

Fallen

by BrenaMarie

On her first day of teaching, Hermione Granger finds a hidden treasure in her office.
What she doesn't realize is how much this discovery will change her life.

Haunted

Chapter 1 of 11

On her first day of teaching, Hermione Granger finds a hidden treasure in her office. What she doesn't realize is how much this discovery will change her life.

Long lost words whisper slowly to me

Still can't find what keeps me here

When all this time I've been so hollow inside

I know you're still there.

~ "Haunted" by Evanescence

When the war ended I think we were all lost in a way. The Order of the Phoenix members especially had to handle the complete loss and devastation the final battle brought. Not only did I have to stomach the death of friends and the loss of my own parents but I had to come to terms with the knowledge that I let a hero die. The battle of Hogwarts may have been a victory, but my internal struggle had only just begun.

The adrenaline of the war instigated my short-lived relationship with Ronald Weasley. When faced with the realization that I was still alive, my hormones took control of my brain. As illogical as it may sound, that is exactly what happened. I tried for weeks to be his loving, attentive girlfriend. I tried to be what he needed to the detriment of my own sanity.

While attempting to be part of a couple, I began having horrific nightmares. I found myself constantly waking up in a cold sweat after watching Professor Snape die in the Shrieking Shack night after night. I knew something had to change; I needed some peace. Since I knew I couldn't control my evening torment, I decided to end my ill-conceived pairing with Ron. I didn't expect it to be easy, but it turned out to be more difficult than I had planned for.

I met Ron at the Burrow and asked him if we could take a walk through Ottery St. Catchpole's countryside. It was honestly the best solution when you think about it. No nosy family members or passers-by trying to hear some juicy gossip. I was so relieved when he readily agreed to my request.

When we had travelled a decent distance from the house I knew it was time. I stopped walking along the gravel path we were on and reached out my hand to his. Taking a deep breath, I looked up to the sky, hoping for some kind support from the bright sun and summer breeze. After I collected the last of my thoughts, I turned to Ron and began.

"Ron, I... I can't do this anymore."

"Wh...what do you mean, Hermione?"

"I care for you, very deeply, but I can't be your girlfriend anymore... There's too much going on, too much I have to process."

He was trying so hard not to be angry with me. I could see the color creeping up along his neck into his ears which always told me when his irritation was reaching a fever pitch. I couldn't let his emotions stop me, so I pressed on.

"I'm sorry, Ron. Honestly, I know you don't need this on top of everything else you're going through... But I can't keep pretending that everything is normal and wonderful when it's not, and it's killing me," I pleaded, hoping it would dissolve some of his anger.

"What is upsetting you so much? Is it something I can do or...?" he said in a quiet yet hopeful way.

I shook my head while the tears began to fall from my eyes.

"No, Ron, there's nothing you can do. This is something I have to do on my own. I have to find my own way through my disjointed feelings. I know it doesn't make sense now, and I don't even know what exactly I need to accomplish yet. But, I know I need to do it alone. I'm sorry."

"It sounds like you've made your decision then," he ground out.

"Yes, I have. There isn't anything you can say or do to change it..."

"Is it someone else?"

"Bloody hell, Ronald! No, there's no one else! My parents think they never had a daughter, and I will never see them again. I watched way too many people die, and I never finished my seventh year at Hogwarts. I have a lot I need to deal with, and I don't need a romantic relationship complicating my other problems right now!"

"Fine! Deal with your issues! I can't promise I'll still be around after you've found yourself or whatever it is that you're talking about!"

I looked up at him, drained completely because of his petulant attitude and shook my head. But before I could respond to his tirade, he turned on the spot and disappeared to only Merlin knew where.

I spent a lot of time following my break-up considering all of my emotional and academic issues. The nightmares about Professor Snape didn't get any easier; if anything they became even more difficult to handle.

As the days turned into months, I couldn't shake the unfairness of it all. I found myself constantly thinking of the man who haunted my dreams. The man who would stare at me with accusing eyes as the last of his life force drained away. He would condemn me each night for my failure. I had finally failed at something in such an utterly spectacular fashion that I began to feel like I would never be able to recover.

Finally, the solution to most of my problems came to me. One cold October morning, after waking up screaming once more, I devised a plan. This plan would not only remedy my lack of career path but would more than likely solve the problem of my night terrors as well. I swore to myself that morning that I wouldn't let Severus Snape's death be in vain.

It only took two weeks to set my plan in motion. When the final owl arrived, I began packing my things.

"Hermione, why do you have to move to Germany? I just don't understand." Ron Weasley whined from the doorway of my flat.

"Ronald, we've been through this. I've been accepted to apprentice with Mr. Knaus in Germany. I need to go to him for this education; it doesn't work the other way around!" Frustrated, I snapped my wand towards the row of packed boxes in the hall to close and seal them for travel.

"I just thought... you know... that after you had your little break that we could have something special..."

"I'm sorry, Ron, but you need to move on. We broke up months ago, and this is just something I need to do."

"But you never even liked Potions! I just don't understand why you've all of a sudden decided that this is what you want to do for the rest of your life! Besides, you've got enough knowledge in the subject to teach the subject if that's what you really want to do... But I remember how angry you were with the greasy git's textbook. You..."

In an instant I had the tip of my wand pressed into his throat.

"Call Professor Snape that again, Ronald, and you will be regretting it for a long time," I seethed. "Show some respect! That man gave his life so we could still be here today. I may not have had the aptitude for Potions that he had, but I can learn anything. Plus, Mr. Knaus believes I have the potential. So, I'm moving to Germany, and I will learn everything about the *subtle art of potion making*. There will be no further discussion regarding this topic, understand me?"

"Yes, perfectly."

I could hear the animosity in his voice, but honestly didn't care. No one could understand my quest to honor Professor Snape's memory. It made me feel better though. I no longer felt lost in my anger and depression regarding what happened to him. I needed to gain the knowledge that he always tried to impart. I needed to be looked to as the foremost Potions maker in the country and proudly state that Severus Snape had been my inspiration.

Five years later, after completing my apprenticeship, I heard from Professor McGonagall. The time had arrived for me to return home and accept the position I had only dreamed of acquiring. Potion making with Mr. Knaus ended up being the cure for my nightmares, at least for the most part.

Standing in the Headmistress's office, I gazed upon the rows and rows of painted former heads of Hogwarts. As a Muggle-born, I've always been fascinated by the concept of moving portraits. While I waited for Minerva to finish her paperwork, I watched the paintings, all of them busy with their individual pursuits and pretending not to notice me.

When my eyes fell upon the man who, by this school's standards is considered to be the last Hogwarts Headmaster, I felt my hands immediately turn to fists. My jaw clenched as I stared into the twinkling blue eyes of Albus Dumbledore.

I had so many issues with this portrait. The first of which was the fact that Albus wasn't the last Headmaster. Professor Snape deserved a damn portrait in this office for all that he had suffered in this position. I knew I wasn't the only one who felt that way; Harry and I had had several discussions on this very subject. But, standing there facing the cold reality simply made my blood boil.

Next, I thought about how Dumbledore set the poor man up for desolation and torture and ultimately sent him to his death. I wanted to scream at him. I wanted to take all my anger and frustration out on that painting for his hand in the wasted life and potential that was Severus Snape's existence. Before I could even formulate a scathing remark for the painted Dumbledore, Professor McGonagall looked up from her desk and invited me to have a seat.

"I apologize for keeping you waiting, Hermione. Thank you so much for accepting my offer," Professor McGonagall said with a smile.

Just seeing my very stern, former head of house smile eased some of the tension running through my veins.

"It's not a problem, Headmistress. I'm sure you are very busy. I just want to thank you again for offering me the position here..." I said calmly in response.

"Please, Hermione, you're a staff member now. It is common practice for us to use first names when addressing each other." She said this with another warm smile, and I simply nodded in return.

"Now, you obviously already know the location of your classroom and office. The entrance to your personal quarters can be accessed through your office. There will be a bare wall behind your desk which is heavily warded."

She handed me a sheet a parchment which had a list of the wards and their removal incantations on it. I perused the information as she continued.

"You may key the wards to you and add to them as you see fit. You'll have six weeks until the start of term, but I would like to see your lesson plans in four. The meal times have not changed since you were a student, and I would appreciate seeing you present for at least one per day. Office hours should be listed on your door should any students need to see you regarding their work."

I looked up when she finished. "That sounds perfectly reasonable. I'll make sure I get that information to you as soon as possible."

She and I exchanged a few more pleasantries, but then my anxiousness to go to my new classroom got the better of me. I quickly made my way through the corridors and down to the dungeons. I took a deep breath before opening the heavy wooden door that lead to the Potions classroom.

I let the door hit the wall with the familiar, comforting slam that it used to have in my past. For as nerve-wracking as it used to be, hearing that sound gave me the feeling that I was home.

The weeks leading to the start of term flew by. I spent most of my time immersed in organizing my new living space and creating lesson plans. By the time my first day of lessons ended, I felt completely exhausted.

I packed up my things and walked the short distance to my office. There I fell, not too gracefully, into my squishy leather desk chair. I leaned my elbows against the age-worn mahogany surface of my desk and began rubbing my temples. I could tell right away my impending headache would be of epic proportions.

I really need to talk to Minerva about the torture session that is first-year Gryffindors and Slytherins together in the same room... on the first day of lessons no less! I thought, irritated as I continued to rub my temples.

I swear it's a wonder they know which side of a cauldron is up!

Dropping all pretense of attempting to ease my headache, I let my head fall to the desktop. Just before my forehead hit the wood, I uttered the only phrase which summed up how I felt at the time.

"Bloody. Dunderheads."

I heard a quiet click after my head made contact with the desk. Wary of what could have made the sound, I opened my eyes slightly and looked in the direction from which the noise had come. What I found startled me so much I bolted upright and stared at the hidden compartment of my desk that had opened for me.

The once smooth mahogany finish now had an eight by twelve seam cut into its surface. Instinctively, I reached out to touch the panel and felt the wood give a little as if held together by a spring clasp. I lifted the cut section to reveal a tattered, leather bound book. After removing the book and closing the lid of the compartment, the desk reverted to its originally smooth surface.

Shrugging, I settled myself comfortably back into my desk chair to peruse my hidden treasure. The brown leather simply proclaimed JOURNAL on the front cover. I turned the book over in my hands a few times, examining it for any markings or indicators of who it had once belonged to. When that proved fruitless, I cracked open the front cover.

I gasped as I read the name written underneath the obligatory "This Journal Belongs To" stamp.

Severus Snape

A/N: This story was written for my amazing fandom sister *debjunk* as part of the 2010 SS/HG Exchange. *Fallen* was written with nothing but love in my heart for the person to whom it was being gifted.

I used two of her prompts to create this story, which will be complete in 11 chapters.

Prompt 1: *Hermione is the new Potions professor. She uncovers Snape's diary, well hidden in the Potions lab or her room. In the diary, she finds evidence that he's still alive. Can be a potion he created or something else. She immediately begins searching for him, and eventually finds him. How does he react and what happens to bring them together?*

Prompt 2: *A fic based off the song "My Immortal" by Evanescence. Can be a real songfic, or just a story inspired by the song.*

Instead of using just "My Immortal," I used the entire album as inspiration, and each chapter has a corresponding song.

I need to thank several people who helped keep me sane during my time writing this story. It's due to their unfailing encouragement that this story ended up being what it is today.

Much love goes out to my alpha reader team of *Clairvoyant*, *isalie964*, and my RL best friend *Jessikitty*. Without them I don't know if I would have had the strength to keep writing.

Extreme praise, flowers, hearts, and chocolate go out to *karelia*, my amazingly supportive and knowledgeable beta reader. She spent so much time working with me and making sure that this story was proper and grammatically correct, even though her time was at a premium at that point. Thank you, honey. I seriously don't know what I would have done without your guidance.

Even though he'll never read this, I also need to acknowledge my wonderful husband for being my rock. He was my pillar of strength. When I thought I couldn't go any further, he would sit me down and talk me through the next part of my writing.

This is my first attempt at writing something that isn't a one-shot, and I would love to hear your thoughts!

Thank you in advance, and much love.

~ Brena

My Immortal

Chapter 2 of 11

On her first day of teaching, Hermione Granger finds a hidden treasure in her office. What she doesn't realize is how much this discovery will change her life.

You used to captivate me

By your resonating light

Now I'm bound by the life you left behind

Your face it haunts my once pleasant dreams

Your voice it chased away all the sanity in me...

~ "My Immortal" by Evanescence

I sat there staring at the familiar spiky script. I wanted nothing more than to dive right into the man's thoughts. To know what he went through and what made him tick. On the other hand, I knew he had been an exceptionally private man. In the face of this, my reading this book would be the height of disrespect; he would have considered it most dishonorable.

With this thought I closed the journal, and placed it gently in my lap.

I felt emotionally torn as I weighed the pros and cons of reading the sad autobiography which I held. I absentmindedly stroked the leather cover while I stared at the office wall, lost in my thoughts.

Finally, my curiosity won out.

I slowly stood and clutched the journal close to my body as if I were protecting it from the harsh outside world. I entered my quarters and sat myself in the comfortable armchair which was situated in front of the hearth. With a somewhat guilty conscience, I lit a fire, summoned some tea, and settled in to read.

22 November 1981

You would be shocked to know that I'm finally writing in the book you gave me years ago. It has taken your death for me to actually use it. You knew I never had any aptitude for romantic words or feelings. And I doubt I will ever be able to express what is on my mind properly, but I'm going to try because this is something you wanted for me... an outlet for my pain and suffering...

For weeks I've been trying to function knowing that you're gone... that your light has been stripped from the world. Now, there is only darkness. I miss you. I know we haven't talked in years, but those are really the only words that can surmise how I'm feeling.

I see you everywhere. I know that your ghost isn't lingering, but sometimes, I feel that you're still here. Reminding me of all of my mistakes, accusing me for the part I played in bringing about your death. How selfish have I been? All I ever wanted was to love you and to have you love me in return. For you to look at me and know how much I adored you. So, I put my trust in a madman to make this happen for me, since I never managed to accomplish it on my own.

There will never be another for me, Lily. You were the only one... the one person in the entire world who could understand me, who accepted me. You were the light to my darkness, the kindness to my sarcasm. Time will never be able to erase you from my memory. No amount of months or years will dull the pain, and I will spend the rest of my life honoring you.

I've already gone to Dumbledore; I wanted him to save you... He's going to keep me out of Azkaban in exchange for remaining his spy, as if I had a choice. There's no telling how long I'll be able to survive when the Dark Lord does return. But I swear I will endure whatever pain and suffering because I know I deserve it. In the end, I hope he kills me slowly...

Wiping at the single tear tracking down my cheek, I closed the book and placed it on the coffee table. My thoughts were as tortured as those of the man whose journal I now possessed.

If this is the first entry, I can only imagine how much worse his state of mind is going to get, mused. He's going to have another seventeen years to suffer with this agony... I'm glad that he's finally at rest, but to live with this kind of guilt for nearly two decades must have been simply unbearable.

As much as I might want to know what he has to say next, I really think I need a break.

With this thought I felt and heard a distinct rumble coming from my stomach. It appeared as though having dinner in the Great Hall would be at the top of my to-do list.

I knew I didn't want to leave Professor Snape's journal simply sitting out on my coffee table as if it were an everyday piece of reading material. Searching my mind for the safest place to store it, I settled on my bedside table drawer. I gently picked up the worn, leather bound book and walked into my bedroom.

Over the weeks since I'd arrived at Hogwarts, I sincerely tried to make the room a tad more comfortable. In the beginning I found it difficult living without any natural light. Having quarters in the dungeon, as convenient as they might be, severely messed with my mood. They were cold, dark, damp and just generally depressing. The aesthetic issues weren't my only problem though. In the back of my mind, I knew the man who continued to make cameo appearances in my dreams once called this room home.

