

Damsels & Dragons

by Velvet Song

Hermione is returning to Hogwarts to teach Potions, and finds something dark and mysterious in the forest.

Prologue

Chapter 1 of 14

Hermione is returning to Hogwarts to teach Potions, and finds something dark and mysterious in the forest.

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If you would like to see the image that inspired and started it all, click [here](#) to see a sleeping dragon and his lover.

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Prologue

It had started the summer after her graduation, when Harry had located all of the Horcruxes and destroyed them, save one: Voldemort's wand. That had been destroyed by an unlikely source during the Final Battle.

It had been an ugly scene: still bodies scattered across the lands surrounding Hogwarts, flashes of red, black and green, the charge of hexes and spells in the air. There were screams, cruel laughter, cries, and cheers from the Death Eaters every time one of the Good fell. It was all expected, no matter the horror. And the worst terror of all was when it seemed that Voldemort was going to win.

That's when it happened, when the balance shifted and *they* crossed the line.

With screamed curses at other Death Eaters, the three Malfoys and Severus Snape turned their faces to Voldemort and his followers, quickly making their way to fight along side the Boy-Who-Was-Surprisingly-Still-Alive.

Both sides stood stunned for a moment at the dramatic switch, and for a sweet moment, everything seemed to disappear as everyone focused their attention on the four in black. A precious moment that was ended to soon, as Voldemort screamed a curse that no one understood.

Everyone watched in deafening silence as purple and black lightning streaked its way toward the Potions master of Hogwarts. A booming pop and an enormous black cloud of smoke filled the air, and no one, not even Voldemort or his followers, moved until every trace of the cloud had dissipated.

Snape was gone, and a crow of triumph from the Dark Lord gave way to the sickening realization that Severus Snape had not betrayed the Order, had not betrayed those who loved him. He betrayed Voldemort, and now he was gone. He was dead.

A shrieking wail of agony could be heard from Narcissa Malfoy, and it was only then that chaos erupted.

When it was over, many had to wonder if the massive loss was truly worth it. Yes, Harry had defeated Voldemort finally; he had won. Yet, despite that victory, so much was

lost.

In the end, Harry could not destroy Voldemort's wand, at least not with his own. Lucius, Draco and Narcissa had taken the wand from him, and with their own, destroyed the final piece of the Dark Lord's soul, partly as proof of their allegiance to the late Dumbledore, and partly as a final act for Snape.

Of course, destroying the wand had not been enough for a majority of the wizarding community, and the Malfoy family had been taken to trial. A trial that was now remembered by every wizard and witch alive; it was not remembered so much for the proven innocence of the Malfoys and their pardon, but for a tragically sad memory of Lucius. A memory that neither of the subjects knew he had been privy to.

"It's the only way, Severus."

The man in black growled as he paced, robes billowing wildly. "Stop saying that, you daft old coot! There is always another way. You have always found one!"

The Headmaster shook his head. "I am afraid there is no other way this time, my boy."

Snape whirled, creating a black cloud of material that floated around him. "You know, Albus, I always knew you were a selfish bastard, but I truly had no idea that it was you, not me, that is heartless."

"That is quite harsh, my boy."

The Slytherin looked like he was about to blow a fuse. "You are asking me to murder you, Albus! How could you ask—no, demand—this of me? How could you ask your only son to kill his father?"

"Eileen told you?"

"Yes, she told me!" Snape hissed. "Despite the fact that I was a bastard, despite the fact that Tobias loathed me, I know that callous bastard would never do something like this. He would never have asked something so..." His lips curled. "At least I know where I get my streak of cruelty. Right, Father?"

Hermione had been at the trial and had gasped along with numerous others. It was no wonder that Harry said Snape had looked at Albus with hatred; the man probably had despised him during those moments. And if Snape's disgust of Albus seemed shocking during that moment of Lucius' memory, nothing was as shocking as the desperate pleas that Snape issued to the man who had been revealed as his biological father.

He was desperate, and for once in his wretched life he was not afraid to show that. "Albus, please..." he said slowly. "You could ask anything else of me, and I would gladly do it. Everything you have asked of me before, I have done. I would gladly give my life for yours, if you wish. I will take my own life, just say the word. But do not, I am begging you, ask me to take your life."

When it seemed that the Headmaster was going to speak, Snape fell to his knees. "DON'T!" he screamed, his eyes red as tears spilled over his pale, sunken cheeks. "I CAN'T! I CAN'T KILL YOU!" A heart-wrenching sob tore from his throat as he clutched Dumbledore's blue robes, burying his face in the material. "Please, Albus... Father..."

"Severus, my son," the older wizard whispered. "I am sorry. I hope that you will forgive me one day."

There had not been a dry eye in the courtroom, and as Hermione Granger sat in her office, thinking about the past, tears slipped from her burning eyes to wet her cheeks.

So much had changed in the seven years since that day.

The Malfoys, indeed, had been cleared and declared heroes of the wizarding world, along with Harry and Snape, who had been given a medal in his honour.

Whether they did it out of penance, duty, or just to help the ailing school, no one knew; but, no matter what the reason, the Malfoys returned to teach at Hogwarts, where McGonagall had remained Headmistress. Lucius took Snape's place as the head of Slytherin, and took over DADA class, while Narcissa led Ravenclaw and Ancient Runes.

Remus, to the delight of the students, became the head of Gryffindor and took over Transfiguration, since McGonagall had to run the school. And, despite his age, the Headmistress thought Draco's knowledge of Arithmancy would make him an excellent teacher.

There were more changes and additions in staff over the years; Susan Bones returned, along with Harry, Neville and Arthur Weasley, who now taught Muggle Studies.

Hermione had been asked to teach Potions that first year after her graduation, but had declined. She had been asked again two years later, when Slughorn began thinking about retirement.

She had been regretting turning down the position ever since. She regretted it today more than ever.

It was one of those days, one of those long, stressful, want-to-bang-your-head-repeatedly-against-the-nearest-wall days. It was the kind of day that made Hermione strongly doubt her intelligence. After all, one would have to be a complete fool to willingly join the Ministry, especially working directly under Rufus Scrimgeour.

For the first few years at the Ministry, Hermione had always thought that Percy Weasley had bailed out, because his beloved Fudge was no longer Minister. She now knew that could not possibly be the reason; the real reason was, and she knew this from personal experience, that the Ministry and Scrimgeour were enough to drive one utterly mad!

Of course, her regret was only short lived that day, for when she had arrived that morning, she found a small envelope on her desk. Her mentor was once again requesting her to join the Hogwarts staff, as Slughorn had finally decided to retire.

Her reply was short, one word in fact. A big, emphatic **YES!**

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Doubts and Severus

Hermione has doubts and thinks about Severus.

Doubts and Severus

Hogwarts afforded enough money to their professors to buy their teaching supplies, but anything else she might need or want to begin her year had to come out of her pocket. Luckily, the Ministry had paid her well, so now she could buy the standard pewter cauldron, as well as a large pewter cauldron, and a large and standard-size cast iron cauldron for her own personal experiments that she needed for her practicum—according to guidelines for acquiring a license, she needed to have a minimum of ten potions of her own creation, and her own personal variations of potions already in existence.

Of course, she had three years to practice and create, because she needed three years of hands-on experience. Luckily, teaching at Hogwarts would qualify.

As Hermione made her way into Flourish and Blotts to look at the choices for a curriculum, it suddenly dawned on her that she truly had no idea of how to teach. She had never dealt with instructing students. Sure, she had lectured Ron and Harry all through school, but that wasn't teaching so much as motherly badgering.

Almost immediately, thoughts of her former Potions professor came to her mind.

She had respected Severus Snape immensely as a teacher; he had high expectations and despite his callous approach, he demanded nothing but the best from his students.

She could not help but wonder if he would have been a better teacher, had he not been a spy for the Order. After all, he did have a brilliant mind and was thoroughly capable of holding the students' attention, despite the fact that he held their focus out of fear. He had an intoxicating grasp on language, and his articulation, every nuance of his voice, could keep students spellbound. Maybe if he had not put the fear of Merlin into his students with his first year speech...

She began thinking about that speech. It really was not a bad speech; it was just recited in a harsh manner. Perhaps she could use it, in her own mild way, to inspire the students, instead of terrifying them.

With that thought, she went in search for the books she might want to use, but in the end, she became frustrated at the lack of variety for young students and ended up settling on the same material that Snape had used. She also thought about buying her own books for her experiments, but remembered Minerva telling her that the Potions master had kept a personal library that had made every other teacher at Hogwarts envious. Apparently, it was to Snape that all the teachers had gone, when they wanted a book on further material in the subject; something that Madam Pince had not been too thrilled about.

As she pulled open the door of the bookshop, it fleetingly occurred to her that she had somehow finished her shopping on "auto-pilot", and before she knew it, she was in and out of Madam Malkin's shop with several robes in various shades of blue, purple and green. She also made sure to get a couple of sets of black robes—one informal, the other in beautiful black velvet, lined with gold rope.

By the end of the day, her pockets were filled with shrunken books, robes, quills, cauldrons, parchment, bottles of ink, and other various items that she intended to take with her. All in all, it had been a productive afternoon, and she was quite pleased with her purchases.

With a glance at her watch to confirm the time, she made her way out of Diagon Alley and into the Leaky Cauldron. She had about an hour before she had to be at King's Cross to catch the train, and since she had not had lunch yet, decided to take this opportunity to do so. At least it would give her a chance to mull over her situation, and teaching.

