

His Muggle-Born Witch

by fizzabella

Summary: Alternate Universe. Hermione, with help from Harry, goes back in time to change Severus Snape's unhappy childhood and years at Hogwarts, in the hope that a happier early life would prevent him from dying alone in the Shrieking Shack.

Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 3

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Author's Note: This story is written for hedgehog33. I liked all of her prompts, but this one struck a responsive chord when I sat down to write it. It was a double-edged sword, actually, because this was supposed to be one or two, at the most, three chapters. The plot bunnies hijacked my keyboard and held it hostage till I wrote what they wanted, but it was great fun. I only hope that it brings the same amount of enjoyment to you, hedgehog33.

I can't close this Author's Note without mentioning my brilliant beta and friend southernwitch69. She is a deservedly well-respected beta-reader, as well as a cheerleader and friend. One of the greatest honors I've ever received is her "Brilliant story" note at the end of the last set of corrections. She has a fondness for this particular genre of story, and I'm thrilled to death to know she enjoyed it. There's no way she could have enjoyed reading the story as much as I enjoyed working with her on it, which is my great good fortune. Needless to say, I am grateful for her help and support.

I am also grateful to the brilliant J.K. Rowling, to whom I pay tribute. I intend no copyright infringement by the use of her characters and make no profit save the joy of writing in her wonderful, sunlit universe.

BOLD text denotes excerpts quoted from "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows".

Chapter One

The playground was nearly deserted.

A single huge chimney dominated the distant skyline. Two girls were swinging backward and forward , and a skinny boy was watching them from behind a clump of bushes. His black hair was overlong and his clothes were so mismatched that it looked deliberate: too short jeans, a shabby, overlarge coat that might have belonged to a grown man, an odd smocklike shirt.

...Snape looked no more than nine or ten years old, sallow, small, stringy. There was undisguised greed in his thin face as he watched the younger of the two girls swinging higher and higher than her sister.

"Lily, don't do it!" shrieked the elder of the two.

But the girl had let go of the swing at the very height of its arc and flown into the air, quite literally flown, launched herself skyward with a great shout of laughter, and instead of crumpling on the playground asphalt, she soared like a trapeze artist through the air, staying up far too long, landing far too lightly.

"Mummy told you not to!"

Petunia stopped her swing by dragging the heels of her sandals on the ground, making a crunching, grinding sound, then leapt up, hands on hips.

"Mummy said you weren't allowed, Lily!"

"But I'm fine," said Lily, still giggling. "Tuney, look at this. Watch what I can do."

Petunia glanced around. The playground was deserted apart from themselves and, though the girls did not know it, Snape.

None of the three on the playground had seen another little girl coming across the park behind them. She was dressed in a short-sleeved blouse striped in green and white, and a pair of green pedal-pushers that matched the blouse. She wore white sandals on her feet. Her honey blonde hair was neatly plaited back from her face, and she was a tiny, delicately built little girl. She had seen Lily go flying off the swing, and her hands clenched to her sides, her eyes narrowed in excitement. She had known the thrill of Lily's flight herself; she had soared off her own swing at home and landed just that lightly, contrary to all the laws of science and nature. She watched the two girls without making a sound, as Lily held a flower blossom in her hand and made it open and close. The girl named Lily, she decided, was showing off, and she could see, even if Lily couldn't, that Petunia was growing more and more angry because she obviously didn't have the same ability as Lily. She moved closer, her eyes sparkling with excitement and interest. She saw Lily fling the blossom to the ground and clearly heard Petunia's next comment.

"It's not right," said Petunia. But her eyes had followed the flower's flight to the ground and lingered upon it. "How do you do it?" she added, and there was definite longing in her voice.

"It's obvious, isn't it?" Snape could no longer contain himself, but had jumped out from behind the bushes. Petunia shrieked and ran backward toward the swings, but Lily, though clearly startled, remained where she was. Snape seemed to regret his appearance. A dull flush of color mounted the sallow cheeks as he looked at Lily.

"What's obvious?" asked Lily.

Snape had an air of nervous excitement. With a glance at the distant Petunia, now hovering beside the swings, he lowered his voice and said, "I know what you are."

"What do you mean?"

"You're...you're a witch," whispered Snape.

She looked affronted.

"That's not a very nice thing to say to somebody."

She turned, nose in the air, and marched off toward her sister.

"No!" said Snape.

He followed the girls, his overlarge coat flapping with each movement. His face was flushed, and the other girl, still hidden, felt her heart contract in sympathy for him.

The other two girls still didn't see the stranger; their attention was still concentrated on Snape. The girl in the green-and-white striped blouse moved closer. She had come to this playground at this time to fulfill a mission; she was going to make sure it went exactly as she'd planned it.

She listened as the boy tried to reason with Lily.

"You are," said Snape to Lily. "You are a witch. I've been watching you for a while. But there's nothing wrong with that. My mum's one, and I'm a wizard."

Petunia's laugh was like cold water.

"Wizard!" she shrieked, her courage returned now that she had recovered from the shock of his unexpected appearance. "I know who you are. You're that Snape boy. They live down Spinner's End by the river," she told Lily, and it was evident from her tone that considered the address a poor recommendation. "Why have you been spying on us?"

"Haven't been spying," said Snape, hot and uncomfortable and dirty-haired in the bright sunlight. "Wouldn't spy on you anyway," he added spitefully, "you're a Muggle."

Though Petunia evidently did not understand the word, she could hardly mistake the tone.

"Lily, come on, we're leaving!" she said shrilly. Lily obeyed her sister at once, glaring at Snape as she left.

