

The End is only the Beginning

by *BellatrixLives*

What might have happened if Harry chose to chase hallows, not horcruxes?

The boy who lived is dead, and Hermione is left to face her own mortality rate. Now, the only thing standing between her and death is Professor Snape.

The Dark Lord Victorious

Chapter 1 of 6

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Author's Note: This story picks up shortly after the trio's escape from Malfoy Manor in DH. Thanks to my wonderful beta dramionejunkie, and to J.K. Rowling for the use of her amazing characters.

SS

Severus Snape lies soaking in his steaming bathtub, contemplating the events of the day. He is tired, *oh gods* is he tired. Two hours ago, he witnessed the murder of the Wizarding World's only hope; Potter had failed. But even worse than that, Severus had failed. He always disappointed everyone; his father, his mother, Dumbledore, but worst of all, Severus had disappointed Lily. He sat by and watched as Lily's sacrifice was thrown away with a flick of the Dark Lord's wand.

Lily, forgive me... he begs silently, head resting on the back of the tub.

Severus glances at his wand laying on a stand next to him; his fingers itch for it. Just one little swish and a whispered thought is all it would take. Then, he could just sit back and let the warm bath water draw his life from him; it probably wouldn't even hurt. What is a scrape on the wrist compared to the torture he'd endured most of his life? It would probably even feel good knowing relief was coming.

Clanking and female screaming resonates loudly from the next room.

"Help me! Please somebody help!"

Sighing deeply, and sounding as weary as a man twice his age, Severus stands up from his bath. He takes his time drying himself rather than casting a simple drying charm. The tedium soothes him; well, at least it used to. He doubts that he will ever feel soothed again.

More screaming and clanking sound from outside the bathroom.

Ever so slowly, he dons his voluminous robes, long fingers gliding gracefully over the many buttons. Heaving another deep sigh, Severus billows out of the bathroom as haughtily as he can manage.

As soon as he enters the adjoining bedchamber, the screaming and clanking stop. There, chained to his old bed lies the insufferable know-it-all, Hermione Granger, glaring at him fiercely.

"Let... me... go," she grinds out through clenched teeth, voice hoarse from yelling.

"And where, my little Muggle-born, would you expect to go?" He asks her, sneering. "To find your pal, Weasley?"

Hermione's face drains of color, and Severus gives a light, heartless chuckle.

"I'll be back momentarily; do stop trying to break your arms with all of your flailing about."

Severus quickly exits his old dungeon room and makes his way towards Dumbledore's, *no his*, office.

"Canary Creams," Severus whispers to the gargoyle guarding the stairs.

As he climbs the spiral staircase, Severus carefully removes himself from the situation, hiding his emotions and smoothing his face he acts as if he is an outsider.

"*Stop that crying, boy; it shows that you are weak. No matter what anyone does to you, don't you ever let them know that their actions have affected you.*" Tobias Snape's words ring in his ears.

Upon entering his office, Severus flicks his wand at the portraits of the previous headmasters and headmistresses. Immediately black, soundproof drapes cover all but one.

"Albus, Potter is dead," he says smoothly, voice dark. "I have... failed." Despite all of his effort, Severus' voice catches on the last word; he bows his head in defeat.

"How did this happen?" Albus asks quietly.

"The Dark Lord finally found out Grindelwald stole the Elder Wand from Gregorovitch, and from Grindelwald, he discovered you were the last master of the wand. He learned this about the same time Potter figured it out; they both made a dash for the wand but the Dark Lord beat him to it by mere minutes." Severus pauses, not wanting to continue, as if not saying it would make it less real.

"Severus?" Albus asks gently.

"Potter appeared at your tomb with Weasley and Granger, and it was over before he could blink. The Dark Lord struck him down and then restrained the other two. Weasley was offered a chance to renounce his blood traitor relatives and join the Dark Lord..." Severus whispers hoarsely.

"And when he refused, Voldemort killed him," Albus finishes.

"No, Albus. He didn't refuse." Severus lets his words hang in the air, allowing Albus to absorb them.

"I see..." whispers the former headmaster. "And what of Miss Granger? I doubt she was given that option."

"The Dark Lord intended to kill her on the spot; I almost blew my cover, Albus. I cried out for him to stop just as he raised his wand. He looked furious at my interruption and demanded I explain myself. I told him that... that I found the girl... appealing. I reminded the Dark Lord of all of my devoted services to him; and he said that he supposed he could allow me to keep her because... because the last Muggle-born I requisitioned was broken before I could enjoy her," Severus spits, collapsing to the floor in a heap of black material.

"Severus," Albus calls down from his place on the wall. "You did the right thing. Now you must pull yourself together. Where is she now?"

"She is in my old room in the dungeon," Severus says dejectedly.

"Severus Snape," Albus pronounces commandingly, "you are not this person I see before me. Get up, clear yourself of emotion and *play your part*. You need to go speak with Miss Granger; find out Harry's actions during his last days. Do not reveal your loyalties to her; you do not know if Voldemort will change his mind and decide that he really should destroy her as a message to other friends of Harry's."

Severus pulls himself up from the floor, takes a couple of deep breaths and puts on a mask of indifference.

"Good. *Now go*," Albus orders.

Flicking his wand on the way out, all of the drapes disappear and the portraits come alive with insults aimed at the current Headmaster of Hogwarts. He ignores them and descends the stairs, momentarily wondering if he'll end up as mad as Kreacher; taking orders from a portrait.

HG

Hermione strains against the cuffs that chain her to the bed and her wrists are raw from the effort, her voice hoarse. Her arms are stretched above her head and each secured to a bedpost, the angle is causing her shoulders to cramp. She wonders how far her wrists are from bleeding and briefly considers helping them along; maybe her slick blood will help her slip her hands free.

She immediately dismisses that idea; the amount of blood she would require could leave her dizzy and weak, and she has no wand to heal herself with.

Finally giving up, Hermione lets her arms rest on the bed and surrenders to tears.

Oh, Harry! I'm so sorry... I should have tried harder to convince you, horcruxes not hallows. Now look where we are. You're gone, Ron's a traitor, and I... held captive by Professor Snape.

Hermione shudders trying to imagine what her future will hold. Her mind runs wild with possibilities... torture, poisons, but even worse, there is the possibility of rape. Professor Snape had told Voldemort that he found her 'appealing'.

Her frightening thoughts are interrupted by the soft sound of footsteps and the turn of a key in her door's lock.

It's him.

He strides towards her purposefully, wand at the ready.

Perhaps it will be a quick death after all, Hermione thinks, hopeful.

But with one swish, she finds herself naked, except for her undergarments. Panicking, Hermione tries to block out her surroundings by screwing her eyes shut and reciting a well read book in her head.

Hogwarts, a History by Bathilda Bagshot...

"Open your eyes girl; I need to ask you some questions!" Snape barks.

Hermione forces one eye open and sees that Snape is sitting on a stool a few feet from the bed. She crosses her legs, but still feels overly exposed in front of this imposing man. She wishes she were wearing boxers rather than boy shorts, a sports bra rather than the red translucent one.

Or better yet, long johns, maybe a parka...

"Here are the rules: I'll ask a question, you answer. If you refuse I will punish you, either by the Cruciatus or other more... entertaining means," Snape assures her icily.

Hermione trembles, not wanting to think about what Snape finds entertaining.

"Do you understand?" He asks, eyes boring into hers.

She nods.

"Good. First question: where have you been hiding?" Snape asks.