She knew that she would never be the teacher that Severus Snape had been, for more than one reason. Not only was she planning *not* terrifying the students, she did not think she had the... well, charisma was not exactly the word that would be appropriate in Snape's case... She did not have the presence that Severus had possessed.

Severus.

Hermione snorted daintily on thinking his first name.

Despite the fact that she was no longer a student and a grown woman, she knew that if he were alive and they had both taught at Hogwarts, he would not approve of her calling him Severus, even if they were colleagues. Snape, more than likely, would insist upon still being called 'Professor Snape'. That had just been the bastard's way.

As soon as the last thought flickered through her mind, she regretted it. That's what he had called himself when arguing with the Headmaster, his father.

That announcement had been one of the biggest surprises of her life. Indeed, it was one of the biggest shocks to ever hit the wizarding world, right up there with Voldemort's return and final demise.

The witch had always respected her professor for his brilliance and bravery, something she was sure he would deny. After all, bravery was a "trait of every stupid Gryffindor". It was a shame that none of the students had looked past that cold exterior, and it was an even bigger shame that they did not know the risks he had taken to spy for the Order.

Hermione knew that if it were not for him and his intense drive to protect the boy, Harry would have been killed a long time ago.

There were times that she wished things had ended differently. She wished with all her heart that she could have had the chance to know him better. She had known since her second year, and the Polyjuice incident, that she had wanted to work with the brooding professor. And while she knew that Snape had not been the type to keep "friends", she was certain that they could have gotten along amiably... if they had had the chance.

She knew in her heart that there were other reasons that she had wanted to know him, reasons that she did not really like admitting. Admitting it would be even more depressing in her mind; knowing that you would never have the chance to love someone you cared for was quite heartbreaking.

Of course, even if he had lived, she doubted that he would have even given her the chance; he would never have let anyone break through that thick armour he had placed around his heart.

Hermione felt her eyes stinging and pushed them away furiously as a waitress came to take her order. There was no need to upset herself over something that could not change. There was no spell, potion, or anything else in the world that could bring back the dead, and she knew that. However, she could not help but think about what might have been.

Everyone had them, did they not? It was a question that plagued every being that had ever existed, that and 'the meaning of life'.

And while she was not certain of her or Severus' what might have been, she did know what his life's meaning was: to play the protector and saviour to the wizarding world. It was a pity that it had cost him that life, a life that she would never get the chance to know and experience.

She smiled faintly, ignoring the burning pain in her eyes. Maybe that was why she'd finally decided to take this position. Maybe it was her way of being close to Severus. Yes, it was a strange way, but it was the only one she had now. Maybe now she would stop think about the 'what might have beens'.

Hermione laughed to herself. She doubted that would happen. It never did, right?

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Pondering Severus in Three's

Chapter 3 of 14

Hermione and her friends ponder Severus Snape.

Pondering Severus in Three's

Hermione was almost finished with her meal, when Harry 'The-Boy-Whose-Name-Seemed-To-Get-Longer-And-Longer-Every-Time-The-Papers-And-Magazines-Printed-It' Potter came through the doors with Neville Longbottom, Harry's partner of nearly five years.

Harry was wearing faded blue jeans and a loose black tee-shirt, and his hair was as wild as ever. Neville looked slightly more dressed up, wearing pressed, black jeans and a forest green tee-shirt with an informal, black suit jacket over his shirt. His dark hair was longer than it had been in school, but nowhere near as long as Harry's was, and had a tousled, just-out-of-bed look.

Both looked very attractive and very much in love.

Hermione remembered how hard Ginny had taken the news of Harry's preference; she remembered holding the younger girl, as she'd bemoaned her fate. She had restrained herself from mentioning that Harry and Neville's sexual orientation had always been questionable, seeing as how both never had too much interest in the opposite sex. Plus, she had seen how Neville had started hanging around Harry more during the fourth year.

The witch smiled as a muscled young man with medium ash brown hair dropped into the booth beside her, draping an arm around her shoulders. "Hello, Neville."

Neville Longbottom had changed drastically. He was no longer a cubby-faced boy who was terrified of everything. Indeed, without Snape around in their seventh year, Neville had improved in Potions. That was not too surprising, since he was a whiz at Herbology. And, while he was not the best, he had improved slightly at Charms, due to Dumbledore's Army being reformed. He had also begun working out, so that he would be in good shape when the War came.

While Hermione knew he was off limits, and gay, she could not help but find Neville hot; and apparently she had been watching Neville's forearm for too long, because she heard Harry clear his throat and chuckle. "What?" she asked hastily, while schooling her face into a look of confusion.

Emerald eyes sparkled. "You know what," he drawled with a smirk. "Stop imagining having sex with my boyfriend."

Hermione gaped and blushed a dark pink, elbowing Neville in the chest when he chuckled at her obvious embarrassment. "I-you-I did not-I..." she stuttered angrily, before huffing. "Rest assured that I was not imagining having sex with your boyfriend...no offence, Neville...and I cannot believe you would even imply that, Harry James Potter."

The raven haired wizard was obviously enjoying his friend's discomfort. "I'm sorry, Hermione. I shouldn't have accused you of such an atrocious crime." He winked at his partner.

Harry knew that Neville had become intensely striking, and could not blame his best friend for finding the taller man so attractive; he would have wondered about her preference if she did not. Even Malfoy, who was straighter than a wand, and married, agreed that the Gryffindor was gorgeous.

As he gazed at his friend, whose flushing was slowly dissipating, he could not help but notice the changes that had occurred in her.

She wore a brown and black peasant skirt, with a tight, brown top and black shrug over that. Her brown hair hung to her waist in smooth waves, and only light make-up accented her pretty face. She looked very earthy, and Harry thought it suited his friend well.

He had not seen her much over the past seven years, and had assumed that when they'd met on those few and far between times that she had taken special care of her appearance for those times. However, as she sat in front of him now, he could not help but wonder if her hair had naturally lost its frizz as she'd matured, or if she spent hours (and bottles of products) every morning to keep it from sticking out in all directions.

All through their school days, the witch's hair had been the bane of her existence, and Harry had felt badly for her. Her hair had been so bad that a nickname had been going around behind her back: Medusa. Of course, what was surprising was that even her bad hair (and it was bad) could not detract from her natural beauty. Well, that was the way he saw it. Ron and many of the other boys never did. No one did... until Victor Krum.

Despite the redhead's dislike of the Bulgarian, Harry found him to be a perfect gentleman to his "sister", and had approved. Of course, it turned out that the two were, as Hermione had said, just friends. He had a sneaking suspicion why.

Severus Snape.

Hermione Granger had always been the biggest defender of the Potions master, and had taken it very hard when Snape had murdered the Headmaster. At first, she had gone through denial, hotly protesting against Harry and Ron. When the anger started coming through, there was not a day when they did not fear for their lives.

Harry could not blame her; Snape, like Minerva McGonagall, had been a big inspiration to her. She had respected and admired him, and had constantly sought his approval, though she would never admit it. He knew that she would also never admit her long standing feelings for him out loud.

She had always had a crush on the man, that was obvious. However, it was around their fourth year that Harry had seen the subtle changes that had made her crush something more.

Finding out that Snape was a traitor had been devastating for her; he remembered how much she cried, how her heart was torn in two. Of course, he knew that Snape's "betrayal" was nowhere as devastating as the knowledge that he had been loyal... and that he had lost his life for it.

As Harry watched her now, it looked like her heart had been pieced carefully back together. It was a façade, of course.

He knew that Hermione still mourned him in secret. He knew that she still held on to his memories, dreamed of him during the night, and heard his voice in her mind. He knew this because it showed in her eyes, her eyes that had once lit up with her smile. Now her smiles never reached those brown eyes. And those brown eyes did not hold the warmth they used to.

The Gryffindor leaned back in his chair, thinking back to the trials, Lucius' memories.

Snape, you bastard, Harry thought to himself. *You both were heartless.*

Or perhaps Snape had just been blind. He would have had to be not to notice how much the young witch had adored him.

Like father, like son, the wizard drawled mentally, remembering the memory from the trial.

A heart-wrenching sob tore from his throat as he clutched Dumbledore's blue robes, burying his face in the material. "Please, Albus... Father..."

"Severus, my son," the older wizard whispered. "I am sorry. I hope that you will forgive me one day."

When Snape raised his eyes, they were cold. "Forgive you..." he hissed, before jumping to his feet. "Forgive you? No. I'm not like my mother. I won't forgive you." He sneered cruelly at the Headmaster. "Do you know that my mother forgave you? Actually, that might be a lie. I don't think she did forgive you, because she felt that there was nothing to forgive. Despite the fact that she loved you, despite the fact that you shattered her heart, she never once hated you."

The younger wizard was stalking around Dumbledore, glaring hatefully. "She adored you, Albus. She worshiped the ground you walked on. She loved you." He snorted. "She loved you. A waste of time, I think. After all, the ones we love hurt us the most."

"Harry?"

He blinked his emerald eyes, reality setting back in, and he found Hermione and Neville watching him intently, worry apparent in their eyes. "Sorry," he said, forcing a convincing chuckle. "I drifted away for a minute." He grinned wickedly at the witch. "Were you lusting after Neville again, Hermione?"

Hermione nearly growled. "I was not lusting after Neville."

"Then who were you lusting after?" the smaller wizard shot back.