My attempts to create a more comfortable environment included plenty of photographs. Reminders of my life before the war changed... well, everything. I created a magical window also, something that would simulate the rising and setting of the sun. I placed it on the far right wall adjacent to my double four poster bed.

I walked across the room to sit on the bed and pulled out the drawer of my bedside table. Being moderately paranoid, I placed a few nasty wards on the table after stowing the journal. Passing the vanity on my way out, I briefly checked my appearance and quickly exited in search of dinner.

Still not entirely comfortable with the staff entrance, I entered the Great Hall through the large oak doors. Most of the students had already arrived and were tucking into their meals. I smiled and nodded as I made my way to the head table.

I chose the available seat next to my long-time friend, and current Herbology professor, Neville Longbottom.

"Good evening, Hermione!" Neville said joyfully as I sat down. "How did your first day of lessons go? Any explosions?" He continued while spooning a helping of roast potatoes onto his plate.

I groaned in response. Seriously, just the thought of rehashing my entire day gave me a headache.

I took a second to begin adding some broccoli and carrots to my plate before answering him. "No, no explosions. Although I think Mr. Craig had actually been looking for one. I managed to catch him in the act of adding porcupine quills to his boil cure while the cauldron was still sitting on the fire... His demeanor gave him away, the mischievous glint in his eyes just told me he was up to something."

"I, ummm, know all about those quills... the hard way. But, wow, you're already getting a feel for who the troublemakers are! I have to admit, it took me a little longer than a day to suss them out," he said with a chuckle.

Before I brought a fork-full of roast chicken to my mouth, I turned back to Neville. "Everything a success for you today?"

I listened as my dinner partner regaled me with tales of his plants and his students. And of how his students handled his plants. I could tell that he'd been simply itching to talk to someone about it.

Ugh, the ins and outs of Herbology never held any interest for me. I love Neville, but he's going to bore me to tears if he keeps this up.

Plants as they relate to potions, or as ingredients, that I could discuss. Conversely, I knew Neville had no interest in potions as a subject, so we were pretty much even.

I could feel myself starting to zone out as his voice became a low level buzz. I mechanically ate my dinner and began contemplating the secret treasure locked away in my bedroom.

"It's really nice having you around, Hermione."

That one sentence called me back to reality.

"Oh, thank you, Neville. It's great to be here!" I said with genuine sincerity.

"It was getting a little tiresome being the youngest professor here..." he trailed off.

I placed my fork down and felt my plate disappear as I turned to face my blond-haired friend. I raised my left hand and gently set it on his right forearm comfortingly.

"I understand how difficult it must have been for you, Neville. Maybe we could plan a trip to Hogsmeade some weekend to catch up?"

My heart warmed a little just by watching his eyes begin to sparkle. Then the most relieved smile I had ever seen broke out across his face.

"That would be wonderful, Hermione! I can't wait to hear all about Germany."

With a quiet pop, treacle pudding appeared on the table.

"Would you like some?" Neville asked kindly.

"Actually, I'm going to need to decline. I have some reading that I really need to catch up on before I go to sleep."

"Oh, okay! Well, maybe next time."

We bid each other good night, and I quickly made the trek back to my dungeon quarters in search of my comfortable bed and a very engaging book.

Finally snuggled into my bed, surrounded by pillows, I reached into my night stand and pulled out Professor Snape's journal.

Instead of reading the entire book in order, I flipped through the pages until I came to a date that I recognized.

31 Aug 1991

The students return tomorrow and a whole new group of first year dunderheads for me to break in. I loathe the start of term as surely as the sun rises, but this year will be the worst. Your son will be on the Hogwarts Express tomorrow. And for the next seven years I will have the privilege of looking upon the flesh and blood proof that you loved another man.

Not only did you give James Potter of all people a son but you refused to save yourself for him. I know you were given a choice, Lily, and I can't help but resent your son for that. You're dead because you valued his life more than your own. Now, my personal hell will be complete. I get to look into your eyes, but they will be set in Potter's face.

*Oh, yes... I already know about how he has "your eyes." Hagrid returned to the school after taking him to Diagon Alley and has not stopped yammering on and on about his time with **Harry Potter**...*

I know everyone thinks the Dark Lord is dead, and that your son killed him, but I know he's still lingering. I've researched the magic used to create the Dark Mark, and from what I found, if its creator is dead, it should disappear... but it hasn't. For the last year I've watched as the faint lines that have made up the outline of my regretful tattoo have proceeded to get just a little darker. He's coming, Lily, he's going to return to finish what he started.

*I don't know how he's going to do it, and all I can do is wait. That's all I've been doing... waiting. When the time comes, as much as I may resent his existence, I will protect your son. He's all that's left of you on this earth. And even though I won't be able to stop thinking about how I had always hoped that he would have been **our** son, I will still protect him...*

"This man's devotion knows no bounds..." I said aloud as I flipped through the pages once more.

24 June 1995

I will without a doubt be sent straight to hell upon my death. There is no light at the end of the tunnel for me. You would more than likely tell me I'm being melodramatic. But once you hear what I had to do tonight, I think you would only agree with my assessment.

The Dark Lord returned to true corporeal form last night. I had known it was coming and was absolutely powerless to stop it. He tried to kill your son, and I wasn't even there. Dumbledore made me wait! He made me stand around and wait while your son was being hunted down and sliced open. He is safe for the time being, not that I had

anything to do with that.

When Albus finally gave me the direct order to return to the Dark Lord, I had been tortured immediately upon arrival, which I had expected. After the Crucio had stopped, I crawled on hands and knees and kissed the hem of the bastard's robes. I had to beg... beg to be forgiven and accepted as one of "The Faithful" once more. Of course I showed him how I continued to remain at my last assigned post and that gave me a slight reprieve... but only slight.

In an attempt to please his Master, Goyle found a few unsuspecting Muggles. They were to be the entertainment for the impromptu revel to celebrate the Dark Lord's return.

They're dead now. But not before some of the most atrocious acts that could be committed against another human being took place. They were raped, tortured and raped again before finally receiving the Avada Kedavra. I'm trapped in a cage with animals, and the only way to survive is to become one of them.

I danced the dance of a true Death Eater tonight in an unconscionable attempt to please both my masters. All I wanted was to ensure the good side of this battle would win in the end. And when the end came, I wanted to see you. I wanted to stand in your presence and know, finally, that you forgave me. This of course is impossible now. After all I've done and will do, hell is truly the only option for a criminal such as I.

Now, my only option is to find a way to keep my final breath from coming... something that would essentially keep me in a coma for eternity. Where my existence would be whatever I created from my own dreams and mind. I already have a few ideas... after tonight, I think it's time to investigate the alternatives.

I closed the book and gently placed it on my comforter-covered lap.

He wanted an alternative to death? Now I want to know if he found it! What if the Death Eaters didn't take his body like we assumed?

My thoughts were traveling a mile a minute. Over and over I considered the implications of what I had just read.

I need to know how his research fared... What if he's still alive somewhere?

I glanced at my bedside clock and groaned, *I also need to tackle second year Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws at eight a.m... I really should get some sleep. I'd hate to have to explain to the Headmistress why there was an explosion on my second day of classes... But, Professor Snape... damn it!*

Frustrated, I put the book away and called out, "Nox." As I closed my eyes I cursed the existence of adult responsibilities and prayed for sleep to take me quickly.

A/N: Again thanks to my awesome alpha reader team and my amazing beta, *karelia*.

This was one of my favorite chapters to write! I hope you all enjoyed it!

Much Love,

~ Brena

Tourniquet

Chapter 3 of 11

On her first day of teaching, Hermione Granger finds a hidden treasure in her office. What she doesn't realize is how much this discovery will change her life.

I tried to kill the pain

But only brought more

I lay dying

And I'm pouring, crimson regret and betrayal

I'm dying... praying... bleeding and screaming

Am I too lost to be saved?

Am I too lost?

~ "Tourniquet" by Evanescence

I was running through the labyrinth which makes up a dream Hogwarts. Halls and halls of the same grey stone walls. I had no way to discern where I happened to be, or even what floor I could be running on. But I knew I needed to get to the library.

Scared out of my mind and knowing I was definitely being chased, I continued sprinting. I rounded a corner and I turned back to see if my pursuer happened to be any closer, which of course they were. I stumbled but kept going as I heard the stone walls around me starting to crack and crumble. That's when the valerian root began breaking through the walls.

Yes, the thing chasing me through the halls of Hogwarts was valerian root. The plant slithered after me at a break-neck rate and emerged from every crack in the wall, and every open doorway.

Finally, I slammed into the double doors that led into the library. I knew that if I could just get to the Restricted Section, I might be able to solve my plant problem. Tearing through the stacks, I finally reached the most dangerous area of the library.

I heard the valerian root making its way towards me and didn't have much time to find what I needed. I passed row after row until I found the Dark Charms area. When I looked down the aisle, I became frozen in place. Any thoughts of stalking valerian root ceased to exist when faced with the much more menacing figure of Professor Snape, standing at the end of the row as if he had been waiting for me.

Something in my brain told me to get to him, so I started to run once more. I knew the root was close, but I could see the spine of the book I needed. Just as my pursuer wrapped its green vines around my ankle, I lunged for the blood-red book, but it was too late.

The valerian root brought me down onto the polished wood floor with a crash and began to cover me completely. It wrapped itself around my ankles and wrists. No matter how hard I struggled, it tightened its grip. It felt like I was trapped in Devil's Snare, but no amount of relaxation would get this nightmare to end.

I called out to the man standing, watching what was happening to me.

"Please, Professor Snape! Please, help me!" I screamed, absolutely panicked as I struggled against my bonds.

I could hear his dragon hide boots moving towards me before he actually came into my line of sight.

Standing directly over me, I looked into the inky black pools that were his eyes, pleading that he'd be able to get me out of the predicament I found myself in.

"No, Miss Granger, I don't suppose I will," he said with a sneer.

With that one remark, I began to cry out of complete helplessness. The valerian root began to circle my neck, restricting my ability to breathe.

I stared at him, wanting to say something... to apologize, to beg forgiveness... but I couldn't say a thing in the state I was in.

He squatted down next to my prone form, and I felt him wipe a teardrop from my cheek. He leaned forward until I could feel his breath. And then, ever so softly, he whispered in my ear, "I do believe it's about time for you to help me."

Then I woke up.

Gasping for breath and covered in cold sweat, I summoned my notebook and pen. I began to write all the details of my nightmare. This dream had things going on which I had never experienced before. At the top of the list was that Professor Snape spoke to me. He touched me... I could feel his presence as surely as I could feel the valerian root covering me like moss on a rotted log.

The next thing that struck me was how badly I had to get to that book. And of course I couldn't remember the title of it after waking. I also noted that I was being chased and held down by valerian root.

"Valerian root is one of the main ingredients in The Draught of Living Death..." I muttered while making more notes regarding my strange nighttime escapade. "It's extremely convenient that I'm assigning that potion to my sixth years today..."

I glanced over at my clock. "Six a.m. I might as well just stay up at this point."

So before even leaving my bed, I reached over and snatched up the journal once more. I flipped through the pages, trying to figure out what I should read next.

I wonder if he completed his work... he might have mentioned his success or failure in his last entry. My thoughts trailed off as I turned the book over and opened the back cover and sifted through the pages to find where they were last written on.

1 May 1998

The storm is brewing; tonight is the night... I can feel it. I feel as though this is the epitome of the quiet before the storm. I know I'm as prepared for this day as I could be, but I still can't believe this is finally the end. I've been waiting for this day for seventeen years. Some nights I've even begged for it, for my role in this sordid affair to come to an end.

Today, I woke early enough to watch the sun rise. I took pleasure in watching its rays reflecting off the ripples of water on the Hogwarts Lake. I also made sure to ask for my favorite meals from the elves, and as I sit here writing this, I'm enjoying a perfect cup of coffee.

These simple things will be what I'll miss the most about being alive. But, in the end, at least the pain of loneliness and the torture of regret will have ended. I'm confident that my continued existence will be exactly as I have planned. I may not know how death will try to claim me, but I am comforted by the knowledge that I'll be with you again... even if it's only my imagination.

I could easily picture him sitting behind the headmaster's desk clearly in my mind.

"He must have been hunched over this book greedily scribbling his last known thoughts down... enjoying just a few moments peace. So... in the end he thinks he succeeded," I said quietly.

I contemplated all the ideas that accompanied this realization. The thought that Professor Snape might still be alive somewhere if it worked, wondering where his body might be if this were true and where I would even start trying to solve this puzzle.

Unfortunately for me, I couldn't tackle any of these problems until at least later in the evening.

I smiled brightly at my sixth years as they filed into my classroom. I could see them sizing me up as they took their seats. I had been so relieved by the timing of me coming to teach at Hogwarts. The age difference between myself and the seventh years happened to be just perfect. I didn't have to teach anyone that I had previously attended school with.

I thought of Professor Snape briefly in that moment. I knew he was very young when he first started teaching and more than likely had to teach students who had once been his peers. I couldn't even imagine how difficult gaining respect and keeping order must have been.

I wonder if that had contributed to his foul, taskmaster persona...

When everyone had settled in, I began to address the classroom.

"Good morning, class. As you may already know, I am Professor Granger. Just so you know, I have reviewed your past years' work from Professor Slughorn and am therefore familiar with what you have already been taught."

I continued my introductory speech as I paced the front of the classroom. I wasn't surprised that I held their attention. The upperclassmen who took Potions had a genuine interest in the subject or they needed to pass the course as a prerequisite for their future careers.

After I finished going through my list of expectations and fielded a few questions that came up, it was time to start the lesson.

"Today we will be brewing the Draught of Living Death." I said as I pulled out my wand and pointed it at the black board. The concealment charm faded to reveal all of my directions.

"Please follow these instructions carefully and make sure you stop before cutting the sopophorus beans. The recipe for this potion can also be found on page ten of your textbook. If you have any questions, please raise your hand. I will be walking around the room to monitor your progress. You may begin now."

I prowled the classroom in a way mildly reminiscent of my former Potions master. The difference between us was the fact that I didn't give the impression that I wanted to scare the daylights out of my students.

I returned to the front of the classroom and watched as pair by pair the students cast stasis charms on their cauldrons. The room was filled with the standard blue steam that accompanies the Draught of Living Death. While they were finishing up I started to get myself ready for the next part of their lesson. I transfigured a spare cauldron that I had sitting on my desk into a metal table. Next I set my silver knife and some sopophorus beans on the table top.

"All right everyone, please come up to the front of the room and gather around this table. Make sure everyone can see what I'm doing."

The sound of rustling robes and scraping stools filled the room as the students moved to watch my demonstration.

"Now that we are in the sopophorus bean stage of the Draught, I would like to show you an alternate method of harvesting the juice from the bean. This method was taught to me in my sixth year," I said as I looked around to make sure I still held everyone's attention.

Before I could begin the actual demonstration, I noticed a hand shoot into the air. "Yes, Miss Hawthorne?"

"Professor, if this method is better, why isn't it part of our text book?" she asked boldly.

I expected this type of question and wasn't the least bit surprised that it had come from a Ravenclaw.

"Because the man who thought of this technique, as well as many other alternatives, passed away before he could re-write your textbooks," I said as matter of fact as possible.

I proceeded to show my students how to use their silver knives to crush the juice from the bean instead of trying to cut them.

After my small side lesson, the students returned to their cauldrons and proceeded to take care of the beans just as I had shown them.