Hermione tells him, in a dead voice, about living in the tent in the Forest of Dean, and then moving constantly to remote locations in other woods up until their capture by the Snatchers.

"If you were captured, how did you come to be here?" He asks, perplexed.

Their escape from Malfoy Manor is unknown, and Hermione can tell Snape is pleased by her tale, no doubt thinking of a way to use the Malfoy's disgrace to his advantage.

"Then what?" Snape presses.

"As soon as we escaped, Harry dragged us here to get the Elder Wand," Hermione whispers, tears rolling down her face.

Snape stands up and Hermione thinks he is leaving, having got enough information out of her for the time being.

She is wrong.

He strides over to the bed and climbs on, placing one knee on either side of her hips. Hermione panics and starts trying to buck him off. She looks up into his eyes, and for a moment her resolve falters; the black depths transfix her.

Images start flashing through her mind.

Harry crumpled on the ground, dead at Voldemort's feet... Dobby, dead, knife still in his chest... Bellatrix approaching, dagger in one hand and wand in the other... Ron's return and the story of how the locket was destroyed...

The locket!

Hermione focuses her mind as hard as she can and pushes Snape out of it. He struggles to get back in but she's ready for him this time and forms a brick wall around her memories. She leaves one thought visible for him; *get out!*

Snape retreats.

He is still perching on top of her, and both are panting and sweating from the exertion used to battle wills. Hermione stares up at him, expression terrified. Snape reaches down and tears her bra straps, but leaves the cups covering her breasts.

He pounces, launching his face at hers.

Hermione is so caught off-guard by the softness of his lips she doesn't immediately fight back. Her eyes drift close, a gentle tingle crawls down her spine and a thought creeps into her head, *Severus Snape is a pretty good kisser.*

Snape!

As the realization dawns on her, Hermione opens her eyes wide and bites down, hard, on Snape's lip.

SS

That little wench bit me!

Severus is astounded and a little amused as he makes his way back to his office. The Dark Lord will want updates on what is being done with the witch, so Severus takes advantage of their disheveled appearances and makes it look as if he were attacking her. Hoping it will be enough to hold the Dark Lord off for a while, Severus makes use of the Pensieve upon entering the office. He cuts apart the memory and forms it together flawlessly.

Quickly, he reviews it.

Severus unlocks the door to Hermione's prison; then, he strides across the room quickly and purposefully, removing her clothing with one charm. He immediately launches himself onto the bed and perches over the top of her. Hermione flails about trying to throw him off and, in attempting this, works up a sweat and starts panting for air. Severus rips her bra and leans down to force his kiss upon her followed by her biting him. He sits back up, furious, holding his bleeding lip and tells her, "You'll pay for this."

Severus bottles the memory and uses a brown barn owl perched by his window to send it off to the Dark Lord.

Severus feels confident in this memory; it will satisfy the Dark Lord, and it did not actually cause harm to the girl.

Not that I care if I did harm her, Severus assures himself. But, it would be beneficial if, in the future, Granger not completely loathe me.

With that taken care of, Severus once again obstructs the view of all portraits but Albus Dumbledore.

"Albus, tell me about the locket," Severus commands.

The Fall of the Boy Who Lived

Chapter 2 of 6

Severus finds out about the locket, and Hermione finds herself revisiting that horrible night.

Author's Note: Thanks to my beta dramionejunkie, and to J.K. Rowling for her spectacular characters.

SS

Severus paces back and forth through the debris that once made up his study, mouthing obscenities under his breath.

How could Albus not tell me about the Horcruxes? He spent years trying to convince everyone I could be trusted, and the old codger didn't even have the decency to lead by example!

Dumbledore has finally told Severus everything he knows about Voldemort, and he has also explained how Harry has spent the better part of the last year in search of the remaining Horcruxes.

Looking around at the destruction he has caused, Severus sighs and throws himself into his favorite armchair, a comfy wingback upholstered in rich green fabric, right next to his crackling fireplace. Using his wand, he conjures up a large snifter of Ogden's Old Firewhiskey and starts musing over the newly discovered information.

Seven Horcruxes: 1) The diary, destroyed; 2) The ring, destroyed; 3) The locket, destroyed; 4) The boy, destroyed; 5) The cup, missing; 6) The snake, untouchable; 7) Something of Ravenclaw's, unknown.

Severus downs the rest of his Firewhiskey and quickly starts on another.

Granger has known about the Horcruxes far longer than me; perhaps she'll have some insight to share.

He laughs darkly to himself.

Of course the insufferable know-it-all would have some insight. Getting her to share it with me will be the real issue. Dumbledore told me not to reveal my loyalties to the girl, but he so obviously loves keeping people in the dark that he may be biased.

While working on his third brandy, Severus decides that he will not tell the girl everything about him, but just enough for her to believe that maybe he can be trusted after all. Finishing his drink, Severus throws his glass into the flames and billows out of the room, heading for the dungeons.

HG

Hermione longs for sleep to carry her away from her current situation, but unfortunately her body is too uncomfortable for that wish to be granted. Her arms, once numb, are now prickling painfully, her shoulder blades feel far too stretched, and considering she is still in nothing but her underwear and torn bra, she is absolutely freezing.

She lies there wondering how long it will take before the pain spreads from her immobile arms to the rest of her body, and if it does spread, will it intensify to the point that the Cruciatus curse would be preferable in comparison?

You shouldn't have bit him; he'll leave you here to freeze to death, for sure, she tells herself.

Well, he shouldn't have kissed me! she responds desperately.

When he comes back you should apologize; you should play nice. Maybe if he thinks that you can be trusted not to fight back, he'll relax around you, and you might find a chance to escape.

Hermione's eyes swell once more with tears.

Even if I do escape, Professor Snape was right... Where would I go? Ron cannot be trusted; I don't know how to contact the other Order members... if there even is an Order anymore. With Harry gone, hope is gone. The Horcruxes will never be destroyed, and Voldemort will reign over the Wizarding world forever.

Hermione gasps.

No! That cannot happen! When I escape, because she is determined to escape, when I escape I will find a way to destroy the remaining Horcruxes! she vows silently.

Hermione promises herself that she will behave and be nice to Snape, in hopes of giving him a false sense of security.

Just as she resigns herself to being good, she hears her prison door unlock once more.

Stumbling inside in a manner not quite befitting of his usual grace, Professor Snape crosses the room with a sideways gait and perches on the very edge of her bed.

"Are you cold?" he asks, a slight slur to his drawl.

"Yes, Professor, I am." Hermione hesitates briefly before hurrying on in a desperate whisper, not trusting her voice to speak any louder. "I would like to apologize for my behavior earlier, you caught me off guard and I overreacted. Do forgive me?"

Snape arches a quizzical eyebrow at her. He sits there silently, stiff except for a slight sway of his shoulders he can't seem to control, and looks her up and down. Then, sighing heavily, he removes his outer robe and covers her with it.

"Given your troublesome day, I suppose I can understand your rash action," he tells her, giving her as close to forgiveness as possible for Severus Snape.

"Thank you," Hermione says, referring both to the warmth from the cloak and to his understanding.

Snape hunches over and buries his face in his hands, looking thoroughly defeated. Hermione eyes him curiously.

He looks so... vulnerable.

His shoulders seem about to collapse under whatever weight he is currently burdened with. His hair, more shiny than greasy she notes, hangs in thick black curtains hiding his face from view.

Why should Voldemort's right hand man, the killer of Albus Dumbledore, look so dejected when just hours ago Voldemort finally triumphed over 'The Boy Who Lived'?