Hermione's shriek was almost drowned out by the noise of the other customers, but both Harry and Neville were close enough to hear her shout of indignation! *"Harry James Potter!"*

The Boy-Who-Lived wrinkled his nose in mock disgust. "Ewww... Hermione, I always thought of you as a sister. I would rather not have images of us in horrid incestuous situations."

Neville began choking on his laughter, and therefore did not see the glare she sent him or his lover. Once he was able to breathe again, all he could do was watch the love of his life verbally torment Hermione.

It was good to see her smiling again, though. She had not done that near enough during school. Of course, she'd had a reason.

They all had a reason not to smile that last year.

Neville shook his head. *Snape, you bastard.*

He was the reason that Hermione rarely smiled.

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Shadows on the Wind

Chapter 4 of 14

Hermione is returning to Hogwarts to teach Potions, and finds something dark and mysterious in the forest.

Shadows on the Wind

There was carnage as far as the eye could see. Corpses were scattered everywhere. So much blood had been spilled, that it now stained the ground. You could gaze in any direction, and all you would see were pale and emotionless faces, empty eyes... death.

It was a gruesome, horrifying sight.

Now the Death Eaters' masks were off; they were revealing their faces now that the War raged furiously. They were proud of the innocence they destroyed, the lives they took. They were proud to be serving such a disgusting monster; the knowledge that someone could take pleasure in being associated with such horror was enough to make her nauseous.

Hermione was glancing around, looking to see where she might be needed next. Her eyes fell upon people she knew, people on both sides.

Remus was locked in a duel with Bellatrix. Susan Bones was sending a hex toward Pansy Parkinson.

Her eyes continued to scan the chaotic scene, and she felt the world tilt temporarily as her eyes landed on his face.

How could he betray us? she thought to herself as she ran backwards, throwing a hex across the field at a random Death Eater. She watched for any opening to attack, but suddenly blinked when she saw Snape inconspicuously curse a Death Eater that was standing close to him.

Was she seeing things? Surely Severus Snape, Death Eater and murderer of the beloved Headmaster of Hogwarts, did not just attack one of his own?

Her momentary lack of concentration almost cost her, and she dove out of the way of a stream of green light.

"Hermione!"

The witch glanced up to see Remus shooting glances towards her.

"Are you alright?" he shouted above the noise.

Neville, who had been close by when she had fallen, caught her by the wrist and hauled her to her feet. They both took off running towards the werewolf as another hex was sent their way. "Are you hurt?"

"I'm fine," she called back at their former teacher, as she nodded to her friend. When she glanced across the field, she could see Gregory Goyle lifting his wand toward them, and raised her own in response.

A blast of red shot out beside her, and she watched as the young Slytherin was lifted off his feet and slammed into a Death Eater behind him. She glanced at Neville, who had seen the impending attack, and smiled. "Thanks."

"HARRY!"

A scream from Ginny Weasley caught her attention, and both she and Neville turned to see Harry go down.

"NO!"

With Neville's cry in her ears, she took off across the grounds, the muscular boy passing her as he rushed toward the fallen wizard. But she did not have time to consider Neville's odd reaction, because something caught her attention: a uniformed shout. It came from the opposite side field.

Hermione skidded to a halt at the sight of Severus Snape, Lucius, Narcissa and Draco Malfoy running backwards, sending hexes and curses at Voldemort and his followers.

There was suddenly silence from both sides, and the only voices were from the four that were scrambling across the field, over the dead bodies and carnage created from both Good and Bad.

No one moved. No one spoke. No one could believe what they were seeing, and the silence was almost painful.

The Malfoys were in the lead, with Snape just behind. They were so near; Draco was only a few yards away from McGonagall!

Was it a trick? What if they were just trying to get into their ranks to take them from the inside? What if this was a way to get to The-Boy-Who-Lived?

They were closer now, so close in fact, that you could make out the silver colour of Draco's irises from the white.

Hermione was just beginning to think their luck was changing, that with these four on their side that they could take down Voldemort for good. She even allowed the corners of her mouth to twitch, pride shining in her eyes.

It was a brave thing, turning your back on the feared Dark Lord.

They were so close!

A hideous shriek filled the air.

It was a curse, and it was streaking its way like horizontal lighting to the Potions master!

She did not move; it was like she was rooted to the spot.

Everyone watched in horror as the black and purple made contact with Snape, hitting him square in the chest. Instead of a flash of light, there was a deafening pop that left her ears ringing painfully as a thick, massive black cloud of smoke began expanding.

Hermione watched in horror as the cloud grew twelve meters in every direction. Sweet Merlin! There was no way that Snape could survive whatever Voldemort had done, but still she prayed to every deity known to man that when the thick cloud disappeared, that the Slytherin would be there.

Voldemort could have attacked then, but the witch detachedly noticed that he did not. Apparently, Snape's betrayal and punishment were more important to him.

After what seemed to be an eternity, every trace of the cloud was gone. And so was Snape.

Hermione could only blink, her mind going into shock.

She did not know of any curse or hex that could make a person completely disappear like that. It was then that Hermione realized the curse had been spoken in a language that she had not recognized, and her mind was flipping through languages like a rolodex. If she could pinpoint what language it might be, she could look up the translation later.

Hermione could vaguely hear Narcissa screaming, the start of more chaos, but she did not heed any of it. She was still staring blankly at the spot where Severus Snape had been, as if watching the empty air would bring him back.

Surely, he could not be gone.

She did not know how long she had been there, but her attention was pulled away by a dark shadow that passed behind her. She turned to see who was behind her, and saw Justin Finch-Fletchley a few yards away. He was the closest person to her at that moment.

Hermione turned her eyes to the sky, and saw nothing.

She had always thought that Hogwarts' grounds were slightly creepy at night. You could never tell what was hidden in the starlight darkness; the sounds you heard were equally as terrifying, and not knowing what might be lurking near the edges of the forest was enough to scare her half witless.

She was drained from the long train journey; after all, hours spent on a train, with nothing to do, was intensely boring. She was surprised that she was not in a coma.

Shhwooogh.

Hermione's head snapped up to the sky, where the noise was coming from. She could have sworn she heard wings flapping; she knew she was somewhat tired, but she did not think she was crazy.

However, as she peered up into the darkness, she saw nothing.

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Subtlety of a Dragon

Chapter 5 of 14

Hermione is returning to Hogwarts to teach Potions, and finds something dark and mysterious in the forest.

Subtlety of a Dragon

She was not in the dungeons. She was not in the dungeons!

That was the chant that kept ringing gleefully through her mind, ever since she had been informed by Headmistress McGonagall that Lucius Malfoy had moved his class into the dungeons; she was going to be in the large classroom that had once held Defence Against the Dark Arts. That meant she would have a window that faced the sun when it rose, and a good view of the Forbidden Forest.

The Forbidden Forest.

She found it strange that both Harry and Neville had warned her about what was in the forest when she mentioned gathering some of the more deadly herbs and plants from the dark woods. After all, she herself had attended Hogwarts for seven years just like them; she was quite aware of the dangers, especially after the horrors of her fifth year. She was curious to know what new creatures were in the forest, and had the distinct feeling that whatever had flown above her earlier that evening, was hiding there.

Of course, there were more pressing matters at hand.

She had already added her feminine touches to her office, making the stone room seem far cheerier than it normally had been, and she had already redecorated her private chambers. Now, she was left alone to ponder just how she was going to teach the following week.

Both Harry and Neville had admitted the anxiety about teaching, but had said it was more due to the fact that some of the older students remembered them from their own days at Hogwarts, and that Hermione was lucky about the fact that all of the students that had attended during her years had graduated. Of course, she was sure that there were probably a few students who would have heard about her from older siblings, but that was not the problem for her.

Teaching former schoolmates would certainly not have been her biggest obstacle, for she knew that most everyone was aware of her intelligence and would have respected that—except for the Slytherins perhaps. On the other hand, she knew that Lucius Malfoy, though far from evil, was still one of the strictest men that she knew when it came to public behaviour. She highly doubted that he would let his students get away with some of the things that Severus Snape had allowed.

Severus Snape. It always seemed to come back to Severus Snape, Greasy Git and Black Bat of Hogwarts.

She could not deny that there were times that he was well deserving of those names, and while she would scold Harry and Ron out loud, deep down she could understand their feelings a little. A little. After all, he had been a spy and he had to play the part; surely they knew that? Of course, they did not for four years, and those first four years were even more of a hell, especially for her. She could never grasp back then why he seemed to hate her so much; now she knew.

She leaned back in her chair and nibbled on her lower lip, a nasty habit that she had yet to break; it was one of her many flaws, along with being slightly bossy. She knew she was, and tried desperately to control her urges to order anyone and everything about. But that was not what she was worrying about at the moment. No, what she was worrying about was her first day of class—teaching class.

Hermione could not help but ponder over Snape's now infamous speech, and wondered how she could put it to her use. The speech itself was actually quite brilliant, and could definitely catch anyone's attention. It would also be bettered by the lack of use of 'dunderheads'. And his entrance was also attention grabbing; the door slamming open alone was enough to wake the dead!

For her, dramatics would work, but she could not do them in such a spectacular fashion.

She smiled to herself. *A little subtlety was always in order.*

It was completely silent in the room, probably because the students thought their professor was late, and indeed she was, but only by a few minutes.

She crept soundlessly through the door and stood at the back for a few minutes, studying the nervous first years. She laughed to herself as she began making her way down the centre isle with such a slow and steady gait that it appeared to the students as if she were gliding.