The remainder of the lesson passed without incident, and in the end, twelve out of thirteen pairs produced a viable Draught of Living Death. I assigned further reading on the Draught and a small essay for homework and sent them on their way.

When I returned to my quarters after dinner, I was delighted to see a familiar dark-haired head floating in my fireplace.

"Harry! It's so nice of you to call!" I called out excitedly. I hustled across the room and knelt in front of the hearth.

"Hello, Hermione. I thought I missed you again."

"I just got in from dinner, actually. What's up?"

"Well, I was wondering if you'd like to have dinner with me tomorrow night at the Three Broomsticks?"

"That would be wonderful! I don't have rounds on Fridays... Is everything okay?"

I was a little wary. At that point it had been a few months since I heard from Harry. Our interactions were limited while I was in Germany, and he of course had his own personal pursuits.

"Yes!" he said, exasperated. "Can't I simply want to spend time with one of my closest friends?"

Relieved by his response, but still suspicious, I agreed to meet him at six thirty for dinner. After a few more moments we both agreed we would talk more tomorrow and ended the Floo call.

I got up and sauntered to my kitchenette to make some tea. While preparing my drink, I began thinking about the fruitless trip I made to the library this afternoon.

I don't know why I thought I could just walk in there and see the exact same book and know that's the one I was dreaming about... Plus I didn't have a title, an author or any way to find it... I was just hoping that maybe I might recognize the cover or the shelf it was on... It's just so frustrating!

Tea in hand, I went to get the journal from my bedroom. From there I proceeded to get comfortable in my favorite armchair in front of the fire.

27 July 1994

In an attempt to get my mind off things, I went to London today. I know, with everything that has been going on, I shouldn't just leave the castle on a shopping excursion, but I needed to escape for just a few hours. I needed to be someone else, just a normal Muggle, with simple Muggle problems. I longed to be surrounded by people who weren't touched by war and torture every moment of the day.

I blended in easily with the crowd entering Waterstone's at midday. People bustling about, entering the café for their pre-packaged lunches. I simply ordered a cup of coffee and began to peruse the rows and rows of books. I found the perfect thing to read in the Poetry and Drama section. My eyes travelled across the titles of Shakespeare's plays. It was extremely difficult for me to decide which one I wanted to start with. Luckily, I had until nine o'clock to sit and read, so I chose Macbeth first.

After devouring that, I moved on to Romeo and Juliet. The tragedies fit my mood, this one in particular. When I reached the end I sat there, considering Juliet's situation. I had the distinct feeling that there was something I needed to remember regarding Juliet.

She had wanted to appear dead until her true love could find her. I vaguely remember reading about a curse that could have the same effect... If I can find the book, it might be exactly what I'm looking for. I know there would be no one to break the curse, so I could stay in a perpetual coma for eternity. I need to do more research, obviously. At least my field trip did more than just ease my mind...

He really did love books as much as I do... and Shakespeare, how appropriate...I thought after completing the entry.

I continued to read the journal for hours in hopes of finding a solid starting point. I knew it was time to stop when my eyes began to water from tiredness.

I stood, stretched and headed back to my bedroom, journal in hand. After I completed my evening routine I snuggled down into my bed and let my thoughts linger on the man whose personal thoughts I'd been reading all night.

"Merlin, reading this book is going to kill me," I groaned as I punched a pillow.

I just want to hold him. I've been reading about his pain and torment for hours and all I want to do is reach out to him. To tell him someone cares... that I understand. I understand all about guilt and the torture that accompanies it. Because that's what he does to me. Just as he feels he signed Lily's death warrant, I know I just as surely killed him that night in the shack. I'm reminded with every word that I read, that this light... and this mind are no longer a part of the world right now because I froze... And now... I can't stop thinking that maybe, just maybe, we're both getting a second chance here. If I can find a way to right my wrong, redemption could be at hand...

A/N: Thank you so much for reading! Much love to my alpha team of awesomeness and squishes to *karelia* for being the awesome beta and friend that she is.

Everybody's Fool

Chapter 4 of 11

On her first day of teaching, Hermione Granger finds a hidden treasure in her office. What she doesn't realize is how much this discovery will change her life.

More lies about a world

That never was and never will be

Have you no shame?

Don't you see me?

You know you've got everybody fooled.

~ "Everybody's Fool" by Evanescence

Attempting to balance my teaching duties and my extracurricular research had proven more difficult than I'd ever imagined. I hate falling behind when it comes to anything, especially my job. I vowed to leave the journal alone for at least a day in an effort to get myself caught back up. When I should have been taking lunch in the Great Hall, I sat sequestered in my office marking the essays turned in by my sixth years.

I read sheet after sheet of parchment on the use, ingredients, and effect of the Draught of Living Death. While reading I became even more convinced that the Draught must have been a part of Severus' potion.

I groaned loudly when I realized exactly what I had just thought.

"Good grief, now I'm on a first name basis with the man..."

I put my quill down, placed my elbows on the desk and dropped my head into my hands.

I can't stop thinking about him. Reading his most intimate thoughts and feelings is completely wreaking havoc on my deductive reasoning skills. I'm a logical person, but right now I can't separate my heart from my head. Maybe I need to talk to someone about it... It may help me regain some perspective if I have someone to bounce ideas off of...

Then I remembered I would be having dinner with Harry later that night.

They may not have had the best relationship while we were in school, but I honestly think Harry was truly repulsed by how he had treated Professor Snape after he had learned the truth. Maybe I won't tell him about the journal right away...

I finished grading the few parchments I had left and headed back to my classroom. Fourth year Gryffindors and Slytherins would be waiting for me.

Friday afternoon's double Potions lesson for the fourth years featured the Wit-Sharpener Potion. After the students had settled, I turned to write the ingredients for the potion on the blackboard.

"Good afternoon, class," I said, turning to face them. "Today we'll be working on the Wit-Sharpener Potion. I trust that you have all completed your assigned reading on this potion and should be able to begin brewing efficiently. If you have any questions, please raise your hand."

I stood at the front of the room and watched as the students took out their cauldrons and gathered ingredients. I catalogued the facial expressions of certain students. Some gave me the impression that they were perfectly content with the assignment, others I knew I had to keep an eye on.

Once everyone began crushing their scarab beetles, I began prowling the room. My thoughts were lazily switching between the potion being created and the problem of Professor Snape.

There isn't a lot of information regarding prolonged use of this potion. I wonder what the side effects would be...

I stopped to assist Mr. Bodine with the cutting of his ginger root. After demonstrating that the root should be evenly cut and not mangled, I continued to circle the room.

When I began pondering my Professor Snape problem again, an idea struck me. *I really wish I knew which book I had been dreaming about! If only I could remember... Maybe this potion could help me with my nightmare problem. If I were thinking more clearly, I...*

I snapped out of my inner musings when I heard a screech from the back of the classroom. My eyes focused on the offending cauldron. I quickly drew my wand and called out, "*Protego*." The dark green contents began bubbling up and out of the cauldron, and I feared eminent explosion.

"Everyone, out in the hall. Now!" I called out.

I rushed to the bench and extinguished the flame and waited. Luckily, the mixture didn't explode, but it did create a sticky glop on the table top. I examined the ingredients Mr. O'Brien had scattered around his cauldron and deduced what the problem was.

After making sure the cauldron's contents were stable, I let the students back in. As they filed into the room, I gave my next set of instructions.

"I'd like everyone to go to Mr. O'Brien's station and determine what caused the problem we just witnessed."

The students huddled around the bench and looked at the evidence. I stood nearby, arms crossed, listening to some quiet speculation, and after a few moments, a Slytherin girl raised her hand.

"Yes, Miss Lindross?"

"I know what happened, Professor."

"Go ahead, then."

"Well, it appears as though all the potion's ingredients have been used. But by the color of the cauldron's contents I've determined that too much armadillo bile was added to the brew. Then possibly stirred too quickly, which caused it to bubble up so violently."

"Very good, Miss Lindross; ten points to Slytherin. You may all return to your seats and continue working." Then I directed my attention to O'Brien. "Mr. O'Brien, please clean up this mess," I said while pointing to his work area.

When the bell was about to ring, I called out to the class, "Two feet of parchment on the correct brewing procedure for the Wit-Sharpener Potion, due on Tuesday."

I had to smirk as I watched Mr. O'Brien's friends smack him upside his head as they were exiting. They knew the only reason they had homework over the weekend was because of their friend's brewing mishap.

At precisely six-thirty, I opened the door to the Three Broomsticks. Due to his flailing arms, I managed to spot Harry, seated in a far corner. I made my way across the crowded pub to him. Finally, I stood at Harry's side and was enfolded in his embrace. After he released me, I removed my travelling cloak and took the seat across from him.

"It's so nice to see you, Hermione! It feels like I haven't seen you in years!" Harry said excitedly as I reached for the butterbeer he had waiting for me on the table.

"Harry!" I chided. "You just got to see me over the summer."

"Well, yeah, but still... So how's everything at Hogwarts?"

"The same as when we were students, honestly. There are rivalries and troublemakers. Friends, lovers and enemies... I'm enjoying teaching more than I thought I would though," I answered conversationally.

"I always thought you'd make a great teacher, Hermione. I was just surprised you wanted Potions to be your course of study. If anything I thought you'd want to take up Arithmancy or Transfiguration."

I sighed heavily. "You know I had my reasons, Harry. We were all looking for something when the war ended. This was just what I needed, especially looking at it now..."

I trailed off, and Harry gave me a strange look. Before he could ask me what I meant, I asked him a question of my own.

"So, why are we here? Besides the obvious of course?" I said as I reached for my drink once more.

Harry smiled at me and then launched into his explanation.

"Well, we've all been talking. We as in Ron, Ginny, Neville, and I, and we've decided we'd like to throw you a birthday party! It's been so long since you've been home for your birthday, and we want to celebrate! But we didn't want to plan a surprise party because we didn't know what your schedule was like..."

"Oh, well, sure! I guess... It's on a Sunday this year, so as long as it isn't too late. I'm only saying this because I have to get up fairly early, but it's nice of you to think about me. With everything that's been going on, I actually forgot about it..."

"About that," Harry said, curiosity lacing his tone. "What's really going on? I can tell you've got a problem you're trying to figure out."

That was my opening. *Here's my chance*, I thought.

I discreetly cast *Muffliato*, then interlocked my hands and placed them on the table top. I looked into the bright green eyes of my friend, took a deep breath and quickly said, "Harry, what if Professor Snape is still alive?"

Harry stared at me, opening and closing his mouth a few times. Every time he appeared to be ready to voice his thoughts he'd close his mouth again. I could tell he wasn't pleased with my choice of topic, but he was trying very hard not to snap at me.

"Hermione," he said quietly. "I think you should ask Professor McGonagall for new quarters when you get back to the school..."

"Harry! I'm serious. I really think he could still be alive."

"You know I love you like a sister, right? But I just don't see it as being possible."

"Well, you know he was bloody brilliant. Plus, with being a Death Eater and all it must have made him paranoid. Wouldn't he have prepared for something like that to happen to him?"

"You know we've talked about this." He was starting to get irritated, but I had to try to get him to listen.

"Harry, please..."

He reached across the table to cover my folded hands with his own.

"I know you feel guilty, Hermione. I do too. Every day I end up thinking about him. You know I've tried to get answers. I've tracked down and questioned as many Death Eaters as I could get my hands on. I've looked for a reason. Now, the only plausible excuse I have is that the only Death Eater that I could never find has Professor Snape's body, or at least knows what happened to it."

"Who?"

"Rodolphus Lestrangle. The department kept it quiet; we didn't need the public going crazy."

"So, Bella's crazy husband is still running around out there... wonderful," I said sarcastically.

"Listen, this is besides the point. I'm worried about you. I know you don't get out much anymore... and well... It looks like Potions has become your life just as it was his."

"It's not! I... see people!" I sputtered.

"I have to hunt you down to spend time with you. That's why I'm always so happy when I do get to see you. You're sleeping in his old rooms, teaching his old class, and now you're convinced... again... that he's still alive."

"It's not guilt, Harry! I... I think I..."

"Hermione, you know I named one of my kids after him. I know all about what you're going through. Like I said, maybe ask for new quarters; it might help you clear your head."

I nodded sadly. I had hoped that Harry would really listen this time, as it had been so long since we visited the subject after the war. Unfortunately, I had been proven wrong.

"Thanks for the advice, Harry. I'll think it over..."

We made small talk for the rest of the evening, but my mind was in even more turmoil when I left than it had been when I arrived.

I slowly walked into my quarters, aggravated and simply depressed.

"I can't believe him..." I groaned as I put the kettle on. "He made me sound unhinged in just a few sentences... I know they didn't understand me going to Germany, but I did! And I'm not a recluse... I'm a teacher for Merlin's sake! Bloody hell."

While my tea was steeping, I stalked off to my office. I snatched up one of the viable Wit-Sharpener Potion samples submitted by my fourth years and returned to my quarters.

I sat in front of the hearth, drinking my tea and tried to clear my head. By the time I emptied my cup, I was ready for my experiment.

It's a little early, for bed... but hopefully I'll have a more productive sleep than I've had evening. I mused as I turned the sheets down and snuggled into bed.

After getting sufficiently comfortable, I uncorked the vial and drank the potion.

"Nox."

A/N: Hello there, readers! I know my author notes up until now have been very generic and full of love and thank yous, but this chapter needs to have something addressed. During the SS/HG exchange, many readers expressed concern over Hermione drinking a student potion.

Hermione grabs a *viable*, previously made potion to use for her experiment. In my mind while writing this scene, she used what was at her disposal without having to either make it herself, or be asked too many questions by other people.

In my heart, I feel as though no matter how *obsessed* she may be, she would **never** put herself at risk by drinking a potion that she thought would not be capable of achieving the desired results. She's focused on her task, not completely out of her mind.

I just wanted to make sure that you know I considered the situation and still feel as though she's intelligent, but also resourceful.

/explanation

Much love to *Clairvoyant*, *Isalie964* & *JessiKitty* for alpha reading.

Hearts, flowers, cheese and chocolate to *karelia* for beta reading this for me. Without her extreme patience and support, who knows how long it would have taken for this fic to actually be presentable.

I'd also like to extend special thanks to *ApollinaV* and *dressagegrrrl* for pointing out the inconsistencies that existed in the original version of this chapter.

Thank you to everyone who is continuing to read and review this story. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask!

Much Love,

~ Brena

Taking Over Me

Chapter 5 of 11

On her first day of teaching, Hermione Granger finds a hidden treasure in her office. What she doesn't realize is how much this discovery will change her life.

I believe in you

I'll give up everything just to find you

I have to be with you

To live

To breathe

You're taking over me

~ "Taking Over Me" by Evanescence

Once again I found myself in the fourth floor corridor, standing in front of the doors to the library. I looked left, then right and was relieved to find nothing charging at me. I took a deep breath and pushed the doors open.

As I made my way to the Restricted Section, I examined my attire. I was wearing solid black pants and a deep-burgundy, silk, button-down blouse with the kind of cropped sleeves I'd always admired. My hair was piled high atop my head with a few loose curls framing my face.

I twisted my index finger around the curl on the left side of my face and noticed that I made no sound as I traipsed across the floor. Looking down at my feet, I admired the sensible black flats and wished I had a similar ensemble in my wardrobe.

"I guess I should go shopping sometime soon, if I'm dreaming about clothes I don't even own," I commented to myself as I began making my way through the stacks.

I recognized the aisle from the other night easily and walked to the middle of the row. There I began reading spine after spine, hoping and waiting for my heightened senses to direct me.

I chose one red, leather-bound book and read the title.

"The Dark Arts In Colour: A Comprehensive Guide to Curse Appearance. Someone wrote a book on curse colors? This can't be it."

