has located the fifth Horcrux."

Hermione's eyes fell shut. For a moment, it was as though she was back in the Prince field, dreary air and murky skies and the most glorious freedom one could possibly experience.

"Has he destroyed it?"

"We can only hope. I expect so. I doubt he would wait to destroy it. It would not make sense to do so."

"What are the last Horcruxes, Professor Snape?" she asked.

But he shook his head. "I don't know, and I don't think Potter does, either."

Hermione's head dropped into her hands. "It could all be for nothing," she whispered, the enormity of it hitting her. "If he can't find even one, it's hopeless."

Snape crossed the scant space between them and took her chin in his hand. Tilting her face up to him, he said, "What do we do if we fail, Miss Granger?"

Hermione blinked away the blurriness of her sight. "We wait and fight again."

"Very good. You are doing Potter no good in worrying over things you cannot change..."

"But I can change them! I should be out there, helping him! I should be destroying Horcruxes and helping them! They'll never forgive me..."

She wanted to shake her head at her thoughts...she knew they wouldn't blame her for having been kidnapped. It wasn't her fault. But if they knew she living in relative peace while they were risking their lives... no friend could be *that* forgiving, could they? Wouldn't they always wonder if she'd tried hard enough, fought long enough?

She would. She would always wonder.

"I need to do something," she said insistently, placing her hands firmly on his chest. Her fingers clenched around his robes, and she fought the irrational and more likely dangerous urge to shake him until he gave in. "I need to help! He might not be able to do it without me!"

Snape removed her hands as if they were personally offensive. He took a moment to straighten his garment before he responded. "What upsets you more: that you cannot help, or that you might not be necessary?"

The breath left her in a rush, and Hermione had to stop herself from staggering backward. "I am necessary," she said insistently.

He waved a hand, dismissing her low words. "Potter is proving he can do with without you. Maybe not as quickly, safely, or efficiently, but he can. You may not understand it, but you are more needed here."

Hermione laughed, and it was an ugly sound. "I have done *nothing* of use here, Professor Snape, and you know it! How can you say I'm needed... you could probably set me free and no one would even know!"

"As long as you are here, and believe me when I say the Dark Lord *knows* you are here, Potter's actions will seem fruitless. Your reputation as the brains of the operation, so to speak, precedes you. The Dark Lord is more likely to grow careless and lax if he believes that Potter is without your talents. Even I find myself frankly surprised at his success thus far."

Hermione sat on the edge of her bed. "But that doesn't explain why I'm a prisoner. You could just say you have me, and let me out to help Harry."

"Your situation here does more than increase the Dark Lord's confidence in his victory," Snape said slowly, standing very still and making Hermione look deeply between the lines to uncover what he was really saying.

"It also increases his confidence in *you*... the perfect spy. What are you showing him? How can you hide what's really... been happening between us?"

Snape threw an almost pitying look at her, and she wanted to cringe away from it. "What exactly do you think is... 'happening between us,' Miss Granger?"

Unaccountably nervous, Hermione shrugged. "Something. Even you must realise that. But you're avoiding my question."

The corners of Snape's mouth twitched upward, and Hermione laughed. "You are! You're trying to throw me off course. It must be really bad, then, if even you can't say it. What are you showing the Dark Lord, Professor?"

"Nothing you need to know about. But there must be no more trips to fields, no more niceties. It is becoming more burdensome to throw up old images of your starvation and... *devotion*, when the new ones are so much more... personally appealing."

Hermione lay back on the bed, bending one knee so the dressing robe fell open to expose the length of her leg. With her arms above her head, the top half was pulled taut over her breasts, and it was all to satisfying to watch Snape swallow with difficulty as his gaze swept up and down her body.

"So, what you're saying is," Hermione began, pitching her voice low and inwardly crowing as he took an involuntary step closer to the bed to better hear her. "You're showing the Dark Lord dirty, naughty thoughts of the things you do to me... things you actually *want* to do..." She untied the loose knot on her robe and let the side fall open, exposing herself to his searing gaze. "Wouldn't it be better for... *verisimilitude*... to actually do those things?"

Snape was shaking his head even as he approached the bed. "You know not what you ask," he said hoarsely, bending to trail his fingertips down her thigh.

"Tell me, then."

Taking a seat against the headboard, Snape took a few agonising minutes to look her over. Though she was naked, she'd never felt more *exposed*. It was more than her nudity; her desire, her want, her *wantonness*, were all stripped bare for him, if he'd only deign to look closer.

"What we did in the field... by fabricating feelings of disgust, power, triumph, greed, I can turn what you did into something ugly and sordid. I can make the memory a scene of rape and overpowerment."

"What about what you did to me?"

"I dare not show such a thing, even if I did embellish it with the sense that I did it to ingratiate myself with you in order to learn your secrets. If the Dark Lord suspects that I have a... weakness for you, you will not live to see another sunrise."

Wanting to make a quip about how she hadn't seen such a thing in months, anyway, Hermione held her tongue.

"What else do you show him?"

Snape looked at her, his eyes burning and setting her skin aflame until she had to look away, breath coming fast.

"Your desire... your need. I understand it as a product of your capture, and I suspect he must as well, but it thrills him nonetheless to see you... prostrating yourself for me. It is all more amusing to him because of my lack of appeal." Snape said this all very casually without even a hint of bitterness, not even at the last words.

"You are *not*," Hermione said fiercely, "without appeal."

"Ah," he said, smiling slightly, "but if anyone were to have asked you that a year ago, I'm certain your answer would have been as I suspect. It is of no consequence now, of course. All that matters is that he believe you an unwilling and very confused captive, and I a passionately devoted and twisted servant."

"And are you... passionately devoted?" asked Hermione, a smile threatening to quirk on her lips.

Instead of answering, Snape leaned down to kiss her softly. Maybe he never would admit that his feelings were, if not rival to hers, at least more than he'd led her to believe. She could live without effusive proclamations if it meant that what they had was more than just convenient.

"I asked for you," he said, pulling out of the kiss. He had adopted an almost defensive stance, as if he expected some sort of remonstrance from her.

"What do you mean?" Hermione settled them both so they lay facing one another on the bed. Snape's back was to the cell bars, and when she was close to him like this, it was almost easy to pretend the cell didn't exist at all; that they were nothing more than lovers sharing an afternoon of easy talks and lovemaking.

"When Lestrage brought you in, I told the Dark Lord he was inept and not worthy of a reward, despite having managed to capture you."

Hermione nodded. "Yes, you told me that."

"The Dark Lord asked who I believed *was* worthy of such a boon, and I didn't even hesitate. I told him that had earned a toy. I had never asked for anything, in all the years since... since my last request was summarily ignored."

Hermione wasn't entirely sure what he was referring to, but he wouldn't reveal anything more if she pressed, she knew that much. "Did you have this plan from the start? Did you ask for me to... to save me from the others, who would have...?"

"...Would have done terrible, unbearable things? Who would have raped and tortured you, shared you until you were broken and then discarded you?" Snape shook his head. "I wish I could claim that martyrdom, that foresight, as my own. The truth is when Lestrage threw your unconscious body to the ground before the Dark Lord and the inner circle, I just... wanted you."

Hermione watched with wide eyes as Snape's upper lip curled in disgust, but she was familiar enough with the gesture these days that she knew it was inwardly directed and not as a result of anything she'd said or done.

"Do you expect me to be angry with you for that?" she asked cautiously, trailing fingers down his cheek, watching at his jaw clenched beneath her touch. "Do you want me to hate you for saving me for yourself instead of for me, when the result was the same? I can't hate you, even if I wanted to, and believe me... there are times when I want nothing more."

"You are seeing this situation through rose-tinted glasses. You think I'm a saviour, don't you?"

Hermione avoided that question. She didn't think him a saviour, not really. A saviour would have delivered her into the hands of someone who wouldn't think a cell was the best way to keep her. But he was a protector. "Why did you ask for me?"

"I told you," he snapped impatiently.

"No, not really," Hermione said in calm tones, continuing her touches on his face and neck. While it seemed to irritate him, he did not try to stop or redirect her hand, and from Snape, that was as good as asking her to continue. "What did you want, when you saw me on the ground like that? What did you intend to do with me if the Dark Lord granted your request?"

"What does any man want with a beautiful woman at his disposal?" Snape asked rhetorically, but his rude words and sneer didn't faze her in the least.

"I don't care what other men want with other women. What did *you* want at that moment?"

Snape closed his eyes, but he held his features too stiffly to be called relaxed. "To ascertain that no other man touch you."

"So you wanted to protect me?"

"I wanted to keep you for myself! Won't you stop trying to force me into the mould of hero? I wanted to fuck you. I asked for you because I thought I could coerce you, or perhaps gain your gratitude enough to..." Snape cut himself off abruptly and went to sit up, but Hermione had been waiting for such a move. She immediately straddled him and pressed him back down to the bed, her hands on his shoulders, completely unabashed in her nudity.

"Don't just run away, Professor Snape. This is important. You think you're evil, but it's not evil to think of yourself in trying times. It's not even evil to want to do those things to me. You *didn't* do them, did you? Surely you must see that/want you as well?"

"It's as I keep saying: you are confused."

"Maybe," she said easily, settling herself more comfortably now that she knew he wouldn't try to leave. "But there's nothing confusing about this, is there?" Hermione took his hand and guided it between her thighs. She was wet; she wanted him, and now he knew it, too.

"It doesn't have to be more than what it is," she said, even as her mind kindly reminded her that for Hermione, it already was more. "It can just be... relief. Forgiveness. Peace."

"I don't deserve those things," Snape said, his voice hoarse and low. His fingers belied his words as they caressed her most intimate parts, slowly, as if learning her.

"Everyone can earn forgiveness," she said huskily, leaning over him and pressing a chaste kiss to his cheek. "If they want it," she added. She lifted as little as his fingers sought entrance, moaning as they slid within.

"He expects... horrible things." Snape's eyes were shuttered as they met hers, and she knew what he was talking about, knew what was always between them. How she hated that fucking despot.

"You are a master Occlumens," she reminded him. "And I'm a passable actress. We can feed him. We can win."

Hermione removed his fingers and shimmed back a little, quickly unbuttoning his trouser placket and freeing his thick cock, already glistening with precome. Hermione wanted to taste him, but she wanted him inside her more.

"Tell me you want me," she demanded, working her hand over his shaft, twisting a little to earn a gratifying moan from her lover.

"You shouldn't play these games, little girl," he growled, and Hermione's pussy clenched at the admonition.

"But I have no one else to play with, sir," she said, pouting. Snape's eyes narrowed, but Hermione rose up, poised over his cock. Steadying it with her hand, Hermione rubbed the smooth head over her folds, spreading her slickness over them both. She whimpered with desire...how she wanted to just sink down onto him and fuck them both to orgasm. But she wanted to hear the words, first. If she did this, she wanted to know... *needed* to know it wasn't one-sided.

"Say it," she hissed, rubbing him over her clit and gritting her teeth in restraint.

"I want you," he ground out, hips jerking a little as if to thrust up and impale her. "I want to fuck you, you filthy vixen, you troublesome succubus."

Looking at him, it was impossible not to fall into his eyes. His idea of dirty talk was a little unusual, but it was so perfectly *Snape* that it made her quim throb all the more.

She didn't look away as she slowly lowered herself over him. It had been some time since her romps with Ron, and where Ron was a boy, Snape was very clearly a man. His length and width challenged her as she took him into herself, and her head fell back when she was seated on his hips.

Snape's hands were on her thighs, over her hips and waist, cupping her breasts before moving back down to tease her clit. Hermione's body was nothing but sensation, never knowing where the next touch would alight.

There was something dirty and forbidden about riding a fully dressed man. She felt decadent as she began to move over him. She felt insignificant and yet so utterly important.

He moaned her name...her first name...and it was so shocking it threw her stride, but that didn't matter because he was grabbing her and rolling them both over, a move that, when Ron had tried it, had only pinched her thighs and knocked their heads together. But somehow, with Snape, all these things were elegant and sexual, the motion forcing him so deeply into her that she gasped, her head tilting back and strange noises coming from her throat.

But he seemed to love these noises, for he made her repeat them again and again, thrusting into her and hitting places she hadn't known could be hit.

Bracing his hands on either side of her head, Snape fucked her thoroughly, roughly and without constraint. She'd never been so completely *known* by a man. Her every reaction was premeditated by him, her every noise searched and executed.