Hermione wore robes of midnight-blue, panne velvet, and her hair was partially pulled up in a bun, with curls decoratively winding around the knot of hair. "You are here to learn," she started, letting a very small smile cross her face as she held her audience captive with a voice that had a mysterious air to it, though not horribly fake like the late Trelawney.

"You are here to learn the subtle science and exact art of potion-making. As there is little use of wands here, many of you will hardly believe that this is magic," she said softly as she swept her hand around the room, seemingly to gesture to the class. With her wand discretely hidden in her sleeve, she was able to think the spell that suddenly caused the simmering fire to shoot up from under the cauldron that rested on the table in front of her desk.

The class jumped at this show, and she smirked as the flames almost immediately calmed below the pewter pot.

"I will help you understand the beauty of the softly simmering cauldron," she began, once again pulling their eyes to her as she glided through the rows, "with its shimmering fumes, the delicate power of liquids that creep through the human veins." She had made it to the front of the classroom, and whirled to face them, her robes floating around her like dark waves of the sea.

As Hermione moved, she poured vials of resin of myrrh and essence of bisort into the cauldron; luckily, she had her timing down perfectly. She gave them a small smirk that did not hold the smugness of the man who had taught her this subject. "I can teach you how to bewitch the mind..."

She had mixed ground angelica, the borage and powdered uva-ursi into the required amount of water earlier; the recipe then required the mixture to sit for a full hour before receiving a strong burst of heat to disperse the remaining angelica and uva-ursi. Well, her little show knocked out two birds with one stone; she had the burst of heat, and

impressed the class.

“Ensnare the senses...” Her eyes danced as she moved slightly to the side, a mischievous light gleaming behind the warm brown that made the students nervous. “And even stopper...” With another seemingly innocent gesture, she tossed the last ingredient, milfoil, into the simmering cauldron.

A small explosion of bright blue fire and smoke rose from the pot, the fire dying immediately while the smoke formed an intimidating dragon.

The students had cried out at the spectacle, before watching in awe as the smoke image faded away.

Hermione smiled as she finished her speech. “Death.”

If you aren't as big a bunch of dunderheads as I usually have to teach.

The witch groaned internally.

Snape's voice was back again to haunt her.

*

TBC

Books & Dragons

Chapter 6 of 14

Hermione is returning to Hogwarts to teach Potions, and finds something dark and mysterious in the forest.

Books and Dragons

With it being Christmas break, the school was virtually empty, except for a few students and teachers. She had spent most of her time either reading, or with Neville and Harry; the Malfoys had gone to their estates for the holidays and had only come back that day. As she usually did during the evening, she was curled up on the couch with a paperback-paranormal romance in one hand, and a cup of raspberry-mint tea in the other. A knock on the door pulled her attention away from the tense scene. *Damn it! And he was just about to reveal the origin of the Langley ghost!*

With a wave of her hand, the wards dropped, allowing entrance. Hermione was surprised to see Narcissa and Lucius Malfoy carrying massive volumes, with even more floating behind them—there had to be at least thirty books.

Lucius smiled sadly at her apparent confusion. “They are only a miniscule part of Severus’ impressive library,” he told her. “He was certain that he would not survive the war and when he realized that Dumbledore was not going to make it to the end, he changed his will.”

Hermione could sense more than hear the slight hesitation in the older Malfoy’s voice as he watched his wife stack the books against the wall.

“Since he no longer has any living relatives,” Lucius continued, “he wanted his library to go to someone he knew would enjoy and respect the works he’d collected.” His wife had settled the remaining, floating volumes on the floor, and had moved to stand beside him. “In his will, he stated that if you ever returned to Hogwarts, he wished you to have the books in his library.”

Hermione noticed for the first time that the Slytherin witch was holding a massive, leather-bound book. It looked old and there were cracks all through the dried leather; she could not help but be curious about it. Older texts always held an interest for her.

“Severus said that you would love this,” Narcissa said softly as she passed the volume to the Gryffindor witch, whose eyes were shining brightly as she took the book. “It’s a first edition of—”

“Hogwarts, a History!”

The book was a few pages short of enormous, and it was incredibly heavy. All she could do was stare at the ancient tome in wonder and turn it over in her hands. “Professor Snape left me all his books?”

Lucius nodded. “And his estate—”

“His what?”

“Along with other certain assets that are in his vault.”

Hermione was instantly curious and mystified by this. “His account? But aren’t accounts closed after a person’s death?”

“Yes,” Lucius replied with a sad smile. “But his account was, or is, to remain open, until you have retrieved and transferred all of the possessions Severus left to you.” He turned to leave, but stopped. “It says in the will that you can collect the inheritance at the time of your choosing.”

Hermione could only stammer her gratitude as Narcissa kissed her cheek and left with her husband. When she was alone, she dazedly placed Hogwarts, A History on the coffee table and turned to the volumes on the floor. Texts such as Asiatic Anti-Venoms or Important Modern Magical Discoveries did not surprise her, but his collections of Transfiguration and Ancient Runes books did. The large volumes of Dragons of Great Britain and Ireland and Dragons In-depth were also a bit of a surprise, but the most stunning was the books on the Dark Arts.

She knew that as a Death Eater he would have known a lot about the Dark Arts, but some of the books he’d owned shocked her to the core. Among some of the worst were Tormentum: An In-depth Study of Torture, Fatum Incantare, a book of fatal curses, Tomus Morte, a book that focused solely on death, and Malus Magice: An In-depth Study of the Dark Arts.

Her first reaction to the heavy tomes was of horror. When she suddenly realized that the last three she’d looked at had been written by the same man, Perseus Evans, she had a sudden urge to read them. She recoiled, frightened.

Perseus Evans.

For some reason the name rang a bell inside her mind, yet she could not recall ever seeing it and that set off a warning. She made a mental note to ask the Malfoys about the name later and decided to take a walk to soothe her tense nerves. When she stepped into the open stone hall, the blast of cold air that hit her face stung and brought tears to her eyes, which she instinctively blinked back. However, the chill seemed to drive away the dark fog that had settled in her brain.

As she gazed around, she realized that she was facing the Forbidden Forest, and as a thin mist seeped through the edges of the dark trees, she decided to venture through. She could kill two birds with one stone while taking a walk, because not only would the breeze break through her distressing thoughts, but then she would be able to pick some ingredients that were more difficult to obtain. Like Moonspine, a plant that was small, with white blooms that grew on the curvy stem, making it look very much like a person's spine. It, like a few other species that grew in the forest, could only be picked under the light of a full moon.

She entered the black woods without using light from her wand, since any artificial light could affect some of the plants. And until her eyes adjusted to the darkness, she knew it would be difficult to see, so she navigated her way through the deep forest with great care.

Of course, it wasn't like she needed to watch out for anyone or anything. With Voldemort's death and the capture of the Death Eaters, the Forbidden Forest was much safer; she had learned from McGonagall that when half of their clan had perished in the war, the centaurs left Hogwarts to find a new home. She also knew that Grawp was on the opposite side of the forest with Hagrid, and would be completely alone.

She spent nearly half an hour as she trekked through the woods, looking for Black Lace, Devil's Shoe Strings, and Dragon's Breath, before making her way to the clearing where she knew the Moonspine flowers grew; she had seen the open area back in her fifth year and remembered it clearly. Indeed, the open space was nearly an acre, but the dark forest seemed to close around the land, making it seem much smaller.

As she knelt to brush away the snow and pluck the first sprout by the roots, she could not help but feel that someone was watching her. With a rueful shake of her head, she turned her attention back to the ground. *This just goes to prove that you read way too many mystery and thriller novels.* But after about ten minutes of pulling up a few of the plants, a shadow passed above her. Had it not been for the whoosh sound, she would have thought it was merely a cloud drifting across the moon. However, the unmistakable sound of beating wings told her it was not just a cloud.

Hermione's head snapped upward. She saw nothing.

Don't worry about it. You're still stressed, and you are just letting your mind run away with you!

Pointing her wand at a nearby fallen leaf, she Transfigured it into a small basket and dumped the flowers she had collected inside of it. Then, slipping her wand back into her pocket, she plunged her fingers back into the soft earth, digging the Moonspine out of the ground. She was not really aware of the time and after a while she began to worry that she might have been out too long. Dropping the last flower into the basket, she pushed herself to her feet, whirling around at the sudden noise behind her.

All she found was empty, open space. There was nothing there, and while she hated to admit it, she was becoming nervous and wanted to get back to the school as soon as possible.

Turning back around to retrieve the basket of ingredients, she stopped short, terror coursing through her veins. She opened her mouth to scream, but any noise she might have made would have been drowned out by the screeching roar.

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Athair

Chapter 7 of 14

Hermione is returning to Hogwarts to teach Potions, and finds something dark and mysterious in the forest.

Athair

Hermione Granger was known as the most intelligent witch to have ever gone through Hogwarts, and she had a reputation for speaking her mind. However, when faced with an eleven-meter tall dragon, both speech and her brain failed her. On paper, eleven meters did not seem like it would be large, but with one long glance, the witch knew that this creature could flatten her with one "soft" step. And while she was rarely afraid, knowing what it took to bring a dragon down, and knowing she was incapable of doing so scared her nearly senseless.

Her first instinct was to run like there was no tomorrow, which, from the looks of the dragon, could easily be the outcome. However, her mind regained function and she began backing away slowly, surprised when the beast followed her steps immediately. She became aware of the creature's intelligence almost instantly, and the fact that it was mocking her!