Next, I selected one titled, Whither Thou Goest, which seemed plausible.

Shrugging, I read the table of contents and flipped through a few pages. That was when I heard the familiar squeaking of leather boots against the polished, wooden floor.

Without looking up, I began speaking to my companion.

"It's about time you showed up," I said aloud as I turned a page.

At first the only response I received was silence. Then he started to walk towards me, and I could feel my heart begin to race.

"It would be most helpful if you could tell me which book you used."

He was standing right behind me when I finally heard his voice.

"Why should I make it easy on you? You're obviously figuring things out well enough on your own."

"Then why are you here?" I asked while reaching up to put the book back in its place.

That was when I felt him push me against the stacks, grasping my right wrist after I released the book. I could feel the weight of his body flush against mine. He snaked his left arm around my waist and pulled me even tighter against him.

Next, I felt his lips against my neck, kissing, then nibbling the exposed skin. His breath came out in small puffs through his nose.

"To give you inspiration," he quietly answered.

I couldn't resist him; I even found myself encouraging his attentions. I let my head loll back to rest against his shoulder and felt his grip on my wrist loosen and his fingers slide down my arm. Since he wasn't pinning me in place any longer, I took the opportunity to spin around in his arms to face him.

I looked up into the eyes of my tormenter and fell into their dark depths. My breath hitched as I continued to stare; my imagination had completely outdone itself. He looked exactly as I remembered him from my school days. Lank black hair on either side of his fallow-skinned face, and I couldn't stop myself from reaching up to cup his cheek.

Touching his skin sent a streak of fire through my nerves, and I knew I needed more. But before I could make another move, he swooped down and captured my lips with his own.

Bliss, absolute heaven. I reached around to move my hands up his neck and into his hair. I threaded my fingers through his locks and held him close to me while our tongues danced together.

I could feel his hands working their way under my blouse, and when his fingers touched the bare skin of my waist, I gasped in surprise and pulled back.

I slumped against the book shelves and looked upon him once more.

"I... I need to find you. I know you're still alive and it's driving me mad. Please... please..." I couldn't finish the sentence. I just closed my eyes and banged my head against the books behind me.

While my eyes were still closed, he moved in and hoisted me into his arms once more. No passionate kisses this time, only a strong, warm embrace surrounding me. I clung to him tightly and simply enjoyed the feeling of being held by him.

"You can do this, Hermione," he whispered in my ear.

I nuzzled my face into his button-clad chest and felt relieved.

"I just don't know where to start; you've been so cryptic..."

One of his hands comfortingly stroked my back as he continued speaking softly to me.

"Think. What is the purpose of the spell?"

"To appear dead... but there are so many Dark texts here. They all deal with death in some way!" I whined, frustrated.

"What else?"

I thought about that question for a few moments, and then the answer I'd been looking for struck me.

"That's it!" I yelled as I shot straight up in my bed.

"Love... to find true love..." I mumbled to my empty bedroom.

I felt absolutely bereft, even though I finally had the answer I desired and knew which book I needed to grab from the Restricted Section. But all I really wanted at that moment was to return to my dream and back to the arms of Severus Snape.

It was already seven-thirty in the morning when my dream woke me up... or I woke myself. Either way, I was awake and *needed* to get to the library. I quickly got myself ready for the day and hustled up to the fourth floor.

Madam Pince just so happened to be unlocking the doors as I rounded the corner.

Thank, Merlin! I thought as relief washed over me. *I don't think I could handle waiting for her to show up.*

"Good morning, Irma," I said cheerfully as I entered the library.

"Getting an early start this morning, Professor?" she asked conversationally, although I could detect a hint of irritation in her tone.

Is that woman ever going to retire? Sometimes I think she's going to end up like Binns... I thought before I responded.

"Indeed, I am. Will most likely need to check something out also; I shouldn't be long."

I briskly walked to the Restricted Section, my fingers itching to find *the book*.

"I swear I'm going to have the contents of this one shelf memorized with the amount of times I've stood in front of it..." I grumbled as I began reading spine after spine once more.

Finally, I found it. I grasped the spine of the book and held it reverently as I read the title from the front cover.

"Mastering Love: Attain and maintain the object of your desires. Not exactly the kind of book I can picture Severus Snape reading from, but this has got to be it."

I cracked open the back cover and skimmed the Appendix, and there it was.

"Juliet's Curse, page 89."

I flipped directly to the indicated page and read. When I had finished the entry on the curse, I snapped the book closed and uttered the first thing that came to mind, "Oh, shite."

I quickly made my way back through the library to check out the book. Madam Pince shot me a speculative look when she read the title, but didn't comment. I scooped the book up and began my trek back down to the dungeons.

When I reached the entrance hall, I came face to face with Professor McGonagall. From the look on her face, I could tell that she was not very pleased with me. I adjusted the way I was holding the book so that the title wouldn't be legible.

"Good morning, Headmistress," I said cordially.

"Good morning, Professor. Will you be joining us in the Great Hall today?"

Shite. I didn't eat in the Great Hall at all yesterday... I really should just go now and get it out of the way.

"Yes, I will be. My apologies for missing yesterday..."

She leaned in close to me and quietly said, "I understand this is a lot to get used to, Hermione. But I need you to make an appearance at least once a day. It's simply good practice for the students to see you eating with them."

"I understand, Minerva. It won't happen again," I responded.

She nodded in return, and we walked side by side into the Great Hall.

Throughout my breakfast it felt as though the book was burning a hole in my lap. I was so irritated sitting there, mechanically eating my meal, knowing I had better things to do.

I also knew that Minerva let the issue drop easily enough, but that if I tried to get up too quickly, she might say something to me. Especially since it was a Sunday and I didn't have any classes to teach.

I waited until the Headmistress exited the hall to make my escape. As gracefully as I could manage, I stood and slipped out through the staff entrance and headed straight for the dungeons.

When I was finally sequestered in my quarters, I gathered a few necessary items and sat on the floor behind my coffee table. I spread everything out on the surface in preparation for my impending research session.

I opened *Mastering Love* and re-read the entry on Juliet's Curse.

Juliet's Curse:

Juliet's Curse is said to be first invented in the late sixteenth century. Little is known about the nature of the curse. It is assured that the cursed person will appear dead, but would essentially be held in stasis until their true love is available to release them.

At this time, the definition of *true love* is unclear. It may mean any person who loves the cursed one in the arcane meaning of love...an unconditional love...or it could possibly refer to the phenomenon commonly known as "soulmate," which, essentially, comes down to the same. It is also unknown whether physical contact is required to break the enchantment. There has been some posturing that the "true love" could simply be within a certain radius of the afflicted and that would be enough to awake them. After all, unconditional love is known to cross the barriers of time as well as space, so the common sense conclusion might well be that neither time nor space matter. There have been no volunteers to test this theory.

Administration of Juliet's Curse can be carried out in two forms. One option is an instantaneous direct spell that can be cast on someone or upon oneself. The second option comes in the form of a time-release potion. The potion form of this curse is said to be created from a mixture of several potions, including the Draught of Living Death. Once the base has been created, the physical curse is to be cast into the cauldron where it would be absorbed by the potion.

Once consumed, the curse wouldn't take effect until the drinker is on the verge of unnatural physical death. The curse would then catch the soul, holding it in a safety net of sorts and binding it to this mortal plane. The enchantment would also heal the physical wounds inflicted to bring about its activation.

Several sources state that the afflicted will never age, and thus never die. Information regarding the mental state of the victim has been deficient. *Faerie Curses* states that Baron Akerfeldt from Stockholm was cursed in 1768, then successfully reanimated twenty years later.

"There's obviously more information available on this curse and its history. This doesn't even give the incantation or how to brew the actual potion! The only thing this book is telling me is that the curse exists and that you need to be either a "true love" or a "soulmate" to break the enchantment... which isn't really helping me at all!" I exclaimed.

Frustrated, I reached for Severus' journal and pushed away from the coffee table. I rested my back against the sofa and began flipping through pages. When I found where I had left off, I began reading once more.

30 Jan 1995

Today is your birthday... I performed my typical duty of placing roses on your grave. Every time I have to go to Godric's Hollow, I die a little inside. I know you would never encourage these graveside vigils, but it's just something I need to do. While I was standing there, I remembered the year you turned eleven and how brilliant your smile was when you waved your Hogwarts letter at me. It is memories like these that keep me going and yet torture me at the same time.

My research has been proving successful. I've been brewing the potion for the last few days. It was such a relief that there happened to already be something predesigned. I haven't had the time to do much of my own research lately, so I could only imagine how much further behind I'd be if I had to create something from the beginning. This potion is a time-release version of the direct curse. Since I wouldn't be able to curse myself at the time of my would-be demise, the potion is the best option.

I've also been able to complete further research on the history of the curse. I've been able to determine that my continued mental state will be of my own making. Considering my skill level in Occlumency, I'm confident that I'll be able to create the most perfect alternate reality.

My memories of you will be the only thing I'll need...

"But he purged all his memories of Lily in the shack. What does that mean? What is his mental state going to be like if I do find him?"

I touched my fingertips to the spiky scrawl that filled the page and traced the heart-breaking words written there.

"I wonder if he even remembers her now..." I said quietly.

Did she even know how much he loved her? How absolutely devoted he was... Oh, to only have that kind of affection directed solely at me... It makes me so irritated. He deserved better, in all aspects of his life, especially this one.

I felt so lost and confused. I had begun this mission to find him and bring him back but in that moment started to second guess myself.

"What if he's happy now? Will he hate me for dragging him back to this cold and cruel reality?" I wondered aloud.

But what if he's alone in his mind? Stuck in a state of perpetual isolation... with no hope, no connections. Or maybe he's got all his other memories, just not the ones of Lily. Does that mean his new reality is devoid of anything good? This life was nothing but one traumatic event after another for him.

Shite, is he going to be absolutely nutters when he wakes up?

I guess there's only one way to find out... I'll deal with the consequences then...

A/N: As always thanks go to the alpha team of awesomeness for helping me stay on track.

Thanks, as always, to *karelia* for agreeing to beta this for me. I also need to thank her for helping me with the actual wording of the textbook entry, which appeared in this chapter.

Thanks to *janus*, *slytherinlaurel*, *ApollinaV*, and other members of my g-chat f-list whom I am unable to remember at this time, for assisting me with coming up with interesting book titles. *squishes f-list*

If you're still hanging in and reading my tale, please leave me a note to tell me what you think. I really do appreciate every single review.

Much Love ~ Brena

Imaginary

Chapter 6 of 11

On her first day of teaching, Hermione Granger finds a hidden treasure in her office. What she doesn't realize is how much this discovery will change her life.

Don't say I'm out of touch

With this rampant chaos Your reality

I know well what lies beyond my sleeping refuge

The nightmare I built my own world to escape.

~ "Imaginary" by Evanescence

As the days passed I felt as if I were treading water. I fell into a frustrating routine, where I would teach, eat, study Severus' journal, then try to find more information on Juliet's Curse. I performed my required duties as a means to an end. But all I really wanted was to find more free time to comb through the library.

It was Saturday afternoon, and I had been eating my lunch in the Great Hall when Neville sat down next to me. I looked over and gave him a wan smile and resumed picking at my sandwich.

"Hello, Hermione. How are you?" he said cheerfully.

"To be honest, Neville, I've had a lot on my mind lately."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

I shook my head and responded, "The last time I tried talking about it, Harry accused me of going barmy. So, I think I'll just figure it out, but thanks for asking."

Neville leaned in close to me and in a hushed voice continued speaking. "Harry told me about what happened last weekend. I think he should have at least tried to hear you out. If you want to talk about Professor Snape, I'd be happy to listen."

I considered Neville's offer for a few moments.

"Well, it would finally give me the opportunity to talk to someone and get some of this out of my head. But I also know Professor Snape wasn't your most favorite teacher either..."

"Hermione, he tried very hard to protect us. I was here, remember? I watched as he tried to run interference between us and the Carrows."

A lot of what I've been dealing with is theory... the rest is just my out of control emotions on the matter. Neville's a good friend; I'm sure he wouldn't judge. I hope this is more successful than my last attempt.

"Do you want to take a walk around the lake?"

"Okay," I answered.

He grabbed a few sandwiches and wrapped them in a napkin. After tucking them away in his robes, he nodded to me, and we stood and exited the hall.

We walked in companionable silence down to the Hogwarts Lake. When we finally stood on the water's edge, I stopped and turned to Neville.

"*Muffliato*. Neville, I really hate to do this to you but I'm going to need a Wizard's Oath that you won't discuss the contents of this conversation with anyone."

Without even questioning me, he swore to not repeat anything we were about to talk about. Satisfied that my privacy was ensured, I turned away and began walking around the perimeter of the lake.

"I don't know how much Harry told you but I'm going to start from the beginning," I said in a rush.

Neville nodded and extracted his sandwiches, preparing for the long haul.

So I told him everything. Starting with my disenchantment with the end of the war and my disgust with how everyone had been attempting to couple up. I expounded on my nightmares, explained my true reason for choosing Potions as my life path and how I ended up in Germany. Then I brought up my first day of classes and how I found Professor Snape's journal.

"I just can't get anywhere. I know what curse he used, but I'm at a loss for how I should proceed at this point," I said, exasperated.

After a period of silence Neville said, "Bloody hell, Hermione."

"Wonderful, you think I'm crazy too," I deadpanned.

"No! Of course not! I'm actually in awe of how you've been handling the whole situation. You've got this great big secret, and you're just puzzling it out. I... I understand why you didn't want me to be able to tell anyone," he said in awe.

"Oh! Thank Merlin!" I exclaimed. I felt like I wanted to cry; I was so relieved.

Neville smiled at me and then said, "Well, maybe you are a little crazy since you obviously want to molest him... but whatever makes you happy, Hermione."

I felt the heat creep up my neck and settle in my cheeks. I couldn't deny his joking though. So I simply settled on playfully punching him on the arm.

We shared a small laugh at my expense, but I wasn't angry that he had picked up on the underlying theme of the dreams I'd been having.

Neville quickly began speaking again to change the subject back to the real problem at hand.

"I had originally thought there was a chance he was still alive out there, but I never made a big deal out of my own speculations. The man was brilliant. Scary, but brilliant. If anyone could find a way to survive, it would be him," Neville said.

"You have no idea how relieved I am to hear you say that."

"Happy to help. Is there any chance he left more of his notebooks behind?"

"I've checked my quarters, the potions storeroom and my private lab for anything that looked inconspicuous. I found the journal completely by accident, obviously. The man is absolutely infuriating me with his vague references to what he was actually doing. I'm sure he wasn't planning on anyone reading his journal one day..." I trailed off, trying to think of somewhere I hadn't looked.

We walked a little further in silence while Neville munched on one of his sandwiches. After swallowing a bite, he asked, "How about the Headmistress' office?"

"Oh, yeah, that would work... 'Hey, Minerva! I need to search your office for anything that might have once belonged to Professor Snape because I think he's still alive.' I don't think so," I said with sarcasm lacing my tone.

"Hmmm, good point," he said thoughtfully. "This really is a great mystery! Where do you think he is?"

"My first guess is his house since we couldn't find it. It must have been under a Fidelius Charm, and none of the Death Eaters Harry questioned had any answers, which tells me Professor Snape was most likely the Secret Keeper of his own home."

"But how would his body have gotten there if he was already under the effects of the curse?"

"Argh! I don't know! He didn't talk about his back-up plan or precautionary steps in the journal. All I know is that he's somewhere. Do you see what I mean about the situation being unbelievably frustrating?"

"Yes, without a doubt. Is there anything I can do?"

"I don't know. Listening to me has actually been helpful. I'm going to need to focus on finishing the journal to see if he answers any of our questions, and then I guess I'll go from there..."