It doesn't make sense.

"Are you... alright, sir?" she asks, and to her own surprise she finds she is actually curious.

Snape lifts his head and studies her face with glassy eyes.

"You are so good, so pure; you are almost too selfless to be on any side but your own. The bad guys and even the good guys can't compare to someone so... naive," he finishes, with a sneer. "Do you honestly think that by pretending to show me compassion your odds will improve?"

"I am not trying to play you! I was just curious as to why you are depressed when you have finally won?" she huffs indignantly.

"I have won nothing... I never win," Snape says quietly.

Then, without another word, he passes out cold, falling onto the bed and across Hermione. His head rests on her breasts, and she can smell the alcohol on him.

"Professor? Sir?" she says, attempting to rouse him to no avail.

It's going to be a long night.

Hermione's breath quickens... She starts panicking... There is just so much of him; his weight pushing into her makes her feel trapped.

Attempting to calm herself down, she tries to make a list of things that are not entirely horrible about this situation.

I'm no longer freezing.

Snape's body heat, in addition to the cloak he draped over her, is quickly warming Hermione up.

If he's sleeping he's not hurting me.

I'm likely to manage sleep; the smell of alcohol on his breath should be enough to cause me to pass out as well.

A piece of Snape's dark hair shifts and tickles Hermione's cheek.

She tries, carefully, to wiggle up higher on the bed, her body grinding against his in the attempt.

"Mmm, Lily." Snape laughs sleepily.

Lily?

XX

She is running as fast as she can after Harry and Ron. They skirt the edge of the lake silently, pushing towards the white tomb. Panting, they finally reach it, only to see it's already been blown open; chunks of white marble litter the ground. A shrouded corpse lies on the platform before them, giving her chills.

"Harry, we have to go! Something isn't right," Hermione whispers fiercely.

"I reckon she's right-" Ron starts.

High-pitched laughter sounds loudly, interrupting him. The icy timbre surrounds them, driving fear into the very marrow of her bones.

"It's a trap," she whispers.

"Run!" Harry screams.

Before they get the chance to launch even one step of retreat, the shrouded body rises from its crypt, freezing them in place. The white veil ignites into black flames and goes out almost as quickly in a puff of smoke. Standing before them, red eyes flashing, Voldemort extends his wand. Harry spins on the spot and shouts at Ron and Hermione, "GO NOW!"

Hermione, rooted to the spot, glances from Voldemort, whose slit-like mouth is spreading wide across his face, to Harry. She sees the green light explode behind Harry and screams. Harry's face jolts in surprise as his gaze locks with Hermione's. She watches the light go out in his brilliant green eyes and falls to her knees, screaming.

"HARRY!"

Ron is at her side throwing an arm around her shoulder, urging her to her feet. She can't do it; she is paralyzed under the weight of her despair. Hermione is still screaming as the air fills with black smoke and cloaks.

SS

The strong aroma of lavender and chamomile fills Severus' nose about two seconds before the girl's screams fill his ears. He jerks awake, and winces, his head pounding from the previous night's indulgence in Firewhiskey. Granger is thrashing about and Severus realizes, with a start, that he is lying on top of her, his face burrowed into the hollow of her neck.

Severus pushes himself up and tries to wake the witch from her nightmare.

"Miss Granger!" He scowls. "Stop blathering and wake up!"

He reaches down, grabs one of her arms, and gives it a shake.

"Miss Granger!"

Her chocolate eyes pop open wide, her chest heaving. The shock on her face is almost comical.

Her eyebrows are arched high, and she wears the expression of a deer caught in Muggle headlights.

If deer had mass amounts of horrid, unmanageable hair...

"It was a nightmare, Miss Granger. You are fine now," he tries to assure her, his words thickly coated with sarcasm.

Her cheeks are red and tear-stained as she turns her head away and mumbles something he can't hear.

"Speak up," he commands.

"I said waking holds no reprieve when you are living your nightmares," she enunciates raggedly.

"Ever the poet," he sneers, getting up and crossing the room to a large store cupboard.

From inside, he pulls out a large phial of Hangover Brew and downs it in one gulp.

"Professor?" Granger asks timidly.

"What?"

"I... I have to use the loo," she rushes.

He flips his head around to look at her and can immediately tell, from the embarrassed flush in her cheeks, that she isn't lying. He snarls and throws the empty phial on top of the cupboard. Crossing the room in three quick strides, he whips his wand out and vanishes her shackles.

She lets her arms fall to the bed and sighs gratefully. Slowly, she pulls them to her chest and attempts to rub feeling back into them.

"Thank you, sir."

Severus just grunts acknowledgment and stands awkwardly next to the bed. She sits up slowly and throws her legs over the side of the metal frame. The cloak, covering her, falls, and her cheeks flush even deeper as she rushes to gather the material around her again.

Seeing her small, barely covered breasts before him, Severus rolls his neck and listens to it crack. He hadn't much in the way of pillows the night before.

"Um, where is-" she begins, but he cuts her off.

"Door on the left."

When she stands up, her legs immediately go out from under her, and she falls forward right into his chest.

"S-sorry... my legs are numb," she sputters.

In one fluid movement, Severus sweeps her up into his arms and carries her across the room to the bathroom door.

"This is far as I go, Miss Granger."

He sets her gingerly on her own two feet and she uses the door frame to brace herself. Her 'thank you' is almost inaudible. It's not until after the door is closed behind her that Severus wonders if he should have made her leave it open. He dismisses that thought; Granger isn't one with the strength to harm herself.

Severus paces back and forth outside the door impatiently; he is so focused on wondering what is taking her so long that he is completely unprepared when his Dark Mark begins to burn.

"Shit!"

He hesitates, just a moment, before making a decision.

"Miss Granger," he calls, "I have business I have to attend to. I am going to allow you to remain unbound today, but if you try anything foolish, you will be chained back to that bed permanently. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir. I understand."

The pain in his arm intensifies. Severus flicks his wand a few times, sealing the doors and locking his potion cupboard. He pulls back his sleeve, and is preparing to touch his wand to his Dark Mark, when another thought occurs to him. Two more flicks and he is gone.

Lists of a Foolish Girl

Chapter 3 of 6

Hermione tries to answer some questions, but only ends up with more. And where is Ron?

Author's Note: Unfortunately they are not mine, all characters belong to J.K. Rowling. A special thanks to my beta flaminia_x

HG

Hermione takes her time in the bathroom, admiring the grand surroundings. It is, without a doubt, a Slytherin bathroom. The tiled floor is a deep forest green, and the gray walls are almost completely hidden by green and silver banners. She ventures over to the immense marble tub and sighs longingly.

I might as well indulge; who knows if I'll ever get the chance again?

She puts a stopper in, cranks the hot water on high and locates a cabinet filled with towels, placing one next to the tub. Then, deciding it wouldn't be wise to wear Professor Snape's cloak, she ventures out into the bedchamber, meaning to grab a sheet to wrap herself in.

The bedroom's contrast to the impressive bathroom is staggering. It's a bachelor's room for sure... a poor bachelor. The single bed is tucked away in the farthest corner of the room, the mattress, she recalls, ragged and thin. Close to the bathroom door there are two cabinets pushed against the wall. Hermione recognizes one as the cupboard Snape removed a potion from and decides to put off snooping around until later.

The farthest wall is covered with bookshelves filled to the breaking point. Immediately her resolve on 'no snooping' is tested.

What kinds of books does a Death Eater curl up with at the end of a long day? She wonders.

