

# Emissary

by labrt2004

A father recounts a series of meetings with a black-robed emissary. Written for Kribu during the Summer 2010 SS/HG Exchange.

## Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 5

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Nothing was out of the ordinary the first time I met the man.

Well, it wasn't out of the ordinary considering it involved Jeanie. Oh, Jeanie! I suppose you wouldn't know, would you? That's what we call Hermione here at home... *Hermione* was entirely my wife's idea. When she was carrying Jeanie, she was cooped up at home and climbing up the walls. The boredom drove her to distraction. I didn't envy her, not at all. She couldn't even leave her bed...doctor's orders. You see, we had been trying bloody forever to conceive. Yes, I said we. I had wanted a child as much as she had.

Jane...that's Jeanie's mum...and I met each other at the annual British Dental Association conference. We were both well past thirty and thoroughly finished with all the romancing rubbish. Mind you, it wasn't for lack of trying. Women were anxious and fluttery, and I was singularly untalented at pleasing them. They all required careful handling and thoughtful conversation and trips to the concert or opera. I considered myself lucky if I knew where the violins were in an orchestra. Add in mysteries such as *trust* and *communication*, and I was lost. I contented myself with the company of similarly inclined blokes, our shared incompetence with women making us natural allies in matrimonial evasion.

Everything changed during my keynote address at the conference. I had stopped bothering with anything remotely resembling exercise the minute I had taken over the practice and was getting rather soft around the middle. And Jane? Well, Jane walked into that auditorium in a Harvard jumper and Bermuda shorts like she owned the place, her frizzy hair exploding around her head and a garishly colored tote bag slung over her shoulder. She plopped into the front row, quite unperturbed, and I just remember seeing this *thing* fill my field of vision without warning, so much so that I had to stop talking. I even remember what I was talking about...something mind-numbingly dull about wisdom teeth in teenaged boys, which I remember only due to Jane's memorable entrance. I tried not to pay her any heed as I rattled on with my presentation. Why would I trouble myself with a rude chit like that? *Must be some foolish resident from the clinic*, I'd thought. She scratched notes loudly and furiously in a notepad. How was I expected to ignore her when she was sitting right there? A duck among swans with her intense, scrutinizing eyes and fly-away hair.

She was waiting by the door half an hour later when I had finished. Everyone was milling about, chatting and exchanging pleasantries, flattering each other and discussing nothing of worth. *Networking*, is that what they call it? I took my time; a lot of colleagues were queuing up to meet me. Apparently, teenaged boys with wisdom teeth held universal appeal. I meandered slowly about the room, shaking hands with this one, handing off a business card to that one... until I looked up, and she was still there. I frowned. Didn't she have something better to do? I shook my head to myself and turned my attention back to the orthodontist from Manchester.

"The ruckus they make when their parents bring them in to have their braces fitted, never mind the squawking when you tell 'em their wisdom teeth need to come out first," my fellow dentist complained belligerently.

*Squawking.*

I looked up again, eyes scanning the room for her. She hadn't budged an inch from her original spot. She leaned negligently against the doorframe with the same disdain that had inspired her to barge in on my presentation dressed like a street urchin. Suddenly, it hit me. I blinked as I watched her flip a page slowly in the novel she was perusing.

*Bloody hell. She is waiting for me.*

I promptly excused myself from the conversation with my colleague and picked my way through the crowd to where she stood. When I reached her, she slammed her book shut and peered at me with a critical eye.

"Well, it took you long enough, Dr. Granger!"

Incensed, I reined in the instinct to splutter at her and instead coolly inquired, "Are you enjoying your residency?"

Her eyes, a striking honey color, were still boring into mine. Extending a hand, she announced, "Jane Anderson, pleased to meet you."

This time, I *did* splutter. "Jane Anderson?" *This addled woman is* Dr. Jane Anderson? "Jane *Elisabeth* Anderson, from the University of Dundee?"

My heart sank. I knew the answer before I'd finished the question. Observing her closely, it was obvious that she was indeed the same woman whose glossy portrait graced the back of the conference brochures. Smoothen down the terrifying curls, deploy a bit of airbrushing here and there, and it was certainly her.

I had just called the youngest ever Dean of the Dental School at the University of Dundee a resident.

She smiled at me indulgently, which only served to further my humiliation. "One and the same, Dr. Granger."

"The pleasure is mine," I choked out. I wondered what I had done to deserve this.

*Jane Anderson parades around conferences in Bermuda shorts?*

"I enjoyed your presentation. So sorry I came in late!"

I could only smile weakly in response to this.

"I've heard a lot about you. You do excellent work." She paused, flashing a crooked little smile that suddenly made my head feel strange. "I don't agree with you on some points of your talk, though. And it's not every day that I'm accused of being a resident. I think you owe me dinner as recompense."

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In any case, I digress. I was thirty-six years old when I finally worked up the nerve to propose to Jane, and she was thirty-eight. I ended up doing it just the way I had always wanted to. That she was willing to accept that is, I suppose, the reason I married her. My own mum and dad were neat, enterprising suburban folk who had insisted I do everything by the rules; they would have been scandalized had they known that I proposed marriage to Jane over a couple beers at a football match.

We weren't getting any younger, so we started trying to have a child right away. We tried for two years with no result. These things are never easy when a woman is older, you understand. Mother Nature works against you. Most women would have given up, but not Jane. We played hopscotch across England, visiting scores of fertility specialists. With the zeal that was so characteristically my Jane, she never shrank from giving herself shots of God knows what hormones, month after month, so bloody many of them.

And then one day, it happened.

I was at the clinic. A sedated patient (the best kind!) lay before me, and I was in what I called "my zone." Dentistry is not for the faint of heart. Sometimes, it is more art than science with two gleaming rows of ivory serving as canvas. And dentistry is certainly more pragmatic than medicine. With medicine, the problems are cagey. Medical illnesses hide inside patients, behind layers of confounding skin and flesh. But dentistry pulls no punches. Challenges stared at me right in the eye, and it was up to me to fix them. This particular root canal procedure was going well, and my favorite jazz track was piping softly over the speakers. My tools were lined up in precisely the way I liked, and my hands hadn't yet got sticky underneath the latex gloves.