While most animals might have plowed forward and attacked at her movement, it matched her step for step. She backed away from it, it moved toward her. Step back, step forward. She slid her left leg behind her, stopped, and watched as the dragon's right legs moved forwards. It held its pose like her.

Sweet God in Heaven, I'm going to die!

Abandoning reason and logic, she turned and ran straight into the woods, only mildly thankful for the cover the trees gave her. Her mind did not register the pain from the delicate branch that slashed her cheek open as her head snapped around to a hideous shriek that seemed to rise into the air in the clearing behind her—the dragon was taking flight!

Her heart was beating so hard that she could feel it hammering in her chest. Her muscles strained as she ran over the rough terrain, trying desperately not to trip over the rocks and roots that protruded out from the ground. Her lungs burned excruciatingly, and she prayed that she could make it to the safety of the castle.

Though the branches of the trees, she could make out the illuminated stone of Hogwarts, and as she burst out of the forest, a small cloud of white flashed across her vision. "Draco!" She could barely make out his features, and as Lucius stepped into view, a burst of energy surged through her. "Lucius! Draco!" She would have run over Draco with her speed and force had his father not caught her around the waist to halt her furious pace.

"I was gathering a few ingredients in the forest and I remembered the clearing from fifth year—" She was talked in rapid succession, making no sense whatsoever. "—and I remembered seeing Moonspine growing there. And I thought Harry and Neville had to be exaggerating. And then I heard something. Well, I thought I heard something.

Now I know I heard something!"

She was babbling.

"Well, I thought maybe I was losing it—too many books, you know," she continued at a frightening speed. "But when I turned around, there it was! And it copied me! Backwards, forwards! I think it was mocking me! And it was HUGE! Look!" She thrust an arm upwards, her pointed finger directing their gaze skywards so they would see...

Nothing.

Hermione was sitting in front of the fireplace in Narcissa and Lucius' living room with a blanket tucked around her and a cup of hot chamomile tea in her hand. She tried to ignore the stinging pain from the salve that had been put on the gash on her cheek as she recounted, as calmly as she could, what had happened. "Harry and Neville warned me not to go into the forest alone. I thought they were exaggerating, not to be exaggerating—I just thought they were being overprotective."

She glanced at the lovers, who had been called down by Draco much to her embarrassment and displeasure. "I went for a walk to clear my head. I wandered into the forest and thought I might as well take care of some work while I was there, so I started looking for some ingredients for my stores. I remembered this clearing from my fifth year and that Moonspine grew there. I am running low, so I thought I would pick some." She sighed, took a sip of tea, and sighed again. "Then I started hearing noises. The next thing I know, I am face to ankle with a huge dragon!"

She turned to face Harry. "If you knew there was a dragon on the grounds, why hasn't anyone done something about it? Why haven't you contacted the Ministry to get rid of it?"

Everyone glanced at each other, looking highly uncomfortable. Finally, the older Malfoy spoke up. "The Ministry was contacted about the dragon when it arrived, which was about four years ago." He ignored the witch's stunned look. "The Ministry had their best teams brought here and they could not do anything to capture the beast. He is a special subspecies of the Hebridean Black, a Shadow Dragon. They have special powers over light and darkness. They can warp and manipulate shadows and space; they can disappear. They can become actual shadows." He smiled drolly. "You cannot catch something that is not there."

"The Ministry became terribly frustrated at the lack of a capture," Draco spoke up for the first time that night. "So they left Charlie Weasley here for a few months, to study the dragon's behaviour. He was surprised to find that the dragon was not aggressive towards any of the students or faculty. In fact, do you remember a when few Death Eaters escaped about three and a half years ago?"

When Hermione nodded, he smiled. "They tried to get past the wards. Athair was not pleased by this and let everyone know about it." He chuckled. "When the teachers went outside to find out what was going on, we found a few of them had been knocked unconscious. We were shocked to find Athair carrying two of them up hundreds of meters into the air, dropping them, and then waiting until the last minute to swoop down and catch them."

The younger woman blinked. "You named him?" Her mind was racing; she did not know what to think. A tame dragon? Well, maybe not tame, but non-aggressive? A dragon that protected people? "You have to be joking!"

"No. That's his—"

She huffed. "I'm not talking about his name now. The dragon attacked some rogue Death Eaters?"

Draco nodded. "Occasionally, he will make an appearance during the day by flying over, but it is rare. He usually makes his rounds over the castle at night."

"Rounds?" Hermione asked credulously.

Lucius gave an elegant shrug. "Why not? He has not harmed anyone in the school and he made it quite clear to the Ministry that he did not want to leave; he seems to be here to stay. He apparently thinks that he is Hogwarts' guardian."

Beginning Brewing

Chapter 8 of 14

Hermione is returning to Hogwarts to teach Potions, and finds something dark and mysterious in the forest.

Beginning Brewing

Since the next day was Sunday, Hermione did not have to worry with waking up early and therefore settled down in her bed, a ball of blue light floating above her so she could read. In her lap was the heavy tome *Dragons In-depth*. After talking with the Malfoys, she found out that the dragon that currently resided at Hogwarts was a sub-species of the Hebridean Black dragons. There were three sub-species in that category: Mist dragons, Cloud dragons, and Shadow dragons. Athair was a Shadow dragon, the rarest of the three.

She learned that their body and scales were dark and semi-translucent, making them appear as giant shadows from a distance. As she continued reading, her level of comfort dropped.

The Shadow dragon breed is crafty and conniving; while instinctively sly, they are not a breed that is prone to taking risks. They have their own tongue of communication and they know a common tongue known to all dragon species. Fifteen percent of hatchlings can communicate with any intelligent creature and the possibility of gaining the ability increased five percent with every age category.

She quickly did the calculations in her head, realizing that there was a good possibility that she could have communicated with the creature, and stored the bit of knowledge away in her mind for future reference.

The Shadow dragon's only defensive weapon is its breath. It can breathe a black cloud that is six meters in length and five meters in depth and breadth. Depending on the toxicity released in the cloud, a person can be temporarily blinded, paralyzed or exhibit symptoms akin to the Muggle flu; if the cloud is extremely toxic, it can permanently blind or paralyze. With a maximum amount of toxicity in the cloud, a Shadow dragon's breath can cause permanent brain damage and even death.

Some of the Shadow dragons' offensive weapons are the control over light and darkness; they can manipulate shadows and even create them. They can appear and disappear at will and are fond of using invisibility to confuse their opponents. The most dangerous weapon of deception is their ability to become a shadow and to become

part of the shadow world. While invisibility can hide them temporarily, they can be sensed by their body heat; when a Shadow dragon fades into the shadow world, they are utterly undetectable.

She realized that this is why she had not been able to see the dragon before, when she heard wings flapping. It had either disappeared completely or blended into the shadows.

Closing the book with a loud thud, Hermione sighed and leaned over to set the heavy book on the floor. As she moved to change, she saw a shadow move across the window and gave a soft gasp. Rushing to the window, she threw it open and leaned outside to see the massive shadow moving away from the castle, toward the forest. She watched with mixed emotions, knowing the dragon was dangerous, but consoled slightly by the fact that he did not seem to be aggressive toward those in Hogwarts.

But a quiet voice in the back of her mind nagged at her. *How long will it last?*

Sunday morning found the students roaming Hogwarts or its grounds, or in their common rooms, the Great Hall, the library, or wherever they went to study and spend their free time. Hermione Granger, however, was in her private office, door locked and a sound-proofing spell surrounding her work area.

It was the first potion she would be working with for her licenses and she was intensely nervous. She had never attempted to create her own before, nor had she even thought about ever making variations of potions, but now she had to if she wanted to become a Potions mistress.

Her office had been cleared of any clutter and now had only a table, on which sat her large pewter cauldron and a huge book of Herbology, with the largest index of herbs and plants. Luckily for her, Neville only kept the best when it came to Herbology.

It still amazed her that the wizarding world seemed so advanced in some areas and so behind in others, and that was why she had picked this particular potion to be her first. There was one thing that both Muggle doctors and the wizarding Healers seemed to have in common: the lack of finding a cure for eczema and psoriasis. Since finding a cure would be difficult and take far longer, she was determined to at least create a better relief until that time. She had seen what having eczema could do, how it drove her mother crazy, and she wanted to help. So that was Hermione's goal for the day; the first potion she was going to attempt was a treatment for eczema.

"No one can fault me for having high hopes," she murmured to herself as she pulled out her three most important ingredients: chervil, blue flag iris and pokeweed.

She started with the standard eight ounces of water and then began adding extra ingredients, beginning with the minced mullein, comfrey and sweet bay. As it simmered, she crushed the aloe and carefully extracted the gloopy juices, mixing it with the essences of nettles. Using a turkey baster, she collected the gooey mess and carefully added it to the cauldron one large smelly drop at a time. When the potion started reaching a boil, she emptied the extracts of the soapwort and bee balm into the mixture.

She had no clue if a certain stirring pattern would help, since it was her first creation and an untested one at that. Going over the properties of all the plants, she decided on a clockwise motion for five minutes before switching and stirring counter-clockwise for another five. She grabbed a large pinch of pokeweed and blue flag iris and sprinkled it into the potion, stirred again and retrieved a smaller amount of chervil and aimed at the direct certain of the potion.

With a sharp, fast motion, she threw the chervil into the cauldron, delighted when a small puff of smoke rose in the air. So far, the potion was the colour she wanted. She began stirring again, growing uneasy when the mixture started changing from a beautiful powder-pink to a dark shade of magenta. Then it started bubbling.