"Put your legs around me," he instructed softly, and she did, wrapping her thighs tightly around his waist, and the new angle almost brought tears to her eyes. She couldn't look away from his face, and he hers, it seemed. Hermione, ever the apt pupil, encircled him with her arms as well, and then they were truly connected, in want, in need, in outcome.

Then his mouth was on her neck, behind her ear, marking her. She turned her head, baring her throat to him. They were nothing but animals at this point, and she knew he'd see her submission as trust. She trusted him implicitly, and he needed to know that.

Too quickly, her climax was upon her. She wanted to stave it off, to force it away, but it was beyond that now. She could only let it build, shaping her to his needs, to hers. Snape shifted his weight to one hand, bringing the other to the joint of their bodies. His fingers manipulated her clit for only seconds before she was crying out, freezing and clamping down around him, making her feel every vein and pulse of his cock.

His mouth was on hers, punishing and demanding, and she weakly gave him everything she had left as he used her body to finish. She drank his surprised-sounding cry of ecstasy as he came. He buried his face in her neck as his body continued to empty itself into her. She held him tightly, too tightly for her protesting muscles, but she had no intention of letting him slip away.

"Just perfect, Professor Snape," she whispered, feeling silly for using such a formal honorific but knowing that she didn't want to, and couldn't, say his name when so much was still at stake...and if she said his first name, as she so wanted to, within the walls of her prison, she'd always know that he'd held her captive, he'd kept her. This way, her captor was Professor Snape... and maybe, some day, Severus would let her go.

Hermione wakes up in a cell, held captive by none other than her former professor, Severus Snape. She's scared, alone, and confused about her feelings for her unwilling captor. How can she know what is real and what isn't when he won't tell her anything?

Chapter Thirteen

Day 72

Snape didn't come home yesterday.

How well and truly fucked am I that I'm referring to the cell as not only my home, but his as well? I'm going to need some serious mind healing if I ever when I get out of here.

After what happened the day before last, he's been acting differently toward me. At first I appreciated the extra attention, the almost loving way he's been tending to me. But I almost immediately began to get concerned. If he kept acting like that, he might let his guard down and let Voldemort see something that mustn't be seen. I explained my concern to Snape, and while he didn't admit that I was right, he did stop... caring for me in that way.

But I don't regret that he did it. I just knew that Snape could be a loving man. There might have been times that I'd worried he'd be cold and impossible to reach, even during sex, but there's no worry now.

I've never known a man to be so intense... true, I've not 'known' many men in that way, but I can't imagine they'd all be like this. I certainly never heard about men like this in the girls' dorms, late at night, when we were only bold enough to speak of such things when the lights were out and the curtains mostly drawn.

But none of that mattered when I went the entire day in a state of panic, thinking the Dark Lord had finally annihilated Snape's barriers, sentencing his 'most loyal servant' to fates worth than death, all of which included my own eventual starvation.

The refilling cheese and cracker plate only lasts as long as there is cheese and crackers in the house. When those run out, I will go hungry. The water probably has a longer lifespan...he must keep a lot on hand, if the tap water isn't drinkable. Either way, a week, at the most, and a horrible week, at that.

But then Snape did return, late at night, I think. He brought me food from a restaurant. It was the first such food I'd had in all my days here. It tasted like shit, but I couldn't tell him that. Somehow his watery stew has become the best thing I've ever eaten, and the rich and hearty roast beef and mashed potatoes made my stomach roil. He looked really pleased with himself, so I forced it all down.

He wouldn't say what had kept him away. It seems I've fooled myself into thinking I'm his fucking girlfriend, trying to take care of him... 'Oh, honey, don't go back to that evil, evil man! Stay with me and make brainy, rude little babies, and never leave this cell.'

I could tell, though, that something is bothering him. We didn't make love again last night, though I badly wanted to, if only to show him that no matter what happened, he has my respect, loyalty, devotion... he has me. Everything I am is his, unconditionally.

We both made sure of that.

Snape finally closed *Jane Eyre*, fingers running almost tenderly over the cover.

"I like Jane Austen better," Hermione promptly announced. Though Snape was rather like Rochester, all dark and brooding, and then thinking he wasn't deserving enough of Jane in the end. But she stayed with him despite his flaws and disfigurement...she loved him anyway.

Still, Austen's precise, canny, and cutting humour ingratiated Hermione more toward the regency author.

"Your palate is unrefined," Snape drawled, placing the book gently on the bedside table.

"Oh?" Hermione said, poking him lightly. "That's not what you said half an hour ago."

Hermione had the pleasure of watching Snape blush a little before he turned a chiding frown on her. "One can be eloquent in some matters and wholly crude in others."

"Crude?" Hermione said, affecting an aghast tone. "How dare you, sir? You malign me!"

"You beg to be maligned," he drawled, and suddenly they weren't talking about books anymore.

"Only by you," she whispered against his lips, forgiving his slur on her literary acumen in favour of showing him her other talents.

But after only a few moments of blissful snogging, Snape pulled away, looking anywhere but at her.

"I will not be able to keep this up any longer," he said at length, his face impassive as she shot up and stared at him.

"What are you talking about?" she demanded, her heart jumping.

"It is putting us both at risk, and despite my considerable skills as a spy, I do not have such blind faith in my abilities that I can carry on."

"No, please, sir, no..."

"We are acting selfishly!" he shouted suddenly, and Hermione drew back sharply. "We are not the only ones in danger. We are making choices for people who would not choose to sacrifice themselves so we can *fuck*." His voice had lowered into a snarl, and he fairly spat the last word.

"What happened yesterday?" she asked, defeated.

"More of the same," he said, and his voice wasn't angry any longer, just resigned. "The Dark Lord wants proof of your suffering. I can no longer hide all these memories behind the times I starved you or made you suffer. He wants fresh memories, more... creative suffering."

All Hermione heard was that she was in danger of losing Snape. "Make me suffer then!" she cried recklessly. "I know you can make it look worse than it is. You could... you could beat me. Not really, but make it look like it... and then he won't think you're going soft or anything."

But Snape was shaking his head. "It is not a beating he wants to see, Miss Granger. Would that it were. As you say, it would be easier to enact a beating or even more intricate torture. I would not know how to... *pretend* to do what he wants."

Because Snape wouldn't meet her eyes, she immediately knew what he meant. "He wants you to fuck me," she said flatly.

"Not fuck you."

"Rape me," she amended. She crossed her arms over her body. The idea made her feel dirty and soiled. Having sex with Snape had made her feel anything but...she'd felt wanted, cherished, even. But the Dark Lord didn't want captives to be cherished. He wanted them broken.

"Just so," Snape said, looking at a point on the wall beyond her head.

"If the Dark Lord saw such a thing, would your place as a spy be secured?"

Snape nodded detachedly. "And my place in the Order destroyed once it got out, and it would. The Dark Lord would make it a point to tell even the lowliest of minions that I had... *violated* you."

"But you could still send them tips anonymously," she suggested.

"Yes, I could. I do that even now, when the information I gather means that I was a part of something that... that even Dumbledore wouldn't have forgiven me for."

"Are you worried about what people will think once the war is over?"

He shook his head. "I have never worried about the thoughts of others. That is not to say I want an extended vacation in Azkaban thanks to their misconceptions..."

"I won't let them!" she cried hotly. "I'll show them memories, I'll..."

Snorting, Snape touched her cheek gently in what very much resembled a gesture of annoyed affection. "I will always be hunted. Once the Dark Lord is defeated, his loyal followers...and there are many...will despise me for being involved in his downfall. I will not be able to live a normal life for quite some time."

"But the Death Eaters will be rounded up and prosecuted!"

"And some will not serve time. Some will make deals; some will have proof of their coercion or force. Nearly all but the most fervent supporters have a back-up plan if their side turns out to be the wrong one."

"We will never be free," she whispered, horrified.

"You will be free," Snape corrected. "You will go back to your friends and your family, ascertain that everyone is all right, and you will look back on your time here as a horrible but necessary experience. Do not waste our time making empty promises and false declarations. Potter will almost certainly not see fit to use the evidence he has regarding my spy status..."

"What?" she interrupted. "Harry has proof?"

"He is in possession of it, yes, but it will not reveal itself to him until the fall of the Dark Lord. It was Dumbledore's plan for me."

Hermione suddenly felt very small. Knowing she was nothing more than part of a plan made her feel insignificant and scared, but knowing that it was *Snape's* plan also made her feel safe. His plans were good; they were sound, and he wasn't going to let anything bad happen to her.

"Even if you are not the world's favourite wizard after the war, I want you to know, you'll always be important to me. I'll come visit you, wherever you are, and annoy you. I might even bring Harry to get in the full allotment of irritation."

For some reason, this made Snape wrap his arms around her very tightly, though he said nothing.

"Professor Snape," she began a time later, "I think we could make it look like rape."

"I cannot do that to you; I cannot even conceive of it."

Hermione pressed a lingering kiss to the corner of his mouth. "But we are warriors, remember? We do what we have to do. You make it look like it hurts, and I'll make it look like it's real. And then after... we can make love, and you can take away those ugly memories of what we just did and replace them with something beautiful. That way the Dark Lord will have something to look at and laugh at, and I'll... I'll be able to remember that you didn't mean it, that you did it for the cause. And you'll be able to remember that, as well."

"The Dark Lord will not be easily fooled," Snape warned, and Hermione felt a shiver through her heart. She could only begin to guess what he meant by that, but she had the feeling that whatever Snape did, she would be hard pressed to remember that it was a ruse.

"Do what you have to do," she said with a braveness that was almost all affectation.

Snape closed his eyes. Hermione held her breath; a part of her was hoping he'd say no, he'd promise to find another way. But there didn't seem to be another way, and when she thought of Snape suffering under Voldemort's wrath because of her, it made her sick. And even more than that, if Voldemort did manage to uncover the truth, her own life was certainly forfeit, along with Snape's. A little acting would save both their lives.

"I can't do this now," Snape said tiredly. He seemed to be looking anywhere but at her, and Hermione almost wanted to call him a coward for that. "I will leave, and when I come back... when I come back, we will begin. Immediately. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Hermione in a small but strong voice. "I understand."

He nodded brusquely and left without looking back. With the cell locked and Hermione alone, she couldn't help but begin to doubt the plan, such as it was.

When Snape returned, Hermione was going to be raped.

And he wouldn't come in with soothing words and reassurances, Hermione knew *Immediately*, he'd said. She'd just seen the last of Snape as she knew him. It was very possible that neither would be able to move past what was about to happen, even though it *needed* to happen. But she'd meant what she'd told him before; after, he would have to make love to her and remind her that she wasn't in this alone, that he cared, that he didn't want to hurt her like that.

Hermione's thoughts were ugly and crowding in the time between Snape's departure and his return.

She'd stripped the bed of linens and herself of clothing. She thought it would add a realism to the memory. Snape could force different emotions to attach to real memories, but he couldn't really change what he saw, and if Voldemort saw comfortable bedclothes and full Muggle garb for her, he'd surely have questions...though he must have noticed it before. But this was the memory that was going to make the difference, she knew. After this, Snape would no longer be punished, and she wouldn't have to tear her hair out every time she heard him Disapparate from the house.

It had to be more than *look* real; it had to *be* real.

And Hermione was terrified.

She sat, shivering and naked, on the bed and waited for Snape. She didn't feel ready for this. Letting her eyes fall closed, Hermione imagined herself on a bed in her own home, a place of her own that didn't exist but one day would. She was wearing a black negligee and waiting for her husband to return from work. Maybe it was their anniversary.

She heard the heavy wooden door open, and she tried to imagine how excited she'd feel, all dressed up for her husband. He'd be so excited to see her.

Snape wasn't making a sound.

She heard the clink of the key in the lock and the cell door swung open noisily. A shudder ran through her and she opened her eyes. She owed it to him to at least try her hardest to make this look real. She owed it to them both to not drift away amidst a sea of false promises.

Her eyes widened when they fell on Snape. It was like spinning through time back to when she'd been a student. His glare was so sharp and full of spite, his sneer so vicious that it made her cringe. She brought her knees to her chest, unwilling to expose herself to his gaze. He laughed coldly, and Hermione clenched her eyes closed, hoping that when she opened them, *her* Snape would be back.