"Sounds good. Keep me informed, okay?"

I turned and gave Neville a warm embrace. He patted me on the back awkwardly and said, "I hope you find him, Hermione."

"Thank you, Neville, for everything."

"It's no problem, Hermione," he said comfortingly as he released me.

I cancelled the privacy charm surrounding us, and we walked back to the main entrance of the school. Neville left me at the steps, and I watched as he headed off towards the greenhouses. I, on the other hand, had a mission to accomplish down in the dungeons.

I tried not to run back to my quarters. Talking to Neville had reignited my original purpose, and the only way I would solve this mystery would be to read the journal in earnest.

Journal in hand, I took my favorite seat in front of the fireplace and began to read.

14 Aug 1995

If it weren't for the fact that you were still alive at the time I would have to believe that the act of reincarnation is truly possible. I've found over the last four years that you don't simply haunt me through the eyes of your son and through my own mind.

There is a girl who would have been your ultimate rival for most-talented witch at Hogwarts. She's bright and bossy and I can't stand her. I try to avoid contact and ignore her as much as possible because of how much she makes me think of you.

You two look nothing alike, but when it comes to her actual personality... that's mostly a different story. She's a Muggle-born also and has an extreme inferiority complex. Although in the last few years that aspect has toned down mostly.

She's one of your son's best friends. They're always up to no good, and it seems as though I'm the one who ends up having to catch them or save them. I swear running around with those boys is going to get her killed, and in some small way it would be like losing you all over again.

While sitting in the kitchen at Headquarters, I was privileged to watch this girl open her start-of-term letter that held her Prefect's badge. The joy on her face was remarkable, even though she must have known they would choose her. It made me think of the summer you received yours... that last summer we were speaking.

Even though I try to stay away from her, the times I am around her I try to find differences between the two of you. The masses don't flock to her as they did you. From what I can tell, she has a bit of a reclusive nature but enjoys having a few close friends. She doesn't appear to need hordes of people to love and adore her and simply wants to feel as though she belongs here. Which I can understand completely...

There is a very small part of me that wants to talk to her. To tell her about the difficulty you experienced at first and assure her that it won't matter once she's left Hogwarts. But, like I said before, I really try not to interact with her. The added bonus being that the Dark Lord would kill me instantly for even bothering to counsel a Muggle-born Gryffindor...

"He... he noticed... he..." I stumbled.

Before I could really wrap my mind around what I had just read, a head popped into my fireplace.

"Hermione!" Harry called out harshly. "What is wrong with you? You made Neville take an oath of silence? This has gone on..."

"Harry James Potter!" I shouted back as I jumped out of my chair. "You've got a lot of nerve. If you want to have a row with me, you come over here and do it in person. Otherwise, I don't have time for this."

"Fine! I'm coming through."

His head disappeared from the flames only to be replaced by his whole body stepping out of the fireplace.

"You..."

"No. You're completely out of your mind asking Neville to talk to me, or shall I say spy on me. Since you decided to send someone to satisfy your own curiosity, of course I'm going to protect my privacy."

"This has gone too far, Hermione! He's DEAD! I can't be nice about this anymore; you're scaring me!"

Infuriated, I slammed Severus' journal down on the coffee table. I shot Harry a nasty look and pointed to it.

"NO! He's not, Harry! That's HIS journal, and what I was trying to tell you last week. He found a way to never die because he was afraid of eternal suffering for his past misdeeds. I have no idea where he is, which is what I've been sitting here trying to figure out!"

Harry paled. His head kept turning from staring at the journal to looking back at me.

Yeah, that's right. I'm not so nutters after all.

"Go ahead, Harry. See for yourself."

He reached down to pick it up and began flipping through the pages. After a few moments he gently closed the cover and placed it back on the table.

"I'm sorry, Hermione," he said earnestly. "That is definitely Severus Snape's journal. I would know... I got to see enough of his handwriting on my essays through the years..."

"Wonderful. I'm glad that you finally believe me. Please don't tell anyone though, Harry, I'm serious. I don't want a huge problem before I even find him. Just start trying to investigate what paperwork needs to be filed to make him not dead. That way when I do bring him back, it won't take forever."

"I can do that. Hermione, I..."

"Stop, Harry, please. I appreciate the apology and all, but I really want to get back to my work. I'll Floo you later, okay?"

Harry nodded solemnly, turned and exited my quarters the same way he entered without another word.

After Harry left, I resumed reading. I read and read, stopping only to eat and use the facilities. Around nine o'clock I finally read the entry that held the clue I had desperately been trying to find.

27 Jun 1996

I woke up in the infirmary again. I never remember getting here, and I always manage to lose entire days to my healing. The Dark Lord was not pleased regarding the events that took place at the Department of Mysteries a few days ago and subsequently tortured me and a few others. I knew it was coming, but having to stomach the bouts of Crucio, beatings and torture is just too much at times.

It's also frustrating knowing that I might be able to just die out there, after they drop me off at the gates. Then it might stop; I'm not necessarily prepared for the end of my life, but at least the torment would finally be over. But of course Dumbledore has found a way to control that too.

I wish Poppy would stop trying to mother me. I appreciate her expertise, but bloody hell, she fusses constantly. You would think she didn't have any students that need to be looked after with the amount of time she spends checking in on me...

I didn't need to read any further because I knew where my former professor was, or at least who would know.

I jumped out of my chair and tossed the few texts I had in my possession that mentioned Juliet's Curse, plus the journal into a small messenger bag.

In an attempt to save time, I rushed to the fireplace and threw some Floo powder into the flames.

"Madam Pomfrey's office!"

A/N: Thank you so much to everyone who's stuck with me!

Accolades to the alpha team of awesomeness which consisted of *isalie964*, *Clairvoyant* and *Jessikitty*. They totally kept me on track and supported me when I was having the breakdowns of doom.

Glomps and squishes to *ApollinaV* in particular for her advice when it came to this chapter in particular. It wouldn't be in the state it's in now if it weren't for her taking the time to point out where it was lacking... Thank you AV!

Much Love goes to *karelia*, who took the time to beta read this fic for me. It's because of her that this final version is as grammatically correct as it is.

Thanks also to the readers who have left reviews for this story or who have listed it as a favorite. It really means so much to me that others are getting enjoyment out of my work. I know I'm a little behind on review responses, but I will get to every single one of them. I swear. Thank you so much.

Much Love ~ Brena

Going Under

Chapter 7 of 11

On her first day of teaching, Hermione Granger finds a hidden treasure in her office. What she doesn't realize is how much this discovery will change her life.

Now I will tell you what I've done for you

Fifty-thousand tears I've cried

Screaming, deceiving and bleeding for you

And you still won't hear me.

~ "Going Under" by Evanescence

I stepped out of the fireplace and into Poppy Pomfrey's office. Thankfully, she was sitting behind her desk, working on several charts.

"Hermione! What's wrong? Are you okay?" she asked, concerned.

"Yes, I'm fine. I need to speak with you though; it's very important," I said in a rush.

She gestured to the chair in front of her desk. As I sat down quickly, I pulled out the books I had gathered before I left my quarters and slammed them down on her desk.

"What's this about?" she said while eyeing the stack of texts.

"I need to talk to you about Professor Snape," I said.

"What about him?" She looked uneasy as she shifted in her chair, and her calm exterior seemed put on.

"It has come to my attention that he's still alive."

"I... I don't know what you're talking about."

Come on, Poppy. You practically have Guilty written on your forehead.

"Oh, I believe you do. You see, Poppy, after my first day of classes I found Professor Snape's journal. In it, I've read about all sorts of interesting things, including his bid to cheat death."

The nurse looked pale and drawn.

"Did he say what he did?"

"Yes, I know what he did, but I've been unable to find any information regarding countering the curse other than the prescribed reversal."

She reached across her desk towards for the journal that was sitting on top of the pile of books. I put my right hand on top of it to stop her.

"Not so fast. Do you know where he is?"

"Yes..."

I waited for her to elaborate. When she didn't, I pressed on.

"Well, where is he?"

"I can't say."

"What do you mean?" I said, agitated.

"He's... safe."

"Poppy, I want to help him. Please, tell me."

"I can't."

Oh, for the love of Merlin...

I could tell that she was frustrated with the situation, but I refused to give up.

"Okay. So you know he's alive and where he is, and it appears as though you want to tell me about it but are unable to."

"Yes."

"Then you need to get the Secret-Keeper to tell me where the hell he is. Right. Now."

She eyed the journal and apparently came to a decision. Nodding towards me, she stood and walked over to her hearth. I watched as she took a pinch of Floo powder from the pot on her mantle and tossed it into the flames. She got on her hands and knees and called into the fire, "Headmistress' office!"

"Minerva," I heard her call out over the flames.

After a few moments I heard Poppy say, "Can you please wake Albus and ask him to come to my office? It's very important. No, no, everything's fine. Yes, I'll talk to you later. Thank you."

When Poppy ended the Floo call, she returned to her desk chair and looked up at the frame above her fireplace. I joined her in admiring the painting of a sunny conservatory set with a breakfast table in the center. It was very lovely... that was until the painted form of Albus Dumbledore sat himself comfortably at the table.

Oh, great! Just what I needed... a chat with Albus bloody Dumbledore.

"Good evening, Poppy! Oh, and Professor Granger too! What a pleasant surprise," he said jovially.

I gave him a sour look and raised my eyebrow in Poppy's direction.

"Albus, she knows about Severus."

"Oh! Excellent!"

Argh! He's making it sound like this was all part of his master plan too!

I shot out of my chair and rounded on the portrait.

"You knew!" I shouted, pointing my finger at his painted visage. "You knew this whole entire time that he was alive. Both of you did, and you didn't tell anyone!"

"My dear girl, calm down. He's been well looked after in his current location."

"And where might that be?" I asked, seething.

"Why don't you sit back down, and tell me all about what you've found," Albus said.

"Why don't you just let me take care of him? It's not like you gave a shite about him!"

I've had enough of this sanctimonious bastard.

I drew my wand and pointed the tip straight at Dumbledore. In an instant Poppy jumped out of her chair to block my aim.

"Hermione, please, he's the one who can give you the answers you seek. If you curse him, he won't be able to tell you anything." Then she turned to Dumbledore and said, "Albus, quit antagonizing the girl. She apparently no longer feels the same about you, so just get on with it already."

I lowered my wand but continued to glare at Dumbledore. Poppy reached out and nudged me back towards the chair in front of her desk.

After both of us were seated, Poppy looked towards the painting.

"Albus, it's obvious that Hermione is reluctant to share her information with you. I also know you won't reveal the location without a good reason," she said diplomatically.

Poppy then turned to me and implored, "Please, Hermione. I know he'll tell you, just explain what you know."

I stared at her, trying to figure out what I should do. I knew I had no collateral and would have to simply trust her assurances because I really didn't want to continue trying to figure things out on my own.

I turned to face Dumbledore. "Fine, I'll tell you what I know. I expect the two of you to answer my questions completely and to ultimately give me Severus Snape's location. If you hold out on me, I will take everything I know to the Ministry, and you'll have to answer to them. Am I understood?"

Poppy nodded and Albus said, "Yes, perfectly."

"Very well," I said. "Severus Snape created the potion form of a spell known as Juliet's Curse."

There was a sharp intake of breath from the nurse, and she quickly covered her gaping mouth with her hand.

"The True Love Spell? Why would he do such a thing?" Albus asked as he leaned forward in his painted chair.

I didn't want to divulge all of Severus' reasons, so I chose the simple, plausible response. "He decided he'd lived enough hell here on earth and didn't want to gamble on what awaited him in the afterlife. He never thought the curse would be broken; he just wanted peace."

My companions were quiet for a few moments as they considered my words. In that time I decided I should voice one of my own questions.

"Poppy, how did you find him?"

She looked to Dumbledore, who responded to the unspoken question, "Poppy Pomfrey, you are free to speak to Hermione Granger regarding Severus Snape."

Poppy took a deep breath and began to explain.

"Severus nearly died once shortly after he turned spy. He was tortured with the Cruciatus and beaten, then left at the front gates. Hagrid found him, but it took days for me to get him back together. The internal bleeding had been the worst part that time."

Ugh, this is going to be painful, hearing the gory details from the nurse...

At this point she conjured herself a glass and quickly cast, *"Aguamenti,"* to fill it. After taking a few sips of water, she continued. "Albus decided that we needed a way to know when Severus was on the grounds and near death. This way we could firstly treat him faster and secondly avoid a situation of a student finding him in that condition. After a week or two the Headmaster brought me this pendant."

So, that's what he meant about Dumbledore controlling his death too...

She reached beneath her robes and withdrew a gold chain. From the bottom of the necklace there hung a teardrop-shaped onyx gemstone.

"What are its properties?" I asked quizzically while staring at the stone.

"Albus linked the stone to Severus' life force. If Severus happened to be on the Hogwarts grounds or in the relative vicinity and near death, the gem would burn white-hot, but fortunately for me not leave any blisters. All I would need to do when this would occur is touch the tip of my wand to the pendant, speak the key-phrase, and it would then Portkey me to Severus' location."

"But isn't that a little dangerous? I mean, you were Portkeying blindly! What if Voldemort were still there or Death Eaters watching him?"

Albus interjected, "It was a calculated risk."

I growled in response, but kept my mouth shut. *Calculated risk... he plays chess with people's lives!*

Seeing my distress, Poppy began speaking again. "I agreed to it, mostly because Severus is like a son to me. Since he was eleven, I looked after him and patched him up. I wouldn't have been able to live with myself if he died out there where I could have helped him."

"Okay, I understand. So, your pendant... it was a reverse Portkey also?"

"Yes, again I would touch my wand to the stone, and it would bring us to... where he is now."

As much as I wanted to know *where* that was, there were a few other things still bothering me.

"Poppy, you thought he killed Albus," I said as I jerked my thumb towards the painting. "Why would you even bother helping Severus in the end?"

"I told her to," Albus chimed in.

"And you didn't question him?" I asked, flabbergasted.

"Listen, Hermione, I knew there were a lot of things going on with the war that I didn't know. And honestly, I didn't want to know. But the evening that Severus was appointed Headmaster, Albus came to visit me, just as he is now. He told me that night to continue looking after Severus. To say I was confused would be an understatement, but the order gave me hope, and I was actually relieved in a way."

"But your portrait was dormant after you died," I said to Dumbledore.

"Hermione, all those portraits feign sleep all the time. Why would I be any different?"

"All right," I said. "Please explain how you knew Severus wasn't dead when you got to the shack."

"I popped in just as the three of you were leaving. I surveyed the damage and started to perform as many healing charms as I could. The blood... it was everywhere. I started to panic because he looked dead, but my pendant was still burning me. You see, if he had died, the pendant would have become ice cold. As I considered trying to move him, his wounds began to close, and the pendant became completely dormant as if he were back to normal health. He had no heartbeat, but he wasn't dead. I knew the pendant worked! Plus, his wounds healed! I figured he must have taken some kind of precautionary measures, but I didn't know what. So, I decided to Portkey us to... his current location and talk to Albus. This way I'd be able to continue looking after him until we were able to figure out what he did."

"It's been six years! What would have happened if you died? Or even if you decided to retire?" I retorted.

"We had back-up plans for both of those situations, Hermione. He would have continued to be looked after," Dumbledore answered.

They're starting to give me a headache.

"Albus," I said wearily as I closed my eyes and pinched my brow, "I want to help him. I've spent the last week and a half searching for clues and answers. Please, just tell me where he is."

"The entrance to Severus Snape's healing quarters can be found on the rear wall of the infirmary."

Did he just...