"Uh-oh." She was in such a state of shock that she could barely think; she just stood over the pewter bowl, watching the dark liquid bubble into a thick lump of goo at a frightening speed. As it boiled higher and higher, she suddenly realised that she needed to get out of the way quickly. As she dived under the table, a loud boom was followed by the sickening sound of big drops of ooze splattering against the walls.

She scurried out from under her work table, but as she saw the mess the explosion had left, suddenly wished she hadn't. "Perfect," she grumbled to herself. Waving her wand around the room, the mess disappeared. "I hope this isn't a sign of what the rest of my week is going to be like."

Letters & Decisions

Chapter 9 of 14

Hermione is returning to Hogwarts to teach Potions, and finds something dark and mysterious in the forest.

Letters and Decisions

She had been putting it off for as long as she possibly could, but when Lucius and Narcissa had asked her if she was going to enjoy her summer in Marbh-clach, she had reluctantly admitted to not having been to the mansion. The look of surprise on their faces let her know that they had assumed that she had spent part of her Christmas in Elgol, the small coastal town where Snape's manor was.

Feeling a little uncomfortable and worried that she would be questioned even further, Hermione excused herself and slipped out through the side door. Wrapping her arms around her body, she hurried through the corridors, hoping to hide in her office. She was glad to escape; she would not have to admit that she had yet to transfer anything from Snape's account to hers.

She could not bring herself to claim his assets or anything else; it seemed so... final.

In her head, she could hear her former professor saying drolly, *Silly, little girl. As if seven years isn't final enough.*

No matter how much she tried to make herself believe the truth—and it was the truth—it just felt so wrong. Even after seven years, she had difficulty believing he was gone; she kept waiting for him to storm through the halls and berate her for even daring to teach *his* classes.

As she climbed the steps from her classroom to her office, she could not help but wonder what he would think of her now. Would he still think of her as a silly know-it-all, some show-off trying to gain attention, or would he be proud of her for having the intelligence and capabilities of teaching? Would he think she was pathetic for only now doing something with her life, or praise her for going for her masters in Potions? Would he congratulate her and think of her as an equal?

As the door softly clicked to behind her, she pulled back her chair and sank into the soft leather.

It really doesn't matter what Snape would have thought about me...

She picked up a quill and dipped the tip in the black ink, bringing it to the paper and scratching out her greeting to Gringotts. She needed to schedule a time to come in and

fill out the paper work to transfer Snape's funds and get the keys to his home.

...After all, Severus Snape is dead.

The reply had come sometime during classes, but as soon as she had seen the scroll on her desk, she opened it immediately. Her appointment was for Friday, during the time she would normally have lunch—not that she minded; she wanted to get the whole ordeal over with as soon as possible.

However, that was not what was on her mind as she stared at the powder-pink potion. Last time, stirring it after adding the final ingredient made it explode and coat her office in globs of magenta; now she just stared. She had turned the heat down on the burner, sat on her stool and gazed hopefully into the simmering cauldron. The potion seemed fine; it was not bubbling violently or turning funny colors and it had been stable for a little over two hours.

Hermione was quite sure that the potion was perfect, but there was no real way of testing the potion without sending it to her mother for a trial. So after ladling out copious amounts of the thick gel into a vial, she made her way back to her desk and shuffled through the mess on the desktop until she found some sheets of blank parchment.

Dear Mum,

I hope this letter finds you well. I do have some news that I would like to share with you and Dad, but I would prefer for you to Floo to Hogwarts, so I can tell you in person. No, Mum, I'm not getting married and, no, I'm not pregnant. I just would like your opinion on something rather... expansive. Don't ask. It's too complicated to explain in a letter.

Well, the main reason for my owl is not to bother you for help. In fact, it is just the opposite.

As I said in my last letter, I must have at least ten potions of my own or variations of pre-existing potions. I know how much your eczema irritates you (in more than just the physical affliction), and have created what I hope to be a suitable treatment. It should, if prepared right, start relieving some of the symptoms immediately. I hope to see the results soon, preferably this weekend.

Would it be possible for you and Dad to come on Friday? Say around 11.30? Just let me know.

All my love,

Hermione

She studied the letter for a few moments, and wondered about rewriting it and telling her mother why she wanted to see her. Deciding against it, she rolled up the scroll and tied it with a black ribbon before passing it on to Phantom, the light Great Grey owl that Draco and Susan had given her for her birthday. "I promise that I will have lots of treats when you come back," she said, giving the large bird a gentle stroke before he took off.

Closing her eyes, she leaned her head back. So far her day had not been too bad; so far was the operative term, though. She still had one more class, but she knew it could not be as bad as the earlier accident with the second year Hufflepuffs. Of course, she still had one more meal in the Great Hall left to go; after the mention of Severus at lunch, she realized that dinner could easily make this day the worst in history.

Her eyes snapped open and she tried to put the man from her mind, focusing on the forest beyond her window; a shadow could be seen rising in the distance.

She had just pushed to her feet, when the heavy door to her office flew open.

"Hermione?"

The Gryffindor witch suppressed a moan, and turned to face Susan Bones-Malfoy. "Yes, Susan?"

The redhead gave her a half pleading-half apologetic look. "Um, I'm sorry, but there has been a tiny accident in Charms with the second years. Madam Pomfrey needs some more of the Soothing Salve."

Hermione nodded and moved toward her cauldron. "Tell her I will bring it down as soon as it is through." She did not even glance up when her friend departed, focusing solely on the task at hand. "At least this should keep my mind off Severus."

Far outside her window, a bellowing shriek echoed through the air, causing the witch to jump in surprise, her fingers loosening on the beaker. She winced as the glass smashed on the floor. "Bloody dragon."

Home

Chapter 10 of 14

Hermione is returning to Hogwarts to teach Potions, and finds something dark and mysterious in the forest.

Home

"Mum! Dad!" Hermione Granger moved toward the fireplace, where her parents greeted her with smiles and hugs that were all too brief. "Before you ask, I am fine. I know you probably didn't believe the letter, but I promise, Mum, I'm okay." She sighed softly. "I'm just in a bit of a situation." She raised a hand to cut off any questions that she knew were forming in her father's mind. "It has nothing to do with me—well, it does, but it's not..." She shook her head dejectedly as her voice trailed away. She took a moment to gather her thoughts. "I'm not in any trouble, but the situation is hard to explain."

She ushered them into her private den, where a pot of tea and China cups waited. "Have you eaten?" When both her parents shook their heads, she waved a tray of sandwiches into existence, along with a few plates. "Please, sit. Eat."

As she poured the fragrant rose congo into their cups, she watched them taking in their surroundings and smiled to herself. Her parents were probably surprised at her choice of décor.

When she was younger, she preferred a warmer country style, but as she grew up, her tastes evolved to the contemporary. She had covered the stone floors in her private

quarters with stark white carpet, but left the stone walls and ceiling. She had hung many pieces of art ranging from abstract to impressionist, from orphistic to Baroque; and above her large fireplace were two miniature Bernini sculptures: The Ecstasy of St. Teresa was on the right, while The Rape of Proserpina sat on the left. In between was a large mirror that had been charmed with picture behind the glass, so as one gazed in to the mirror, they saw their own image blend with the infamous Liliith painting—the snake curled around the woman in an erotic display.

The painting of Liliith, she had always loved, but she had never seen the two sculptures until she went searching for them, after reading about them in Angels and Demons, by the famous Muggle author, Dan Brown. She had fallen in love with the images and immediately purchases small-scale versions for her home and had carried them with her to Hogwarts.

Placing the tea pot back on the small table, she dropped down into the leather loveseat, allowing her parents more room on the couch. “The reason I asked you here is because I am having a problem that concerns Professor Snape.” She could tell by her mother’s wide eyes that she remembered the dread Potions master.

“I thought you said that Lord Voldemort murdered him,” her father said crisply.

Hermione nodded. “He did. The thing is... Well, Professor Snape had no living relatives when he died and the only people he was close to are so rich that they need and want nothing. He had an impressive library from what I am told and those—” she waved to the stack of books still lining the wall— “barely scratch the surface of it. The rest are at his estate, which he also left to me.”

“He left you his estate?” her father questioned, shocked.

“He left me almost everything; only a few certain items went to the Malfoys—items, which I assume, were related to his past as a Death Eater.” She picked up her own cup and took a sip, before continuing. “The Malfoys told me that he left me everything, because I was the only person that he knew that would truly appreciate it. And I have to admit that I can’t wait to see his library, but it just feels odd inheriting nearly everything he owned.”

She pushed a long, spiraling curl away from her face and gazed pleadingly at her parents. “I do not have to accept everything, but... I do. I mean, it’s not like it can go to anyone else; magic wills are iron clad. If I do not redeem his assets, they will just sit there. I made an appointment to go to Gringotts today to transfer everything, but it just feels so awkward.” She paused and nibbled on her lower lip. “I was hoping you would go with me?”

Her parents had gone with her to offer moral support, which Hermione had needed desperately. It was not that Snape had anything that shocked her, but this final act was almost too much for her.

She had gained ownership of his property, the mansion and everything in it, including his library, his equipment and a few house-elves. She still did not like the idea, but had come to accept that these creatures had strange, twisted ideas. It nearly killed them to think about freedom, but since they did not want to be free, she could at least give them comfort and care.