Hermione Granger watched Severus Snape's face fall as he watched Petunia and Lily march through the playground gate. She recognized his disappointment and guessed that he'd been planning this moment for a long time, and whatever his goal had been, it wasn't this. She hung back for just an instant more, but she didn't want him to get away. She had to act now.

She called out, softly, so as not to startle him, "Wait, please!"

He whirled around at once, his hands clenching into fists at his sides.

"Who're you?" He looked her over from head to toe, taking in the girl walking towards him now. If he looked mis-matched and neglected and angry, she had the look of a well-cared-for child, from her carefully braided hair to her tasteful, age-appropriate clothing and sandals. Severus noted that she wasn't pretty, but her eyes were bright and sparkled with intelligence.

"My name is Hermione. I didn't mean to startle you. I was watching you with those other two girls...the ones who just left. And I heard what you said to the one called Lily." She hesitated then asked, timidly, "What's your name?"

"I'm that Snape boy." His voice was bitter. "My name is Severus."

"I'm Hermione Granger. The girls who were here...do you know their names?"

"The witch is Lily Evans. The other girl is her sister, Petunia." He made a face and muttered a curse word under his breath as he spoke Petunia's name, and Hermione blushed.

Her mother would have turned purple if she'd heard a word like that coming out of her daughter's mouth. She shrugged off her shock at the word. Severus Snape hadn't had a happy home life at all; when she and Harry had decided, against all law and logic, that someone needed to go back in time to help him resist becoming a Death Eater and winding up dead on the floor of the Shrieking Shack, unloved and alone, she'd prepared herself for the certainty that she would have to be patient and as non-judgmental as possible.

"Not that it matters who they are. What I want to know is, why were you watching?"

She took a deep breath and moved a few steps closer. "I was watching what she did when she jumped off the swing...because I can do that, too. I've done it."

His eyes widened. "You?"

"Yeah. My mum and dad watched me, and they were sure I was going to be killed when I went flying off the swing. But I couldn't stop myself, you know? I had to know what it felt like."

He looked her over again. "I've never seen you round here. Did you just move in?"

"No, I don't live here. I live in Mayfair with my mum and dad, but my mum's aunt lives on Millers Close, round the corner from the park here. I'm staying with Great-Aunt Evelyn while my mum and dad attend a dental conference in Hawaii."

"Dentists? Are your parents Muggles?"

She looked confused. "What are 'Muggles'?" Before he could answer, she rushed on, words spilling out of her mouth in a rush. "They can't do what I can. My...the weird things I can do..."

"Magic," he interrupted. "Call it what it is, which is magic." There was a fiercely determined look on his face, and she nodded her head.

"My magic...confuses them. I think they're afraid of it."

Severus flushed bright red again and dropped his eyes. Speaking with reluctance, as if his words were being pulled out of him with fishhooks, Snape nodded his head. "My dad hates that my mum is a witch," he whispered. "He hates it even more that I can do magic. But my mum says my name is already down for Hogwarts, and my gran and gramp have already paid my school fees for all seven years. So my dad can't stop me from learning more about how to do magic. My dad is a Muggle. Muggles are people who can't do magic."

"What's Hogwarts?" Hermione took two steps closer and impulsively reached out, grabbing Severus's hand. "Come on, let's sit down. I want to hear everything you can tell me about magic, cause you know a lot and I don't know much of anything."

He looked down at her small fingers, wrapped around his own much bigger hand, but Hermione couldn't figure out what he was thinking from his expression, which seemed to be one of puzzlement more than anything else.

"Hogwarts is a boarding school for witches and wizards. It's up north someplace...I think it's in Scotland, actually. Mum went there for all seven years and studied lots of different things. Transfiguration, and Charms and Potions...something called Divination, which sounds really dumb cause it's reading tea leaves and crystal balls and rubbish like that."

She smiled, but protested, "Stop, wait, I don't understand what those subjects are. Transfiguration? What is it? What does it do? What do Potions do?"

He looked at her for a moment, obviously judging her sincerity, but she must have passed some mental qualifying exam, because he relaxed and began to speak.

"Well, they're different subjects, of course. Transfiguration is turning something into something else by means of magic. Mum told me one of the things she had to transfigure for an exam was to turn a teapot into a tortoise. When my dad lets her, she can do all sorts of other amazing things. One time, my dad had to stop the car to change the tire...it had gone flat, you see? And it was pouring down rain, and Dad only had a thin jumper on. Mum transformed it into a Mack for him and he didn't get a bit wet."

"It sounds like a very useful kind of magic."

"Yeah, it is, I reckon. Mum was quite good at it, I think. She told me it was one of her favorite subjects."

"What's Charms, then?"

He smiled, a brief, fleeting smile, but Hermione saw how it lit up his eyes. "I think Charms sounds like great fun...there are charms to make things fly and charms to bring things right to your hand. You can use a charm to...what was the word mum used...distill water out of the air. There are other sorts of charms that affect how you feel, like a Cheering Charm, and other charms that make you feel things, like you feel like you're being tickled. I don't really like that one...mum cast it on me once so I could see what it felt like."

"I don't much like being tickled, either." She frowned, then dismissed the frown in favor of another question. "What about Potions?"

"My mum's family all went to Hogwarts, and she tells me a lot about what my relatives were good at when they went there. My granddad was really good at Potions, mum said. I think it sounds interesting. Potions can be like medicines...mum actually brews this potion that helps with her headaches...or they can be like poisons. There's a potion called Veritaserum that will make you tell the truth if you only take three drops of it. I think that one sounds scary."

"Telling the truth is scary?"

"Well, it could be." He looked at her impatiently. "Look, what if someone gave you Veritaserum and then asked you if you liked them. And you didn't. And you told them that. They'd be mad."

She nodded her head, finally understanding what he meant. "I imagine it would be even worse if you did like them. Especially if they didn't like you."