Pushing the thought away, she continues scoping the room.

The center of the room hosts an unstable-looking wooden dining table, featuring just one chair, and the only other furniture in the room is a large green wingback sitting in front of the fireplace to the right of the bathroom door.

First thing first, Hermione rushes over to the door leading to the hall, which is, of course, locked. She attempts to open the door to the right of the fireplace and finds that one locked as well. Huffing loudly, she approaches the bed to gather her sheet, but notices something on top. Sitting before her are a pair of men's black boxers and a white button-down dress shirt, both shrunk to her size. Smiling in spite of herself, Hermione gathers the clothing and locks herself in the bathroom.

The bathwater envelops her, instantly easing her aching muscles, the marble surprisingly soft against her back.

It must be charmed to form to your body...

She closes her eyes sleepily and slowly drifts off, her fretful night catching up with her once again.

Ron's arm is wrapped around her shoulder, attempting to pull her away even as the Death Eaters continue to arrive.

"Hermione, get up!"

"Silence, Blood Traitor!" Voldemort commands.

The Death Eaters form a circle, encircling Voldemort, Ron, Hermione, and Harry's dead body.

"Step away from the Mudblood," Voldemort hisses. "Do you want to live, my boy? The Dark Lord always needs courageous purebloods such as yourself. Join me; killing you would be so... wasteful. Renounce your Muggle-loving relatives and feast upon power beyond your wildest imaginings. Join me."

Ron looks down at Hermione, who is still sobbing, clutching her chest. He opens his mouth to speak but closes it again immediately. He removes his arm from around her and takes a hesitant step away from her, towards Voldemort. Taking a deep breath, Ron sinks down onto his knees.

"I am at your mercy... My Lord," he whispers.

Voldemort cackles loudly.

"Rise, my sson," he spits. "Look me in the eyes."

Ron stands back up and looks deeply into those garish, red eyes. Barely a minute passes before Voldemort releases his stare.

"Take your place in the circle, I am pleased."

Ron shakily walks over to a spot that has been made for him in the ring of Death Eaters, leaving Hermione alone with Voldemort and a corpse.

"This Muggle filth," Voldemort pronounces loudly, "is a symbol of everything we are against. Not only has she stolen power from a rightful wizard, but also she excels at it beyond all of your pureblood children. She mocks them, she mocks you; she must be destroyed."

Voldemort raises his wand high and brings it down in a shining arc.

"Avad..."

"My Lord, wait!"

Voldemort's hand freezes and his eyes ignite.

"Who dares interrupt this cleansing?" he demands.

"I do, my Lord." Professor Snape steps forward, removing his mask.

"What is the meaning of this, Severuss?" Voldemort hisses.

"I have been a faithful servant and spy all these years. I ask you, please, spare her life," Snape pleads.

"Why would you ask for this as your repayment when you could have so much more?"

"I find the girl... appealing, my Lord," Snape reveals.

"Surely you realize that you, my most faithful servant, could have your pick of any respectable witch?" Voldemort asks.

"Yes, my Lord, but I enjoy a solitary lifestyle. All I seek is a bed warmer ready at my command." Snape sneers, glaring at Hermione. "I would never wish to demean or demoralize a pureblood that way. After all, what else are Muggle-borns good for?"

Voldemort considers this, eyeing the heap of sobbing girl before him.

"Very well, Severuss," he concedes. "You may have her since the last Muggle-born you asked for was broken before you could... enjoy her. But do not make me regret this."

Snape bows his head at his Master and descends on Hermione, dragging her to her feet and pulling her behind him to the castle.

She screams the whole way.

XX

Hermione wakes up sputtering; while flailing around during her nightmare, her head had slipped below the bathwater.

She coughs up another mouthful of water and warily pulls herself up and out of the tub. Anxious to look around before Professor Snape returns, Hermione quickly towels off and dresses. The clothes are a perfect fit, and she feels much less vulnerable now that she is covered.

Entering the bedchamber again, she decides to try the two cabinets. The potion cupboard is, of course, locked. The second one, however, jerks open when she tugs on the door handles. Inside she finds a large stack of parchment and folders. In the corner next to that is a pile of quills and jars of ink.

Hermione examines the folders and realizes that they carry the Scriber Charm. Once a document is placed inside, the folder will only open for the author of said document. Smiling, she takes a folder, quill, ink, and several sheets of parchment.

Sitting at the rickety dining table, Hermione begins making a list of possible ways to kill Voldemort's snake.

Ways to Kill Nagini:

1) Knock out Professor Snape and take Polyjuice Potion to look like him; appear before Voldemort as Snape and kill snake

2) Hide a poisoned dead animal on Professor Snape and hope the snake will sniff it out and eat it

3) Beg to be taken before Voldemort and throw a knife at the snake's head

Hermione sighs and buries her face in her hands.

"These are about as likely as Mundungus Fletcher becoming Minister of Magic," she whispers.

Hermione's stomach gives a ferocious growl and she quickly doubles over.

"I'm so hungry," she breathes.

CRACK!

Popping her head up, Hermione finds herself face to face with a bowing house-elf.

"Oh!" Hermione exclaims.

"Hello, Missy," the house-elf squeaks, raising its head. "Mazy at your service."

"Um, hi, Mazy," Hermione says, taking in the pillow case toga bearing the Hogwarts' crest.

"What can I get Missy today?" Mazy asks, brown eyes wide.

"Mazy, can you get me out of this room?" Hermione asks, hopeful.

Mazy's ears droop, and she begins to twist the bottom of her toga.

"I'm sorry, Missy, but I have orders from the headmaster. I is able to get you food and such, but I is not allowed to be taking you from this room," Mazy says apologetically.

"Headmaster?" Hermione wonders aloud. "Oh, I forgot Professor Snape is the new Headmaster of Hogwarts. It's okay, Mazy. I would like some food then, if it isn't too much trouble."

"Oh no, Missy. I is being told to look after you and it is no trouble at all. What can I be getting for you?" The elf squeaks, happy to be of service.

Hermione places an order for a hearty helping of turkey, mashed potatoes, parsnips and pudding, then as an afterthought asks for a tea service and scones. Mazy nods her enthusiasm and cracks out of the room after promising to return shortly.

Hermione takes this time to search through the bookshelves, finding two that stand out to her:

Fantastical Forebears: Founders of Hogwarts

Willful Wish-Work for the Wandless

She pulls *Willful Wish-Work for the Wandless* off the shelf and quickly pages through it. The book has in depth step-by-step instructions on how to manage simple spells without a wand. Seeing just how much work is involved, Hermione places the book back on the shelf in exactly the same position.

I'll look into it further when I know I won't be interrupted. I don't want Professor Snape to remember it is here and confiscate it.

Just as she takes *Fantastical Forebears: Founders of Hogwarts* off the shelf, Mazy cracks back into the room with Hermione's food.

Famished, Hermione rushes to the table, her stomach aching from the delicious smells wafting towards her. She's already taken two bites of potatoes before she manages to sit down.

"Thank you, Mazy. It's so good!" Hermione exclaims, now digging into the turkey.

"Missy is too kind, it is no trouble." The elf blushes. "When you is finished just call my name and I will collect your dishes. And if Missy ever needs anything, just calls 'Mazy' and I will come. The headmaster is telling me to take good care of you, and I is trying to be a good elf and do my best."

Then, before Hermione can say another word, Mazy disappears.

Pausing only to take deep swigs of tea, Hermione manages to finish her dinner and desert in less than ten minutes. Her belly bulging uncomfortably, she leans back in the chair and sighs.