He wasn't.

Snape was unbuttoning his robes slowly, never looking away from her. She could do nothing but wait, helpless and willing but somehow *not*. She could fight this, but she couldn't stop it.

Not bothering to get fully undressed, Snape approached the bed in black slacks and white shirtsleeves, unbuttoned and pushed up his forearms, baring the Dark Mark. She exhaled sharply at the sight, half in disgust, half in awe that he was playing the part so well.

"Well, Mudblood?" he spat, grabbing her hair and forcing her onto her back. She tried to stay curled up, but he twisted her until she lay flat against the bed.

"Please, don't do this," she said, and it seemed even he didn't know whether or not she was playing the part. *She* almost didn't know anymore.

He didn't pause, but there was a hesitation in his eyes, a look of self-loathing that made Hermione want to tuck his hair behind his ear and kiss his fallow cheek. *Everything will be all right*, she said with her eyes, though her heart didn't quite believe her.

Snape slapped at the inside of her thigh, and she parted them softly, not wanting to spread herself to his gaze. Everything Snape saw, Voldemort would see. She looked away.

"Wider!" he snapped, smacking her again, harder. The point of impact flared and she hissed, but obeyed.

"Such a pretty little whore," he cooed, black eyes empty and hard.

"Don't," she whimpered. She couldn't bear to hear him talk like that. He made it seem so real.

Settling himself between her thighs, Snape took his wand from behind his back and cast an unfamiliar spell. She gasped as her arms were tightly bound, first together and then to the headboard. There wasn't enough give in the ropes to even rock from side to side without straining her shoulders.

Snape was looking at her body and stroking his freed cock with one hand. He studiously avoided her face, and Hermione felt ill. He was using her body to get erect; she was nothing more than an image to him. She began to breathe shallowly...breathing deeply kept her aware on a visceral level, and that made her feel desperate. Shallow breathing made her feel lighter, more in control.

Breathing was *hers*; it wasn't something he could take from her.

She heard him spit and a wave of nausea rolled through her, filling her mouth with saliva. She moaned when his wet fingers touched her; the cool spit against her body was disgusting and unwanted. She tried to jerk away, and he only laughed.

"Stop... stop, stop, stop," she chanted, meaning the laughter. The actions she could handle, the actions were part of the plan. The laughter and the words would be unforgivable, and she *needed* to be able to forgive this; she'd never survive, otherwise.

Then he was pushing into her, and she'd never felt such anger. *How dare* he? And how could she have offered herself up like this? She'd always had such self-respect.

But a part of her brain reminded her that she was *strong* for doing this, not weak. She was doing the best she could with the scant resources she had. But somehow, her body stretching around a previously welcomed cock, she only felt dirty and stupid.

Snape was sitting upright, not leaning over her, and for that she was grateful. Being so close to him, seeing the flickering reflection of the torches in his eyes as he fucked her would be something she'd never be able to see past. Hauling her body into his lap and making her arms lock as he stretched her, Snape used her body, pulling her onto him in a parody of consent.

And that was what this was, after all. A parody of non-consent. It was strange to not want this, and yet allow it all the same.

Her pussy was thankfully providing slickness, just as the spit had begun to wear thin. She felt absolutely no enjoyment from his actions; they weren't meant to entice her at all. She'd thought that maybe Voldemort would get a kick out of seeing her come against her will, but she was thankful that Snape didn't seem to agree. She wouldn't have been able to feel pleasure even if Snape were trying to elicit it, and if she *had*, she'd always compare it to their first time, and she'd never be able to be with him again without thinking of what they'd been forced to do.

As he thrust into her, filling and emptying her, Hermione realised this was as much of a rape for him as it was for her. He didn't want to do this any more than she did, only he *did* have to come.

When she tossed her head to the side at a particularly brutal thrust, she felt a coolness against her cheeks as though they were wet. She sobbed brokenly. She hadn't wanted to cry, to make this harder on him, on herself. She'd thought she could remain detached and leave this horrible memory in a part of herself that she'd never have to revisit.

Snape was no longer grinning or laughing. He was barely making any noise. His face was a mask of concentration, but she could see, when she braved a look, that he was frustrated.

He wasn't going to be able to come.

Despite her attempts to keep her breath shallow, she inhaled reflexively at that thought. Her natural lubrication was already fading, and she could feel him abrading her inner walls.

Hermione began to clench her pussy whenever he bottomed out inside her. He would groan and thrust again, harder, faster, and she would continue to grip him, tightening around him. She knew right away it was helping; his thrusts began to accelerate, his hands digging in bruisingly around her hips and arse.

And finally, with a sound more like pain than pleasure, Snape roared in completion and filled her, his come immediately soothing her dryness.

"Looks like we found a use for Mudbloods, after all," he spat, withdrawing from her quickly and leaving the bed. The cell door slammed shut and he locked it with the key and the spell before stalking out of the room.

Hermione immediately curled onto her side. She felt like she was going to throw up. Her body ached and her heart was tired. A dry sob wracked her body, but she quelled it, trying not to think that this had been her idea.

She hated Voldemort for needing such ugly proof. She hated herself for being so angry. She hated Snape for saying those words.

A few moments later when the wooden door to the room slowly opened, Hermione didn't move. It was too soon for him to be back here.

Her eyes were dry when she watched him open the cell door. He didn't hesitate before getting back onto the bed. Snape tried to pull her into his arms, but she froze.

"I apologise," he said quietly, tracing her cheek with his thumb very lightly. "I don't think that."

Hermione knew that. But the image of *her* Snape had been shattered, and it hurt to lose that piece of stability. Now she felt as though she had nothing left, nothing real. Snape was illusory; there was no *real* him.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

She knew he was trying to help, but he had no idea how to go about comforting her; in truth, she didn't even know what she needed at the moment.

She shook her head, not looking at him.

Snape did pull her into his arms then, and she let him. It was obvious that he needed it as much as she did. They were in this together.

"I know it seems like empty platitudes," he said slowly, caressing her trembling back and he spoke close to her ear. "But you very well could have saved my life. No one has ever..." He trailed off, his hand gripping her side lightly. "Your sacrifices are not unappreciated."

Just please don't let them be for nothing she thought desperately, allowing herself to find comfort in his embrace.

"Kiss me?" she said quietly, clenching her eyes closed. She tried not to feel so dirty, his come slicking her thighs and fingerprint bruises forming on her hips. She wanted him to cover her graffiti with a fresh coat of paint. Make her new again.

Snape tilted her face up to meet his, and his lips were soft and searching. Even through her closed eyes she could sense his intensity. He needed a fresh coat of paint just as badly as she did.

His tongue tentatively touched her lips, seeking entrance. Hermione obliged, opening her mouth to him and moaning when their tongues slid together. It was already worlds apart from what they'd just done.

"Come here," he said, standing and holding his arm out to her. Hermione shakily crawled off the bed and folded herself into his arms. With a few spells, Hermione was fresh and clean, free of the stains from their act. Another spell had the bed made and the pillows back in order. This was familiar, this was right.

She let Snape draw her back onto the bed, his hands moving soothingly, exploring her body.

The bed sheets were cool and crisp against her heated skin, and she squirmed against the softness beneath her. Snape took her breast in his hand and softly cupped it; his gentleness so at odds with his harshness only minutes before that Hermione almost believed it was just a horrible dream. Or that it had been another man...not her Severus.

Snape took her nipple into his mouth, making her groan as he teased it, flicking it with his tongue and sucking. Her other nipple was not left out, as his hand pinched and tweaked. Being under his control in this way was infinitely better than before, and beneath his tender touch, all thought of the staged rape made way for new, sensual thoughts involving only two of them, and all the consent she was capable of giving.

Snape kissed a trail down her body, beginning at the sensitive underside of her breast, nipping the skin before travelling farther. He kissed each rib on his way down, licking her navel and biting her hipbone before finally spreading her folds with his fingers and placing the most teasing of kisses against her clit.

"Oh, please," she whispered, drawing her knees up to intimately expose herself to him. This was right. He wouldn't hurt her or take advantage. Snape wanted her.

Her body's reaction to Snape was night and day to how she'd felt earlier; no longer trapped in that liminal space of unwilling arousal and self-disgust, Hermione wanted Snape with her entire being.

"Professor, please, I want you inside me," she said hoarsely, touching his hair lightly with her fingers.

Snape slid back up beside her to kiss her, and she began to unbutton his robes. He would be naked for this, she vowed. It would be nothing like before.

With his help, Hermione removed Snape's clothing, though it took longer than she would have liked. His body was a sight to behold, all scars and white and covered in history. She traced an ovular scar on his pectoral, curious about the story behind it.

Her fingers moved down his body with purpose and threaded through the thick, dark hair that surrounded his cock. Hermione bit her lower lip as she took his member in her hand, stroking lightly with not-quite-certain movements. Snape groaned a little in his throat before he wrapped his hand around hers, showing her what he liked...long, slow, and tight. Learning quickly, Hermione kissed him as she stroked, taking a less passive position as he turned onto his back and she leaned over him. Everywhere his skin touched her own, she burned.

"I want you to ride me," he said, so quietly she might have missed if she hadn't been kissing his neck, her ear close to his mouth.

His words sent a surge through her, and though she felt a little nervousness...*too soon*...she wanted to show both of them that she *wanted* this, that this was something she could control.

Straddling him, Hermione raised herself up and steadied his cock with one hand, the other bracing her weight against his chest. His eyes were flashing, his lip raised in what might have been a sneer in any other circumstance, and she watched him carefully as she lowered herself.

Hermione was able to accommodate Snape much more comfortably now that she was wet and ready for him. She sank slowly, relishing every inch of his throbbing cock until she was seated against his body.

Snape's mouth had dropped open, and his hands were running up and down her thighs. Hermione leaned over him, letting him hold her weight as she began to move slowly, rolling her hips and coming only a few inches off of him before sinking back down blissfully.

Long fingers found their way into her hair, and he gripped it tightly, guiding her mouth to his for a long and amorous kiss, as slow and tortuous as the way she was moving on him.

Snape's other hand gripped her arse cheek and moved her harder, faster, as his kiss began to react similarly. Even though she was on top, Snape was completely in control. She let herself relax and move with his motions. He began thrusting into her from below, pushing her body onto his and pressing her against him, her nipples rubbing against his chest hair, making her shiver and clench.

Shifting a little, a jolt went through Hermione when the base of Snape's cock rubbed against her clit with every thrust. Pushing herself harder and harder onto him, Hermione felt her orgasm gather like a perfect storm. Crying out as she came, Hermione watched as Snape's face tightened; his hands became almost punishing. He came soundlessly, pulling her hips hard onto his cock.

Once they both stopped panting, Snape brought Hermione's face down for a slow, sweet kiss. She tasted salt on his mouth and realised she was crying. Brushing her errant tears impatiently, she kissed him again.

"Will you be able to hide this?" she asked quietly.

"I have always been a greedy, possessive man. I've no intention of sharing you, even in memory." He pulled the coverlet over them and settled them both comfortably on their sides.

She wondered if he would stay the night...if it was night.

"What happens after all of this, Professor Snape?"

Placing a tender kiss on her temple, Snape said, "I think you should call me Severus."

Hermione didn't offer for him to use her first name. It was easier to imagine that Miss Granger and Professor Snape were two different people, just two trapped characters in a play. Hermione and Severus... maybe they had a chance, or maybe not. But when she left here, she'd leave Miss Granger behind. She'd leave Professor Snape as well. And it would be up to him whether he became Severus after.

"What happens after?" she repeated.

"I imagine once Potter has defeated the Dark Lord, you'll find yourself back in the arms of many a redhead, celebrating the defeat of the darkest wizard of our time."

Hermione asked the question she'd been dreading for weeks. "Will you Oblivate me?"

Snape sighed and pulled back to look at her. His face was impassive, but the twitch in his jaw and the slight flaring on his nostrils meant that he didn't want to say whatever he was about to.

"I don't see that I have a choice. You can't expect Potter...or the Wizengamot, for that matter...to understand, especially if they learn about our more intimate connection. It would also be very dangerous for me if it got out that I protected you instead of handing you over...you can't expect Potter to get rid of every single Death Eater. It is in my best interest to make sure you don't remember. You may not thank me, but you'll know it is for the best."

"Not for me," she insisted stubbornly, glaring at him.