"Yeah, that would be bad. Embarrassing."

"So how do you know your name is down at Hogwarts? What does that mean?"

"When anybody has a baby with magical talent, the baby's name appears on a magical list at Hogwarts. I think the list is kept at the Ministry, too. You can start at Hogwarts when you're eleven, so the summer before you turn eleven, you'll get a letter from Hogwarts, and if you want to go there, you send them back a letter that says so. There's a special train platform and a special train that goes from London to Hogwarts. It's called the Hogwarts Express."

"So I'll get a letter from Hogwarts when I'm almost eleven?"

"Yeah. But my mum was a student there, and she wanted to find out early whether I would be able to go there or not, so she wrote to the headmaster and he checked the list for her and found my name on the register already."

"That's brilliant! I wish...do you think, if my mum and dad wrote to the school, they would look and see if my name is on the register?"

Severus shrugged and shook his head. "I don't know. I could ask my mum and tell you the next time I see you...if you're going to be staying with your aunt for a while."

"Mum and Dad will be gone for three weeks."

"Well, I can ask my mum. But...my dad doesn't like for Mum to talk about magic, so it might take a few days before I can ask her."

Hermione nodded. "I understand. I hope I can find out soon, somehow. I think I'll cry if my name isn't down for the school."

"If you can do magic, you're almost sure to be on the list."

"You said your dad can't do magic?"

He frowned, but answered easily enough. "Right. He's a Muggle."

"So, how does it work then? When a witch marries a wizard and they have children, are the children always magical? My parents aren't magical at all...how is it that I'm able to do magic?"

"I don't really know how that works," he admitted, "but I do know that a witch and a wizard can have a child that can't do magic. Those people are called Squibs."

"As far as my mum and dad know, nobody in either of their families ever could do the things I can."

He looked at her appraisingly. "What can you do, then?"

"Well, aside from the time I went flying off the swing and didn't get hurt...it terrified me, by the way...my mum said that when I was a baby, she came into my nursery one day to find my toys floating in the air and spinning around. And more than once, when I was a little kid, if mum said I couldn't have a sweet from a shop, she would see it floating towards me anyway. They don't let me have sweets very often, and I love chocolate, I must confess." She looked a bit chagrined, and the boy laughed.

"I heard my mum talking to my gran once about that kind of magic. Mum called it wishful magic. I guess, when a magical child wants something and isn't old enough to understand why they can't or shouldn't have it, that kind of magic happens."

She nodded her head. "That makes sense. I do try to be good and not eat tons of sweets now, cause too much sugar really is bad for a person's teeth. I haven't had that kind of wishful magic happen in a long time."

They both fell silent, and Hermione looked around. The sun was beginning to set and the playground had grown cool with the coming of night. She really wanted to reach out in friendship to this boy, so unhappy, so tense, so much older than his years. But she knew, from knowing the man he'd become, that if she pushed too hard, she would make him defensive, maybe scare him away.

"Will you be here tomorrow?" she asked hesitantly.

"Usually, I can come to the playground after I get my schoolwork done, if mum doesn't need me to do something for her."

"I hope...I'm not being too much of a nuisance, asking you all these questions. My mum says I can be a real pest."

At that, the boy, Severus, laughed out loud.

"Knowing things is really important. You can't protect yourself unless you know how."

And that, Hermione saw, was the Polar star in Severus Snape's personal heaven. She sighed. What had she been thinking?

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 3

Summary: Alternate Universe. Hermione, with help from Harry, goes back in time to change Severus Snape's unhappy childhood and years at Hogwarts, in the hope that a happier early life would prevent him from dying alone in the Shrieking Shack.

Author's Note Thanks to Southern_Witch_69 for the original beta and encouragement, and thanks to WriterMerrin from TPP, who helped corral the unruly commas I put in after Sunshine vetted the story for me. Any remaining errors are ALL MINE!

Chapter Two

Actually, what had she and Harry been thinking?

The final battle was two nights past, and she and Harry were staying at Hogwarts, sleeping in the Common Room in Gryffindor Tower. Much of the damage to the school had been on the lower floors; the Gryffindor Common Room and the boys' and girls' dormitories hadn't suffered much visible damage. Hermione and Harry had been offered rooms in Hogsmeade and also guest accommodations at the Ministry in London, but neither of them wanted to go either place. Hogwarts felt like home right now, and they had moved into the Common Room with identical sighs of relief.

There were still things left undone, but they needed to rest and recover from the battle, first. Hermione's parents were under memory charms somewhere in Australia, and Hermione still had to make arrangements to find them and restore their memories. Harry had Grimmauld Place and Kreacher to worry about, but Kreacher was presently at Hogwarts, and Grimmauld Place could wait.

Neither of them could bear to think of going to the Burrow, not after losing Fred, Ginny, and Ron. Fred had been killed by a falling wall, early in the battle of Hogwarts. Ginny hadn't been fast enough to dodge Bellatrix's Avada Kedavra after the mad witch had knocked Hermione out with a Stupefy. Luna Lovegood had been badly injured but was in the hospital wing, recovering. Molly Weasley had avenged Ginny's death with her own killing curse, but vengeance wouldn't bring Ginny back. Nor would it bring back Ron, who'd incapacitated Fenrir Greyback but bled to death from his wounds even as Neville Longbottom successfully killed the Werewolf with the silver sword of Gryffindor.