Is it wrong to have such a strong appetite just one day after losing one, no, two of my best friends?

Then, remembering wild mushrooms boiled in a billycan, she decides that Harry wouldn't want her to continue starving.

I'll need my strength, after all.

Hermione pushes her plate away and pours herself another cup of tea. Sighing softly, she opens *Fantastical Forebears* and finds the section on Rowena Ravenclaw. In no time, Hermione finds the information she is looking for and begins writing a second list.

Possible Horcruxes:

1) Rowena Ravenclaw's Diadem Most likely option; said to have strong magical properties and render the wearer much more intelligent than they normally are. Whereabouts unknown.

2) *Ancient Wizarding Encyclopedia* Rowena had an ancient encyclopedia dating back to the discovery of 'Lumos'. She kept this in an ornately carved treasure chest as a tribute to her House's motto 'Wit beyond measure is man's greatest treasure'. Whereabouts unknown.

3) *Fawkes* Rowena had a phoenix; is it possible that Fawkes can be that same phoenix, and that he has been pledging himself to people who are important to Hogwarts?

Hermione tries to wrap her mind around the new possibilities but finds herself much too full and sluggish to do more than raise more questions.

She takes her first two lists and places them inside the charmed folder, then, after returning *Fantastical Forebears* to its shelf, she starts one more list.

Severus Snape: Friend or Foe?

Signs he is evil:

Delivered contents of Prophecy to Voldemort, causing the Potters' deaths

Voldemort has the utmost belief in him

Killed Dumbledore

Cursed George's ear off

Openly hated half of the Order

Let Harry die

Signs he may be good:

No excitement at Voldemort's victory

Forgave me for biting him, which is completely out of character

Telling the house-elf to 'take good care' of me

Saved my life

Hermione gently sets the quill down and starts massaging her temples. Looking at the short list for 'good' she starts to doubt her sanity.

How could I think he could be good? I mean, come on! This is Snape we're talking about. He saved my life for selfish reasons. And yet...

She can't seem to vanish the look of despair he wore the previous night, or his dejected declaration! "I never win."

Hermione places the third list inside her folder and then cleans up all evidence of her musings. She places the ink pot and quill back in the cupboard and then slips the folder inside the cover of a book on the top shelf.

Having no way to judge the time aside from her lengthening yawns, Hermione decides to go to bed.

Lying on her side, she pulls her knees up to her chest and wraps both an itchy sheet and her arms around them.

Good or Evil?

SS

Just two days ago, if Severus Snape were asked to choose between the likelihood of a Weasley becoming a Death Eater and the likelihood of Severus adopting Lupin as a lovable pet, he probably would have rushed to a pet store to pick a collar for his new werewolf.

At least this way there is no shedding on the furniture...

Severus, having just Apparated outside the gates of Hogwarts, sets off at a brisk pace towards the castle.

He runs through the events of the night in his head...

Severus appears, apprehensively, at the Dark Lord's side, expecting an order to execute the girl. He is therefore surprised to learn that instead, he has been called for an enlistment ceremony.

The Weasley brat, Ronald, is standing in the middle of a circle of Death Eaters next to the immobile form of Argus Filch.

Severus takes his place in the circle, to the right of the Dark Lord.

"Loyal followers," Voldemort begins, "we are here this evening to welcome a new brother into our midst... and what a unique addition he shall be."

The Dark Lord pauses, letting his words ring dramatically.

"Ronald Weasley, former friend of Harry Potter, relative of Muggle-lovers, has chosen to see sense. He stands here before you ready to renounce his past and accept his pureblood status. Does anyone have any reason why we should not accept him?" the Dark Lord asks.

A cloaked figure steps forward from the circle.

"My Lord, how can you be sure he can truly be trusted?" Bellatrix Lestrange asks.

"My dear Bella, I have seen his mind. I know he seeks power and that he recognizes that only I can give him that."

"Yes, my Lord, but perhaps he has tricked you," she rushes, cringing.

Voldemort's eyes flash dangerously, challenging her.

"You dare assume I, master Legilimens that I am, could be fooled by this boy?" he questions, but continues on without waiting for a response. "Severus! Step forward."

Severus takes a step immediately, keeping his back straight and hands resting behind his back.

"Severus here is a master Legilimens, second only to me. He fooled that softhearted fool, Dumbledore, for years. Severus, read the boy. Is this what you wanted, Bella? A second opinion?" Voldemort asks mockingly.

"My Lord, I..." Bellatrix pleads.

"Silence!" Voldemort hisses. "Read him!"

Severus slowly approaches Ron and withdraws his wand.

Standing eye to eye, Severus takes aim.

"Legilimens!"

Severus is flying through images...

Ron at Christmas receiving nothing but hand-me-downs... Ron always fighting for attention over his brothers and failing... Ron watching Harry bitterly as Harry is begged to sign autographs... Ron watching his dad being passed over for a promotion because of Arthur's Muggle fascination... Hermione at the Yule Ball with Victor Krum... Hermione throwing herself into Harry's arms after every return from holiday, while giving Ron an awkward handshake... A devastatingly beautiful Hermione half naked, wrapped around Harry... and one lone thought left drifting around: 'for the greater good'...

Severus withdraws from Ron's mind and is momentarily caught up with the image of Hermione and Harry intertwined.

"Well, Severus?" Voldemort asks.

"He holds no lasting feelings towards his past life, my Lord. His motives for joining are selfish, yes, but selfish motives are often the most reliable," Severus answers.

"Are you pleased, Bella?" Voldemort questions sarcastically.

Bellatrix bows her head and retreats to her place in the circle just as Severus returns to his.

"Very well," Voldemort breathes. "Let us continue."

Severus had been shocked to discover how quickly Weasley could change sides, but the anger and hatred that tinted his thoughts left no doubt of his new loyalty.

Finally at the castle, Severus gives a wave of his hand, and the front doors fly open wide. Dinner is just ending, and the sudden banging of the doors sends two third-year girls squealing across the entrance hall.

They start giggling over their reaction until they see who the new arrival is.

Severus is used to inciting silence by now.

No one wants to upset the murderer of Dumbledore, just in case Severus gets the sudden urge to hex someone.

Imbeciles!

Shooting them a fierce glare, Severus descends towards the dungeons.

Upon entering his old room, he is assaulted by the smell of lavender and chamomile.

Good god, how does she do that?

Severus surveys the room and sees everything is just as he left it. Well, aside from the large gathering of dirty dishes on his dining room table.

Granger is asleep, curled up in his old bed. He can just barely make out the tip of her nose sticking up from under a mass of unmanageable hair.

She must be exhausted after everything she's been through.

Severus examines the cupboard of writing supplies, deciding he finds a sleeping Granger much more agreeable than an awake Granger.

Finding a folder missing, Severus smiles to himself.

"Accio folder eight!" he whispers.

A book floats off the top shelf of his bookcase, and then, levitating in mid air, the front cover opens to release the missing folder. The folder soars across the room towards him and lands gently in his outstretched hand as the book places itself neatly back on the shelf.

Foolish girl... as if I would conveniently leave you a way to harbor secrets from me.

Severus taps the folder with his wand; the cover flips open instantly allowing him access. Putting years of speed-reading to good use, Severus quickly peruses the lists in the folder.

The list of possible Horcruxes is quite good, he concedes. But it takes every ounce of his self-control not to snort at the content of the next list.

Honestly Granger, throwing knives? Brightest witch of your age indeed, he sneers inwardly.