My head shot up upon hearing the words that had just left Dumbledore's painted mouth.

"Thank you, Headmaster. I may not be your biggest fan, but I truly appreciate this," I said as calmly as possible.

"Just bring him back to us, Hermione, please."

"I'm certainly going to try," I called back as I raced out of Poppy's office.

I ran heedlessly through the infirmary until I reached the newly formed door along the rear wall.

The adrenaline was pumping through my veins, and I could barely breathe as I grasped the handle and pushed the door open.

A/N: I'm sorry this is the cliffhanger of doom, but it's just the way it worked out.

Thanks to the alpha team of awesomeness and much love to *karelia* for being beta reader extraordinaire for me.

Thank you, readers, for being so awesome and supportive. I'm so happy to hear you're enjoying this story so much!

Much Love,

~ Brena

My Last Breath

Chapter 8 of 11

On her first day of teaching, Hermione Granger finds a hidden treasure in her office. What she doesn't realize is how much this discovery will change her life.

All I wanted to say

Was I love you and I'm not afraid

Can you hear me?

Can you feel me in your arms?

~ "My Last Breath" by Evanescence

My breath caught in my throat when I looked at his still form lying on the bed in the center of the room. I couldn't believe it was him, that I had finally found him, and that he was indeed still alive.

I slowly walked to his bedside, taking in every inch of him, from his exposed toes to his long black hair.

He hasn't aged a day... I thought as my fingers itched to touch him.

He was wearing basic black pants and a crisp white dress shirt.

Poppy must be changing and cleaning his clothes because he definitely didn't look like this the last time I got to see him...

I finally tore my eyes away from Severus to look around his room. A small, but comfortable looking armchair sat on the right side of the bed. There was also a wooden end-table at the head of the bed that had a single drawer. On the wall behind the armchair, I noticed a window letting in rays of moonlight.

Well, at least he still gets a little bit of sun...

I debated sitting at his side, but at that moment managed to stifle a yawn. I knew it had to be pretty late by this point and decided I could always come back again tomorrow.

I stepped out of the room, closing the door quietly behind me and walked back to Poppy's office. There I found her standing very close to the conservatory painting, speaking to Dumbledore in hushed tones.

I cleared my throat, and the two of them looked over towards me.

"He... looks good. I can hardly believe he's alive... well in a manner of speaking," I said.

"It's a lot to process, dear. I completely understand," Poppy offered.

I walked over to her desk and began gathering up the texts I had brought with me.

"Hermione?"

I looked over at Poppy.

"Would you mind leaving those? I'd love to take a look at what you've found. I'm hoping to help you as much as possible with this."

"Oh, sure... no problem. I'm going to keep his journal, though, and I would like to be able to come and go as I please since I may have an idea that I'd like to try at any given moment."

"That's fine, Hermione. We trust you with him. Please, just use a Disillusionment Charm when going to see him. I really don't need the added complication of students seeing you entering and exiting a room that isn't supposed to exist."

"That's perfectly acceptable. Thank you so much for letting me see him," I said as I picked up the journal and began to exit the office again through the doorway.

"Hermione! Don't you want to use the Floo?" Poppy called out.

"No, I think I could use the walk to clear my head. Thanks for asking; I'll see you tomorrow."

I woke early Sunday morning after a fitful sleep. I was absolutely restless throughout the night and could feel it in the stiffness of my muscles. It felt as if my mind knew there were greater pursuits that needed my attention rather than sleep.

I sluggishly moved through my morning routine and finally felt human again after my first cup of coffee. As I sat in my living room, I debated my course of action.

I told both Harry and Neville I'd let them know if I made any progress... I just don't want to rush into this. I know it'll be easy to keep it from Harry but I don't think I can hide my excitement from Neville...

I continued to mull over this situation as I reached for Severus' journal which was waiting for me on the coffee table. When I opened the book to where I had last read, I decided that Neville and Harry could wait a little longer.

2 Aug 1996

So much has happened in such a short span of time, but I truly feel as though I need to write it all down to make some sense of it all. I'll start with my apparent promotion, but eventual condemnation. I am now the Defense Against the Dark Arts professor. Finally, after all these years I get the position that I've most wanted for reasons that are less than stellar, which I'll explain later.

If I needed to teach, I wanted to teach something I would be truly interested in. To impart knowledge on the next generation that might be useful. Potions came naturally to me, as you knew, but Defense... that was exhilarating. Due to my abilities in the Potions field, I've always been impatient with the children who tromp through my door day after day. They don't appreciate it or have any interest and yet here I am trying to make sure they don't kill themselves while beating knowledge into their thick skulls. It's extremely aggravating, and the strain of the situation lends to my already caustic disposition.

With teaching Defense, in the height of a war no less, I feel as though I might be able to do some good. These children have hardly received any decent instruction, aside from the wolf. I just want to give them the tools to protect themselves. They're going to be like lambs going to the slaughter when the time comes...

"Hey, Hermione, are you there?"

I closed the journal and looked up at the head floating in my fireplace.

Looks like one of my problems will come to me this time.

"Hey, Neville! What can I do for you?" I said, pleased to see him.

"Well, I've been thinking... do you mind if I come though?"

"Oh, no, I don't mind at all!"

I wonder what this is about...

After Neville had emerged from the Floo, I gestured him towards my sofa.

"Can I get you anything?" I asked as he sat down.

"No, I'm fine. Listen, Hermione, I've been thinking about your problem. This morning I had an idea, and I just couldn't wait to tell you, so that's why I'm here."

"Oh, great! What's your idea?" I asked, genuinely excited.

Neville leaned forward and said, "Have you thought about asking Dumbledore's portrait for help? I mean, he must have a decent insight into Professor Snape's personality..."

I frowned. *If he'd suggested this yesterday... well, I probably wouldn't have wanted to talk to Dumbledore then either. But, since he's here, I might as well just tell him that I know where Severus is...*

"Neville, I... I appreciate your suggestion." I stumbled. "I've actually talked to Dumbledore already... you see..."

So, I told Neville all about my escapades in the infirmary the previous evening and of course that I now knew where Professor Snape was, but couldn't give any details. As I told my tale, I watched as several different emotions passed over his face. At first he looked surprised; now in his silence, he looked disappointed.

"Neville?" I asked, concerned.

"When were you going to tell me, Hermione?" He sounded quiet and slightly depressed.

"Neville, I was going to tell you when I got to see you in the Great Hall! I'm so sorry you think I was leaving you out of this discovery. I had such an awful night's rest, and I wanted to do some reading before I went back to the infirmary later today. So I was hoping I would catch up with you before then," I said.

His features softened and he quietly responded, "Oh, I'm sorry... I..."

"Don't worry about it, Neville. Are we alright then?"

"Yes, absolutely. So, what's your next step?" he asked, getting back on track.

"Like I said, I'm still trying to read through all of Professor Snape's journal entries; then I'm going to have to start investigating other libraries for information on Juliet's Curse. The books here at Hogwarts just don't have all the specifics that I would need in order to start designing a counter curse."

He nodded his head in agreement. "Do you want me to do some research on Dark Arts libraries for you?" he asked, sounding hopeful.

"Actually, let's hold off on that for right now," I said with a smile. "If I haven't made any progress when I finish the journal, we'll start looking into it...sound good?"

"Yeah, that's a great idea," he said while getting to his feet. "I'm going to get going; good luck! I'll talk to you later on."

Before he could run off, I jumped up and gave him a quick hug.

"Thank you for being so supportive, Neville. I really, really appreciate it."

"No problem, Hermione."

As Neville spun out of my quarters, I sat down in my armchair and reopened the journal to the entry I had been reading.

Regarding the Defense job... the position itself was cursed years ago by the Dark Lord, and the only reason Dumbledore is giving me this position is because he knows that I won't be teaching at Hogwarts next year. This summer I entered into an Unbreakable Vow that will ultimately lead to me killing the Headmaster. He of course knows all about it and has subsequently ordered me to follow through with the parameters of the vow instead of just letting the blasted thing kill me already.

Every time I turn around the man finds new ways to torment me. Throwing myself down at his feet begging for mercy and a chance at redemption all those years ago all in the name of protecting you doesn't seem to have meant anything. Every day he puts more and more pressure and guilt upon me, and I have no choice but to say, "Thank you, sir."

I will have to kill him... To cast the Killing Curse takes such hatred, and will of course split my soul from the sheer act of succeeding. It doesn't matter to him; he wants me to protect Draco Malfoy and set into motion the next several moves of his war game. I know I'm simply his pawn... but it angers me to no end knowing that I wanted to help. I wanted to make a difference and all I am... is what he's made me.

I gently closed the journal and wiped at the tears that were tracking down my cheeks.

"It's all so very sad. He never deserved that... for everything that he'd done and was continuing to do... That's it, I'm going back to the infirmary, right now," I said as I started to gather my things in preparation to leave my quarters.

In a matter of moments I was ready to go. I headed straight for the Floo and Poppy Pomfrey's office.

I quietly closed the door to Severus' room and removed the Disillusionment Charm that cloaked my appearance. I also decided to cast an Imperturbable Charm on the door to ensure my privacy should I decide to begin speaking aloud.

I sat down in the bed-side armchair and looked upon his still form once more.

"I... I'm so sorry..." I said, testing how it felt to finally begin voicing my thoughts to the man they pertained to.

"I've been reading your journal... I know what you did and how you came to be in the condition that you're currently in. Your reasons were sound, and I'd have to say it was a brilliant move... except for one small loop-hole that you created. What is it like for you now? Without your memories of her, are you alone? Have you spent the last six years simply wallowing in your regrets?"

After a few moments of silence I continued.

"I've been trying to wake you, trying to figure out how to get you out of this. I've spent a lot of time trying to puzzle it out and come up with some alternative. My resources are slim though. I'd like to think I'm trying so hard just because I know you deserve better than this. You deserve a second chance, an opportunity to live a real life full of pleasure and your own personal pursuits. To be able to do what *you* want to do for a change."

I leaned forward in my chair and reached for his left hand which was lying on the bed sheet at his side. I wrapped my left hand around his still fingers and bowed my head, confessing my thoughts.

"I fear I've crossed the line though. It's not just about you anymore. It's about me too, about how you've affected my life and continue to infiltrate every aspect of it. I dream about you, pretty much all the time. Since I've found your journal... I can't stop thinking about how... how we might have worked. I mean not just worked as two intelligent people interested in academia... but as a couple. I want the opportunity to try. I want to be able to give you what you never had. I want to be able to sit by the fire and read in companionable silence. I want to experience what it would be like to have the considerable amount of passion you have within you directed solely towards me."

"I know... I know I'm no Lily Evans. But, I... I could love you. I want to love you," I cried as I clutched the hand underneath my own.

As the tears fell from my eyes, I became lost in my own grief. The hopelessness of the situation suddenly overwhelmed me, and I gave into it.

Suddenly, I felt something, and my eyes shot open to stare at where my hand rested on top of his.

I watched in wonder as the pale hand lying underneath mine twisted to lace long, calloused fingers between my own.

Shocked, my eyes darted from our hands to his face.

A/N: When I originally began forming the plot and ideas used in this story, this chapter, and especially the end, was the most clear in my mind. The ending sequence (as horribly cliff-hangery as it may be) is what I had been working towards for the first seven chapters. All I wanted was to get to this point.

Please don't kill me.

Thanks, as always, to the alpha team of awesomeness and beta extraordinaire, *karelia*.

I also want to take another moment to thank my wonderful husband of five years for his never-ending support and encouragement.

Flowers and chocolate to all of you who are hanging in till the end!

There's only 3 chapters left! For all the Evanescence fans out there, can you guess which song is next? Deb, don't cheat.

Much Love,

~ Brena

Bring Me To Life

Chapter 9 of 11

On her first day of teaching, Hermione Granger finds a hidden treasure in her office. What she doesn't realize is how much this discovery will change her life.

Wake me up inside ... Wake me up inside

Call my name and save me from the dark

Bid my blood to run

Before I come undone

Save me from the nothing I've become.

~ "Bring Me To Life" by Evanescence

I couldn't breathe. I couldn't form a single sentence. I simply stared into his very alert and alive eyes for what felt like days until finally I snapped out of it. I tried to get up because I knew I needed to get Poppy, but his hand tightly clamped down to stop me.

"Don't..." he rasped.

"But..." I began to protest.

"No, just..." He started to cough.

"Would you like some water?" I asked.

He only nodded in response. I gave him a shy smile and said, "I'm not going to get Poppy until you ask me to, and I swear I won't leave this room until you evict me. But I need both hands to conjure you something to drink..."

Gradually he released the death-grip he had on my hand. I made quick work of conjuring a glass and filling it with water. I bit down on my lower lip while trying to decide how to proceed.

I'm sure he's going to need help... does he want me to help him? Would he get upset? Shite... I can't believe this is happening.

He tried to sit up, and I jumped into action. I placed the glass down on the end table and reached down to give him some extra support. After he was sitting up, I handed him the glass and sat back down. I was sure that he wouldn't need my help with drinking.

He took a few deep sips and set the glass down. When his attention returned to me, I found that I had absolutely no idea what to say.

"How long has it been?" he asked, breaking the silence.

I took a deep breath and settled further into my chair.

"Six years, sir," I said eventually.

I can't believe I'm reverting back to calling him sir after all that I just said. This is ridiculous. I'm falling in love with him, and suddenly I'm sixteen again.

He gave me an odd look. Odd only because I didn't believe I'd ever seen Severus Snape genuinely confused before. Finally, he began to speak.

"Am I correct in my assumption that you didn't create any kind of counter-spell or remedy for my condition and that you actually released me in the natural fashion?"

I felt like a deer in headlights. I had no idea he would jump straight to it in such a way, but I also knew I needed to give him the truth.

"You would be correct. I..."

"Then shall we dispense with the formalities, Hermione?" he said conversationally.

I must be dreaming. There is no way he would be this easy-going... and calling me by my first name!

"You aren't angry?" I questioned, shock lacing my tone.

"No, but I am anxious to hear of the events that have lead to my reanimation, though, if you'd please."

Shite, shite... shite! This is all too surreal.

"Oh, sure. Feel free to, um, stop me at any point when you've got a question, okay?"

By this point, I was actually surprised that I didn't have the tell-tale coppery taste in my mouth that accompanies my gnawing on my lower lip too hard. I felt so wrong-footed.

He nodded in response to my statement and reached out towards me with the hand I had previously been holding. I gladly grasped it and found the strength I needed in order to proceed.

"While attempting to recover from my first day teaching, which of course included first-year Slytherins and Gryffindors, I found your journal. Completely by accident, and of course, I couldn't stop myself from reading it..."

After this statement he interjected, "You're teaching Potions?"

I gave him a small smile and said, "Yes, I know it's, um... well... I'll explain all that later."

He accepted that response and allowed me to proceed.

"I read enough to figure out that you did something and that you weren't really dead. My searches led me to the Restricted Section... several times," I said with a chuckle. "You actually helped me find the book I needed in the beginning."

"Ah, yes. We have been visiting the library a lot recently," he said, clearly reminiscing.

"What!? We? How did you...why? I don't understand." I managed to finally complete a sentence, much to his mild amusement.

"You've been dreaming about me for years, correct?" he asked.

I nodded in response.

"One of the side effects of Juliet's Curse is a dream connection between the afflicted and his or her beloved. The purpose of this being that the cursed party would be able to essentially *call out* to the one who would be able to break the spell."

"I didn't read anything about this in my research," I said.

"I found reference to the dreams in Baron Akerfeldt's journal, which is not available in the Hogwarts library."

"Oh... so why did it take so long for you to actually talk to me? I mean... if I could have released you years ago, why haunt me?"