Harry and Hermione had both spoken to the Weasleys and honored their request not to visit right away when Arthur had gently explained that the family needed to be alone with only family to grieve. There was an element of practicality in what he'd said, as well. At the end of the battle, the Weasleys had decided to return to the Burrow, rather than go back to Molly's Auntie Muriel's house or Shell Cottage, the home of their son Bill and his wife Fleur. They wanted the comfort of their own things around them, Arthur had said. Molly wanted to be able to sleep in her own bed and look out into her own garden, feed her own chickens and try to pretend that half of her world hadn't collapsed with the death of three of her children and her own dire need to cast an Unforgivable curse in the final battle. Harry and Hermione had nodded their heads, knowing that nothing they could say or do would change the outcome of the war or ease the losses The Weasleys had suffered. And so Arthur and Molly, Bill and Charlie and Percy and George had returned to the Burrow, and Harry and Hermione had basically set up camp in Gryffindor Tower.

Kreacher was looking after them, and one good thing about the war; he had decided that Hermione was a heroine for all the help she'd given Harry. He hadn't called her 'the Mudblood' for ages, of course, but now he saw to Hermione's needs second only to Harry's own. At one time, Hermione would have been horrified to have Kreacher tending her, but she'd finally realized it made him happy to do so, and, frankly, she was too exhausted to worry about freeing creatures who obviously didn't want to be freed. There were more pressing things on her mind just at the present time.

When the Weasleys had gone, and Harry had been summoned to London by Interim Minister of Magic Kingsley Shacklebolt, Hermione had gone back to the Shrieking Shack with a team of Aurors, insisting that they recover the body of Professor Snape, who now lay in state in the Great Hall, with an honor guard of Aurors standing at attention around him. Hermione had helped Madam Pomfrey clean him and arrange his body; it had been she who'd gone to the Headmaster's apartments to get clean robes and fresh linen for Poppy to dress him in. When they had finished, Hermione had collapsed in exhausted tears. Harry had told her of the memories Snape had given him, and it had broken her heart to think of his lonely, thankless odyssey.

Now, the battle was two nights past, and Hermione and Harry were sitting on the squashy couch in front of the fire in the Gryffindor Common Room. Harry had gulped a full bottle of Butterbeer as they sat watching the fire, and now he leaned forward, elbows on knees, head propped up by his hands, and gazed bleakly into the fire.

"It's not right, 'Mione. None of it's right."

"I know." She stroked her fingers over the back of his neck. "I know. It's horrible."

"If anybody should've died, it should have been me."

"NO!" Her fingers curled into the locks of hair at the back of his neck and tugged sharply, and Harry looked around at her with a startled yelp. "NO, you SHOULD NOT have died! Never that! But neither should Ron, or Ginny... or ... Professor Snape."

"He gave up his whole life to protect me."

"He felt he'd failed your mother, Harry, and he wanted to atone for that."

Dry-eyed, (and tears would have been a cleansing relief,) Harry shook his head stubbornly. "He didn't need to atone, Hermione. He'd already done everything he could to save her. He turned spy for the Order so Dumbledore would protect her and my dad and me. And because of Pettigrew," (Harry almost spat out that loathed name,) "everything fell apart anyway. And then, when I came to school, what did I do? I acted exactly like my dad. I hated him and made fun of him and disrespected him, and he still SAVED MY LIFE, HERMIONE! He saved my bloody life HOW MANY TIMES? And the best I can do for him is testify before the Wizengamot that he was a hero, so he can be awarded a bloody Order of Merlin, after he's dead and it can't possibly make one bit of difference. IT'S NOT RIGHT, HERMIONE!" The last was a scream, and then Harry's voice died down to a broken whisper. "It's not right. And there's abso-bloody-lutely nothing I can do about it."

"I know. I know." She opened her arms as Harry turned to her, and his head found a place on her shoulder, and finally he cried, cried as he had wanted to do all his life. When the storm of emotion had passed and Harry sat up, he wiped his face on a handkerchief Hermione conjured from something, and then turned to face her.

"I'm not saying I think I would have liked him. He was bloody brilliant, and I'm just an ordinary bloke, you know? But he deserved better than he got. More than anyone, he deserved better than he got. He gave up so much."

Hermione's mind was racing, though she felt numb, too. "His death was so un... so unnecessary." She stumbled over the words, which had been tumbling around in her mind for a while. "What did his death accomplish?"

"Abso-bloody-lutely nothing." Harry spoke with conviction, enunciating every syllable carefully.

"I think...actually, Harry, I think I might have liked him, if I'd known him when he was...you know, our age. And I don't like to speak ill of the dead, Harry, but your mum should have forgiven him."

"I know." He pondered that for a moment, eyes as round as an owl's as he thought over what she said. "You...you're a really forgiving girl, you know? I never realized that till yesterday, during the battle, when you and Ron got Goyle out of the Room of Requirement."

"Harry! He was horrible to us when we were at school, and he surely had nothing good to say about Muggle-borns, but we couldn't leave him to die in that room."

"There are people who would have. People who would have said he deserved whatever he got."

"No." She shivered even in the warmth of the fire. "I couldn't have lived with myself if we didn't help him."

"I don't know why my mum didn't make up with Snape. I hate to think she treated him...treated anyone... like that."

Hermione didn't want to criticize Harry's mum, but she thought, in her heart of hearts, that Lily should have forgiven her childhood friend. "She was very young, Harry. Maybe she didn't understand how badly she hurt him."

"No, I think she knew. I think...I can't say I've never felt this way myself...I think she felt she was right to hurt him back, for hurting her. She wasn't right. But I think that's what she thought. Sometimes, when someone hurts you...you can think to yourself that it's right to hurt them back." He paused and then confessed, "After the Ministry...when Sirius died...I wanted to hurt Dumbledore like that."

He looked back at her, and she could see something like shame in his green eyes. "I wanted Dumbledore to pay for what happened to Sirius."

"I...I can understand that." She spoke slowly. "I've felt like that sometimes, myself."