The door opened, and my assistant entered, a phone in her hand. "Dr. Granger, your wife is on the phone, she says it's important."

Bent over my patient, I raised my head and looked up with a frown as the phone was pressed against my ear.

"Jane?"

"Darling. We did it. I'm pregnant."

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Of course it wasn't going to be easy. Nothing with Jane ever was. Getting pregnant was just the beginning, and it wasn't a state that suited poor Jane at all. From almost the first day, she was plagued with debilitating bouts of morning sickness, except that for Jane, it was really morning, afternoon, and night. She was glib about it though, shrugging it off in between the frequent runs to the toilet. "It's my punishment for feeding all my vegetables to the dog when I was a girl," she had joked weakly.

One night, at twenty-seven weeks into her pregnancy, Jane started having contractions.

"Too early!" she gasped, bolting up in bed. "God damn it all to hell, David, get your arse out of bed and drive me to hospital!"

On the way to hospital, her water broke. It was the first time I ever saw Jane cry.

*High risk pregnancy. Advanced maternal age. Incompetent cervix.*

Words were swirling around us like malevolent spells as doctors shouted to nurses, nurses to orderlies. I don't remember how I got through it. There was only Jane, lying on the gurney, screaming, sobbing, writhing, and our baby, who was dying inside her.

It took me awhile to realize that people were working on her. Slipping an oxygen mask over her face. Heaving her hips in the air. A doctor sat between her legs, stitching frantically. Nurses pumped magnesium sulfate into her, halting her premature labor.

They had not given up, they weren't telling us to go home.

Paperwork was being shoved in my face. I signed blindly.

Our baby...our girl...we knew we were having a girl by that point; she was still alive.

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Jane was ordered onto full bed rest. Her cervix had been artificially sewn shut. The loss of the amniotic fluid was worrisome. Fetuses need it for proper bone growth, for full lung development. The doctors had infused Jane with synthetic fluid, but they couldn't make any predictions. Forty weeks is full term. We were praying to get to thirty-five.

"*Hermione*?" I had repeated incredulously during another long evening. There had already been countless evenings during that hot, muggy August, each one more sweltering than its predecessor. Jane was particularly fretful that night, her intractable curls plastered miserably against her forehead even though the air-conditioner was on full force. I was trying to be... helpful. We decided to have the name discussion again, though we were clearly off to a bad start.

"What kind of atrocious name is *Hermione*?"

"Oh, really, David, surely, you've read Shakespeare?"

I lowered my head onto the table and muttered, "You want our daughter named after some bint who was turned into a statue after her husband ordered her executed? Is naming children questionable names something you picked up in the States? Perhaps from the Hollywood contingent? "

"Queen Hermione was *right*, though," Jane insisted doggedly. "She stood up to him. Her heart was pure, and that's why she came back!"

"That's a truly awful thing to do to a child, you know. She's going to be the girl in school with the funny name," I objected.

She looked down at her swollen belly, wrapping her hands around it and smiling. The mutinous lines on her face were instantly gone. "Yes, maybe. But I *hope* for her to be odd. I hope that she stands out for far greater things than her name. I hope she *never* blends in."

I contemplated Jane as she lay there. I thought back to how she had marched into my presentation with those hideous clothes, how she had instilled the fear of God into me after I had called her a resident. How I had somehow, against all odds, ended up a married man. To *Jane*, for Christ's sake. How the two of us, senior citizens in the world of human reproduction, had still managed to conceive a child. And how the Dean of the School of Dentistry had spent eight weeks horizontal on a bed. Faced with one improbability strung after another... well, bugger that, if Jane wanted our daughter named Hermione, then so be it.

"She has to have a normal middle name though," I insisted.

"Jean," she responded without missing a beat. "It will sound a bit like my name, but not exactly. I can't stand having yet another Jane in the family. When my grandmum, my mum, and I all lived under one roof, it was a bloody nightmare."

Jane could make the sun shine in Hades if she put her mind to it. She carried Hermione Jean all the way to thirty-eight weeks.

On September 19th, Jeanie arrived at last, our precious miracle girl.

## Chapter Two

*Chapter 2 of 5*

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Back to the man, though. Like I told you, there was nothing *too* odd about him. With Jeanie, we saw lame kittens rescued from the river rise like Lazarus from the dead, moss she had somehow dug from under a rock weighing ten times as much as she did, leaf piles on the lawn every morning spelling out the weather forecast. At first we were worried that she'd fallen in with a bad crowd or something, but her grades were still top of her form, she certainly didn't listen to any horrid rock music, and she wasn't even interested in makeup. After a bit, we shrugged it off. Lots of strange things happened around Jeanie. I suppose she got it from her mother. So, a man in a black cape standing on the doorstep on a Sunday afternoon? I'd definitely seen worse.

"Dr. Granger?"

He spoke with a strange accent in clipped, economical tones.

I narrowed my eyes. Well, now I was slightly concerned. I'd originally had him pegged as some poor feeble-minded bloke who'd taken a wrong turn at the intersection, but this man was no village idiot.

"Yes, how can I help you?"

He inclined his head slightly and said, "I am here to deliver a missive to Miss Hermione Granger."

*Missive?* Who says that nowadays? And why the devil would he be delivering a letter to Jeanie?

I raised the arm that I was bracing against the entryway slightly higher and asked pointedly, "My daughter?"

Black eyes flashed in a way that I didn't like, but the voice remained neutral. "If you please, sir."

"I'm sure you'll understand if I insist on knowing what business you have with an eleven-year-old girl."

"Certainly," he replied stiffly. He was still standing awkwardly on our front steps, looking rather uncomfortable, and it occurred to me how very inhospitable I was being towards this caller. Manners be damned. I didn't trust him. "However, I recommend that you assemble your entire family first..."