The final list surprises him. It hadn't taken her long to question his allegiances. A small smile plays around his lips as he reads her reasons for thinking him good.

So she thinks his sullenness and forgiveness are enough to rival his murder of Dumbledore.

She's as foolish as the old man, and yet just as insightful.

Severus reseals the folder and places it back inside the book cover in which he found it. Deciding to turn in for the night, he makes a sweeping motion towards the door but stops suddenly.

He glances over his shoulder at the frizzy mass on his bed. Before he realizes what he's doing, Severus glides over to the small mattress and secures the sheet around Granger's sleeping form. Then, going a step even further, he conjures a warm, dark green comforter, securing that around her as well.

This time, as he leaves the room, he doesn't look back.

I saw you

Chapter 4 of 6

The Enlistment Ceremony

Author's Note: The characters are not mine, and quite honestly neither is the coherent grammar. Thanks to sempra for the beta and making this fit to be read!

HG

Hermione wakes feeling deliciously warm and secure. She snuggles further into her comforter, ready to let sleep reclaim her when she realizes that she is wearing shorts.

I never sleep in shorts... or without shoes.

Hermione shifts a little, wiggling her toes.

This sheet isn't as soft as mine either, she thinks sleepily.

Slowly, she starts to pull herself out of her dream state and is flooded with memories she'd rather not have.

Sighing heavily as a knot settles in her stomach, Hermione peeks one eye open. She is lying on her side facing the wall. Pulling the covers further around her, Hermione notices the addition of a green comforter that wasn't in the room the night before.

He must have brought it.

As soon as the thought enters her head, Hermione's skin prickles as if being watched.

Both eyes pop open wide and she sits straight up in bed, head jerking towards the rest of the room. Sure enough, sitting at the dining room table with a bored expression on his face is Professor Snape.

He nods at her and takes a sip of tea.

"Good morning," he says.

"M-morning," she croaks nervously.

"Are you hungry?" he asks quietly.

Hermione opens her mouth to say no, but her stomach growls, giving her away. She closes her mouth and gives him a small nod.

"Mazy," Snape calls.

CRACK!

"Yes, headmaster?" the elf asks, bowing.

"Please bring a fresh tea service for two, and bring Miss Granger something for breakfast," he tells the elf.

Mazy bows again and Disapparates.

Professor Snape pulls out his wand and conjures a second dining chair.

"Join me?" he asks conversationally.

Hermione eyes him suspiciously, distrusting this cordial version of her ex-professor more than an openly hostile one. Slowly, she pulls the covers back and lowers her feet to the cold stone floor.

"I've left you a pair of slippers next to the bed; I know how uncomfortable these floors can be." Snape tells her, gesturing to a pair of soft looking slip-ons.

Hermione quickly puts the slippers on and sighs, enjoying the instant warmth they provide. She stands up and takes a step towards the bathroom.

"Thank you," she tells him. "I have t-to..."

"Of course."

Hermione quickly rushes to the bathroom and shuts the door. She leans against it and allows herself to sink to the floor.

What is going on?

She can feel the panic rising in her chest and tries to steady her breathing.

First, he ties me up and attacks me, then he releases me and sends an elf to make sure I'm taken care of, and now he's giving me gifts and joining me for breakfast.

She tries to find some logical reason behind his actions but comes up with nothing other than the idea that he is trying to lead her into a sense of false security.

If he keeps this pattern up, next he'll be proposing marriage.

Hermione shudders at the thought of being bound to Severus Snape for life.

SS

Severus smiles wickedly to himself. He can practically hear her thoughts questioning her sanity and his motives through the bathroom door.

When the running water stops, Severus wipes off his grin and begins stirring sugar into his newly arrived tea.

Hermione opens the door and slowly makes her way to the seat across from Severus.

"Mazy brought you bacon, eggs, and toast while you were in the facilities," he says, gesturing to the heavily laden plate in front of her.

"Aren't you eating?" she inquires, picking up her fork.

"I'm not hungry."

Was that concern in her voice?

"Oh, it's just... I feel uncomfortable eating in front of others who are not." Her cheeks flush.

Severus sighs and stretches a hand out to her plate, plucking a piece of toast off the top. He bites into it and begins to chew exaggeratedly.

Her cheeks flush further, but she gives him a shy smile as she starts on her eggs.

Of course, prim little Gryffindor Princess, held captive by a Death Eater, and still worried about manners.

Severus pulls out a copy of the *Daily Prophet* and turns it strategically, leaving a certain article in plain view for Miss Granger.

It takes her less than ten seconds to notice it.

"Ron has taken the Dark Mark!" she exclaims, clamoring across the table to rip the paper from his hands, sending eggs flying in the process.

"Miss Granger! Control yourself!" he commands, pulling the paper out of her grasp.

Hermione slinks back into her seat.

"Sorry, sir. It just... surprised me, that's all," she whispers, knotting her hands as she stares into her lap.

"Indeed."

"Is it true, sir? About Ron?"

Severus eyes her hopelessness and immediately questions his plan to be honest with her.

He sighs heavily. "Yes, it's true. I was there."

Hermione's head shoots up, and she opens her mouth several times before actually speaking.

"But, sir, I thought one had to kill in order to seal the mark. Are you saying that... that Ron k-killed someone?"

Her wide brown eyes transfix him.

"He did," Severus answers quietly.

"S-show me," she whispers, still holding his gaze.

Before he even realizes what he's doing, Severus summons his Pensieve and is pulling the memory from his mind.

He stands and offers his hand to Hermione; she hesitates only milliseconds before taking it and standing by his side.

They take the plunge together.

Having already lived through the ceremony, Severus focuses his attention on watching Hermione.

She is still holding his hand, though Severus is certain she doesn't realize this. Her expressive eyes are trained on Ron, and her tears threaten to spill over.

They are standing inside the circle of Death Eaters about ten feet from Ron.

When the Dark Lord begins to speak, Hermione visibly cringes and takes an unconscious step towards Severus.

"Ronald Weasley, former friend of Harry Potter, relative of Muggle-lovers, has chosen to see sense. He stands here before you ready to renounce his past and accept his pureblood status. Does anyone have any reason why we should not accept him?" the Dark Lord asks.

A cloaked figure steps forward from the circle.

"My Lord, how can you be sure he can truly be trusted?" Bellatrix Lestrange asks.

Hermione presses herself firmly into Severus' side, trembling. He quickly recalls her telling him about Bellatrix torturing her at Malfoy Manor. Severus gives her hand a reassuring squeeze before he can stop himself. She looks up at him momentarily, but is quickly drawn back into the memory.

Looking for a distraction from the warmth crawling up from his belly, Severus focuses his attention on the memory as well.

"Are you pleased, Bella?" Voldemort questions sarcastically.

Bellatrix bows her head and retreats to her place in the circle just as Memory-Severus returns to his.

"Very well," Voldemort breathes, "let us continue."

Ron visibly straightens himself and stands proud.

"Do you, Ronald Bilius Weasley, swear to serve me and only me as your Master?" Voldemort asks.

"I do," says Ron.

"And do you also swear to uphold the virtues of our future untainted society?"

"I do."

"And do you swear to attempt to show your traitorous family the path to salvation... that is to say, the path to me?"

"I do."

Voldemort's eyes flash red in his excitement.

"Kneel before me," he commands.

Ron approaches slowly and kneels before Voldemort with his head bowed.

"Your arm," Voldemort commands.

Ron presents his arm, sleeve rolled up to his elbow. Voldemort grabs Ron's wrist with one hand and uses the other to firmly press his wand to the boy's forearm.