"It's still not right, though."

"No, it's not."

They sat silently for a moment, and then Harry spoke again. "Unnecessary. You've been saying that every time we talk about Snape. What do you mean, about his death being unnecessary?"

"His death didn't change anything, Harry. He could have given you the memories without dying. He wasn't a Horcrux. Dumbledore wanted Snape to kill him so that his death, Dumbledore's death, would count for something. You saw the memories. Killing Snape didn't give Voldemort mastery of the Elder Wand. He thought it would but he didn't realize that Draco had disarmed Dumbledore that night on the Tower. So that didn't make any difference to the final outcome. And Snape... he didn't want to kill Dumbledore, either. It nearly killed him to raise his wand and cast the curse. I can't imagine having that kind of courage...to do what Dumbledore required of him. If he hadn't killed Dumbledore when Draco failed, then he and Dumbledore and Draco would have all died for no good reason, and he wouldn't have been able to protect any of the students at Hogwarts last year. And he wouldn't have been able to give you the memories he saved for you, or the sword of Gryffindor. He's the one who delivered that when we needed it."

"I know."

"But when you look at it logically, his death didn't do anything to affect the outcome of the war. He truly didn't have to die."

"Neither did Ron or Fred or Ginny."

"The whole war was an exercise in waste and stupidity, alright?" It wasn't like Hermione to snarl, and she immediately put her hand up to her mouth. "I'm sorry, Harry. I

shouldn't snap at you like that."

"Don't worry about it." He waved away her apology. "I keep thinking unnecessary, unnecessary."

"I do, too."

The room was entirely silent, save the crackling of the fire and the sounds of their breathing, amplified in the absolute quiet of the Common Room.

"Hermione, what would you change if you could...go back?"

A sound very like a sigh escaped her lips. When she spoke, her words flowed easily, as if they'd been waiting for the chance to escape. "I'd go all the way back, Harry. I'd go back to when he met your mum, or at least to when he came to Hogwarts, and I'd be his friend. I'd even ask the hat to sort me in Slytherin if that's what it took to keep him from taking the Dark Mark."

"Would it be that easy?"

"I...I don't know. Obviously, I'd like to think it would be."

Harry was silent for a moment, and then he spoke again, resolutely. "Hermione...you know I didn't love Ginny. Not like a boyfriend, that is."

"But sixth year... you were crazy about her."

"Yeah. But...it wouldn't have worked. I realize I just wanted Ginny so I could be part of her family. And now that's not going to happen."

"Not for me with Ron, either. But...that kiss up in the hallway...I think Ron really loved Lavender, you know?"

"There's someone I realized I really do love when I almost lost her." Harry wouldn't look at Hermione, until she pushed him back on the sofa. "Harry James Potter, you better tell me who she is, and it better not be me. Or I'll...I'll hex you!"

At that, he laughed, a genuine laugh that came from his belly, a laugh that Hermione hadn't heard in days. "No, it's not you. Can you guess though? It's someone weird enough to understand all my quirks and put up with them. Someone who's patient and tolerant and kind and has had her own share of losses."

Hermione thought for a minute. "You're talking about Luna, aren't you?"

"They don't call you the brightest witch of your age for no reason. Got it in one guess."

"Luna's had her share of hard times."

"But they don't change her. She's just...herself. A little nutty, but good and sweet and kind and understanding."

"She's all those things."

"So you're the hero and you'll get the girl in the end."

"I think there's a good chance of that, yeah."

"My parents will never miss me, Harry. If I don't go to Australia and collect them, restore their memories...they'll never know they had another life, never know they had a daughter who was a witch."

She hesitated for a moment, a swimmer perched on the edge of a verbal diving board. She drew in a breath and plunged.

"If only I still had the Time-Turner I had in third year."

Now Harry hunched forward again, head in his hands so she had to listen hard to hear him. "That's the thing. I think...I'm pretty sure, actually...that I saw a Time-Turner in the headmaster's office."

"But all that would let me do would be to go back to 19...whatever year it was that Snape started at Hogwarts."

"There was a book in Snape's office...back when he was trying to teach me Occlumency. I saw it in his bookshelf. It was a book of potions. And one of them was a de-aging potion. If you wanted to...you're good enough at Potions, you could probably make it. And then use the Time-Turner to take you back. You'd be giving up so much, Hermione. You're the brightest witch of your age and a war heroine. You deserve everything you've earned...but if you wanted to go back and try to save Snape...I think you're the only one who can."

"But my mum and dad...I wouldn't have parents at that point in time. I don't think."

She scrambled out of the couch and knelt on the rug in front of Harry. "My mum and dad were actually married in 1959. They didn't have me for years and years cause my mum...kept having miscarriages. Maybe...oh, I need to get to their things I stored away when I sent them to Australia. I wonder... Harry. Are you SURE you would be happy if I did this?"

"If you want to, Hermione...if you're SURE you don't mind giving up everything you could have by being a war hero...you'd have my blessing and every help I could give you."

She had to think. "Harry, it's pretty insane to think of even trying this."

"I know." There were those green eyes again, round as an owl's and blinking away tears. "I just...look, there's no way we could use a Time-Turner to change things for Fred and Ron and Ginny. Too many people around, and when Ginny was killed, you were knocked out in full sight of everyone in the Great Hall. We can't change what happened to them. But maybe...Since it's so far back anyway... maybe you could save Snape. And I know I'm putting a horrible burden on you, cause I can't go back and save him, Mione. I would if I could."

"Do you think I could?"

"Look how your friendship saved me, Hermione. More than once. I'm sure you could."

She drew in a deep breath, wondering if perhaps she was the one who'd had too much Butterbeer.