"Oh, you're finally here!"

Astonished, I turned behind me and saw my daughter bounding down the staircase two steps at a time.

"Jeanie," I barked as she sped to a stop before me, "do you know this man?"

Though she had raced to the door, she seemed to only *really* look at the stranger after I pointed him out. She glanced over him, tipping her head backwards to accommodate his considerable height, then wrinkled her nose. "No, Daddy, I don't know *him*. I just know what he's here for."

That seemed to startle the man, and one simply knew that he wasn't a man who startled easily. He stood up even straighter, if that was possible, then lifted thin eyebrows.

I gripped Jeanie's shoulder and demanded, "And what might that be, young lady?"

She cocked her head matter-of-factly. "He's come to take me to school."

"What..."

"Dr. Granger. Perhaps it is time to show me inside and summon your wife," the dour man interrupted forcefully.

I glared at him. He glared back.

Fifteen minutes later (I had insisted upon patting the man down for concealed weapons, which he had consented to with a sneer that could curdle milk), he was finally settled in an armchair, holding a cup of tea between long, disturbingly pale fingers. I'd called Jane in from her weekend gardening, as instructed, and now we sat with Jeanie between us on the couch.

"Madam," he acknowledged.

Dirt-smudged and tetchy, my wife snapped, "Well? We haven't got all day!"

"Then I will dispense with the formalities," the man rejoined dryly. "I am Severus Snape, Potions master at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Your daughter is endowed with magical abilities. I was sent here by the Headmaster of Hogwarts with an offer of admission to the school, where she will receive a magical education that will allow her to competently use her powers." He reached inside the cape *thing* he was wearing and pulled out an envelope, which he proffered wordlessly to Jeanie.

We took in this absurd pronouncement, listened to the incomprehensible words which were being spoken to us. After a moment of blank staring, I could only manage to ask, "*School?* There's a school for this?"

"*Shite*," I heard Jane curse under her breath.

"Yes, there is!" came the answer from a voice we didn't expect. Both Jane and I fastened suspicious stares on our daughter.

Our guest was also directing his attention toward Jeanie now, a subtle shift in his demeanor evident. "Though I have broken this news to families on many occasions, this is the first time that any Muggle-born student has been cognizant of her abilities and expecting my arrival."

The conversation was spiraling far beyond my control, and I could only try to follow dazedly.

"Well, I've always known I was different. I didn't understand why these weird things were always happening around me, so I went to the library and found all the books that could possibly contain information."

That much I could believe at least. Jeanie's world was books. Of course if there was anything to work out, she would have worked it out. She looked like she would burst with excitement now.

The man...Severus, he called himself...asked, "You were able to find out about the magical world through books available in a Muggle library?"

"*Muggle?*" interjected Jane. "What does that mean?"

"It means a non-magical person. And no, I didn't find it *at all*, not in one place. I had to piece it together from little tidbits I found scattered across lots of different books, most of them written by... well, I guess my teacher at school would call them *quacks*."

With the exchange growing more outlandish by the moment, I finally overcame the sheer incredulity that was keeping me from saying my fill. As if awakening from a bad dream, I found my voice again. "Magic? *Witchcraft?* You have a lot of nerve, sauntering into my house and accusing my daughter of this fairytale nonsense!"

The infuriating man threw a haughty expression my way. "You would do well to reserve judgment, sir, for you know nothing of this. The concept is... difficult for minds such as yours to grasp without evidence."

"*Minds such as mine?*" I began, but he stood before I had a chance to pummel his nasty attitude into the ground. Something about him...his steely eyes or perhaps the unnerving steadiness of his voice...caused me to reconsider the wisdom in sinking my fists into him.

"Observe," he said coldly, taking out a stick from inside his cape. He muttered then waved it about, and the coffee table took to the air, bobbing right before our disbelieving eyes.

"Oh!" our daughter cried in delight.

"This has got to be a joke," Jane whispered.

Spinning around, he aimed the stick at the fireplace where a flame immediately flared to life in spite of the July heat.

"Most Muggles require a parlor trick or two in order to convince themselves of a very simple truth." The man returned to his seat, movements filled with fluid grace. "Your daughter is magical. Ignore this fact at your own peril."

"Well," I bit out, "I'm not convinced, I hope you'll understand. You're expecting two individuals with multiple post-graduate degrees to believe *imagic*. Jeanie, *you* think you can do these sorts of tricks, too?"

The man rose from his chair, causing me to immediately follow suit. "She cannot be prevailed upon to demonstrate, Dr. Granger. She is not yet adequately trained, and in

our world, it is not permissible for an underage witch to practice magic. You have seen what I have done with your own eyes. Trust your senses or not, it is entirely up to you."

Jane took a hold of Jeanie's chin and peered into the rich brown hues of the eyes we had come to know so well and swept a hand over the wild curls which were a carbon copy of her own. "Are...are you sure?" my wife whispered as she held Jeanie close, cupping her cheeks and examining her as if she might find proof somewhere. "How can this be? All this time, we didn't know about this... world."

"Judging by your current reactions, is it any wonder the knowledge was kept from you?" the man scoffed. "Would you have been willing to renounce your logic, your vaunted laws of physics, your infallible doctrines and theories, and your impenetrable understanding of the world to accept a magical being in your midst who could sweep all that aside with a wave of her wand?"

"That is an unfair assessment, Mr. Snape!" I replied heatedly. "We love Jeanie... no matter what she is," I finished the last bit hesitantly. I simply could not believe that I was accepting the premise that she really was a... *witch*.

"Commendable, certainly," the professor pronounced. "However, I have no doubt you would have institutionalized your daughter had she come to you on her own with her discoveries. It has been happening for centuries to witches and wizards, and it still continues today. The tendency to mistrust those who are different is universal." The professor's tone was strangely hard.

An uncomfortable silence lingered in the air.

Finally, Jane cleared her throat. "Jeanie, why don't you go ahead and open that letter?"