And as watery blue eyes gazed up at her, she had to repress all thoughts about SPEW. “Hello, I’m Hermione Granger. I work at Hogwarts. Professor Snape left—”

The house-elf nodded furiously. “Yes, Mistress Granger. Marigold was informed by Master Snape that you would be coming one day. Marigold attended the house until Mistress Granger came.”

It occurred to Hermione that Marigold spoke very well and assumed that the more prestigious wizarding households would want to educate their servants. “Thank you, Marigold,” she said with a soft smile, “but could you please refer to as something other than Mistress Granger?” *It reminds me of some expensive prostitute.* “And not Miss Granger, either.” *It reminds me of Severus.* “In fact, Miss Hermione would work nicely.”

Glancing around the lavish foyer, she once again felt awkward. Brushing it off, knowing this was now her home, she turned back to the house-elf. “Marigold, I have had a rather long day today. Could you show my room? I would like to take a bath and change.”

“Marigold can run your bath water,” the elf supplied happily.

“No.” When blue eyes started watering violently, she offered up a distraction. “But I would enjoy some tea and a good book for while I soak.” This seemed to please Marigold, much to the witch’s relief; she really did not feel like dealing with a distraught creature banging her head into the wall, not today.

When the house-elf stopped and opened a door, Hermione stared in shock. She glanced down at Marigold then back into the room, before taking a tentative step forward.

While her taste had indeed evolved to contemporary, a style that held no lavishness to it, this was enough to almost take her breath away. And it was nothing like she imagined Snape living in; she saw him living in a severe, minimalist-styled room—this room, while decorated in Slytherin’s primary color, was exquisitely beautiful.

The black carpet looked thick and soft, and the walls were a deep green with gold and cream swirling brush strokes. The enormous bed was covered in a thick green comforter of velvet with gold patterns weaved in. The mahogany footboard and headboard were amazingly intricate, and four posts, with carved serpents twined around them, held up a velvet canopy, while sheer green silk trailed down back down the posts.

“Was this...” She had to stop, nearly choking on the words; after a deep breath, she tried again. “Was this Professor Snape’s room?”

“Yes, Miss.”

Hermione turned away from the house-elf, a single tear sliding down her cheek as her eyes darted around the room, taking in the fireplace and the elegant chaise, the marble-top table and the crystal lamp. *This was his home*, she mentally whispered.

In her mind, she could hear Snape’s voice reply, *It is your home now, Miss Granger.*

Perseus Evans

Chapter 11 of 14

Hermione is returning to Hogwarts to teach Potions, and finds something dark and mysterious in the forest.

As she sank into the over-size bathtub, the jets on low, she mused at how much Snape's personal bathroom reminded her of an evening at the beach, watching the sun set. The floor was a dusky marble, like sand under a red sun, and the walls were dark steel-blue; the ceiling, however, had been charmed to show the sky, just like at Hogwarts. She could not help but wonder if Snape ever came here to relax, but as a flash of Snape's image passed through her mind, she laughed. Severus Snape probably spent as little time as possible in a bathroom.

Insolent little girl, the Snape voice said.

"I know, I know. Teaching these past few months has taught me that standing over a cauldron all day can do damage to one's locks. Thank Merlin for cleansing charms," Hermione responded.

As she sank deeper into the bubbling water, enjoying the heat that made her muscles relax as she rested, she could not help but think of Severus, of how his home did not seem to fit the man she thought she knew; of course, therein was the key. She thought she knew him, but how could she when she had only seen glimpses of a façade that he kept in place because of Voldemort?

"Ugh! That horrible, miserable..."

"What, Harry?" came Hermione's annoyed voice. She knew that Harry had to be very angry to be saying something negative about Snape, whose class they had just left, knowing there was a possibility of being heard.

"...Git!" Ron exclaimed loudly before his friend got the chance.

"How dare he take off twenty points just because he thinks the potion was medium lavender instead of light lavender! It was the same shade as in the book," Harry continued to rant. "And he did not have to torment Neville like that! You would think the overgrown bat would leave him alone...there was absolutely nothing wrong with the way he was mincing those bundles of elderberry leaves!"

"It's okay, Harry," Neville returned as he walked between him and Hermione. "I'm used to it."

"But you shouldn't have to be, Neville," the emerald-eyed wizard huffed. "No human being should treat another the way he treats you."

"Harry," Hermione hissed softly. "We all know that Snape has to keep a cover up! Voldemort will get suspicious if the Malfoys report Snape being nice to any of your friends. You know that!"

"Hermione, calling Neville a brainless, useless lump..." all four winced as Ron recalled Snape's words... "was going beyond keeping up a cover! It was cruel!"

"I know, Ron, but..."

"He's an arse, Hermione!" the red-head exclaimed. "Anyone who can treat people the way Snape does has to be screwed up in the head somewhere. I'm telling you, he's evil!"

The witch glared hotly at her friend. "He is not evil."

She remembered her words to her best friends as if it were yesterday; she had repeated them enough, so it was not like she would forget them anytime soon. And no matter what or how many sacrifices Snape seemed to make, most of them usually at a huge personal risk, her friends seemed to think he was loyal to Voldemort. And of course, he had seemed to prove her wrong when Harry had watched the man raise his wand, point it at Dumbledore's chest and let loose the curse that had claimed so many others before the Headmaster.

Luckily for her friends, they knew better than to ever tell her "I told you so", even in roundabout ways.

Even after so many years, she could feel the pain of betrayal as if it were as open as a fresh wound. That pain, however, was eclipsed intensely by the agony of watching Severus disappear in a cloud of black. She watched it in her mind over and over again; there was not a day that went by that she didn't see the mix of black and purple strike his chest and the enormous cloud engulf him; nor could she forget the boom that left an eternal ringing in her mind.

Closing her eyes and fighting desperately for control, she settled completely into the hot, swirling water, and called for Marigold to bring her tea and a book. She was only slightly surprised when a bath tray instantly appeared over the tub...a teapot, cup and a large tome sitting atop the surface.

The book instantly caught her attention, looking old and dusty, and she turned it to read the title and the author's name on the spine. *Fatum Incantare*. Perseus Evans.

Hermione started so violently that she had to grab the book to keep it from falling into the water, and that is when she noticed... Perseus Evans.

Severus Snape.

Hermione brusquely dropped the books on Lucius's desk, glaring. "Did you know?" When he blinked up at her, apparently shocked by her aggressive behavior, she shoved the tomes toward him. "Did you know that Severus Snape wrote these books, Lucius?"

As soon as she realized who the writer really was, she had called for Marigold to bring her fresh robes and immediately charmed herself dry, dressed and traveled by Floo straight to Lucius' office.

Now, the older Malfoy glanced down to look at the writing on the spine, and closed his eyes. "Yes, Hermione. I did."

"Were you going to tell me?" she demanded angrily. "Were you ever going to mention that Severus wrote these? Were you?" Oh she was furious, angrier than she could ever remember being, and the normally aristocratic man seemed to wilt slightly under her rage.

"Not until you asked me, no." Lucius sighed and turned weary eyes up to the girl. "Severus did not want me to tell you that he had written those books; he did not want you to know everything about his past. The only reason he left those books in your possession was so that in time, when you were ready, you could save him."

"Save him?" she questioned, angry and dumbstruck. "Save him? He's dead! Severus Snape is dead!" She paced furiously around the room. "What is this? Is it some kind of sick joke that you two created before he died to see if he could finally drive me to the edge of my sanity?"

"Hermione, I am only telling you what I know." Lucius leaned back in his chair and gave her an apologetic shrug. "I have no answers for you, and for that I am sorry."

The witch felt tears welling in her eyes, and with a slow nod, turned to leave, pausing only when Lucius' voice stopped her.

"He was very impressed by you, Hermione," the man said with conviction. "Despite everything he said and did, despite the harsh mask he showed to everyone, he could be a very caring and gentle man. He cared about his students more than they could ever imagine, and he deeply enjoyed having you as a student, because you actually cared about what you were learning, because you had a genuine interest. And even though he never showed it to you, you had his approval all along. You always did, Hermione."

"Severus did not have many regrets in his life, only three: joining the Death Eaters and Voldemort, Dumbledore..." it was here that he gave her a small, sad smile... "and you. He regretted never telling you how proud he was of you, of the woman you were becoming. He would still be proud of you."

Tears spilled from the witch's eyes and down her cheeks as she turned to face the man she had been angry with only moments before. "Really?" She felt like a foolish child for asking, but could not stop herself and was pleased when the blond nodded.

"He cared about you, Hermione; he regretted you as well, but was also grateful for you. You were one of the few things in Severus' life that could make him smile."

Feeling a little better, the Gryffindor opened the door and made to leave, stopping once again at Lucius' question.

"Out of curiosity, Hermione, when was the last time you restocked your supply of ingredients?"

The woman was stunned by the curious question and threw the Slytherin a surprised glance. "It's been a while, and they are running low. I need some more Dragon's Breath, but I doubt Neville and Harry would be too thrilled with me going into the forest again."

Lucius nodded. "I would not go alone at night, but perhaps you can go one afternoon on a weekend. You don't want to run out."

Hermione returned his smile. "Thank you. I will probably go this Saturday." She nibbled her lip, her grin sliding into a frown. "Lucius, are the faculty quite sure that Athair is not dangerous?"