"When you are free, you will likely be horrified to learn that what happened between us happened because you were in a delicate mental state, of which I took advantage. You needn't live your life with those memories."

"I *want* them!" she insisted, pressing her lips against his for emphasis. "Please, sir."

Snape didn't answer, but she could tell she had done nothing to convince him. A wave of sadness hit her as she realised everything they'd done, everything she'd learned about herself would be gone. She'd be the same girl she'd been before her capture. She didn't want to be that girl anymore.

"Don't," she whispered against his chest, wrapping her arms around him and holding him tightly to her. Snape reciprocated the embrace just as fervently, and though she desperately wanted to, she didn't cry as she lay in his arms, feeling as though it was good-bye.

14/17

Chapter 14 of 17

Hermione wakes up in a cell, held captive by none other than her former professor, Severus Snape. She's scared, alone, and confused about her feelings for her unwilling captor. How can she know what is real and what isn't when he won't tell her anything?

Chapter Fourteen

Day 73

My teeth always hurt just before a storm.

When I was younger, I used to think I could use that little idiosyncrasy to predict the future in other ways, as well. But my predictions never came true, only with storms.

My teeth hurt today, but I have no idea if it's storming or not. Snape's not even here to tell me, but I can hear him stomping around upstairs. He's usually not so loud, but I think something's bothering him. I yelled at him about an hour ago to come downstairs and take his frustrations out on me instead of the poor, abused linoleum. He stopped his heavy steps for about ten minutes, but they slowly built back up to a headache-inducing crescendo, and now I can only wait it out and hope he comes down for a visit soon.

Drinking tea only makes my teeth even more sore, that horrible shock-sting that you get when you inevitably take up the dare to chew on tinfoil, or when you dip a French fry into your milkshake and the extremes, while delicious, are agony to your mouth.

If it storms outside and no one is there to see it, is it really a storm?

If Hermione is downstairs and no one knows, does she exist?

Merlin, he's even louder now. Sounds like there's three of

Hermione dropped the quill as she heard shouting. Snape wasn't alone. Hermione's breath came short as she stood quietly and moved as close to the door as she could, pressed against the bars, straining to hear.

"It's absolutely preposterous!" came Snape's level voice.

Mumble followed, and then Hermione clearly heard Snape's disbelieving snort, a shout, then one deafening crack of Disapparition, the loudness signalling that it had been a Side-Along, and that one member...at least...had not been prepared. Wherever Snape was, Hermione knew that being Splinched was the least of his worries.

This was it. Her lifeline was gone, and if Voldemort saw through their ruse of sexual abuse, Hermione had only a few days to live.

I don't know whether to save my food or eat as much as I can before it goes bad. On the one hand, I want to make sure I have enough to last. On the other, nothing would be more horrifying than to cast Repleo just to have a plate full of mouldy food come back.

I'm so tired.

I'm so scared.

When Hermione woke up the next day, she drank as much as possible to stave off hunger and ate sparingly. It would be better to eat mouldy cheese and stale crackers than starve. The longer she stayed alive, the better her chances were. Snape could come back, after all. Or someone else might come.

Anything could happen, really.

I dreamt last night that he was tortured. I imagine it's happened to him many times over the course of his espionage. I didn't want to be morbid, but I can't help but wonder how long I would last until I broke and crumbled under the pain. I might have a high tolerance, but everyone has limits.

Needles. Fire. Suffocation.

My mind is going horrible places. I want to sleep but I've never felt so vulnerable.

On the third day without Snape, Hermione began to doubt his return. She had to escape. Harry wasn't coming, though not for lack of trying, she was sure. He and Ron and Ginny and everyone must be sick with worry over her by now. She only hoped that they weren't putting themselves in danger looking for her.

At least the milk hadn't gone bad yet. Hermione drank cup after cup of tea. It helped fool her stomach, at least.

The bars were solid.

The mirror couldn't even be shattered, not that she'd know what to do with the shards if she'd been able to. Death by self-exsanguination seemed just as, if not more painful than starvation. She owed it to everyone to hold out until the end.

The stone walls yielded nothing except scrapes, bruises and numb fingertips from exploring every inch.

I can't believe he let himself get caught. Some master fucking spy. Didn't he realise this might happen? Didn't he, in all his grand scheming, stop to think for a second that I might get trapped in here? He didn't give me a way out!

Snape killed me over two months ago; it's just taken me this long to die.

On the fourth day, Hermione destroyed the room.

Not the brightest move, seeing as how she almost fainted from exertion. But at least she felt better mentally.

Not that there was much to destroy. Her loose-leaf papers were torn and shredded, her quills snapped, even her teacup had fallen victim to her rage, and she regretted nothing more than that. She tried tapping the shards and catching tea with her hands, but it didn't work. The spell was broken.

The desk hadn't gone down easily, but she'd launched drawers at it from atop the bed, and eventually the wood splintered enough for her break it in half by tipping it hard onto the stone floor again and again.

Hermione was dooming the dresser to a similar fate, throwing chunks of desk and drawer at it, when she noticed something peculiar.

Watching carefully, Hermione threw a piece of desk a certain way and watched it fall inside the open face of the bureau. But it didn't just fall inside.

It disappeared.

Hermione blinked. She stood quickly and knelt before the gaping front of the dresser. She picked up a pair of knickers and tossed them inside. They, too, vanished from sight.

Where on Earth were they going?

But then Hermione realised it didn't matter where they were going; they were going *somewhere*. And that meant... there was a way out.

Fingertips tingling with excitement, Hermione picked up a mostly intact drawer and began to break apart the dividers between the drawers so there was enough space for her to crawl through.

She spared one last look for her destroyed room. Her eyes landed on her battered copy of *Ulane Eyre*. It was one of Snape's favourites. He had tried to take it back, but even though she didn't much like the heroine or the 'hero,' she'd refused to return it, saying she wanted to read it again until she understood why Snape liked it so much. In truth, she had no plans to read it again, but it smelled of him. Fingers trembling, Hermione tucked the book into the back of her jeans, fell to her knees, and entered the dresser.

Once inside, she didn't disappear like the clothing had. She had no idea what she was doing wrong. There wasn't much room in the dresser, nowhere for her to go. In frustration, Hermione fell against the back of the dresser, and had to scramble when she seemed to physically shift, like the room around her had moved, but she stayed in the same place. Hermione glanced behind her and gasped. Her cell was gone, replaced with a wall that looked just like the back of the dresser. Turning, Hermione cried out in surprise. What had once been the back of the dresser was now the front... only it didn't lead into her own room. She bolted out of the piece of furniture.

She was standing in front of the bureau in an entirely different room. *Snape's* room. She remembered it from her search for the potions when Snape had been hurt. It was

just as Spartan as she remembered, looking unlive*d* in...painfully so.

The fucking dresser.

Hermione wanted to scream in frustration and at the sheer ease of the whole thing. The dresser was like the Vanishing Cabinets Draco had used to let the Death Eaters infiltrate the school. Only Snape had used it for *laundry*. If she hadn't pulled her drawers out on her side, she was sure they'd be sitting properly in their cubbies, filled with her gifted clothing. That was how they always came out clean...Snape washed them for her!

Hermione wanted to cry. She wanted to sneak into Snape's bed and curl up in his sheets. She'd fall asleep there and when she would awaken, he'd be pushing the hair from her face and tenderly pressing his lips against her forehead.

But that wasn't how things worked in Hermione's world anymore.

And the most important thing right now was to save Severus Snape.

Hermione wasted about ten minutes looking for her wand, but there was no sign of it, and Snape was much too clever to leave it anywhere she'd be able to uncover it. She knew she had no hope of finding it.

Walking around Snape's house made her feel both triumphant and scared. If Snape came back, he might be furious. Then again, he might think her rather clever for having figured out the dressers. Though one look at her demolished room would detract from 'clever' and add to 'crazy.'

In the kitchen, Hermione found the only things that could be used as weapons. She tucked a small but sharp paring knife into her sock and grabbed a larger steak knife and put it in her sweater pocket. There were no shoes for her to wear, but no matter.

The lack of natural light told Hermione it was night time, and thank Merlin for that, because she could catch the Knight Bus and get to Grimmauld Place. The Order would be able to help her. And once she found Harry and Ron, they could go help Snape.

She was about to make for the door when a tapping on the window caught her attention. An owl stood on the sill, glaring impatiently, if an owl could do such a thing.

Hermione thought taking the letter could either be a very good thing or a very bad thing. As it was, she needed any help she could get, especially as she looked around and saw no front door. Snape had warned her there wouldn't be one, but she hadn't quite believed him. Maybe she'd hoped that he'd begun to trust her enough to at least leave her that much.

No matter how she tried, she couldn't get the window to open more than a few inches. Squirming her fingers out, she managed to take hold of the missive, though the bird could not have looked more disgusted with her. It didn't bother to wait for a treat, undoubtedly thinking her uncouth to even offer.

Hermione quickly unrolled the small scroll.

Severus,

My mother had me leave the Manor today. I think what we feared is about to come to pass.

Please be careful.

Best,

DM.

Hermione had no doubt that the formal yet stilted handwriting belonged to Draco Malfoy. What had they feared? If Narcissa Malfoy had bid Draco leave, then that meant that something might have put him in danger, for Narcissa loved her son.

A battle of some sort? At Malfoy Manor?

Pocketing the letter, Hermione immediately picked up a rickety kitchen chair and launched it at the window, expecting it to shatter. It didn't, and she had to jump back to avoid the ricocheting chair.

Fuck.

There was *no* way out.

Hermione wondered if she began a fire if it would burn a hole in the wall or ceiling before it devoured her, as well.

An ancient fire extinguisher by the equally ancient stove made her laugh. Oh, yes, that might protect her for all of thirty seconds. What a quaint little Muggle relic.

Wait.

Muggle.

For all its protections and charms, this was a *Muggle* house! Breathing deeply, Hermione tried to remember... that bathroom!

Running now, she entered the bathroom that doubled as a laundry room. She'd found it while looking for Snape's potions when he'd been sick.

With strength borne of sheer determination and pure rage at her former Potions professor, Hermione tore the dryer away from the wall.

Unfortunately, the vent was much too small for her to fit through.

Hermione ran back to the living room and laid eyes on the fireplace. There was no Floo powder, though of course Snape would have closed it to anyone but himself in the first place, but maybe...

Crawling into the hearth, she was devastated to see the chimney was much too narrow for her to shimmy up.

Hermione's heart was straining with the hope and loss of her attempted escape. There was no way out.

Before she even realised what she was doing, she found herself downstairs, standing outside the door to the room with her cell in it. The sense of safety she'd had when Snape had been in the house was gone, but so was the feeling of vulnerability through which she'd suffered ever since he'd been taken away. If someone came, she would at least have a fighting chance. Probably not against a wizard intent on killing her, but a slim chance was better than none at all.

Wandering farther into the cellar, Hermione saw a huge iron furnace, the type that would have been used to heat the entire house before baseboard heaters had been put in with the advent of electricity. There was tinder and matches, more than enough to start a fire.

Hermione trailed her finger over the matches and picked one up, flicking her ragged thumbnail against the head and watched, transfixed, as it burst and dwindled. It might

not be a way out, but it could give her a chance.

With the matches in hand, Hermione turned to leave. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw that a piece of the wall had been boarded up. Curious, she tried to investigate, but the boards were hammered in deeply.

But it might be a window. Though she'd thought she was too far underground for a window, but the boarded up bit of wall made no sense otherwise.

Running back up the stairs, Hermione searched the closets, finally finding the one thing she needed. Maybe the house would work with her, after all.

With the crowbar, she pried the boards off the wall, uncovering a small metal chute.

For coal.

Snape's house had a fucking coal chute.

Hermione hadn't realised she was crying until she could no longer see where to pry off the next board. She wiped her face on her shirt and finished uncovering the hole.

Looking through, she could see it was at least two metres up and only just wide enough for her to squirm through. It was black as pitch and slippery with coal dust.

When the last bar was gone, Hermione clambered inside the hole. Her hands slid and there was nothing for her to grab onto, but she braced herself with her back and elbows and just *heaved* herself straight up, scrambling like an animal to get to the top.

"Please, for the love of Snape, don't let him have closed off the door on the outside," she whispered.

Hermione reached the top of the chute and pushed the door open. It wouldn't budge. Growling in frustration, Hermione began to punch the metal door...losing her temper had worked with the dresser, after all.