"*Dear Miss Granger,*" my daughter read in her clear, strong voice. *We are pleased to inform you that you have a place at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Please find enclosed a list of all necessary books and equipment. Term begins September 1. We await your owl no later than July 31. Yours sincerely, Minerva McGonagall, Deputy Headmistress...*"

She lowered the letter and looked at me with eyes that shone bright with pleasure. I opened my mouth then shut it again as I clumsily shifted through the jumble of thoughts in my brain. Shakily, I turned to Mr. Snape and inquired, "What must I do?"

"Affix your signature to the Terms of Acceptance. And submit to a Fidelius Charm in keeping with the International Statute of Secrecy."

I took a deep breath and nodded. One look at Jeanie's eyes had cemented my decision. Even if this magic school business was codswallop, her birth...her very existence...was pure magic.

## Chapter Three

*Chapter 3 of 5*

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The second time I met the man was more than a year later.

I, of course, had spent many mornings after his *first* visit waking up and hoping that it had all been just a nightmare. There were times I would have given anything for Jeanie to not be a witch, for no strange man to have appeared at my door, and for the three of us to carry on just like any other family. It wasn't until after we had sent Jeanie off for her first year at Hogwarts that I finally got used to it. I'd seen her reading her new "books" if you could call them that. As far as I was concerned, they were just bound volumes of blank parchment, but Jeanie assured me that their contents were only invisible to me because I was *Muggle*. I took her word for it, but to my shame, Mr. Snape's prediction that we would have sent Jeanie to the asylum leapt back to mind as I watched her stare for hours on end at those empty books.

The second year was much easier than the first year. By then, I had really begun to believe that she was like any other child returning to boarding school. Almost. She did travel with quite the odd assortment of paraphernalia, but mostly, we thought we were over the worst of the surprises.

Until *he* showed up again.

I suppose it's to his credit that he had bothered to actually notify us this time of his impending arrival. That is, only if you counted a wrinkled piece of paper stating, "*Drs. Granger and Anderson, expect me to arrive tonight with regard to an urgent matter, S. Snape, Hogwarts*" as ample notice. I had the hyperactive owl that had descended upon me while I was at the clinic to thank for the forewarning. At least I knew what to do with the flapping fiend after more than a year's worth of magical correspondence with Jeanie.

When he arrived, drenched from a rainstorm, I showed Mr. Snape into the house immediately. His expression was grim. Jane and I sat and watched him fearfully, trepidation tugging at our hearts, for what would have sent this strange man back to our doorstep in such a rush if not Jeanie?

"Sir, madam," he began after peeling off his soaking garments, "your daughter has been gravely injured. She has been Petrified and is currently in the Hospital Wing at Hogwarts."

The pit of my stomach plummeted to the floor as I was overcome by nausea. "Wh-what does that mean? Is it critical?" I managed to ground out.

"It means her body has been cursed into a state of frozen stillness, not unlike a statue. And no, not critical, though very serious."

"So, is she in a coma?" Jane asked worriedly.

"No. The brain is not affected and should recover when the curse is reversed," came the level reply.

"Oh, it can be reversed!" I exclaimed, relieved.

Mr. Snape held my gaze. "Only with time," he said. "The antidote is a potion. It requires as an ingredient mature Mandrake plant, all of which are in their adolescent stage right now. I will be overseeing the formulation of the potion myself."

"How long will it be, then?" I immediately asked.

"It can range anywhere from a few weeks to a few months."

We sat in shocked silence, trying to imagine our daughter lying still in a bed for all that time. I reached out and pulled Jane closer. I squeezed her trembling hand if only to stop myself from trembling.

"She was *cursed* into this Petrification state?" Jane repeated. "As in..." she gestured about vaguely, "an evil spell?"

"It is possible to incant a Petrification spell, but we believe in this case that it was caused by a dangerous creature known as a Basilisk."

"*Dangerous creatures*? What exactly do you have going on at this school of yours?" I demanded, hearing my own voice ratchet up several decibels. My mind was reeling.

"I assure you, this is highly atypical. Hogwarts has not seen students injured on this scale in fifty years."

"Students?" said Jane, plucking the thought straight from my own mind. "So, Jeanie was not the only one?"

"I am afraid not. Others were also harmed. You should know, however..." The professor stopped suddenly and cleared his throat, seemingly frustrated.

"Yes?" I prompted.

"Dr. Granger, we believe it is quite possible that your daughter intentionally sought to engage the Basilisk"

"You blame *Jeanie*?" I interrupted coldly.

He held up a hand. Then in harsh tones, he began speaking again. "You will please assume that Miss Granger is an adolescent girl rather than a responsible adult. It is not out of the question that she should take some foolhardy risks. After observing the occurrences around her, she grew curious." He paused and appeared to have difficulty finding his next words. "Your daughter possesses... remarkable intellectual aptitude. She succeeded in finding the answer just in time, not only to save her own life but also that of a fellow classmate, Miss Clearwater."

My breath suddenly drained from me. "She could have died?"

The professor nodded and for the first time during his visit, averted his gaze. "The headmaster noted right before she was sent to the infirmary that Miss Granger had a mirror in her hand and a crumpled piece of parchment on which a single word, *pipes*, was written. We would have taken these artifacts from her for further inspection if there hadn't been so many other urgent tasks to attend to; however, even without the benefit of thorough analysis, we were able to infer from that word alone that the creature was a Basilisk dwelling in Hogwarts' pipes. Had Miss Granger met its gaze fully rather than in a mirror, she would have died."

"Then we must go see her as soon as we can!" said Jane, who had turned an alarming shade of white as the professor was explaining.

Mr. Snape sighed heavily. "Neither of you can gain access to Hogwarts Castle. I am sorry. It is certainly not safe to remove her from the Hospital Wing, and in her Petrified condition, it is unlikely she would be able to hear you."