The wizard nodded. "We have never had any problems with him. I know your first meeting with him was probably terrifying..." he chuckled at the face the young woman made... "however, he is very territorial about the forest; it is where he lives and he probably wasn't expecting a "newcomer" to be wandering around in his home. He might bellow and screech, but he would never hurt you. I promise. Athair's bellow is worse than his bite."

Hermione chuckled softly. "That kind of reminds me of Severus."

The Damsels and the Dragon

Chapter 12 of 14

Hermione is returning to Hogwarts to teach Potions, and finds something dark and mysterious in the forest.

The Damsel and the Dragon

Hermione had decided to take Lucius' advice sooner than later, and made sure to slip out right after Sunday brunch, in hopes to avoid Neville and Harry. And as she strode across the bright grounds of the school, she waved her wand around her, effectively changing her informal robes into jeans and a light-weight, black sweater.

While she would miss the snow of winter, she certainly would not miss the cold or the heavy clothing. Of course, it really would not have mattered too much in the forest. Indeed, it would have still been cold, but the severity was lessened by the dense population of trees; it was difficult for wind to break through the numerous trunks and branches. In some areas the trees grew so close together that it provided a great canopy for the few plants that could survive the cold, because very little snow could pass through the crowded branches of the firs.

But in areas like the one she stood in, the sunlight could easily filter through the trees and spill warmly onto her face.

She inhaled the clean air deeply, the crisp coolness stinging her already agitated sinuses. Resisting the urge to loudly exclaim a curse word, she carefully tracked her way through the forest, thinking of how many times Snape must have come to this place to search for ingredients both common and rare.

You think about me far too much, you silly girl.

"I know," she answered herself, knowing that Snape's voice was one of her own making. "I can't help it. I'm living in your home, teaching your classes, spending my time with the people you loved; I'm living your life, the life you were always meant to live." She snorted daintily. "Hell, I'm probably even walking down a path that you have probably traveled many times before."

Hermione stopped at a large tree and pressed a palm to the trunk. "I wonder what you would be like, not having to live under Voldemort or Dumbledore." She sighed heavily and began walking again. "Lucius said that you were impressed by me, proud of me... Before I knew you were a spy, it hurt; every single time you berated me, embarrassed me, it felt like a slap. I spent too many nights crying because of you, and even when we realized you were a spy, it still hurt. All I wanted was just one tiny sign of approval, and apparently I had it... I just wanted to see it."

The rising sun caused shadows to dance across the forest's floor, and it reminded the witch of the tainted past that Snape had been so keen to hide from her.

He had not been a good man. She was certain that he had murdered, tortured, raped—the Death Eaters were among the cruelest, vilest humans alive, and if Voldemort's reaction to Snape's betrayal was any sign to go on, then it left no doubt in her mind that Snape had been one of the highest ranking, and certainly a favourite.

Yet knowing he was going to die, he had ordered his friends not to inform her of the books he had written. But then he left them for her? To save him.

She pushed it away from her mind almost immediately; she really did not want to think about that—it made her head spin trying to figure out how in the world she was supposed to save a dead man, a man who had not existed as part of the world for over seven years. It was ludicrous!

It is, isn't it? the Snape voice asked rhetorically. *There are no spells, incantations—*

"Yes, I remember," she huffed. "And do you know how crazy I feel now that my conscience has decided to adopt your voice?"

Awwww... I'm sure Snape would feel loved.

Hermione snorted. "I just bet he would. Now could you please shut up? I'm supposed to be working!" It was at her oh-so-polite request that her Snape-conscience went silent and stayed that way, allowing her to finish her trek in peace, so she was able to gather copious amounts of quite a few ingredients.

Of course, the lack of talking from her confused mind did not give her complete ease, considering she had felt eyes watching her for over ten minutes. She knew exactly who was watching her and repressed her fight-or-flight response, refusing to be scared off by an over-grown lizard!

I dare you to say that to his face.

"I thought I told you to shut up," the witch hissed angrily as she stepped out into the clearing, glancing around for signs of Athair, sighing in relief when she did not see a trace of him.

You do know that they can meld with your own shadow, right?

Hermione blinked. "They can?" She didn't remember reading that. "How in the world do you—"

A massive shadow eclipsing her own and a loud sound of **dmmpmph** as the dragon touched ground behind her cut off any retorts she was going to throw to the Snape-conscience.

Turning ever so slowly, so slowly that it probably appeared that she was moving in slow motion, she blinked up at the black shiny beast in front of her, jumping with a yelp of surprise when he lowered his head and bellowed at her, the heat from his nostrils causing her to stagger backwards a few steps.

Plucking up every ounce of bravery she could muster, she leaned forward and shouted right back at him. "I'm not bothering you!" She watched as the creature shook its head like a confused dog that had just gotten a good surprise whack; he was apparently shocked by her sudden boldness, and she used this moment of disorientation to gain more ground. "I have no plans on disturbing you or your home! I am only gathering ingredients for my class."

When he tilted his head as though at a complete loss as to what she was saying, her blood boiled in her veins. "I know you understand every single word that I'm saying!"

The dragon drew himself up, spreading his wings wide before tucking them sharply back against his body.

Hermione could sense what was going to happen next and braced her feet slightly apart, waiting for the onslaught.

Athair lunged forward, thrusting his neck toward her, his face only a few feet from hers as he shrieked and blew hot breath from his flaring nostrils, sending her sprawling to the ground despite her efforts to stay upright. Shifting slightly, he swung his tail and slammed it to the ground just in front of her before lunging at her again.

The witch stiffened as his jaws snapped shut only mere inches from her face, and she could feel the heat coming from him in small puffs as he panted in exertion. Inside she was trembling, because she knew that he could easily shred her to tiny pieces; however, she was more worried that, instead of attacking, he kept his face so close to her body... so close, in fact, that when he inhaled deeply, her hair fluttered around her.

She suppressed the gasp of surprise that threatened to burst from her chest as she realized what he was doing.

He was taking in all of her scents, the smell of her sweat and the blood that oozed from the abrasions on her knees where she fell; he was inhaling her fear and the strange exhilaration that coursed through her as he sniffed near her face again, shifting to smell her hair before he moved his face farther down to her neck and chest. As he moved lower, Hermione blushed, but did not dare move; she did not want to risk angering him again.

She whimpered as she felt the warm puffs of breath against her calves, and could not stop a tiny cry of surprise as he abruptly moved his face back up and buried his snout beneath her armpit. She instinctively back away, wincing when he head-butted her again between her breast and closed arm, and when he repeated the move, it dawned on her that he was, indeed, trying to get her to move, but not away... He was trying to lift her—he wanted her to stand!

Shaky, she hauled herself to her feet and watched as the dragon drew himself up to, what she was sure, was his fullest height. And as he stared down at her, studying her still form, she suddenly had the feeling that he was sad and she could not, for the life of her, figure out why.

Without warning, Athair pushed off the ground, his wings spreading out as he took flight, leaving Hermione alone, confused, and feeling strangely empty.

Lucius' Reflections

Chapter 13 of 14

Hermione is returning to Hogwarts to teach Potions, and finds something dark and mysterious in the forest.

IMPORTANT NOTES ARE AT THE BOTTOM. PLEASE READ.

Lucius' Reflections

"I'm crazy!"

Lucius rolled his eyes at his black-clad friend. "You are not crazy, Severus. She is very pretty, after all; she is bright, witty and..."

"And my student! My underage student at that," Snape argued.

"She is perfect for you, and she is not going to be a teen forever," replied the older wizard. "She is already a year older than the rest of her year-mates, or so Draco told me. Come next year, she will be a legal and consenting adult."

"Well, there will not be anything to consent to, considering that I will not survive to next year!" Before the blond could tell him he was wrong, Snape continued, "You know that when the War comes and we have to cross the line that he will not let us go unpunished. I doubt that we will even make it to the other side. Besides..." he bowed his head to hide his watering eyes... "after tonight, the little witch will hate me."

Lucius did not have to ask what his friend meant; he already knew: Severus had to kill Dumbledore.

"She would not hate you, not if she knew what was happening."

"But she cannot know," Snape growled. "My father, in all his glorious wisdom, doesn't want her, or Potter, or those Weasley brats to know. They do not have the ability to ward their minds against the Dark Lord, and Dumbledore does not want to risk him stumbling across that information should he go searching in their unguarded minds."

the life and brilliance that I knew I would never be able to for many, many years.

If I had tried to force this story out of myself while being so ill, it would not have been of any worth. It would not have been fair to me or to the story, and it certainly would not have been fair to you the readers to continue with something that my heart was just not in at the time. It would have been a poor shadow (no pun intended) of what I had dreamed of, and that would have been unacceptable.

So at that time, I made the choice to give the Damsel and the Dragon a very good home with the amazing [MsTree](#). If you just click on her name, it will take you to her profile, where you can find the continuation of this story, or you can just click on [Velvet Song's Damsels and Dragons](#) to go straight to the story.

She is a wonderful and creative writer, and I am so grateful that she was willing to take this story on, and more so that she put my name in the title. She is an amazing story teller, and a generous person. I was blown away with the fabulous plot she spun to conclude this tale, so to read the continuation of D&D, as well as her fabulous story Heaven or Hell, click on her profile above and have a look.

Thank you.

~Anushka

MS TREE

Chapter 14 of 14

Hermione is returning to Hogwarts to teach Potions, and finds something dark and mysterious in the forest.

This is NOT a chapter, but a direction to the continuation of the story by MS.TREE!

Please go see her amazing continuation of the story, here at <http://www.thepetulantpoetess.com/viewstory.php?sid=19501>