And apparently it was working for the coal chute door. It creaked and protested, but it gave. It had been rusted shut but not boarded up.

Squirming the rest of the way out, Hermione was finally *free*. *Free*. She'd done it. She'd escaped!

She fell onto the grass by the side of the house, rolling in it to clear off the worst of the coal dust and grime. Her hands were black, but she scrubbed them on the ground until they were only grey.

Severus Snape, she thought viciously, standing at the curb and throwing out her hand for the Knight Bus, thinking with all her might of how she needed it right now *you had better need rescuing, because I'm not fucking around anymore*.

15/17

Chapter 15 of 17

Hermione wakes up in a cell, held captive by none other than her former professor, Severus Snape. She's scared, alone, and confused about her feelings for her unwilling captor. How can she know what is real and what isn't when he won't tell her anything?

Day 75

Hermione tossed the parchment across the room. Fucking ridiculous. She'd never keep another journal for as long as she lived.

"Everything all right in there?" came Molly Weasley's voice from outside her closed and locked door. Her borrowed wand wasn't exactly in tune with her, but it covered the locking spell adequately.

"Fine!" she lied, hating how foreign and *wrong* everyone's voices were.

She'd been welcomed with shock and amazement. They had thought she was dead. Harry and Ron hadn't given up hope, of course. But Hermione had seen a sad glimmer in the twins' eyes when Arthur had said that, making Hermione think that maybe they have given up, just a little.

No matter. She was safe and she planned on helping.

Only no one wanted to let her. And that pissed Hermione off to no end, because these people had *no* idea what she'd gone through, and they had no right to stop her from doing whatever it took to help.

An owl had left soon after her arrival with news of Hermione's return. She'd insisted that the letter also say how Snape was on their side, after all. A long hesitation in which Hermione had stared down Remus Lupin so viciously he must have thought her mad, before he nodded curtly and added her addendum.

They'd tried to get the story out of her, but she'd only said that Snape was on the side of the light, and it was their duty to protect him.

They didn't seem to want to leave her alone, but she didn't care. Let them try to follow her around. She had nothing to hide.

She had nothing except anger and determination, and she planned on using both.

*

"Merlin's balls."

"It's true..."

Hermione turned over on her bed, the light from the window hurting her eyes. Had Snape put in an enchanted window? That was thoughtful of him.

"Hermione!" someone shouted, and all of a sudden her bed was much too small.

Squinting, Hermione tried to see why Snape was being so... energetic.

"Give me a minute to wake up, Professor," Hermione mumbled.

"Mione, it's us! Ron and Harry!"

Gods.

Hermione inhaled sharply, her eyes flying open. *Ron. And Harry.* Gods, they were beautiful.

Ron launched himself at her and hugged the life from her. Harry, laughing, pulled him away, only to replace him immediately.

"You're okay," Harry whispered, his hand rubbing her arms as if to make sure she wasn't a spectre.

"I've missed you both... so much," Hermione said, her voice cracking. Then she was crying. And then she *wasobbing*. Her friends immediately gathered her into their arms, and while it felt good and safe, it just wasn't right.

"It's okay, you're okay," Harry was saying, sniffing suspiciously.

Ron kept randomly laughing and then cutting himself off, making Hermione and Harry smile as well.

"Now what?" she asked softly.

"Now," Harry said with determination, "we fight."

Hermione almost asked what would happen if they didn't succeed, but Snape's words rang in her ears as if he were whispering them to her.

Then we wait... and fight again.

*

Hermione wanted to close her eyes against the carnage around her. Seeing her friends and colleagues fall was almost more than she could bear. But Ron was fighting, and Harry was fighting, and somewhere, she just knew Snape was fighting.

So she would stay and be brave because she knew it was in her to do so.

"Hermione!" Harry shouted, pausing to fire two Stunners. "The Shrieking Shack! Go, *now!*"

But Hermione could see Voldemort, and Harry couldn't do this alone... What was in the Shack? Was Harry just trying to protect her and keep her out of the fray?

She ran to his side, casting a hex to immobilise one of his opponents, and the Death Eater who'd been in mid-lunge fell with a satisfying thud.

"He's there, Hermione. Neville killed Nagini, but Snape was bitten. You'd better be right about him!"

"Harry!" she cried, torn. She didn't want to leave him alone.

Another curse had the other Death Eater on his knees, and Harry grabbed Hermione and hugged her with the certainty of a good-bye. "It's going to be okay. I swear it," he said fiercely, kissing her forehead and pushing her back. "Go!"

Hermione gripped his hand and tried to convey all her strength and love and gratitude. He squeezed back and turned away to face Voldemort for the final time.

And Hermione ran.

She darted past the Whomping Willow, not even bothering to prod the knot to stop its vicious pummelling. She barely made it through the swinging branches. Crouched over, she ran and ran the length of the underground passage, only one thought on her mind.

Save him.

Finally, the trap door was before her, and she threw it open with all her strength.

When she finally found Snape, it was almost too much.

The blood was everywhere. The floor was slick with it and the smell of it hung heavy in her nostrils, making her think of the piggy bank she'd had as a child, all coppery metallic and cheap.

A weak, gurgling choke reached her ears, and Hermione no longer cared about the blood. Falling to her knees beside Snape, Hermione searched for a wound. There was so much blood that it seemed to take forever, but she finally found a bite mark on Snape's neck.

Hermione tore off her outer robe and pressed it firmly against the wound, staunching the flow. Snape made a protesting noise, and his eyes flickered open.

"...ger?" he said hoarsely, frowning.

"I'm here. You're going to be okay. Do you... I mean, you must have an antivenin on you!"

"You're dead," he said, but Hermione ignored him, searching his pockets instead.

She knew Snape rarely labelled his personal potions, except the ones he'd numbered. In his inner breast pocket, Hermione found a potion with a large number one on it.

She thought that was probably a safe bet.

Popping the cork, Hermione tilted Snape's head and placed the potion at his lips.

"No," he whispered, turning to the side. The action made the blood flow more freely from his wound, and Hermione clamped down on her robes to slow it again. "I killed you."

Hermione was starting to get exasperated. "I'm alive, you stubborn bastard! I'm right here and alive, and you need to drink this. Drink it and I promise everything will be okay."

A great roar from outside reached her ears, and Hermione hoped, oh, gods, she hoped it was her side's roar of victory.

Snape's eyes fluttered and closed, and Hermione resisted the urge to slap the obstinate man. He wouldn't respond to her gentle shaking or even her yelling his name. She pried his lips open and just poured the potion into his mouth, closing her hand over it and rubbing his throat with her fingers. Snape swallowed automatically a few times, and when Hermione checked to make sure the potion was all gone, she noticed that the blood had stopped spilling rapidly from him.

She gingerly pulled away her robes, and tears of relief blurred her vision when she saw the wounds on his neck shrink and close completely.

The sounds of fighting had stopped completely, but maybe that was because Hermione only had ears for the steady in and out of Snape's still-laboured breathing.

A swipe of her wand had the blood cleaned up. Hermione wished she knew which potion bottle was a blood replenishing potion, but there were a few in his robes that met the consistency, and she wasn't willing to risk poisoning him in an attempt to save him.

Snape would be okay.

Hermione shifted until she was lying on her side next to Snape. She arranged him so one of his arms served as a pillow, and then she draped one of her own across his chest.

If Harry hadn't won, the two of them would be dead within the hour, she was sure.

But Hermione just had a feeling that Harry had defeated Voldemort, and everything was going to be okay. Just like Harry had said.

Tired and aching, Hermione set wards on the door to alert her if anyone tried to come in and finally let her eyes fall closed.

*

The staff at St. Mungo's had been easily convinced about Snape's true loyalties. Hermione had the feeling that Harry would have an easy time of convincing anyone of anything these days.

Upon saving the world, a little clout was inevitable.

However, convincing Harry had been a different feat altogether. Her word had been enough to get him to the hospital, but not enough to convince him to let Hermione stay with Snape.

Unperturbed, Hermione let Harry view some of her memories. She was loath to leave Snape alone, even for the hour or so they'd be gone, but Harry personally spoke to the guard on duty, giving Hermione his assurances that everything would be fine.

She tended to believe Harry whenever he said that.

With the Headmaster's Pensieve, Hermione pulled thread after thread of memory from her mind. Snape giving her the *Repleo* spell. Snape reading with her. Snape taking her to the Prince grounds. Snape telling her about Harry's progress.

Many memories she kept to herself, but not because she regretted them or was embarrassed, but because Harry wouldn't understand. Hell, she barely understood. Now that she was free, Snape was safe, and the war won, there was no reason to fight anymore.

"Hermione," Harry said when he finally came out of the Pensieve. "Did he hurt you?"

Wincing, Hermione knew she couldn't lie to her friend. "He was *aspy*, Harry. What do you think Voldemort would have done if he'd found out Snape was leaving a Muggle-born in perfect peace in his basement?"

Harry nodded slowly, but he was eyeing her in a way that reminded her of... herself.

"I believe you that Snape was on our side. But *don't* believe that his actions came from the good of his heart."

Unfortunately for her, Harry was right. Snape had told her he'd asked for her as a boon from Voldemort.

"It doesn't matter," Hermione said slowly, realising for the first time that her words were true. "It's not like I'm going to marry him, Harry."

Saying it aloud was like a fog clearing. Hermione had fancied herself in love, but Snape didn't even *like* her. He'd tolerated her because he'd had to and because he'd wanted her, but that didn't mean anything. And even only a week out of her cell and she was already beginning to question her feelings. Could anything be real with so much on the line? Had her love been a coping strategy to deal with her fear and anger?

"But you care for him... like that," Harry said, watching her as she reinserted her memories.

"I do. I did, and I do now. Maybe I always will. It was... it was like there was nothing else in the world. And for more than two months, there really wasn't. He was all I had."

"But now you have us," Harry prompted softly, taking her hand.

"I'm okay, Harry. I just need some time to myself."

Nodding, Harry squeezed her hand before releasing it. She knew that if anyone understood about needing time, it was Harry.

"I'm thinking about going away for a while," she said carefully, the words tasting strange in her mouth, almost like she wanted to take them back. "I have to go to Australia to fix my parents' memories. I was thinking I'd stay for a while. Sort of... get to know myself again."

"Will you visit?" he asked softly.

Hermione's throat swelled. She didn't really want to leave. But everything was so strange and open here. She felt like she would just float away any moment. She needed to be somewhere smaller, somewhere easier.

"You can visit me," she promised. "I'll find a flat in Australia's wizarding quarter. I've heard they're very friendly. I'll owl you every day, promise." Hermione laughed, knowing it was true.

Maybe writing letters would take away her need to write in her journal.

"But I'm not going to leave until Professor Snape wakes up," she said seriously. She looked at Harry as if daring him to deny her.

Harry held up his hands and chuckled softly. "I believe that he was on our side all along, Hermione. I've no problem with you staying with him. But don't dismiss the guard, okay? He's there for Snape's protection."

"Thank you, Harry," she whispered, layers of meaning in the simple word. Thank you for saving the world. Thank you for not hating me because I didn't help. Thank you for knowing me.

"You're welcome," he said simply, and she knew he meant just as much as she did.

*

"No change," said the mediwizard, cancelling the observational spell he'd put on Snape.

Hermione nodded bleakly. She settled back into her chair and opened her book once more. Snape's copy of *Jane Eyre*. She was beginning to see, now that she was on her third time reading it in the past two weeks, just why Snape liked it so much. The passion and sheer anger behind the words, the heartbreak, confusion, misunderstanding, loss... Hermione knew it all intimately.

Resting her head on the bed beside Snape's still body, Hermione was lulled to sleep by the deep breathing of her former lover.

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Hermione felt like a coward, running. But everything between them had been a lie. How could she be expected to stay with him when she didn't even really know who he was? And who was he? A Death Eater, her saviour, a hero?

Or just Severus Snape, formed by circumstances, driven by promises to dead people?

In her dream, Hermione was tired. She'd been running for days, it seemed. The field was cool and her body was so hot. This seemed like a perfect place to rest her head.

Silly Jane. She had run from the man who needed her, who loved her. He'd made mistakes, horrible ones. He'd taken Jane for granted and he'd hurt her desperately. But did any of that matter?