"This is absurd!" I had finally resorted to shouting. "You come here to tell me that my daughter has been attacked by a vicious monster, and yet we are not permitted to see her. Are we simply supposed to sit here and do nothing? What kind of school are you running? Who is responsible for this creature, and why isn't it being contained? I thought you had all sorts of magic tricks up your sleeve!"

A vein pulsed in the professor's temple. "Were it for us to decide, which it is emphatically *not*, you would certainly be able to see your daughter. As for your other question, Hogwarts is steeped in history, some of which remains incomplete. This monster may have resided within our walls since the school's founding, thousands of years ago. It has been a hostile presence within the castle since at least fifty years ago, the last time it appeared, coinciding with a student's death then, too. We have as yet no means to expel it."

I tried not to sink into panic as I grappled with the sensation of being so fully at the mercy of another. I stared at this Snape, my daughter's professor, who came bearing news of Jeanie from a world we could not see, of a crisis we didn't even know how to comprehend. He was too calm, too composed. His restraint was unnatural and practiced, but behind it all, I still sensed the haunted weariness of a tired man.

I slumped, turning to Jane, who was blinking rapidly, and searched her wet eyes, seeking their familiar comfort and finding in them the likeness of my daughter. After allowing myself the benefit of a few deep breaths of air, I extended my hand to Mr. Snape. "Please take good care of her."

A shadow seemed to momentarily pass through his eyes. "Her Head of House, Minerva McGonagall, is responsible for her care. She will do a fine job."

"But you'll be the one making the medicine?"

His head dipped once. "Yes."

## Chapter Four

*Chapter 4 of 5*

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My apologies to anyone who was watching this story on TPP...I'd completely forgotten that this wasn't complete here (it was posted elsewhere as complete). Here is the rest!

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In keeping with tradition, the third meeting was even more bizarre than the second. I recount it here only after lengthy reflection and a painstaking effort to piece together the eyewitness accounts of others. You see, I did not recall this meeting until long after it had occurred. I learnt that to live in Jeanie's world was to become the unwitting subject of magical intervention.

*"Wendell, get the door, please. I'm up to my elbows in potato peels."*

*I set down the newspaper down and headed for the door, inhaling deeply as I did so. Savory scents drifted from the kitchen; Monica was putting her considerable culinary talents to use again, concocting some delicious wonder for dinner. After years of waiting for the right opportunity to move from England, Fortune had finally smiled upon us. The significantly upgraded kitchen, with its new appliances and sprawling counter spaces, was just one of the perks of our new Australian home.*

*It took a moment for my eyes to adjust properly to the nighttime darkness when I opened the door and another moment to make certain that I wasn't seeing things. A wan, hollow-faced man with startling black eyes stood before me, his body draped oppressively in thick, heavy clothing in spite of the boiling summer heat.*

*"Good evening, Dr. Granger. Evidently, you have not received any of my correspondence, as it has taken me quite a while to locate you. Regrettable, though understandable, for one cannot be too careful these days."*

*His words were as strange as his appearance, and in confusion, I replied, "I am very sorry, sir, but I'm afraid you've got the wrong man. There is no Dr. Granger here."*

*His eyes narrowed, though no other thoughts were evident upon his guarded visage.*

*"You are not David Granger? Is your wife not Jane Anderson?"*

*"No, indeed not," I affirmed. I was inexplicably glad that I was not this David Granger, whoever he was. Something about this stranger was disturbing, and I had the vague feeling that David would have objected to his presence. "Perhaps the man you seek used to live here; my wife Monica and I have only lived here for the past few months, though I can assure you that I've never dealt with anyone by the name of Granger when I bought the place."*

*"It is certainly very odd," the dark-robed stranger agreed. I realized he was now assessing me in a rude, impertinent fashion, his eyes gazing frankly into mine with unwarranted familiarity. A flash of unnaturally intense heat overcame me. Bristling, I glared at him, intending to put an end to the intrusion, but he himself had already jerked his eyes away, brows furrowed and nonplussed.*

*"Sweet Merlin, Granger, a Class C Obliviate?" he muttered.*

*Before I could ponder the meaning of that, my wife joined us. "Wendell, who is it?" Her voice carried before her as she entered from the kitchen. She took in our black apparition and raised her eyebrows.*

*"He is looking for someone who doesn't live here," I explained.*

*Monica inspected him shrewdly. "Well, it would be a shame for you to have come all this way for nothing. Come have a bite with us before you leave. If you're lucky, the temperature may drop down a few degrees." She eyed our guest's insulating layers pointedly.*

*I gaped at my wife, scanning her face for an indication of why she might have invited a complete stranger to dine with us. "Monica, dear, perhaps..."*

*"Oh, relax. It's just dinner. If he really wanted to kill us, we'd all be dead by now. Why have this great big house if we're only going to keep it to ourselves? Besides, look at him, he is exhausted and distressed."*

*Exhausted and distressed? I was sure he wasn't anything besides sour and unfriendly. But I gave our guest another look, and only then did I observe the stress lines creeping from the corners of tired eyes, the unhealthy hue of sallow skin, and a bandage upon his left hand. Leave it to Monica to see everything where others saw nothing.*

*The man bowed his head and murmured, "No, madam, your offer is kind, but it will not be necessary. I have imposed on you enough."*

*"Stay," I insisted, guilt and curiosity intermingling to bring me into agreement with my wife. He had the appearance of a bloke who had fallen on hard times, to say the least. I was willing to overlook our rough beginning. "You must have journeyed from somewhere far away, if your clothes are speaking the truth. Have something to eat, and perhaps if you tell us about this David Granger, we could help you locate him."*

*The stranger considered us wearily, the simple decision appearing to weigh greatly upon him. He looked from my wife back to me again, then closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. I did not understand this display of undue reluctance, but this only served to pique my interest in him.*

*Finally, he acquiesced. "I thank you both for your hospitality."*

*Several minutes later found us all seated around the table. "At least tell us your name," I prompted as we began tucking in.*

*"Douglas," he said simply. He chewed absently, oblivious to the excellent casserole.*

*"All right, Mr. Douglas, what is your occupation? And what brings you here to Australia looking for Mr. Granger?" Monica encouraged. I let her take the reins. She was always better at teasing information out of prickly types.*

*Mr. Douglas set his fork down with precise, careful movements, a preoccupied expression clouding his features. "I am a teacher," he responded slowly. "David Granger and his wife, Jane Anderson, have a daughter who was, until recently, a pupil at my school."*

*"Ah," Monica murmured. We both listened attentively.*

"A number of months ago, the daughter went missing," he continued mechanically, eyes fixed upon his plate, "along with two of her friends. They were last seen at a wedding where... violent intruders appeared and incited a chaotic riot."