"Morsmordre da Carne!"

Instantly a lead-like substance snakes from the end of Voldemort's wand, twisting and writhing to form the Dark Mark. Ron gasps loudly as the material sinks into his skin.

"You must seal our agreement now, or a poison will be released and it will kill you," Voldemort reminds Ron.

Ron nods his head and stands. He then carefully returns to the center of the circle, to the body of Argus Filch. Ron points his wand at Filch.

"Eneivate!"

Filch comes awake, gasping and clawing at the ground.

"Why have you chosen this one?" Voldemort asks.

"This filthy squib has been posing for years as a respectable wizard, trying to use cheap gimmicks in place of magic to fool those around him. He is unworthy," Ron tells the ring of Death Eaters.

"You may finish him," Voldemort assures.

Ron once again points his wand at Filch. Filch stares up at him, eyes full of hatred and anger.

"I'll k-kill you!" he croaks.

"I think not," Ron tells the man. "Avada Kedavra!"

Green light fills the circle, and the old caretaker falls flat, struggling no more. A smattering of applause breaks out around the circle.

A strangled sob bursts forth from Hermione's throat, pulling Severus back to the present, so to speak. She is staring fixedly at Ron, who is now bowing for the crowd, a single tear trailing down her cheek.

"Let's go," Severus whispers, giving her fingers a tug.

She just nods once in response, and he pulls them from the memory and back into his bedchamber.

When they land softly next to the dining table, Hermione gives herself over to her despair and collapses in a heap on the floor.

Severus kneels down next her and gently places a hand on her shoulder.

"He... actually... did... it," she sobs.

"He had to, at that point," Severus tells her. "If he had taken the mark and refused to seal it with murder, a slow acting poison would have trickled through his veins, leading him to a slow and painful death."

Hermione's head shoots up, and she glares at him fiercely. Her skin is all blotchy and red from crying, but made beautiful by her intensity.

"Then he should have died," she enunciates.

For the first time, Severus starts to question whether he has misjudged Hermione's strength. He remembers thinking that she didn't have the strength to harm herself, but quickly reevaluates his opinion.

If she believed it was for the greater good, or that her sacrifice could save another, Granger could pose as a great danger to herself.

Hermione sighs heavily and drops her head once more.

Severus pulls her into his arms and stands up easily, barely registering her weight. She cringes slightly against his chest, but doesn't offer any protests.

He carries her over to the bed and places her gently on the comforter.

"What did you see?" she asks.

"What did I see?"

"When you looked in Ron's eyes, what did you see?" she presses.

This time it is Severus' turn to sigh.

"I saw you."

Willful Wishwork

Chapter 5 of 6

Severus explains what he meant in saying he saw Hermione in Ron's thoughts, and Hermione does what she does best: study.

Author's Note: J.K. Rowling owns all the best parts, and a special thanks to my beta, sempra, for being amazing!

HG

Hermione sits quietly, staring into Professor Snape's eyes as her mind attempts to sort out what she has just heard.

"What do you mean, you saw me?" she asks.

For once it is Snape who breaks eye contact first, perhaps unnerved by her vulnerable gaze.

I bet few people risk looking into his eyes so unguardedly.

He sighs.

"I went in looking for Weasley's motives for switching sides. His thoughts were tinged with a thirst for power and recognition, angry and fearful, but strongest was his jealousy, like an acidic film on his skin, burning and impossible to ignore," Snape replies.

"His jealousy of Harry?"

"Indeed."

"But... he was past that, I thought. He seemed to finally understand that Harry loathed all the attention and the burden. Ron *understood* Harry hated being famous," she trilled, trying to identify a flaw in Snape's assessment. "And what does this have to do with me?"

"It has everything to do with you, you foolish girl. Weasley didn't envy Harry his fame, he envied him owning your heart!" Snape sat down on the edge of the bed. "Weasley was in love with you."

Hermione's eyebrows practically disappear into her hairline as she looks at Snape in disbelief.

"Owning my...what? Harry and I were nothing more than friends!" she insists. Another thought hits her. "He was in love with me?"

Yes, Hermione, was, as in 'no longer' loves you.

"I believe he lost interest after finding you and Potter having sex."

If the statement itself weren't so shocking, Hermione might have managed to laugh at the uncomfortable tone Snape had slipped into at the mention of 'sex.'

"I didn't... I have not... we NEVER..." she splutters. "I never, and I mean *never*, had s-sex with Harry."

"Miss Granger, while your... virtue is of no concern of mine, I do not tolerate being lied to so vehemently. I saw Weasley's memory of you and the Chosen One having... being intimate."

Hermione falls silent at the look of disgust on Severus' face.

How can he seem so certain when he is obviously mistaken?

Unable to muster the nerve to protest any further, Hermione bows her head. Because of this, she doesn't notice Snape's fluid withdrawal of his wand or the subsequent waves.

Cuffs appear instantly around her hands, and she jumps, startled. Hermione shoots Snape a fierce, questioning glare, but her fire is replaced by fear when she sees the predatory gleam in his dark eyes.

Snape reaches out and places a hand on her shoulder, gently urging her to lie down. Hermione's breath hitches and stomach rolls, but she complies with eyes clenched shut.

Play nice... be good... don't fight.

Snape spreads out on the bed and places a tentative hand on the hem of her shirt. Ever so slowly he slips his hand under the fabric and traces gentle circles on her abdomen.

Don't move...

His hand reaches higher, and he traces the bottom curve of her breast with one finger.

Earn trust, Hermione.

She forces herself to remain as still as possible as his hand ventures even further up to cup her breast. Hermione opens her eyes and looks at Snape, attempting to show her acceptance of the situation but managing nothing more than to express her terror.

Something flashes in Snape's eyes, and he gives her breast a quick squeeze, causing her to squirm and gasp with discomfort. Hermione can feel a single tear roll down her face and turns her head away from him. Immediately his lips descend on her exposed neck. After a quick kiss and a faint nibble, Snape bites down hard, just stopping short of breaking skin.

She lets out a quiet pant, struggling to regulate her breathing and pounding heart.

The pain from her neck begins to ease. A sudden draft makes her eyes pop open and her head whipped around towards him.

Snape is standing over her, giving her an unreadable look before turning on his heel and stalking away. At the door he turns to face her once more.

"Call Mazy if you require anything," he tells her coolly.

Then, banishing her cuffs, he leaves.

SS

After leaving, Severus uses a secret entrance behind a portrait of a famous Quidditch player Severus never bothers to remember to access his private laboratory. He could have entered through his old rooms, but he doesn't want Hermione to know he is close by.

Damn that girl...

He paces back and forth around his workspace, attempting to erase her reactions from his memory: her shock, anger, tears, fear, and her acceptance.

Unfortunately, without her reactions to think about, he is left only with his own.

Her skin is so smooth, body so soft... almost willing. But no, he reminds himself, not willing, just... compliant.

He is furious with himself for the twinge of disappointment in his gut, and for that other twinge a bit lower. Severus storms to his potion cupboard and begins to rear ingredients from the shelves. Sadly, the infirmatory potions needing restocking are ones Severus could brew blindfolded and offer no respite from his own thoughts.

HG

Maybe his plan is to drive me crazy little by little.

Like that will work.

Well, you are talking to yourself an awful lot... and replying.

Hermione plops down on a dining chair and crosses her arms angrily in way her father would declare 'uncontrollably pouty.'

I'm not pouting, she declares silently.