Her life wouldn't be like Jane's. She'd save Snape from himself, from her. She'd save herself, too. Everything would be okay, just... no more running.

*

Hermione awoke when the bed shifted beneath her head. Jerking her head up, she saw Snape's eyelids flutter and open. His entire body stiffened before gradually relaxing, and Hermione watched him take in his surroundings. Finally, his eyes fell on her, and she offered a shaky smile.

"You're okay," she said, and she wasn't sure if she was asking him or telling him. But he nodded, and that worked with either scenario.

"The war's over." Hermione straightened in her chair, wincing as her back popped and her neck didn't quite want to turn to the right.

"Potter defeated the Dark Lord?"

Hermione nodded. It still felt unreal to say aloud, as if admitting it would cause their new world to falter and crumble.

Snape sighed, a bone-deep noise that sounded like absolution. "How did you get out?" Snape asked, his eyes closed again.

"The dressers," she said.

Snape's eyes snapped back open. He stared at her for a long minute as if looking into her eyes could reveal exactly how she'd done it. And Merlin knew her mind was open enough at the moment for him to do exactly that.

"And then I crawled up the coal chute," she added, reflexively wiping her hands on her pants as if to rid herself of imaginary coal.

"Coal chute?"

Hermione realised how scratchy and coarse Snape's voice was. "You probably shouldn't talk. I don't know how deep the fangs got you. They might have scraped your larynx or something."

Snape rolled his eyes. "The coal chute?" he repeated.

"In the basement. It was boarded up," she explained.

"Ah," Snape said, shaking his head a little. "I'd completely forgotten that was there. Rather remiss of me, actually."

"Well," Hermione snapped, "thank you for not thinking of *everything* for once, because if you had, I'd be dead! And you would, too."

Snape eyed her warily. "You were the one to save me?"

Hermione's heart felt unaccountably heavy. For some reason, she wanted him to *know* that despite everything he'd done she'd still wanted him alive. He was still worth something to her.

"In the Shrieking Shack," she said. "You were bleeding to death. I gave you the potion labelled *One*. The bleeding stopped. Then I..." Hermione cut herself off. Snape didn't need to know she'd slept beside his barely breathing body, hoping they'd be saved, but also hoping that if they weren't, they'd at least be able to stay together.

And Snape didn't even know it'd been *her*.

"And then the war was over," she finished instead, smoothing her hands over her jeans and carefully avoiding his eyes. "You could have saved yourself." It was a statement.

"Yes," answered Snape simply, as if there was nothing more to it.

Hermione felt angry again. That was as good as suicide. Selfish prick.

But her eyes were becoming scratchy at the thought that she'd been *that* close to staying with Harry as she probably should have, to help him win the war. No, Snape had taken her away from the fighting *again*.

But that wasn't really his fault, she knew.

"I'm glad you're going to be okay," she said, her voice no more than a whisper.

"And you," Snape said. His eyes were closed again.

When his breathing evened out, Hermione felt more comfortable in watching him. In repose, he looked no younger, no more innocent. She doubted even as child he'd looked anything but mildly sinister.

He didn't respond when her fingers trailed over the back of his hand, but she was glad for that, because it meant he wasn't awake to hear her say good-bye.

16/17

Chapter 16 of 17

Hermione wakes up in a cell, held captive by none other than her former professor, Severus Snape. She's scared, alone, and confused about her feelings for her unwilling captor. How can she know what is real and what isn't when he won't tell her anything?

Day 100

His trial is today.

Harry said I didn't need to be there, that the memories and testimony I'd sent were more than enough, not to mention the evidence the Headmaster had prepared.

The Headmaster might have been manipulative and tricky, but he would never let one of his own fall victim to the sort of fate that might have awaited Snape, otherwise.

The trial is a formality, Harry said. And I believe him. He's never lied to me about Snape. Not when I asked how he was and Harry would answer truthfully: Not well. Ill-looking. Angry as ever.

Harry doesn't sugar-coat things, and he doesn't give false hope.

But still, I worry that Snape will end up in Azkaban. That would be a fate worse than death. The reason it took so long for Snape's trial to come about was because he was lower on the list of priorities, again, thanks to Harry, who'd said he wasn't a threat. Which means that all the Death Eaters who'd been captured have already been tried and sentenced.

Which means that Azkaban is teeming with people who'd love nothing more than to see Severus Snape, betrayer of Voldemort, at their mercy.

I'd thought that time apart would make things easier. I was sure that my feelings would have dwindled and died once I was no longer in the immediacy of needing Snape so much.

Now that I want him more than ever, I don't know what to think.

I'm happy here. My parents seem to enjoy having me around...they've decided to stay in Australia, and I'm happy that they're happy. I'd been so scared that they would be angry once they'd learned what I'd done. They do want me to stay away from the wizarding world...they'd like for me to live like a Muggle. I've thought about it.

But I'm a witch. And I'll never run from myself.

Which is why I'm going to Snape's trial.

The journey back to Grimmauld Place where Harry lived was easier than Hermione had anticipated. The good thing about wizard travel was that once you made up your mind, getting there was but a moment's work. There was no waiting for endless hours on airplanes, hiring taxis, building up nerve.

You want to be there, and then you simply were there.

"Hermione, I didn't know you were coming," Harry said as he entered the room, having heard the Floo sound. Their Floos were connected, though Hermione hadn't actually been back since before the end of the war.

"I didn't either," she said, "until just now. I'm coming to the trial."

Harry looked startled. "Are you sure? You don't have to. It's really just..."

"A formality," Hermione finished. She straightened the cuffs of her robes and took a deep breath. "I know, you've said. But I... I think I need to see him."

"You still care for him, don't you?" Harry asked softly. He led her to his bedroom where he finished getting dressed. Harry looked very sharp in dress robes, though his hair could use a good... but Hermione knew there was no point in trying.

"I don't know what I feel anymore. I thought what I wanted was false, my desire born of capture and desperation. If that were true, why do I still want him?"

Harry shrugged as if to say, 'I can't fathom why you wanted him in the first place.' He tossed a cufflink into the drawer and began digging. "Maybe you just... want him," Harry suggested, frowning at the messy drawer. He gave up and just Summoned a matching pair of cufflinks, letting Hermione fix them for him.

"How do I know it's what I really want, though?" she asked, sitting heavily on the edge of the bed.

Harry sat beside her and put his hand over hers. "Hermione. Feelings are *always* real. They can be falsely influenced or they can be formed under duress, but they're *yours*. Do you want him?"

Hermione's heart felt laid bare. "Yes," she said in a small voice.

Inhaling deeply as if steeling himself, Harry asked, "Do you love him?"

"Oh, gods," Hermione said, groaning. "I do. I love him."

"Well," Harry said cheerily, "you've done dumber things."

Hermione thought that was probably supposed to help, but the problem was that she wasn't sure she had.

*

Kingsley Shacklebolt's voice rang clear and strong over the courtroom. The cadence made her heart pound as he began to wrap up the proceedings.

Snape's trial had been one of the easiest, so said Kingsley, and one of the most clear-cut. Hermione's own memories had been played in front of the court like a movie reel, revealing to the Wizengamot and the limited members of the audience and press that Severus Snape done his duty to Albus Dumbledore and that his imprisonment of Hermione had been for her own safety. Despite Snape's derisive snort when Harry had said the latter, the court was obviously sympathetic to him.

Everyone loves a hero.

With his back to Hermione, Snape barely moved an inch throughout the entire trial. Not even when Walden Macnair was brought in as a witness to testify that when Snape had been taken from his home, he'd been beaten and tortured for days until Voldemort had set Nagini on him during the final battle. That was proof enough that Snape was not on the side of the dark.

Macnair's description of the abuses was enough to make Hermione's stomach clench, and Kingsley had eventually told the gleefully reminiscent Death Eater that his co-operation would be taken into consideration. Macnair glared and spat at Snape, but a spell kept Snape free from his disgust. Macnair was taken away in chains...Hermione hoped his testimony wouldn't shorten his sentence at all. The things he'd done to Snape...

No wonder it had taken Snape so long to convalesce after Nagini's bite... it wasn't just the venom he was recovering from.

"It is the decision of the Wizengamot that Severus Snape be cleared of all charges against him. Mr. Snape is to pay the traditional reparation for having taken the Dark Mark, a sum of five hundred Galleons. The Wizengamot will also require five hundred hours of service to the wizarding community for crimes, though necessary, against fellow human beings."

The reaction to Snape's sentence was mixed. Hermione was appalled at the money...she knew Snape likely didn't have much, judging by the state of his home. But the community service seemed like a good idea, even if just to get Snape out of his home...Kingsley probably feared the man would become a recluse, otherwise. The punishment would appease those out for blood, though for those who hated Snape it wouldn't ever be enough.

Snape's council led him out of the courtroom. His eyes stayed straight ahead, though he gave a curt nod to Harry, who was sitting in the first row. Hermione sat toward the back, knowing she'd need to slip out right after he left in order to catch up with him. As she'd suspected he would, Snape was moving quickly and with the intention of getting out of the Ministry as soon as possible.

Another trial was scheduled for directly after Snape's, so most people stayed seated in order to watch more blood spill. The Death Eater trials had been going on since the third day after the war, and they would likely last for another month. Then with appeals and remands, no one could really say when the fallout would end.

But none of that mattered now. Hermione quickly ran after Snape, who was walking with a determinedly average speed toward the lift. His council entered first, followed by Snape, who turned and looked directly at Hermione as she lunged forward and stuck her hand in the door.

Snape's council glared a little behind her horn-rimmed glasses, but obligingly pressed the Door Open button until Hermione could gracefully sneak in.

They were the only three in the lift.

"Hi," Hermione said, wincing. Not very clever, but neither congratulations nor commiseration seemed appropriate.

He nodded and looked pointedly at the closed doors.

"I'm glad that... you're okay."

Snape's face turned very slowly toward her, and he looked so incredulous that she had to repeat her words back to herself to make sure she'd said what she thought she had.

"I mean," she said, trying to make up for whatever blunder she'd made, "service for the community's not so bad. The reparation is unfortunate, but that's an across-the-board law, so..."

"It's a travesty of justice, is what it is!" Snape's council announced bitterly, her hand twitching as if she'd relish the chance to blast the law itself into space. "Mr. Snape is a hero, without whose efforts the war might not have even been won! Is this how we thank our heroes?" she demanded of Hermione, whose eyes widened.

"No, I..."

"No, it isn't! Unbelievable."

Hermione listened, a little stunned, as Snape's council continued on in that vein for the rest of the ride. Hermione kept trying to catch Snape's eye, but he studiously stared forward as if nothing were more interesting than the floor buttons.

When the doors opened, Snape left quickly, striding across the Atrium with a speed that was completely contradictory to his prior attempt at nonchalance, leaving his counsel behind easily.

"Professor Snape!" Hermione called, half-jogging to keep up.

"Miss Granger, I thank you for whatever concern you feel compelled to show, but I assure you, it is unnecessary and..." He paused to look at her. "...Unwanted."

"What will you do now?" she asked.

"Give my savings to the Ministry of Magic, work off my debt to the community, and then enjoy the only freedom I've ever known."

"How?" Hermione put her hand on his arm, hoping to slow him down. His long legs made chasing him frustrating, and her high-heeled shoes weren't helping matters. "How will you enjoy it?"

Snape stopped once they were beyond the Ministry's doors. He looked up to the sky as if he'd never seen it before.

"It's like that day we spent on the Prince grounds," she said softly, looking upward.

"What?"

"The sky. Doesn't it look the same?"

"I don't remember."

Hermione wanted to think that he didn't remember because he'd been too busy looking at her, but she'd never really been the lucky type. There were two options: he didn't remember, and that meant that he didn't care; or he *did* remember but didn't want to, and that meant... that he didn't care.

"I think it does," she said, bravely ignoring his dismissive attitude. "The same grey. Like the world was black and white and we were the only colour." Hermione stepped closer and quietly added, "And when I was on my back and you were between my thighs, I looked up and thought, 'I am the only woman in the world who will know you like this.' Was I right?"

Snape looked away. His face was hard angles and severity, but his eyes were just a little sad. "Why did you leave?"

Hermione started. She hadn't even realised he'd known she wasn't around. "I had to... figure some things out. I was confused. I still am, I think."

He shook his head. "Then you should go back."