"Oh, how awful!" my wife gasped.

The man nodded. "Much effort was undertaken to find her... them. Meanwhile, we were having trouble locating the whereabouts of her parents. It seems they had... moved without leaving a forwarding address."

"Well, that's a truly asinine thing to do," I remarked, "especially given the fact that these people had a girl in boarding school!"

Mr. Douglas actually smirked, though it did not reach his eyes. "Yes, most unfortunate."

"So, you are looking for them in order to tell them that their daughter is missing? What horrible news to receive," said Monica with a shudder.

"Correct, hence my erroneous call here," the man replied. "However," he began in a changed tone as he finally met our gazes, "the nature of the news I bear has changed greatly, as I am now seeking them in order to inform them that their daughter has been found."

"Oh, good," Monica sighed.

"What had become of her?" I inquired.

"She...and her friends...had gone to great lengths to conceal themselves in an encampment in the forest. It took us a long while to determine their whereabouts." As he explained the details, his eyes became progressively more somber and his voice quieter. "They had realized immediately that it was they who had been the target at the wedding..."

"So, they hid in the woods?" I asked, frowning. "Didn't you say they were just students? Could they not be protected by the authorities?"

A bitter look crossed his face. "We are currently without the rule of law where we are."

I endeavored to think of some lawless places from whence this man, Douglas, might have come. "The Middle East?" I ventured. "Though why on earth would this Granger fellow send his daughter to boarding school in such a hostile environment?"

Mr. Douglas paused, and Monica quickly filled the silence. "Perhaps he would rather not say where he's from, dear," she said sympathetically. "Maybe he himself is in some sort of danger, if it's truly such a horrible place that everyone has to fend for themselves."

"So, you found her in the forest and brought her back to the school? Was she injured?" I asked in an attempt to steer Mr. Douglas back into his narrative again.

"No...", he replied, voice suddenly strained. "I...left her there. I left all of them, that is."

"WHAT?!" both my wife and I choked out.

"I ascertained that she was well. But it was impossible, given the circumstances, to remove her. There is a reason why she and her friends wander through the wilderness, related to why they were attacked in the first place. They must fulfill a certain objective before they may return." The man's eyes were shadowed.

"That is just... barbaric!" Monica exclaimed, appalled.

"But what I don't understand is this," I cut in. "This is a hell of a lot of effort you're putting in, Mr. Douglas, to find these parents, only to tell them that their daughter was lost and is, er... still lost. Why bother telling them at all? I'd imagine it would distress them unnecessarily. Perhaps you should just wait until she's definitely safe again."

"I would have thought the reason was quite obvious!" said Monica as she lightly speared at her vegetables. "He's in love with her."

"Pah," I scoffed, turning to Mr. Douglas.

Startled alarm briefly crossed his features before they were instantaneously cloaked behind a cold, impassive mask.

You can imagine that our repatriation after the war finally finished was an awkward and confusing affair. Our memories were restored to our minds as easily as one replenishes an empty candy dish. But there was a pervasive feeling for me that something was wrong, not the least of which was Jeanie herself. She bewildered us with her complete and total transformation into a grown woman. I suppose she had been progressing into adulthood all along. Nevertheless, every parent understands the distress that occurs when children are inevitably borne away by time. For us, the change was unaccountably sudden; Jeanie had left home a bubbly teenager, the last vestiges of childhood still evident in a round, content face and a bouncing gait. She returned to us a paragon of sedate dignity, her will steely, her expressions brooding.

We were almost immediately at odds with each other. Even before she had left home a child and returned an adult, she had already started keeping secrets. But after her return from her seventh year, it seemed she had closed off her entire heart to us, and there was not a piece of her soul which we could call our own.

"We're here for you." Jane and I had tried soothing her during the first few weeks, hoping that she would unburden herself to us. Our only rewards were the sad smiles and the same haunted silence.

Oh, we knew some things, of course. For example, even though she was already finished with the last year of her magical education, she decided to stay at Hogwarts for an extra year, though she never gave us any explanation for her extra schooling. She disappeared for long intervals with her friends, Harry Potter and Ron Weasley, and frequently returned from her outings with even deeper sorrow upon her face than when she had left.

"Hermione, for the love of God!" I snapped at her one day in frustration.

She reacted to the use of her name with a raised eyebrow.

"Whatever it is that happened to you in school last year, bottling it up inside you isn't going to alleviate it. Your mother and I want to help you, but we can't if you won't even talk to us!"

At first, there was no response save the usual carefully wary expression. Then the thinnest of cracks appeared in her stony façade. Guilt colored her troubled gaze, making it doubly heartbreaking, before she swiftly turned away.

A year came and went. Jeanie remained stubbornly angry, her mind secluded in a distant world filled with unnamed bitterness. Jane and I prayed daily for the strength to leave her be, for no amount of our parental prodding, cajoling, or pleading was having any effect. Then, unexpectedly, a year after she had come home a withered shell of her former self, I returned from work to find her sitting at the kitchen table, a pensive look upon her face. Jane was still at the office, and Jeanie always kept to her own room until both of us were home. It was a strange sight. I paused in the doorway.

She turned to me and smiled faintly, yet it had been so long since she had smiled at all that I sucked in my breath and inquired, "Jeanie?" I went to her and placed an



encouraging hand upon her shoulder.