"Would the book still be there, do you think?"

"The Potions book? It was in the shelves in the office off the Potions classroom. If Slughorn didn't move the book for some reason... And if it's not there, we could check the headmaster's office."

"But Harry! How do we know that meddling with time won't make it somehow horribly, horribly worse? Professor Dumbledore always said..."

"Yeah, yeah, I know. But he let us go back to save Sirius...even told us how to do it. So the time stream couldn't be that unforgiving."

"Harry, I want to think about it and do some research. I want to see if I can pinpoint the time when Severus would have met your mum at that park when they were kids. And I need to check that de-aging potion and see if it allows the drinker to remember their past, older life. And how long the potion lasts."

Harry chuckled. "That's the Hermione I know. Always researching something."

"Well, if I do this, I want to be well-prepared."

"I understand."

That had been the start of it. Hermione and Harry had gone to the headmaster's office and found the Time-Turner hidden at the back of a drawer that had burst open during the final battle. Hermione had carefully cast a freezing charm on the knob, so it couldn't accidentally be triggered, then Disillusioned the device and slipped it around her neck, hidden carefully under her jumper and robes. The directions for the De-aging potion had been harder to find. Harry couldn't remember which book he'd seen the directions in, and there were a lot of books in the office just off Snape's old dungeon classroom.

Once they'd found those, it was a simple matter to begin preparing the potion, which used fairly ordinary ingredients; the only thing it called for that was really exotic was hair from a unicorn's tail, and Hagrid had a whole braid of that. The potion would take three months to brew, but Hermione had the perfect solution even for that. She offered to help with the reconstruction of Hogwarts, and volunteered to brew all the potions Madam Pomfrey would need for the Hospital Wing. Given the damages to the school, and the fact that entire sections had to be completely re-built, it was a fair guess that people working on the repairs would injure themselves from time to time, and medicinal potions would be needed.

Hermione hadn't sent off her parents without their permission. She'd carefully explained the upcoming war to them, and they, themselves had chosen Australia as their new home, since they'd always thought of going there once they gave up their practice and retired. They'd sold their London practice and given Hermione a generous share of the proceeds, safely kept not in Gringotts, but in a Muggle bank. The Grangers had built up a prosperous practice, and one of the things they'd done for Hermione when she came of age at eighteen, had been to buy a Muggle flat for her, located in Muggle London. Hermione had only seen it once, but her family's lawyer had graciously agreed to manage the property for her. Hermione and Harry and Luna used the flat as a *pied a terre* whenever they needed to go to London, and Hermione bought a computer and set up in the flat's tiny den.

Harry had contacted his cousin Dudley after the war and had been surprised at the warm response he'd gotten to his first letter. Living in exile had done nothing for Vernon Dursley's temper, and, very surprisingly to Harry, Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia had gotten a divorce. Aware, for the first time in decades, of the events in the Wizarding world, Petunia developed a warm appreciation for the protection afforded to her and Dudley, and she had struck up a correspondence with Harry. This expanded to an occasional lunch or dinner shared with Dudley, and Harry was able to glean information from Petunia about Lily's childhood. In a surprise rush of something akin to maternal affection, Petunia had even taken Harry, Luna and Hermione to visit the house in which she and Lily had grown up, the primary school Lily had attended, and the park where Lily had met Severus Snape all those years ago.

Petunia didn't remember much about Severus; she thought he'd been very poor, as he had always worn ragged clothing that didn't fit, and looked half-starved most of the time. When Harry explained the role Snape had played in the war, though, and what a hero he'd proven to be, Petunia had been anxious to insist that she'd felt a tremendous amount of pity for him, as it was clear his home life was nothing like her own happy family. Harry was glad Snape wasn't there to hear those sentiments expressed, but managed, with great subtlety, to get her to expound on the few times she'd seen him with Lily, and that had given them a month and a year, something they'd not had before. It had been the year before Lily's Hogwarts letter had come, announcing that she was a witch and eligible to attend the school.

Hermione had done all the rest of the research she'd needed. Her mum did have a great aunt who'd lived near Spinner's End, fortunately, and the Grangers had been married in 1959. Hermione could legitimately claim them as her parents, if an official enquiry was ever made.

There was one other discovery they made together that gave Hermione pause, at first, but later, warmed her heart and made her very glad. It was a letter they found in a dusty file drawer. Not really even a letter, more like a fragment of a memo, written in Headmaster Dumbledore's hand. It said simply, "Received at Hogwarts today, a young lady who has gotten diverted from her normal time stream, but who seems to be a very talented young witch. Must make it a point to monitor her progress. Bless her heart, she is fast friends with the Snape lad, about whom I had very grave cause for concern, given the gossip and Magical Law Enforcement bulletins that have appeared from time to time in the Daily Prophet. Eileen Prince Snape has more than once been the victim of abuse, if the reports are true, and I'm sure her little boy has suffered because of that."

The memo suggested another avenue of search; Hermione would see if the Daily Prophet archived back issues of the paper. Knowing more about what Severus had suffered would be hard, but it would also help her prepare for what he might be like. Most heartening of all was the idea that SOMEONE had gone back in time and befriended Severus. She could only hope that she was the one to whom the memo referred.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 3

Alternate Universe. Hermione, with help from Harry, goes back in time to change Severus Snape's unhappy childhood and years at Hogwarts, in the hope that a happier early life would prevent him from dying alone in the Shrieking Shack.

Many thanks to Emmeline33 for the prompts and Sunshine for the beta reading.

I make no money from this fan fiction and salute J.K. Rowling with grateful thanks for her wondrous characters. I also intend no copyright infringement.