"Maybe," she admitted softly, casting her eyes to the heavens again. She didn't care if grey wasn't a very nice colour...it was her favourite. "But I think I'd rather sort it out here. With you."

Snape was still for so long Hermione almost poked him to check for *Petrificus Totalus*, but then he snorted.

"But I'm not confused," he said harshly, not quite meeting her eyes.

"You weren't the one behind lock and key," she reminded him, feeling a little defensive.

And then he looked at her, and as clearly as if he'd said the words himself, she knew he was thinking, *Wasn't I?'*

"What do you want from me?" he eventually asked, sighing heavily and wincing a little.

"I want to see if the things we felt can turn into something larger. I want to give us a chance."

"Miss Granger," Snape began in a tired voice that rang with finality. "There is no chance."

Too quickly for her to even protest his words, Snape Disapparated.

She wanted to follow. She knew where he lived. It would be easy enough. And if she couldn't get in, in all likelihood the coal chute was still open.

But she didn't follow. She stood rooted to the spot, staring at the space he'd taken up and wondering when something so complicated suddenly seemed so damned easy.

Eventually Harry came out of the Ministry, and without even asking, he took her back to Grimmauld Place and plied her with tea and placebo platitudes.

It didn't make her feel any better.

*

Rapping her knuckles against the front door, Hermione wondered if maybe she was wearing a groove into the wood. If not now, then certainly soon.

Of course she knew Snape was inside. There was nowhere else for him to be. She'd been unable to find out where he was volunteering for his service, thought not for lack of trying. And Harry hadn't been any help, either, telling her she was obsessed.

Nonetheless, she knew he wasn't out because she'd heard him, even seen his shadow pass under the door, tantalizingly close and yet so completely out of reach. She'd called to him when she'd seen the break in the light that signified his proximity, but other than a sharp intake of breath that very well might have been her imagination, there was no response.

"Professor Snape, please!" she called, lips almost pressed against the door as if to tempt him.

Nothing.

It was day seventeen. Again.

*

On the twentieth day that Hermione Granger went to try to convince Severus Snape that they were meant to be together, she was sure he wasn't there, just as on those other days she'd been sure he was.

She sat on the stoop of the house that was once her cage, waiting for her former captor to return home and claim her.

There was so much wrong with this situation, Hermione didn't even know where to begin.

But she'd had enough time to think about it. More than enough, truly. And she wasn't coming to any new conclusions. She wasn't the type to believe in fate or destiny, but there was a certain appeal to the idea. Somewhere, she and Snape had been brought together. He had saved her from a horrible fate with Rabastan Lestrange, who now called Azkaban home again. It had to *mean* something. Things like that didn't just happen, not in her world.

That Snape would ignore her like this hurt, naturally. But she was convinced that he would come around. Eventually. She always known him to be a stubborn man, but she could be just as bull-headed when it came down to it, and she knew she could outwait him.

She had no other option.

A muttered curse drew her attention to the street. Seeing Snape approach, she stood rapidly. She'd never thought she'd see him outside his house; surely it would be easier and safer to just Apparate inside. But perhaps he'd warded against all Apparition...after being kidnapped from his own home and tortured for days, it wouldn't surprise her in the least.

"You are becoming a grave nuisance," Snape snapped, withdrawing a key from his pocket and holding it at his side as he would a wand.

"I just want to talk," she said, trying to keep her voice from falling into the pleading it tended to do when there was a door between them.

"I've nothing to say, and neither do you."

Hermione quickly moved to block the door. They stood on the stoop and regarded one another, Hermione imploringly, Snape warily.

"Why are you so scared?" she asked quietly, firming her stance in case he tried to push her away.

"You," he spat, then broke off and swallowed. "You have no idea what you're asking of me."

"Do you think it's any easier for me?" she asked incredulously. "If anything, I'm in the worse position here. How strange and uncomfortable do you think it is for me to have fallen in love with the man I should, by all rights, despise...both on principle and thanks to a long and aggravated history?"

"Then by all means, Miss Granger, go with your instincts on this, and hate me."

Snape pushed Hermione aside and she let him, pretending to stumble as he opened the door not with the key, which seemed to be for appearance's sake only, but with a softly muttered spell and a wave of his wand.

Not needing to recover from her 'misstep,' Hermione threw herself through the barely opened door. She pressed herself against the wall in the foyer, wincing as he followed her through furiously and slammed the door.

With one hand gripping the front of her jumper and the other holding his wand tightly, Snape pressed his face up against hers and hissed, "You take liberties with my patience, but I've had enough. Leave here and do not ever return."

"Professor Snape," she said quietly in a voice fit to sooth any less dangerous beast, dragons included. "Answer one question for me. Just one and I'll leave you alone."

Pushing her away as if burnt, Snape wearily rubbed his face with one hand and walked into the living room. Hermione realised she'd never seen the foyer before; it must have been Disillusioned when she'd been trying to escape. She followed him quietly, keeping a wise distance.

And then Snape turned calculating eyes on her, and she couldn't help but feel nervous.

"In return, you will answer one for me. Regardless, though, of your answer and mine, you *will* leave. Is that understood?"

She nodded and moved closer, but he didn't sit, and she would stand as long as he did. "Who goes first?"

Snape looked considering. "I will ask first."

"All right. Ask me whatever you want. But you didn't need to make a deal. I'd have answered whatever you asked. I really do care about you."

Waving her comment away like a pesky insect, Snape crossed his arms over his chest and regarded her carefully. His gaze seemed to travel over her skin directly, and she pressed her hands against her thighs as if to protect herself from, or perhaps encourage, the touch.

"Do you believe," he began slowly, his eyes holding hers, "that if you didn't *love* me now, your actions during your imprisonment would make you wanton and weak?"

Having prepared herself for nearly anything he might have asked...and having intended to answer honestly, even if he'd wanted to know how to make her go away forever...Hermione was surprised when her heart stuttered and her blood felt frozen.

"Yes," she whispered hoarsely before she could stop herself. Yes. "But that's not why..." she continued hastily, desperate to explain herself.

But Snape help up one hand imperiously, and she slammed her lips shut, her eyes begging him to understand, to let her speak.

"You need not feel compelled to explicate, Miss Granger. I know well enough that your actions were caused by a delicate mental state brought on by the natural desire for survival. The point was to see what *you* thought. Now we both know. You may ask your question."

Sinking into the sofa, not caring that Snape was still standing tall and abrupt like a lord who never deigned to lower himself in front of a vassal, Hermione tried to calm her breathing. *It doesn't mean you don't love him*, she told herself. She'd already been through this. But hearing it said so... callously... made her wish she hadn't offered the stupid bargain.

Sometimes not knowing was better.

"Can you please just sit?" she asked, unaccountably tired.

To her surprise, Snape did. Taking a seat beside her on the sofa, he watched her carefully as she pretended not to notice.

"Things are not always as... simple as we'd like them to be," he said in a quiet voice, one she didn't have much experience with. She'd gotten to know his various intonations and fluctuations of emotion and tone over her time with him, but this almost grudging kindness was foreign.

"Sometimes they are, though." Hermione turned to face him. He looked much better than he had the last time she'd been able to truly study him, when he'd been recuperating from Nagini's bite. His skin still held that slightly yellow tinge, his nose was intimidating the rest of his features, but his eyes had changed. He looked... exhausted.

He didn't turn away from her scrutiny. He seemed content to let her take her fill; probably because he knew that she would be leaving for good the moment this conversation came to a close.

So Hermione did the one thing she could think of to keep the *conversation* going.

She kissed him.

And he froze, his entire body stiffening, but he didn't wrench his mouth away and toss her out on her arse. She couldn't help but feel that was encouraging.

His lips were just as she remembered, thin and forbidding but still soft and warm. No matter what masks he wore, Snape would always be human. He couldn't hide that, not from her.

Hermione held the kiss as long as she dared, which was quite long for having a partner who refused to reciprocate. She slowly, millimetres at a time, pulled away from the kiss. But before she was even far enough to lick her lips, Snape had the back of her neck and was pulling her forward, pressing his mouth against hers like he was starving and she the only available nourishment.

The kiss spiralled beyond their control; Hermione thought about slowing it, but she wasn't willing to take the chance that he'd break it and she'd once more be without him. All that mattered was that right now, he was taking what she offered.

"Nothing changes," Snape whispered against her lips. "You'll still leave."

Hermione thought about that as she crawled into Snape's lap, straddling him and continuing the kiss. She couldn't be sure if he was lamenting the fact that she'd leave, or reminding her that she had to. But she didn't care any longer.

If he was offering a moment, she would take it.

Snape's mouth moved to her neck, pressing small kisses and licks along the tendon. Hermione's head fell back to offer him as much of herself as possible, and he took it. His hands snuck beneath her jumper, and the coolness of his fingers against her fiery skin made her jolt a little. She pressed his hands against her waist, wanting to warm them, wanting him to be heated by her, fuelled by her.

"Take off your shirt," he said against her throat, helping her by pulling her hem up. Hermione did as he asked and tossed it aside, quickly following with her bra.

She moaned as his mouth found her nipple, his hand caressing her other breast. Her fingers tangled in his hair as his mouth worked magic on her body. Each tug with his lips, every nip with his teeth drew a line to her pussy and made her body sing for him.

"Gods, Professor," she hissed at a particularly sharp bite. He responded by gripping her hair and kissing her mouth again, his hand guiding her head to make the kiss everything he wanted, which was everything she wanted, too.

Hermione's fingers scrabbled for his belt, unbuckling it quickly and parting his trouser placket. He groaned as her fingers delved inside, stroking his erection lightly through his pants. When she freed his cock and balls, both hands moved to cup and caress, to sooth and stroke. How could his fingers be so cold when his cock was so very hot?

Snape's hands were everywhere. He couldn't seem to decide where to rest them. They travelled from her waist to her back, around her shoulders and down her arms, up her belly and over her breasts, resting on her neck and tangling in her hair.

Finally, he unbuttoned her jeans. Then he hoarsely demanded, "Take these off." His eyes were wild and black, his expression desperate.

Standing, Hermione slowly pushed her jeans and knickers to the ground, exulting in the way his eyes followed her every moment as he sat back on the sofa and lightly stroked his cock. She swore she could come just from his eyes on her and his hands on himself.

"Come here," he said, and Hermione realised he'd been ordering and she'd been obeying without question, and for some reason, that was all right. He wasn't going to hurt her...he never had. He was protecting her, even like this.

With her knees on the outside of his thighs, Hermione settled back into his lap. She held his face with one hand as she kissed him, wishing there was a way to own him through her lips on his.

"Tell me you want me," she whispered against his lips, her words barely a breath, but she knew he heard her.

"Yes," he hissed, raising his hips to indicate his need. But it wasn't enough.

"Say it." If he could make demands, so could she.

With a heavy breath and closed eyes, Snape said, "I want you."

Bracing his cock with her hand, Hermione slowly sank down onto it, and the feeling of fullness was so much more than physical. She wished... but it didn't matter anymore.

Snape's eyes clenched shut and his head dropped against the back of the sofa as she seated herself. His hands were moving almost unconsciously up and down her back.

When Hermione began to move, it was like steps to a dance long forgotten, danced on marble instead of sand: the movement was easier, tangible...

And then his hands were on her hips and he was moving her, pulling her body down onto him again and again. She kept up easily, her body demanding more touch, harder, deeper, and she complied. Her mouth moved over his throat, brushing against the raised scar tissue, cleansing and absolving him.

As much as he seemed determined to, Hermione did not let Snape take over. If there would be no more, they both needed to know that she wanted it, that she took what she needed. She wasn't here because there was a lock on the door. She wasn't here for her safety or his cover. She was here because she *wanted* to be. And he would never forget that.

Hermione slipped a finger into her folds to bring herself to completion. Almost immediately the swell of sensation commenced. Snape watched her, groaning. She felt his cock twitch within her, proving his appreciation.

But then his hand pushed hers away, and he took over, his thumb teasing her as she rocked over his cock. "More," she begged. "Harder." And he would, but only for a moment before he'd begin to slow again, tormenting her.

Snape's hips began to thrust up, and she cried out as she was brutally filled.

He was no longer teasing her, and her body was climbing higher and higher. She was reminded of all the times she'd touched herself and thought of him or touched herself in front of him, and she knew that he wanted her: more than her body, more than in a cage.