"Daddy," she began, then paused and chewed on her lower lip. Finally, with a resigned sigh, she said ruefully, "I'm sorry, I really ~~am~~<sup>am</sup>, I hope you'll understand some day."

She pulled out that infernal magic wand of hers and pointed it at my temple.

*"Restituo Memoria."*

## Chapter Five

*Chapter 5 of 5*

A father recounts a series of meetings with a black-robed emissary. Written for Kribu during the Summer 2010 SS/HG Exchange.

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*He's in love with her.*

I am pondering those words again, revisiting them as I have countless times over the last few months. I take a sip of wine.

Jeanie is still moody at times, but it is a different sort of sensitivity, what I would characterize as *flightiness*. She is easily distracted and prone to wool gathering. It is rather difficult to stomach; until lately, Jeanie was always firmly grounded and practical as they come. But flightiness is infinitely more preferable to gloom. And in spite of the irrationality of it all, I have come to understand.

I snort. That is, I have come to understand after finally managing to grasp the fact that Jeanie had shorn my wife and me of our identities, emptied our brains of our memories, and sent us in an impaired state of mind to live in a different country. Then, just as expediently, she effected our return and reinstated our memories. Except for a few crucial ones, of course.

She insisted she had reasons. I smile wryly. They may even be compelling reasons, though I would never admit as much to her. A war had forced her hand, she had explained. Then, when the war was over, she came to Australia to fetch us. But she never gave us back our memories completely because Mr. Snape had been presumed dead.

She returned home heartsick and weary. The memories were withheld for her own sake, she claims.

But then, unbeknownst to her, Mr. Snape had miraculously survived.

*He's in love with her.*

The voice whispers to me through my memories, goading. Jane, even in her adopted persona of Monica, had instincts that were frightfully keen.

I swirl the wine in my glass, waiting. The note, owl delivered, naturally, lies next to me on the coffee table, the television remote weighing down upon the crisp folds of parchment. The elegant black scrawl it bears is now quite familiar. Finally, the doorbell rings. I stand and head for the door. Jane emerges from the powder room, smoothing a hand over her skirt as she joins me.

Slowly and perhaps more theatrically than is warranted, I open my home for the fourth time to Severus Snape. My daughter stands with him, an arm looped through his, her cheeks pink with pleasure. He is clad in black, as usual, and looks upon me gravely.

I return the gaze in challenge. Just because I understand does not mean I approve.

Jeanie bounds into my arms, breaking the awkward spell, and I kiss her, genuinely glad to see her. "Hello, Daddy!" she says, returning my kiss before reaching behind her and gently tugging Jane inside.

Jane elbows me, and I finally extend my hand to him. "Welcome, Mr. Snape."

The handshake is brief and perfunctory. As he steps inside, he looks slowly about him, as if seeing the house for the first time, though he has already visited twice before. I smirk triumphantly at him. It is one thing to sweep into others' homes as a self-assured professor and quite another to enter the home of your lady friend's parents.

"We are delighted to see you again," Jane says, patting him on the sleeve.

*Speak for yourself.*

"Come, Severus, don't be nervous," I hear Jeanie whisper as she unhooks the ever-present black cloak. His only response is a baleful glare. To my surprise, he wears something akin to a normal jacket and tie beneath the accursed cape. Jeanie smoothens him down a bit before leading him toward the dining room. I endeavor to keep a straight face as I follow.

The food is already laid out. Jane, in her true form, is not much of a cook at all, but she had put in an admirable effort, claiming she was now in possession of skills she had "learnt" as Monica.

Snape walks to the head of the table and pulls out a chair, signaling to my wife. "Madam," he intones. Jane blushes prettily as she sits, and I roll my eyes. He extracts a

second chair and solicitously hands Jeanie into it before looking expectantly at me.

Scowling at him, I take my seat across from Jane. Finally, he sits, and I nod at him in begrudging approval.

"So, Mr. Snape, you no longer teach, I presume?" Jane says. I settle in, preparing myself for an evening of banalities.

"No, I am proprietor of an apothecary in Diagon Alley now," he answers. "It is a joint venture with Hermione."

"Severus is the only Potions master in all England who is capable of brewing Wolfsbane," Jeanie states with pride.

"Wolfsbane?" I repeat.

"In the wizarding world, certain individuals are afflicted with lycanthropy," Snape explains.

I rummage deep in my brain for the meaning of the word. "Werewolf?"

He nods. "Yes. Within the last few years, I formulated a potion that renders werewolves harmless during the full moon." He holds my gaze. "It has been a lucrative investment."

I make no acknowledgment of this cryptic declaration, though, unwillingly, one of my doubts eases away. Jeanie is more than capable of supporting herself, of course, but it certainly couldn't hurt for Snape to prove his worth.

I watch him dubiously as I cut my steak. He explains the intricacies of the potion, in that sparse, highly snobbish tone that I have begun to associate with him. Though he isn't quite as ragged as the time he visited us in Australia, the man is still rail thin. Black hair, too long for any self-respecting man, drapes down the sides of his face. His features are harsh and angular, like a craggy stone, dominated by a disproportionately large nose. And his fingers...I have always noticed his fingers...are aberrantly long, seeming to swallow up the fork he wields with freakish precision.

"Quite the contrary," he replies smoothly to a question posed by Jane. "*Belladonna* is only toxic when consumed in its natural state. When processed properly in a potion, it confers a sedating effect upon the werewolf."

Automatically, he reaches for the water pitcher and refills Jeanie's glass before topping mine off, as well. His smooth, orderly execution of things grates upon me, as does his confident lecturing. *A cold fish*. What on earth does Jeanie see in him?

"Now we're working on a variant of the potion which will suppress the transformation completely," Jeanie says excitedly. "Someday, a werewolf will no longer need to worry about the full moon. He would simply take his potion and carry on with his life as usual!"