Chapter Three

"How's the project coming, Hermione?" Harry entered the Potions lab at Hogwarts with Luna Lovegood a step behind him; it wasn't lost on Hermione that they were holding hands. Hermione smiled and rose from her lab stool to hug both of her visitors. "The potion is finished. I just need to let it cool before I can bottle it. I forgot to tell you that I found directions for the antidote, too, and I've finished brewing that as well. I'm going to take several flasks of the antidote back with me, just in case. And I've memorized the directions. I'm taking De-Aging potion with me, too."

Harry's smile was filled with slightly awestruck delight. "You think it's going to work!"

She bit her lip and nodded her head. "I really think there's a good chance it will."

Hermione cast a 'no disturb' charm on the cauldron on the work bench and motioned for Harry and Luna to follow her into the private sitting room reserved for the Potions instructor.

This was still Severus Snape's own personal domain, as Slughorn had demanded the suite of rooms used by Professor Merrythought when he'd come back to Hogwarts to teach Potions in Hermione and Harry's sixth year; those rooms were up on the third floor near the hospital wing.

Hermione found herself very comfortable in Snape's old quarters. The rooms were austere furnished with mostly dark wood furniture and cool blue, green and silver being the prevalent colors. Snape had appreciated his creature comforts, too. His sofa and chairs had down-filled cushions, his rugs were thick and plush underfoot, and the stone walls were covered with heavy paneling to keep out the cold, paneling that was, in its turn, covered by built-in book shelves on all the walls. Hermione felt right at home among the books and had already read a goodly number of them. She was already planning which ones to shrink and bring with her on her journey.

Snape's bed was an indulgence she hadn't expected. It was wide and high and situated in an alcove with a window overlooking the Black Lake. Instead of bed curtains, the entire bed was built into a cupboard that could be closed off for privacy and warmth by heavy doors of carved mahogany. The mattress offered firm support but also had a thick layer of springy feathers for padding, much like the pillow-top designs used by Muggles. The linens were, frankly, decadent: smooth sheets of high thread-count cotton with embroidered monograms, topped by a thick down comforter tucked into a duvet made of silk brocade. Hermione couldn't remember ever sleeping in greater comfort.

Harry and Luna looked around curiously as Hermione called the kitchen and asked Kreacher to bring them tea; they were deep in conversation by the time the house-elf popped into the room with a heavily laden tray.

"You said, the last time we spoke, that you thought you'd have your plans finalized by the time the potion was done. Tell me all about everything," Harry said, serving Luna a cup of tea.

"Well, let me start with my parents. My dad was born in 1940, and my mum in 1941. They married November 28, 1959. They took their training together at the same college. Mum got pregnant sooner than they planned, must have been in midsummer, but she lost the baby in August of 1960. I went to the Muggle hospital where she was treated for the miscarriage and did some finagling, and so the hospital records actually show my being born at the time Mum was originally in hospital after losing that baby. She lost it very early; the fetus was only about seven weeks along when she miscarried, so it was too early to tell whether it was a boy or girl. My new birthdate is August 29, 1960, by the way. I'll be eight months younger than Severus and make the deadline for starting Hogwarts in 1971 by one day. We'll start in 1971 and graduate in 1978."

Harry listened intently but didn't say anything. He was trying to absorb as many details as he could, in case he needed any of the information later, and resolved then and there to have Hermione write it all down and give it to him, just in case.

Hermione continued, "Then I went to the *Daily Prophet* and looked through their archives of old issues of the paper. I found the marriage announcement of Eileen Prince to Tobias Snape, buried in the very back of the Society section. They were married in June of 1959. Severus was born January 9, 1960, if you're keeping track."

Luna nodded her head and scribbled another note on the parchment she had propped on a book in her lap.

"And yes, if you count on your fingers, you'll realize that Eileen Prince was pregnant when she married Tobias Snape. Something I didn't know and I doubt anyone bothered to remember; Tobias Snape was mentioned in the *Prophet* article because he was actually part of a group called the Muggle/Magical beings Liaison Committee. For a brief while back in the late 50s and early 60s, the Muggle government had this committee that met with a similar group from the Ministry on a regular basis. The meetings were held about every three months, at least from the records I could find. Snape's mum was employed as a clerk to the committee, and that must be how she met his dad."

"Wow, Professor Dumbledore never mentioned any kind of committee like that."

"No, and the committee wasn't mentioned in any of the books I read either. I wonder what made them decide to disband it. Probably never will know," Hermione grumped. Then she continued, "I needed to make sure my school records were correct for the time I'm going back to. Lucky for me, my mum and dad bought their house right when they got married and lived there all their married life, so the Primary school I went to is the same one I would have gone to if I'd been born twenty years earlier anyway. Again, it was really easy to finagle the school records. I went and talked to the Sorting Hat, did I tell you? And it told me how to bamboozle the magical records here at Hogwarts and at the Ministry. I think my identity and records and everything are good enough to pass as genuine. I've encoded some charms into the De-Aging potion; when I drink it, the charms will cast the needed changes to my magical birth and school records."

She sipped her tea while counting something on her fingers.

"You said it was safe to talk to Bill Weasley, Harry, so I did that. I didn't tell him I was planning to travel back in time; I told him I had used a Time-Turner third year and I thought I had messed up something in the past. He did whatever he does for Gringotts to make sure I will have an account in my name when I do get back to 1970. I've been studying old magazines and catalogs and looking at Oxfam and other thrift stores for 70's style clothes and shoes, too. I even found some school robes from that era at a thrift store in Diagon Alley. That was a major find!"

"Wow. You've thought of everything."

"I've tried to."

Harry nodded his head and then got to his feet. "I thought of something, myself, that might come in handy," he said quietly and rummaged in the pack he'd carried in with him. "I want you to take this with you. You might need it, and I want you to have everything that will help you succeed." He drew out his Invisibility Cloak.