"It took me a while to figure out exactly what was happening and why I was dreaming about you. I never thought the dream connection aspect of the curse would apply to me. Therefore, at first I believed that dreaming about you and dying in the shack over and over again was just part of my cursed existence. Eventually, I was able to gain some semblance of control regarding how and when I would make my appearances."

"In the beginning, you were scaring the hell out of me. Honestly," I confessed.

"I know, you were fighting me for a long time and obviously afraid. In addition the dreams were further complicated by the fact that I was dreaming about your eighteen-year-old self..."

"So, you're disappointed," I deadpanned.

"No!" he called out quickly as he held my hand a little tighter.

"But... I'm not Lily, and I don't want to be just... some kind of Lily substitute," I stumbled.

His brow creased as I said this in my despair. It was silent in the room for a few moments while he gathered his thoughts.

"You will never be her, and I would never want you to be," he said.

"I read your journal, Severus. I know how you felt about her... and you've been in a coma for six years! How could you possibly be okay with me being your *true love* or *soulmate* or whatever it is I am to you."

This is going to be a bloody disaster. I'm falling in love with him, he's in love with her... this sounds like a soap opera.

I heard what sounded like a low growl coming from the man on the bed. I could tell he was unimpressed by my emotional outburst, but I didn't care. I needed to know the truth and knew in my heart that he wouldn't lie to me. Especially not about Lily Evans, considering that I knew the whole story to begin with.

I was staring at the floor when he finally began to speak again. As I heard his voice, my head shot up to look at him once more.

"As you already know, I had hoped to find Lily Evans waiting for me in my cursed slumber. What I found was simply my home at Spinner's End, with only my books, a few past acquaintances and random memories to keep me company."

He reached for the glass of water and took a few more drinks, then set it down once more.

I gasped, "How did you not go completely crazy?"

"It was difficult at first. I was extremely disappointed and angry, but couldn't necessarily remember why. As time passed, I began to remember things. The most painful memories of Lily were gone, so I had an opportunity to examine everything in a more logical way. The hurt and regret had left me with the purging of those memories. I was able to see her and the situation in a clearer light. She will always be my first love, but my world no longer revolves around her."

"I'm sorry if I appear to be skeptical. I read that journal and know how you felt about her. Plus, you've only been alive again for what, twenty minutes? How can you know?"

"Hermione, believe it or not. I may have looked dead, but my mind has certainly been alive for six years. In that time, I had the cliché thoughts that accompany such an existence. I would find myself thinking things like 'If I ever get out of this' or 'When I wake up again.' In those moments I would swear that should a second chance come, I would embrace it completely. And here you are..."

I couldn't stop myself from blushing or the few tears that had begun to leak from my eyes.

I want to believe that... I want to trust him... This is all just so much to process...

Suddenly, his voice broke through my thoughts.

"May I... may I hold you?" he asked quietly.

I think my heart is trying to relocate itself to my throat. He sounds so... lonely. I don't want to rush, but I've got this opportunity... and if I spurn him now, who knows when I'll get another chance. It won't hurt... to just be held by him and see how it feels...

I nodded in agreement and stood, examining the bed he was lying on and trying to figure out the logistics of what I was about to do. He scooted over a little to his right, which gave me just enough room to lie next to him. He outstretched his left arm in invitation, and I eased myself down onto the bed.

I nestled myself into his left side, resting my cheek against his chest and felt his arm wrap around me.

"Thank you, Hermione," came his voice, barely louder than a whisper and full of sincerity. Then I felt his lips brush the crown of my head.

I didn't know what to say in response that wouldn't sound trite.

I felt so content, like a cat curled up in front of the fire. After a few moments of silence, I had to voice the thoughts running through my mind.

"This has got to be the most wonderful feeling in the world. I could stay like this for hours..."

I felt his chest rumble under me; then, as he began to stroke my loose curls, he said, "I'm not in a hurry to face what's waiting for me out there at the moment either."

I let out an unbecoming snort and said, "You were awarded an Order of Merlin, First Class..."

His body gave a slight jerk following my pronouncement.

"What?"

"Um, yeah... and there's a memorial..."

"Potter."

"Right in one."

"Joy."

"It shouldn't be too bad... we'll have to, um... come up with a story though..."

He stopped playing with my hair, only to wrap his arm around me once more, and squeeze me tightly.

"In this matter, I think I would prefer the truth."

"Really?" I asked, surprised.

He wants to tell the entire wizarding world that he had cast Juliet's Curse on himself and that was the one to break the spell?

"It'll be less work in the long run, and the truth will cause such a sensation that it will more than likely die out as quickly as it comes out."

"Good point... So, how would you like to proceed?"

"I think at this point, we might want to alert Poppy. I'd hate for her to walk in here to find us like this and wind up having an aneurysm," he said sardonically.

I let out a small laugh and said, "Another good idea. Your mind definitely didn't slip any..."

"So good of you to notice, dear."

I gently shoved him and spun to look at him. Our faces were so close, and I couldn't resist the opportunity that I had just been presented with. I scooted up a little further on the bed and leaned closer towards him, then he met me halfway.

When his lips touched mine, it was one hundred times better than the dreams. This was real. I was kissing Severus Snape, and it was perfect and amazing. I never knew a simple kiss could wake every single nerve in my body until that moment.

The chaste kiss that I had started became something deeper in a matter of moments. As our tongues danced, I could feel both of his hands slide in my hair.

I slowly pulled away and just looked at him.

"Severus..." I said with what must have been a goofy smile. I reached out my left hand and gently stroked his cheek.

"Mmmm, yes?"

"That was wonderful."

"I'm glad you think so because I plan to do it again." And with that he closed the distance between us once more.

After a few moments of bliss, he pulled away.

"We should really get Poppy..." I trailed off.

"Yes, I agree."

With that I extracted myself from his embrace and stood next to the bed once more.

"I'll be right back, okay?"

He gave me a small smile and said, "I'll be waiting."

I practically ran to Madam Pomfrey's office after I closed Severus' door. I found her door open and the nurse sitting behind her desk. She appeared to be reading one of the tomes I had checked out of the library.

When I canceled the Disillusionment Charm, she looked up in surprise.

"Hermione! How can I help you?"

"Poppy, you aren't going to believe this..." I said as I shifted my weight from one foot to another impatiently.

"What is it?"

"He's awake."

"What?!" she shouted as she shot out of her chair.

"I... I was talking to him, you know, as he was just lying there. And I said... well, some things, and then he started moving..."

"Let's go."

In an instant she pulled her wand and Disillusioned both of us, and we were moving rapidly towards the rear of the infirmary.

I followed her into the room and almost ran into her since she had come to a stop a few feet from the door frame.

I walked around her shimmery form and closed the door. Since Poppy wasn't making any moves, I canceled the Disillusionment Charms we were wearing and looked at Severus.

Now he was standing in front of the small window on the right wall, pensively staring outside. The sunlight streaming through the glass made him look somewhat ethereal.

"Severus?" Poppy asked, still in shock.

He turned away from the window to look at both of us.

"Good day, Poppy," he said easily as if he had only just seen the nurse recently.

"You... Oh, thank Merlin!"

She rushed towards him, and he held his arms out to her, knowing what she would need.

I hung back and watched the very happy and emotional reunion.

"Thank you for taking care of me, Poppy."

"You know you were like a son to me; of course I was going to," she snuffled into his chest.

When they separated, Poppy immediately began pushing him towards his bed.

"Poppy, I've spent six years in that bed!"

"I just want to run a few diagnostic charms on you, then you may stand all you'd like," she said, sounding bossy.

Severus didn't argue further and placed himself back in the center of his bed.

I looked on as she cast a myriad of spells over his body. When she had finished, she happily said, "You're completely healthy."

"I could have told you as much, but I know you wouldn't have believed me. Now, Hermione and I have a few more things to discuss if you don't mind."

Poppy spun to face me. Apparently, she had forgotten I was even in the room.

"Oh, yes. Absolutely, I... I'll go tell Albus."

"If you must, and please inform Minerva while you're at it. I don't want to tell this story more times than I have to," he said curtly.

"I'll take care of it, Severus."

As she turned to head for the exit, he called out to her.

"Poppy? By any chance did you happen to recover my wand?"

"It's in the drawer."

"Thank you."

With that exchange, Poppy disappeared from sight and exited the room.

Severus spun and placed his feet on the right side of the bed and opened the tiny drawer of the end table. He extracted his wand and held it in his right hand.

"It's time for a little experiment," he said with a smirk as he stood.

How I never thought that tiny facial expression was sexy before now is absolutely beyond me...

In an instant he slashed his wand through the air and called out, *Expecto Patronum!*

To say I was surprised with the result would truly be an understatement.

A/N: Well, we're in the home stretch now! I hope the wait was worth it. :-)

Thanks to the alpha team of awesomeness for dealing with my waffling.

Exceptional praise to *karelia* for beta reading this for me!

For anyone who might be curious as to who Baron Akerfeldt actually is, since this is the second time his name has been referenced... Mikael Åkerfeldt is the lead singer, guitarist, and songwriter for the Swedish progressive death metal band Opeth. My husband is a huge fan. So, using Akerfeldt's name in such an obscure way was a inside joke/nod to my honey.

Lastly, I'd like to give sincere thanks to you, the readers, who have been hanging in this long. I can't express enough how much I appreciate every single one of you. I hope you've enjoyed this chapter and continue with this tale to the end.

Much Love,

~ Brena

Hello

Chapter 10 of 11

On her first day of teaching, Hermione Granger finds a hidden treasure in her office. What she doesn't realize is how much this discovery will change her life.

If I smile and don't believe

Soon I know I'll wake from this dream

Don't try to fix me

I'm not broken.

~ "Hello" by Evanescence

A burst of silvery mist shot out of Severus' wand and coalesced into the form of a life-size lioness. The lioness prowled across the floor and came to stand in front of me. I looked down at the magical animal and smiled. I watched as it slowly walked around me, rubbed its flanks against my legs, and then disappeared.

"That answers several questions," he said calmly as he sat back down on the edge of the bed.

I walked across the room and resumed my seat in the armchair.

"Care to elaborate?"

"Well, first I had been wondering if my magic suffered at all due to my experience in the shack. Next, I was curious to know if my Patronus' form would be different, considering recent revelations."

"And how are you feeling about the second?" I asked curiously.

"Perfectly content," he said as he reached out to hold my hand once more.

"So, what do you want to do now?"

He looked towards the small window and said, "I want to go outside."

My mind twisted over how we would pull off such a feat.

If we go out onto the Hogwarts grounds, someone will surely notice us and faint, or possibly something even worse. Unless...

"Severus, I'm sure you realize we can't just go for a stroll on the grounds while being visible. I don't want to just go to the Muggle world either, because you never know who could be out and about. So, the only solution I've got at this moment is for us to go out there Disillusioned," I stated.

"That sounds reasonable."

I stood from my chair and cast the charm on myself, and right before my eyes, Severus shimmered from view. As I turned towards the exit, I felt warm fingers lace through my own.

We quietly made our way through the valley of beds and crept past Poppy's office. When we finally reached the doors that led out onto the third floor, I couldn't stop myself from smirking.

I feel like I'm busting him out of prison... in a way I guess I am.

It was an adventure trying to get from the Infirmary and out the front doors of the school without being noticed. I knew I needed to stay Disillusioned though, since I didn't want to simply disappear suddenly. On the other hand, if I lifted the charm, I didn't want to look like I was outside talking to myself.

As soon as the autumn breeze touched our faces, my companion stopped walking. I couldn't see him; I could only assume that he was reveling in the feeling of actual fresh air. A few moments later we began walking in a companionable silence.

When we reached a safe distance from the school, I cast *Muffliato* non-verbally.

"Now that you've got your whole life ahead of you, what do you want to do?"

"Hermione, I had hoped I would have this opportunity, but right now it's all too much to try and comprehend. I'm sure in a few days I'll have an actual answer for you."

As we were walking along the edge of the Forbidden Forest, he said, "How do you feel about teaching Potions?"

I took a few moments to think about his question; I didn't want to natter on and irritate him.

I should just tell him the truth, but I really don't want to look like a mental case... This is all so confusing.

"You're very quiet, Hermione," he continued.

"Oh! I'm sorry, I'm just trying to formulate an accurate and concise answer that won't make me look crazy, is all."

"You aren't crazy, and I won't judge you, if that helps."

"I just know you can get impatient with things..."

"Yes, I can. But I'm anxious to hear about you, your life and what's happened in the last six years. I'm going to have to be patient and listen in order to catch up, am I not?"

Even though he couldn't see me, I nodded in response. I accepted his words and took a deep breath before finally answering him.

"I think I'll enjoy it more now. I really do like teaching, but I only decided to take up Potions as my course of study out of guilt. You were haunting me, and it seemed like the most logical path to take. After I completed all my training and Minerva asked me to finally relieve Professor Slughorn... well, I've been thinking about you all the time. Even

before I found your journal, when I had moved into your old rooms, and took up residence in your old office, I wanted to reach out to you. I started teaching your old classes, imparting some of your knowledge onto these children, but wishing I could ask your advice on things or..."

"I see."

"Do you? I mean I know you never wanted to teach Potions..."

"Hermione, I'm sorry that you went through that level of torment for years due to the dreams. And this may sound selfish, but it's a relief to hear that someone cared about me enough to do everything you've done. I feel comfortable, I guess is the right word, knowing that you *understand* the guilt that I carried around regarding Lily and why I did everything I did."

"It is oddly poetic that our obsessive guilt ended up bringing us together... I'm so happy that I didn't let the opinions of my friends stop me."

There was a slightly uncomfortable silence, and I could tell that something I said had upset him.

"Who have you told about the journal?" he asked abruptly.

I was completely caught off guard by his brusque delivery, but still managed to formulate a coherent answer.

"Neville and Harry. Harry and I had a bit of a disagreement over whether or not you could actually still be alive, and he thought I was going crazy. In that time period, Neville was a very willing and supportive ear. In talking to him about the situation, I found that I was able to regain some focus."

"Potter and Longbottom... well, I'm at least pleased Weasley wasn't involved also," he said, sounding snide.

He appeared so sarcastic that I could feel myself getting angry. I knew the topic of my friends would be a sore subject, but things had been going so well between us that I had hoped it wouldn't be too bad.

I need to stop him from snapping on me like this over things I can't control...

"Severus, please stop," I ground out. "My friends and I aren't errant teenagers anymore, and I wasn't running about telling tales. I needed support and these two people especially are on your side. They wanted to help you, and ultimately us."

He was quiet for a while, and I could only assume that he was thinking. However, I wish that I could have seen the look on his face while processing what I had said.

After a few moments he finally spoke. "Hermione, this isn't going to be easy. It's going to take some time for me to... I've only trusted one person completely in my entire life, and you know how that turned out. I..."

Before he could finish his thought, we were interrupted by a small Patronus in the shape of common house cat. I wasn't surprised in the least when the irritated voice of my former head of house could be heard from the cat.

"Professors, I need to see you in my office immediately," she said sternly.

How does that woman manage to make me feel like a firstie in just one sentence?

"I think we're in trouble," I commented, trying to lighten my own anxiety.

"I would have to agree."

"My office, now," were the cat's final words before disappearing.

I'm so glad I cast that Muffliato charm earlier...

"Shall we?" Severus said cordially.

"Are you ready for this? I don't know if Minerva will be the only one in that office by the time we get there."

"It needs to happen sooner or later. I'd prefer sooner for the sheer fact that I'd appreciate being able to walk in public without a Disillusionment Charm cloaking us."

"Okay, if you're sure," I said with heavy apprehension.

We promptly changed direction and headed back towards the school to face the highly irritated Headmistress.