I watch her bright, excited eyes, her animated gestures. I watch as she and Snape momentarily meet each other's eyes and see the suddenly bashful smile that she flashes at him. The contrast with her demeanor from just a year ago is stark, and I suppress a resigned sigh.

"That sounds fascinating!" says Jane. Her mouth quirks slightly at the dirty scowl I send her way.

I mostly content myself with listening as the conversation proceeds for the rest of the hour until the plates are cleaned. Jane stands, beginning to collect the empty dishes, and I prepare to follow suit, only to be arrested by Snape's crisp voice. "Dr. Granger, would you care to show me the journal collection you spoke of?"

I am half-way out of my chair as I regard him with suspicion. The black orbs are shuttered, as usual. Another reason to dislike him. However, I am never one to shy away from a challenge.

"Why, certainly." I feel two anxious pairs of eyes upon my back as I lead Snape to the study.

After the door is shut quietly behind me, I turn upon him. "Well, young man?" I snap, crossing my arms as one does in preparation to scold. I had observed a slight streak of gray in his hair every now and then during dinner, and to my displeasure, I judged him to be about twenty years Jeanie's senior. However, that still leaves me with a good handful of years upon him, and he would bloody well know that. "Don't tell me you wanted to come here to look at some sodding journals."

He is standing very still in the middle of the room, head lowered. At my question, he lifts his eyes, and to my shock, I see they are stormy and turbulent, unlike anything I have ever seen on him.

"Dr. Granger. I have come to ask for your daughter's hand in marriage."

I feel as if I have been punched in the stomach. Surely, this is a joke. "Why don't you go ask *her*?" I banter lightly, shakily. "Jeanie never spent a day in her life asking my consent for anything."

"In our world, we still adhere to the old traditions. A father's permission must be procured first, if only because wizarding fathers have a lot more... hazardous means at their disposal to vent their spleen," he finished drily.

I blink stupidly at him. "You are serious."

"Completely," he says quietly.

Suddenly, I am accosted by a nauseating idea. "She's pregnant? You knocked her up?" I hiss lividly.

He casts a stony glare at me, and I am reminded of how he is not a man to be crossed. "I assure you, I did no such thing."

"Bloody hell," I mutter to myself as I realize the magnitude of the discussion. I turn away from him and begin pacing. "She is young," I started.

"Two years past her majority in our world."

"Barely a year beyond majority in ours," I counter firmly.

"The war, sir. I believe you will find that it obliterates all conventional notions of time. Delays become superfluous when one is faced each day with the possibility of not returning through the same door one walks out of."

Ah, the war. The godforsaken war of which I knew both nothing and everything. Snape talks about it in the same dispassionate tone he uses with all things, yet the force behind the words is unmistakable. Jeanie rarely speaks of the war, though, over the years, I have managed to stitch together the snippets I *have* been able to glean. I think of Snape himself. Of him periodically appearing on our doorstep, his news steadily worse as the sinister forces of the war gradually escalated. His preternatural calm. The hints of weariness, the caustic tongue. His journey to the house of Monica and Wendell Wilkins.

I sigh. "Explain to me..." I begin, then trail off hopelessly. *Explain to me how all this bloody well happened!* "Tell me..." I try again. *Did you start wanting her when she was twelve? Fourteen? When?*

He seems to follow the train of my thoughts. "*No*," he grounds out emphatically, and I gaze at him in surprise. Flashes of red rise to his cheeks. "I *never* touched her when she was a student. It was platonic until... it was no longer so after my recuperation."

I glower at him, then spin away. I have no particular wish to dwell on the idea of him bedding my daughter.

"Then?" I prompt, not quite knowing what I wanted to hear next.

He sucks in an impatient breath, and I see that he is as uncomfortable with this discussion as I am. But he continues doggedly on, and I realize that he wishes to gain my approval. "She, ah, visited. At first, with her two friends. I was afflicted with amnesia after I was wounded and was taken in by an illiterate farming couple in Hogsmeade who had no idea of my identity. After I regained my faculties, we continued to... see one another. Then....," he paused and gestured vaguely. "We frequently conversed about potions, occasionally we shared a meal..."

I hold up a hand, stalling him. The only thing worse than describing one's relationships was being forced to listen to others describe them. Especially when the relationship included one's daughter. "I see, Sn...ah, Severus, that will do."

I close my eyes, the memory of a long-ago summer night unexpectedly upon me. *I hope for her to be odd. I hope that she stands out for far greater things than her name. I hope she never blends in.*

Be careful what you wish for.

"Does she want to be married to you?" I open my eyes again and resume the interview.

"Yes," he states soberly. "We both desire it."

The vision of Jeanie from earlier this evening as she came into the house, radiant in spite of the autumn chill, presents itself in my mind. "She *does* appear very happy with you, though why the hell that is, I can't understand," I mutter.

Snape has the good grace to remain silent, though the corner of his lip twitches once.

Then the question tumbles out before I have a chance to stop myself. "Do you love her?"

He opens his mouth, as if to say something, then promptly closes it again. His eyes become warm. "Very much so," he murmurs, almost to himself.

A knot that I wasn't aware existed loosens inside me. I don't trust blokes whose declarations of love flow with ease. This man has the look of one being dragged over hot coals. I almost feel sorry for him.

"Jeanie is precious to us," I state.

He nods. "As she is to me."

"Just because I don't do this wand-waving business does not mean I won't make you rue the day you were born if you ever mistreat her," I grouse.

"I have not the slightest doubt you will."

"Go ask her properly to marry you, then, for Christ's sake," I grunt, waving him toward the door.

"Thank you. I am greatly honored." His joy is muted, sequestered behind an intimidating veneer of self-discipline, but to my own surprise, I still see it swell clearly in his eyes.

Smiling weakly, I sink into a chair, needing to calm my racing heart before I can confront my wife and daughter again. I try not to think too much. The magic will take care of the hard things, I decide. And for the rest, there's always Jeanie.

*Fin*

Reviews are very much appreciated! Thanks to everyone who left me one.