"Oh, Harry! Are you sure? I may not be able to bring it back, you know."

"Won't matter. I don't think I'm going to need it and you very well might."

She sniffled and accepted the cloak from him. Not wanting to be caught sniffing himself, Harry sat back down next to Luna and determinedly asked a question that had been on his mind.

"Were you able to figure out the dates my mum must have met Snape at the playground?"

She nodded her head. "I had a bit of luck there. There was a notice in the *Daily Prophet* in August of 1970 that Eileen Prince Snape was hospitalized the first week of that month; the report said she'd been in a car smash up and spent ten days in hospital. I think that must be when Snape met your mum...his dad would have been working, so he could have snuck out to the park as much as he liked." Hermione paused to consider how lonely Severus must have been with his mum in hospital.

"That might explain why your mum was so important to him, Harry. He was worried about his own mum and missing her." Luna's comment was spoken lightly, but Hermione had learned to really LISTEN to Luna because she had the most ferociously insightful mind when it came to understanding emotional nuances.

"That could be." Harry nodded his head.

Hermione went over some more logistical issues she'd encountered and solved, and then she fell silent. Harry and Luna, who could read her well, noticed her fidgeting with the spoons on the tea tray and biting her bottom lip, and Harry, with the forthrightness of long friendship, called her on it. "Okay, out with it, Hermione. What are you trying to come up with a way to say?"

"Well, two things, really, but they're kind of related."

"Okay."

"First, Harry, I think we need to put all our memories of this into a Pensieve. I want you to be able to come back and find me if something goes wrong."

"Okay. That actually makes sense to me. I don't know what's bothering you about that."

"The second thing is I want to make you my Secret Keeper about my mum and dad's location. If something happens to me, it will be up to you to decide whether to find them and tell them about me."

"Okay." Harry thought for a few moments. "What else are you worried about? I know there's something you haven't told us yet."

She nodded and her eyes filled with tears. "Harry, what if I screw this up? If I do it wrong, I could hurt him even more than he already has been hurt. We know Voldemort was seeking followers; Severus was in Slytherin. He might still attract Riddle's attention."

"It won't be any worse than him being in love with my mum. Voldemort was horrible about her being a Muggle-born, too."

Luna pointed out in her usual breathy sing-song voice, "You don't know that he will sort into Slytherin when you go back. Maybe he'll be in another house."

Hermione dropped her head as if ashamed and began to cry.

Harry and Luna moved to her sofa and each of them put their arms around her. "'Mione, what is it?"

She looked at them with streaming eyes. "I'm scared. I'm so scared. I'm scared I'll screw it up, but I'm scared for myself, too. What if I become a target for Voldemort?"

Harry looked as if he'd been hit in the head by a Bludger. "Oh, Merlin's bloody beard! I didn't think you might be in danger. Hermione, I'm so sorry. Shall I go into the lab and pour out the De-Aging potion?"

"No! No, don't do that. I really want to help Professor Snape. Don't do that. Three months of work down the drain!" She sighed and wiped her eyes. "I think it's a bit like exam nerves. You know how it is, I think of every wrong answer I could have given and panic over every tiny thing I could have done badly."

"Yeah, and then you go on to get perfect marks anyway." Harry affectionately rumbled her hair. "I can understand you being scared. And I won't be mad if you decide you just can't stand to do this."

"No. I won't chuck it now, Harry. I'd never forgive myself for letting him down."

Hermione hesitated and then confided, "I truly don't have a crush on him, but I care about the person I wish I'd had the chance to know better. Does that make any sense? He means a great deal to me, Harry, and I won't quit now because I think I could make a difference in his life. I think he could turn out to be one of the best friends I could ever imagine having, if only we had the chance to know each other."

"I know you miss Ron."

"Terribly, but I don't think Ron and I could have ever been friends the way I hope to be friends with Severus. We're just too different, Ron and I. From what little I know, Severus was as much of a swot as I am. We might become quite good friends."

Luna looked at Hermione with a speculative gleam in her eyes. "You know, you should be quite open to the idea that he might fall in love with you."

At that, Hermione blushed and dropped her eyes. "That's not nearly as scary a thought as it ought to be," she said quietly. "I'm not expecting it to happen, and I'm not going back there with that intent. I...suppose it could happen, though. I couldn't just go back and stay there for a short time, fix everything and come back to this time, if we grew that close to one another."

"What would you do if it did happen?" The question was out of Harry's mouth before he realized he'd spoken it.

"If I really loved him, Harry, and he really loved me...I would either stay back with him or try to bring him forward to our time. I'd want us to be together, and I guess it really doesn't matter to me which timeline we chose. Harry, you saved the Wizarding world. You're happy with Luna. I thought I would spend the rest of my life with Ron, and that's not going to happen. I could get a job, there've been no shortage of offers, but I want to try to help Severus. And if I manage to go back and find something meaningful to do, I think I will stay there. There's nothing that will change now if I don't come back."

"I would miss you."

"I will miss you, too...both of you. But if I can save Severus Snape from dying on the floor of that horrible, dirty shack, it will be worth it." Her voice was filled with quiet conviction. "And, who knows, Professor Snape wound up teaching at Hogwarts. Maybe I will, too."

"'Mione, I love you." Harry wrapped his arms around Hermione and buried his face in her shoulder. "You're a genuinely good person, and I'm so glad we're friends."

Her eyes filled with tears again. "No matter when I wind up, you'll always be my best friend, Harry."

Silently, they held tightly to one another for a moment. Then, with one long, loving look, one heartfelt hug, Hermione drew away. "Now, let me tell you how I think we can manage to send me back."