After some careful maneuvering, Severus and I finally made it to the seventh floor and stood in front of the entrance to the Headmistress' office. I quietly spoke the password, and the gargoyle leapt to the side to admit us. As the gargoyle resealed the entrance, I removed my Disillusionment Charm and Severus followed my lead.

He doesn't look as okay with this as he led me to believe while we were outside.

I stepped in front of him and reached up to cover his cheek with my palm. My fingertips were grazing his cheek, gently trying to smooth the anxiety lines that were gathering around his eyes.

"Severus, I could always tell her it's too soon. You... you need some time to acclimate yourself... I..."

"Stop, Hermione. I appreciate your concern, but I'm not completely broken," he said as he lifted his hand to cover my own.

"I didn't say that you were. I'm just... okay, you're right."

He gave me a small smile for my concern, and we broke apart. We stepped up to the spiral staircase and rode to the top in silence. When we reached the landing, I gently knocked on the Headmistress' door.

"Come in."

Severus and I entered Minerva's office to find her standing behind her desk. When her eyes locked onto Severus', she gripped the edge of her desk for support. I watched as the strength in her knees gave way, and she landed in her desk chair with a plop.

"You're... I... Severus..."

"Yes, yes, I know. I'm alive, thank you for attempting to point that out."

"Please, sit," she said wearily in response.

We both took a seat on the Gryffindor red chaise she had set in front of her office fireplace. When we were both settled comfortably, Severus turned to the Headmistress.

"Minerva, thank you for the invitation to join you this afternoon," he said with his patented smirk. I knew he was mocking her for ordering the two of us to her office.

"Why did you two have to run off like that? You just let Albus and Poppy..."

"Minerva, how many times do you expect me to be able to tell the story of how I'm still alive and not want to curse whomever I'm speaking to? Plus, I've spent years in a magical coma; I wanted fresh air. It was nothing personal, I assure you."

"Since you aren't anxious to continue repeating yourself about how your heart is presently beating, how do you propose we move forward?" she challenged.

"I've devised a plan, but will need the assistance of several people."

The headmistress gave him a quizzical look and said, "Who do you need, Severus?"

"Potter and Longbottom," he said plainly.

What?!

Minerva nodded in response and walked towards her fireplace, apparently on a mission to summon the men Severus had requested.

Shocked, I leaned in close to him and whispered softly in his ear. "Severus? What are you up to? You've not been awake for an entire day and you're already plotting?"

Once again his hand was holding mine. He turned his head, and I could see a mischievous glint in his eyes.

"Shhh, don't worry. You'll appreciate this plotting."

"But..."

I didn't have time to question him further. At that very moment, a flash of green light filled the hearth, and Harry, quickly followed by Neville, tumbled into the room.

A/N: Hello everyone! I'm so sorry for the wait. My husband and I just got done moving, and I'm also eight months pregnant at the moment, so it's been a hectic few weeks. I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday, if you celebrate the day of overeating.

Much thanks to the alpha team of awesomeness, and to my amazing beta, *karelia*.

One more chapter left!

Much Love,

~ Brena

Whisper

Chapter 11 of 11

On her first day of teaching, Hermione Granger finds a hidden treasure in her office. What she doesn't realize is how much this discovery will change her life.

Don't turn away

Don't try to hide

Don't close your eyes

Don't turn out the light...

~ *"Whisper" by Evanescence*

When the *Daily Prophet* arrived during breakfast on Monday, the buzz began. Everyone was openly wondering what Harry Potter's big announcement that evening would be. I was worried about the entire situation. I knew in my heart that even though Severus' name had been cleared, there were still people out there who wouldn't be thrilled about him being alive.

While making my way to the dungeons for my first class, I couldn't help thinking about the entire situation.

I just don't understand why they want to make such a production out of it... and out in the middle of Hogsmeade. It's just not safe... I know he wants to simply make one statement, but this is just insane. Of course I'll support him, but...

With my thoughts lingering on Severus Snape, I could feel some of my anxiety start to fade. I knew at that moment he was more than likely still stretched out on my sofa, enjoying the paper and his coffee.

I wish I could have stayed there with him, but at least I'll be busy all day instead of wallowing in the stress of what's to come tonight.

As much as I had wanted the day to pass quickly, it was anything but. Throughout the entire day the ball of nerves I had developed in my stomach only grew exponentially. I was at the end of my rope by the time my last class was drawing to a close. My fifth-year Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs thankfully behaved themselves, so when class had officially concluded, they were ready to leave without incident.

I rushed to my quarters and found Severus standing in front of one of my bookshelves in the living room.

"How was your day?" he asked.

I wanted to shout at him that his *big plans* had made me a nervous wreck. But in that same moment I was dumbfounded by how utterly domestic he sounded.

I could get used to this...

"Honestly, I've been worried all day about what you're about to do."

He walked over to me and held his arms out. I rushed into them, and as he held me tight, I began to unload all my thoughts into the fabric of his shirt.

"I feel like you're needlessly putting yourself into danger out there. I just found you, and now you and Harry are using this opportunity as some Wizarding sting operation. I hate the fact that you're going to be bait!"

"Hermione, shhhhh," he said soothingly as he stroked my back. "We've got to try to catch Lestrage. You and I would never be safe with him on the loose. I know that with as much as Potter boasted that *everyone* should be there, Rodolphus won't be able to resist the temptation. Plus, I think I've proven my abilities to be able survive time and time again...I'll be fine."

"But... but what if..."

"We've got our whole lives ahead of us. This is the final hurdle; you need to understand that I need to take care of this. After everyone knows that I'm alive, that you're the reason I'm breathing, and Lestrage is behind bars where he should be, we'll be free to do as we please. I don't want to feel like I need to look over my shoulder constantly. I want to be truly free; can't you see that?"

I understand... I still think you're being careless...

I took a deep breath in an attempt to calm down.

I leaned away from his chest to look up into his eyes and said, "Okay, let's just go get this over with. The sooner it's done, the better I'll feel."

He gave me a small smile in response and leaned down to press his lips to mine.

"Shall we?"

I nodded, and we headed towards the fireplace to Floo-call to our destination.

After arriving in the Shrieking Shack, I walked towards a window that faced Hogsmeade.

"Dear Merlin, that's a lot of people."

Severus walked up behind me and wrapped his arms around my waist.

"Excellent."

"How will they be able to protect you?" I said quietly.

"It is what they do for a living, Hermione. Have faith."

We Disillusioned ourselves and made our way across the shack's property towards the raised platform that had been created for the occasion.

Harry was standing at the base of the steps that led towards the podium. He was animatedly speaking to a small group of people, presumably killing time until the guest of honor arrived. I made to move towards Harry, but Severus grabbed my arm to halt my progress.

"Hermione," he whispered. "Please don't lose your cover. I'd like to know that you're safely hidden in the crowd in case things get out of hand."

"Fine. I'm going to stand close by, though, just in case..."

I found a safe place to watch the proceedings off towards the side of the platform. I had an unobstructed view of both the podium and the spectators, so I settled in.

I really, really hope this isn't the disaster that I think it's going to be.

At five o'clock exactly Harry walked up the few steps leading to the podium and cast *Sonorus*.

"Thank you, everyone, for coming out tonight. I'm sure you'll be glad that you did. The purpose of tonight's gathering is to bring out in the open a new development regarding Severus Snape."

There was a collective gasp from the crowd, but Harry pressed on.

"It has come to my attention that he is, in fact, still alive."

"Mr. Potter! How do you know this?" Rita Skeeter called from the base of the platform with her Dicto-quill floating precariously in front of her. Standing next to her was a young man holding a camera and snapping away wildly.

That must be Dennis. How wonderful that he honored his brother's memory by taking up Colin's love of photography...

"I was hoping you'd ask that, Rita," Harry said with a charming smile. "I'll just let him explain it for himself. May I proudly present Mr. Severus Snape."

Severus dropped his Disillusionment Charm, and the majority of onlookers began shouting questions at him all once, but he remained stoic. He nodded slightly at Harry and stepped up to the podium.

As soon as it looked like he would speak, the crowd quieted instantly.

"Obviously, the rumors of my death have been greatly exaggerated," he said with a smirk. "I needed to take the opportunity to inform the entire Wizarding world of this fact. I will now take a moment to answer any questions you may have. Please, one at a time."

Once again Rita Skeeter had a jump on her contemporaries and shouted out, "Mr. Snape, how did you survive?"

"I have spent the last six years in a coma, which was the result of specific potion I had consumed before the final battle. Upon the start of term at Hogwarts, the new Potions professor uncovered my old journal. In my writings, I had mentioned the precautionary measures I was taking to avoid death, and she was able to locate me and subsequently free me from the curse."

Luna Lovegood raised her hand and said, "Was that Hermione Granger, Professor?"

"Yes, Miss Lovegood, Professor Granger resolved my situation. I owe her the utmost respect."

"Is there a history there, Mr. Snape?" An unknown member of the audience called out.

"I will not turn my dealings with Professor Granger into some sort of convoluted conspiracy. While she was still a student, our relationship was strictly professional. Anyone who would like to claim otherwise will have to seriously consider who they are making these allegations against," Severus said in his strictest, most threatening tone.

Thank goodness he's addressing this now.

While the crowd digested the underlying threat in Severus' last statement, there was a lull in the question and answer session. My gaze fell on Harry, who was standing at the edge of the platform, looking agitated. In order to keep things moving, he called out, "What are your plans now?"

"I'm looking forward to enjoying the freedom that comes with not being a spy in the midst of a war."

With this statement, there was a strangled cry from the opposite side of the crowd. A bright green stream of light was barreling towards Severus, while absolute chaos broke out amongst the masses. I was absolutely horrified and could only watch as Severus quickly dodged the offending curse and Aurors converged on the space where the light had come from.

While the Aurors wrestled Rodolphus Lestrange to the ground, and most of the audience members fled the scene, I noticed something unsettling near the edge of the platform where Severus was standing.

Dennis Creevy stood completely still, staring at Severus, while everyone around him was screaming, ducking to the ground or Disapparating. When he threw his camera to the ground, and pulled out his wand, I knew I needed to do something, anything to stop what was surely going to happen.

"No... NO, DENNIS, NO!" I screamed and dropped my Disillusionment charm while running towards the platform.

I jumped up onto the platform and launched myself straight at Severus just before the stream of light could hit him. We hit the wooden surface with a loud bang, and Severus rolled me off of him and cradled me in his arms.

The pain emanating from my right side was excruciating, but I couldn't form the words to tell him what hurt. I glanced down at my side and watched as the blood began to saturate my top.

"I'm... sorry..." I croaked while looking up into his sad eyes.

He yanked up my shirt to look at the damage.

"NO! Hermione, you're not going anywhere," he said in a panic as he began to wave his wand over my abdomen.

I drifted in and out of consciousness as I listened to him chanting.

"You've got to stay with me, Hermione! I just found you, damn it! Don't..."

And then everything went black.

I awoke in Severus' infirmary room. The room was dark aside from the single candle's flame on the bedside table. I looked towards Severus, who was sitting in the bedside armchair. He looked like he was lightly dozing until I adjusted my position on the bed.

"Hermione?" he said as he jerked upright. "Thank Merlin."

"Thank you, Severus," I said softly.

He reached forward to clasp my hand and brought it to his mouth to brush his lips against my knuckles. Then I turned my hand and held it against his cheek, feeling the stubble growing there.

"You scared the hell out of me."

"I'm sorry... it's just, Dennis... Did they arrest him too?"

"Yes, he gladly went with the Aurors. Apparently, he held me personally responsible for the death of his brother."

"I hope he didn't give anyone else any ideas... Severus, I'm so sorry for putting myself in danger, which is the one thing you didn't want. But I just brought you back to life; I didn't want anything to happen to you."

"Don't apologize, Hermione. I'm in your debt for saving me, again."

"I don't want you to worry about any of that. It's not in my nature to hang that stuff over anyone's head. How long have I been out of it?"

"A little over twenty-four hours."

"WHAT?!"

"Shhhh, don't get yourself worked up."

"But what about my classes?"

He chuckled lightly and said, "Your lesson plans were easy enough to follow. You're still exceptionally meticulous."

"Did they pass out when you strolled in?"

"I'm sure they'll be happy when you're well enough to return."

"I feel fine."

"You'll stay put until Poppy releases you."

"Yes, dear."

"Hermione, I need to talk to you about something serious, if you're up to it."

My insides went cold in a flash.

Oh, God, no... Is he going to break it off with me already?

Since I was getting so upset I didn't trust my voice. I could only nod, indicating that he should continue.

"I know we never had the chance to discuss future plans... and I appreciate everything you've done for me. You're an amazing woman, and I've been blessed by whatever deity deigned to bring you into my life..."

Shite... shite... shite...

He took a deep breath and continued on, "You've taken care of me, let me sleep on your couch when I had nowhere to go and risked your own life to protect me. In that moment when you were bleeding out in my arms, I realized that I needed you to know how I feel."

He stopped abruptly and reached up to remove my hand from his face. After setting it gently back on the bed he knelt at my side.

"I don't want to rush you, and we can take as long as you need to make this final step. But I just need you to know that I'm committed to you."

I stared at him, dumbfounded. Finally, I said "Severus, what are you trying to say? What final step?"

"The Ministry replaced the contents of my Gringotts vault this morning. So, after I finished teaching and checking in on you, I left the castle for a few hours..."

He reached into the pocket of his pants and produced a small box, which he opened for me.

In the flickering light of my bedside candle, I gazed upon a small diamond ring with sapphires on either side.

"I... like I said, I don't want to rush to the Ministry tomorrow, but I need you to know I'm serious. Someday, Hermione, will you marry me?"

The moisture gathered in my eyes and began spilling down my cheeks.

"Yes, absolutely!" I cried out.

The grin that spread across his face was breathtaking. He quickly removed the ring from the box and slipped it onto my finger.

"I'm looking forward to someday," he said, admiring his ring on my hand.

I sat up and reached my arms out to him, encouraging him to get off the floor.

He stood quickly and sat on the edge of the bed while wrapping me in the strength of his loving embrace. When his lips touched mine, sealing our commitment to each other with a kiss, I felt the butterflies in my stomach take flight.

I pulled away from him slightly to look into his eyes and quietly said, "Me too."

~ The End ~

A/N: There are so many things I need to say since this is the final installment of my tale, so please be patient with me. :-)

I'd like to acknowledge the awesome author/fangirl/friend for whom this story was written. Over two years ago I struck up a friendship with *debjunk* which has evolved into something extremely special. When I received my assignment email from the exchange mods, I was in shock and scared out of my mind having Deb as my giftee. It made perfect sense that I should write her gift since I know her so well, but I was also extremely intimidated. I wanted to write something that she'd love, and this was the result. Deb, you are made of awesome, and I'm so glad you were the inspiration behind this story.

Next, I need to thank you, the reader. Thank you for taking this journey with me and for all the really supportive reviews... even though I've been the super slacker at responding. I'm really sorry it's taken me forever to post this last chapter, but I gave birth to my son the day after Christmas, and I've been losing my mind learning how to be a mommy.

Much love and hugs to my alpha team, which was made up of several awesome ladies. Thank you, *isalie964*, *Clairvoyant* and *Jessikitty*. I swear if I didn't have them to read over every chapter and give me feedback, this tale wouldn't be as cohesive as it ended up being. Thank you so much ladies; you are amazing.

Many hugs go to my very special beta reader, *karelia*. Thank you so much for all your time and patience while working with me and this story. I know my relationship with the comma is a rocky one, but you were so supportive and understanding. I was truly blessed having you for a beta in this endeavor.

Thanks again everyone! This was my first multi-chapter story, but hopefully won't be my last.

Much Love Always,

~ BrenaMarie