She bit him as she came, right over the scarred fang marks on his neck. Her mark was the one that mattered, her mark was the one intended. He'd look into the mirror and not see the nearness of death but the nearness of *life*. And then maybe he'd admit to himself what she'd known for ages. That he loved her.

Snape came, roaring, a moment later. Her name. *Her name*. Hermione gasped as he pulsed and throbbed within her, her name on his lips. She'd never heard such a sound. But even as he said it, Hermione heard his words from before: *nothing changes*.

But everything had.

He held on to her so tightly that Hermione was afraid she'd shatter. She'd never felt so fragile and yet so safe.

The aftermath was cool and awkward, with Snape buttoning himself back up and handing Hermione her jeans with a disinterested air, but there was no ignoring, no overlooking *her name on his lips*. No more *Miss Granger*.

Just like she'd hoped, once free, she became *Hermione*. And there was power in her name.

She dressed efficiently, watching him for the telltale signs of withdrawal, which were, sadly, all there. He stood stiffly by the hearth as he watched her with distant eyes.

She sighed.

"It doesn't have to be like this, you know," she said, striving for casualness but somehow landing on pleading.

"It is what it is," he responded, voice sharp with self-denial.

She couldn't sit while he was standing; it was different now. "I wanted this."

Snape only nodded. He didn't look away from her, but neither did he give her anything through his eyes. They were shuttered and blank, eerily so. She had the feeling he'd spend the rest of his life like that: closed-up and completely unfeeling. Could she change his mind? Had she a right to try?

"Your question, Miss Granger," Snape reminded her. The use of her last name was a slap across her heated cheek. *Nothing changes*.

Hermione smiled bitterly. "Do you think that if you pretend you don't love me, your behaviour while I was in the cell makes you strong and selfish?"

Snape glared.

"But I already know the answer," she continued, shaking her head. Her smile was sad, now. "You think ignoring your feelings means you only did what you had to do, but we both know it was more. You love me, and that doesn't make you weak. It makes you brave." Hermione crossed the distance between them and touched her hand to his cheek, softly, a memory. "And we both know you are no coward."

She pressed her lips against his, not demanding, not even searching. Just reminding. *I'll always be here*.

But his eyes were still hard and his mouth uninviting. "Nothing cha..."

"You're wrong," she interrupted softly, backing away. "Everything is different now."

Hermione turned. The front door was visible to her now, of course. She wished it wasn't.

She left. He let her.

Author's Note: Only the epilogue remains. I can't wait to hear what everyone thought of this chapter--it happens to be my favourite. Thank you all for reading and for the lovely reviews.

17/17 Epilogue

Chapter 17 of 17

Hermione wakes up in a cell, held captive by none other than her former professor, Severus Snape. She's scared, alone, and confused about her feelings for her unwilling captor. How can she know what is real and what isn't when he won't tell her anything?

"Fuck!" Hermione shouted, her fingernail tearing an impressive hole in her hose, right at the shin where it wouldn't be covered by her skirt. A knock on the door had startled her into giving an overzealous tug, though it was true that her nails were perhaps not as neatly tended as they should have been for this endeavour.

She quickly donned her skirt and ripped off the nylons, tossing them in the bin with a glare. Torture devices.

She quickly jogged down the hallway, a follow-up knock making known the impatience of her visitor.

Yanking the door open, Hermione almost did a double take, but she'd learned from the very best how to school her features, and six months apart from said teacher hadn't been enough to dampen her quick reaction time.

"Ronald," she said cordially, stepping back to allow entrance. "It's so good to see you!"

And it was. It was rare that Ron came to her flat...it could only be accessed by Muggle means, though she still used magic on the inside. She just didn't relish being too easy to get to; her freedom was a cherished thing.

The neighbourhood wasn't the best, either, but at least it was mostly comprised of families. It had been her home for nearly four months now. After Snape's trial and her subsequent... well, stalking of him, she'd decided that Australia just wasn't right for her. She needed to be home. There was much to be done...reconstruction, peacekeeping. She wanted to be a part of that.

"You, too. You look good, Hermione. Really good," Ron said, a wide smile on his face. He enveloped her in a huge hug, and she didn't pull away, though she didn't really encourage the embrace.

Ron had been a little confused by her feelings for Snape. Hermione probably should have told her himself instead of letting Harry say whatever he had, but she'd been too scared. Not that she cared what he thought...she just didn't want to hurt him.

His confusion had led him to a very commonplace male reaction: when a girl wants someone else, a man immediately begins to think he wants this girl. Typical 'wanting what you can't have' syndrome, and Hermione had tried, both gently and firmly, to turn him down, but Ron was obstinate at the best of times. Again, it had taken Harry to really explain the crux of things...that Hermione's heart just wasn't up for grabs. Someone else still held it, whether he wanted it or not.

And he very obviously didn't.

"Tea?" she said, straightening her blouse after Ron's enthusiastic greeting.

"Please." Ron settled comfortably at her small kitchen table, easily watching her prepare the tea.

"You don't have training today?" she asked, sitting down with the tea service and pouring some for both, earning a massive smile when she remembered the way Ron liked his.

"Nope, have today and tomorrow off." Ron took a sip and sighed. "Ginny said you've the next few days off as well," he continued, his voice a forced nonchalance that Hermione recognised from their school days.

"Yes, well, I was planning on using my time to catch up on work." Hermione had spearheaded a small offshoot department in the Ministry, which was called Care and Protection of Displaced Persons. It had begun as a charity to help those whose homes had been damaged or destroyed during the raids leading up to the battle at Hogwarts, but it now operated mainly as a way to help those affected by their Death Eater parents or relatives being sent to Azkaban. The need was ongoing as the Death Eaters continued to be captured. The help included things like financial support, tuition, food, shelter, clothing, relocation, and sometimes funded a search for other relatives and travel costs to get to them.

As Head of the department, she rarely had time off, but Ginny had insisted when Hermione had offered up her own apartment to shelter a fourteen-year-old orphan. Hermione knew she became too attached, especially to the ones who were not much younger than herself.

Helping them helped her.

"Well, that doesn't sound like much fun," Ron was saying, idly playing with the rim of his saucer.

"Maybe not, but it's satisfying." She bit her lip to hold off asking Ron why he'd come. She could always tell the difference between him coming just to talk or hang out or because he didn't have any food in his flat with Harry and when he actually had something on his mind. It always took excruciatingly long for him to come out and say whatever was on his mind.

"Hmm," he said, nodding as if he understood completely. Maybe he did; he was training to be an Auror after all, and that would be a very satisfying job. Though Hermione suspected it'd be more so if she could have convinced Harry and Ron to take their NEWTs as she had. But she'd learned to let that go. Mostly.

"Ron, is there something you want to talk about?" she pressed.

"Okay, yeah. Yeah, there is. Harry said not to say anything, but I think, as your friend, I really should."

Hermione sighed. "And what is it you think you need to say?" As if she didn't already know.

"It's about Snape," Ron said predictably, and Hermione had to fight herself not to correct him; *Professor Snape*, she'd say irritably. Only he wasn't anymore. Last she'd heard, he ran an apothecary out of his home, though he didn't have many customers.

Not that she'd been checking up, of course.

"And?"

"And I think you need to get over him. He's obviously moved on from whatever happened." He raised a hand as she opened her mouth. "I know you don't like to talk about what happened when he... had you, but you shouldn't keep it all inside, either. You should talk to someone. See someone new, even."

Like you, she mentally finished for him, rolling her eyes. "You know I'm seeing a therapist, Ron."

"Yeah, a *Muggle* one," he harrumphed, and she narrowed her eyes. "Not that there's anything wrong with that, Hermione!" he added quickly, placing a hand over hers. "But you're a witch, and you should see someone trained to deal with magical folk."

She'd heard this argument before. "What happened to me wasn't magical. I didn't use any real magic the entire time I was there. I need to deal with my thoughts, and that has nothing to do with the fact that I'm a witch."

That, and she'd really wanted an impartial, outside perspective. Her name was known throughout the medical community, not to mention the fact that she'd never revealed to anyone besides Harry, Ron, and Ginny what had happened inside the cell, and even they had only the briefest details.

But her therapist knew it all, including the fake rape, which she'd said had been videotaped for proof of Snape's allegiance to a Mafia boss.

Stockholm Syndrome. Her thoughts could be easily explained away, perfectly reasonable, understandable, relatable. Simple. Defence mechanisms, natural reactions, duress, all that.

But she still loved him.

"Maybe," Ron said, looking sceptical. "Look, let me take you out to dinner. I know a great place..."

"That's really sweet of you," she interrupted gently, squeezing his hand before pulling hers away. "And I appreciate it. But it's not just that I'm not ready, and it's not just that I still love Professor Snape. I don't think of you like that. You're one of my best friends, and I love you, but I don't..." She stopped. She didn't think anything more really needed to be said.

Ron hung his head. After a few minutes, he looked at her from under his red fringe. She pushed it away softly. He'd always have a place in her heart as her first...of many things...but he wasn't for her.

"Will you... think about it?" he asked softly. The war had changed them all, Ron perhaps most of all. Harry still needed to save people and Hermione still needed to help, but Ron... he'd put that all behind him. He'd mellowed and calmed, and now he just lived life the best he knew how. He'd be okay.

"If you want me to, I will. But I don't need to, Ron. My mind won't change."

He laughed a little sadly, tapping the tabletop with a long, freckled finger. Then his demeanour changed, like sun bursting through clouds, and Hermione almost laughed.
Ron.

"Did you hear that Ginny said yes to Harry's proposal? I could barely get him to stop bouncing off the walls long enough to come see you!"

Hermione laughed. "Ginny Floo'd me about an hour before you got here. She's probably at the Burrow now, telling your parents."

Ron's eyes widened. "Oh, I really think I need to see that!"

"Go," she said, waving him away with her fingers, smiling. "Report back on the damage."

Bending down, Ron hugged her again, and though it was a good-bye of sorts, it wasn't the kind that lasted forever.

"Be safe, all right?" he asked as she walked him to the door.

"Always. And you." The same thing the trio had said in parting for years.

"Always."

Hermione propped her hip against the doorjamb and watched him go. He disappeared into the alley down the street, and she groaned. At least he covered the crack of his Disapparition...he hadn't a few times, and the police had been called with reports of gunshots.

Alas, the rent was cheap.

After carefully filing her nails, Hermione pulled out another pair of nude stockings. They were thicker than the first pair, but they were all she had. She'd likely overheated, but Ginny had requested her presence at the Burrow that evening, and she had to look respectable.

Not now, however. She tossed them onto the bed with a disdainful glare and padded into her study to go through her case files.

Amy Justice Dolohov. Hermione shivered. Her parents were dead and her only living relative was Antonin Dolohov, currently serving life in prison. A headache flared as it did whenever she thought of those they'd lost.

There would be no justice here.

The girl was only seven years old. Beautiful, really, though she looked hard for her age. She'd seen so much. She was staying with a foster family, one that was already overfull, Hermione knew. *These* were the casualties of war.

Hermione closed the file.

Another knock on her door broke through her maudlin mood. This was the job she'd chosen, after all.

Wondering what Ron could possibly want with her so soon, Hermione opened the door quickly.

Then she staggered backward, eyes wide, mouth open.

She blinked slowly and ran a trembling hand through her hair. "Professor Snape," she whispered, forgetting everything she'd ever known and some things she hadn't even learned yet.

"I think it would be best," he said slowly, entering her flat and making the room seem much smaller, "if you would call me Severus." His lips bore the smallest smile, but to Hermione, it was enough.

Fin.

Author's Note: So that's the end! I hope it was satisfying. I know a lot of you were worried that it would be either a sad ending or a too-well wrapped up one, and I think this falls someone in the middle of the spectrum...it's the only ending that felt real.

Thank you all for reading and reviewing. I am so amazed at how well received this story has been...it's definitely the most popular long fic I've written, and I'm sad to have it end because it means I won't get to enjoy any more of your thoughts.

I really hope you all enjoyed the ending. This fic is definitely finished, so no bribing for more! :D If any of you are fans of slash, you can always check out the Harry/Draco fic I'm co-writing with my friend keppiehed, or the many oneshots I write. I am only posting on LiveJournal now, so if you want to read more from me, that's where I'll be. Thank you all so, so much!

Feel free to friend or follow me on LJ! <http://literaryspell.livejournal.com/>