Okay, fine. You're not pouting... but you are talking to yourself again.

Huffing, which even she can't deny is pouty, Hermione stands up and calls for Mazy.

CRACK!

"How can I be helping you, Missy?" Mazy asks.

"Please, enough with the 'Missy;' my name is Hermione."

"I is sorry, Missy Hermione; what services can I be helping with?" Mazy bows low apologetically.

"I'm done with the breakfast dishes," Hermione tells her. "Um, and I need a clock."

Mazy wrings the bottom of her toga and bites her lower lip.

"Mazy is not sure..."

"What's the worst I could do with a clock? I just need a small one so I can get on a regular sleep schedule. It would please the Headmaster if I were awake for once when he comes to visit," she urges.

Without answering her, the little elf snaps away the dishes and quickly follows in the same manner of exit. Hermione barely lets out half of a sigh when Mazy reappears, holding out a small pocket watch. Hermione takes it excitedly and squeezes the elf's hand in gratitude.

"Thank you, Mazy!" she cries.

"Anything else I can get you, Missy Hermione?"

"Do you know if the Headmaster plans on joining me for any more meals today?"

The elf nods.

"He is telling Mazy he is going to be having a late supper here with you, around 8."

"Alright, thank you, Mazy. Oh! One more thing, could you possibly warn me if the Headmaster heads here for an unexpected visit? Just so I have a chance to make myself decent," Hermione assures her.

Mazy is quiet for a long while, and Hermione almost loses hope.

"It would be improper for Missy to be walked in on by a male not Missy's husband. And that is being bad for Hogwarts so is also being bad reflection of Mazy. I will put a detector charm on Missy's door. It dings if you is having a visitor," Mazy explains.

Without giving her a chance to respond, Mazy Disapparates, leaving Hermione feeling happy for the first time in a while.

Yes!

Smiling, Hermione rushes to the bookshelf and pulls out *Willful Wish-Work for the Wandless*, then she carefully arranges the books to look as if none are missing. Happy with her work, she retreats to the bathroom and locks the door. After a quick perusal of the book, Hermione climbs into the empty bathtub, placing the pocket watch on the ledge.

Ooh, the charm works even without water.

Leaning back into the cushy marble, she opens the book. The first chapter is entitled "Lightening the Dark and Shadowing the Light."

Lumos and Nox are the most fundamental spells in a witch's or wizard's spell cache. If one ever finds oneself in a situation without a wand, these spells are likely to be helpful, either by lighting the way or concealing one's escape.

A wand is just an extension of the witch or wizard; the magic flows from the witch or wizard and into the wand, which allows the magic to be more easily directed. With proper practice and concentration, one can control the flow of one's magic and perform many different spells.

To begin, chant the following phrase: "My magic is mine to direct."

Hermione chants.

Concentration is key. Wandless magic has a similar technique to Apparation and requires much determination. Now, to attempt wandless magic, repeat the chant in your head (this is a concentration tool and will become unnecessary as you progress), concentrate on what you wish to do and then say the spell aloud, "Nox!"

Hermione recites the chant over and over again in her head and concentrates on the bathroom light extinguishing. She takes a deep breath...

"Nox!"

Nothing happens.

"Damn it."

She closes her eyes and starts the concentration ritual all over again.

SS

After having brewed several batches of Pepper-up Potion, Calming Draught, and Blood-Replenishing Potion, Severus feels calmer and more in control of his thoughts.

Luckily, he thinks as his arm begins to burn.

* * * * *

"At your service, my Lord." Severus bows.

"Rise, Severus," Voldemort hisses. "I have not yet received a memory today; I was worried your Mudblood had gotten the better of you."

Severus looks into Voldemort's eyes.

"Never, my Lord. I was merely caught up in interrogating her. I have discovered something important about some of your 'loyal' followers."

"Sshow me."

Severus focuses on Hermione's account of the trio's visit to Malfoy Manor. Voldemort is quick and brutal in his search.

"Betrayers!" Voldemort cries, pulling from Severus' mind.

"I am sorry to bring you such unwelcome news, my Lord."

"I know, my most faithful servant. I will deal with the Malfoys and my dear Bellatrix soon, but first tell me more of your relationship with the Mudblood," Voldemort demands.

"I would not call it a relationship... That implies she is a person," Severus contradicts boldly.

Voldemort cackles loudly.

"Ah, Severus, always so adept at answering without *truly* answering. Your actions as of late please me, and therefore I am willing to offer you a compromise."

"A compromise, my Lord?"

"I know you are a very private man, and I know having someone watching your sexual exploits bothers you deeply. So as a sign of my faith in you, I will allow you a reprieve... of sorts."

Severus raises a questioning eyebrow.

HG

After more failed attempts than she'd care to admit, Hermione finally manages to wandlessly extinguish the bathroom lights. She is so stunned, she jumps and drops the book in the tub.

Taking a calming breath, she concentrates as hard as she can.

"Lumos!"

The lights flicker briefly and almost sputter out, but after another second's hesitation, they come on as if never interrupted.

Hermione smiles brilliantly and jumps to her feet only to sit back on the ledge of the bathtub a moment later as a wave of dizziness hits her. Her hand brushes the pocket watch as she grasps the ledge to steady herself. After a few deep breaths, she picks up the watch.

7:45 p.m.

"Shit..."

Realizing she's spent several hours huddled in the bathroom attempting very complicated magic without eating anything, she chides herself, *Smart choices, Granger.*

Carefully, she stands up and makes her way out of the bathroom. Gaining her bearings, she quickly puts the book back and places the watch under her pillow. She then runs to the bathroom to check her reflection in the mirror. Just as she has feared, her skin has a pale sickly pallor, a clear sign of her drained magical energy.

Hermione splashes cold water into her face and pinches her cheeks. A little color reappears just as the room emits a faint 'ding.' Casually Hermione exits the bathroom and spots Snape standing by the door, scoping the room.

"There you are," he says.

"Where else would I be?" she mutters.

"I suppose you are ready for dinner?" Snape asks. Not waiting for an answer, he continues, "Mazy, dinner."

The dining table instantly sprouts food, mimicking the Great Hall. Snape gestures for Hermione to sit and quickly follows suit.

This time, too hungry to wait, Hermione begins eating immediately, not even noticing what is on her plate. After demolishing more than half of her meal in a very unladylike

fashion, Hermione slows her fork and takes smaller bites.

"You seem much calmer than earlier," he notes coolly, his demeanor reminiscent of the vile Potions master from her school days.

Hermione pauses mid-bite and realizes that she hasn't thought about Ron taking the Dark Mark or Snape's accusation since he kissed her that morning.

She sets her fork down and takes a contemplative sip from her goblet.

Her world starts to go fuzzy, the edges blurring, and she has one last distinguishable thought before everything fades to black. *Maybe that was the point. He kissed me to distract me.*

SS

That took bloody long enough; I thought I'd have to propose a toast.

Severus stood up from the table and, for the second time of the day, gathered Hermione in his arms and carried her to bed. He laid her flat and pulled out his wand.

The Dark Lord had instructed him to use a special spell to report his activities with the girl. All he had to do was cast it, and an aura would appear around her, revealing her latest sexual exploits, then Severus would just send a memory of the spell cast to the Dark Lord.

Although he knows what to expect, he reviews once more...

White Virgin

Green Sexually Active

He aims his wand.

"Revelio actes sexuals!"

An aura begins to build slowly around her. It turns red.

Rape.

The Boy Who Lost

Chapter 6 of 6

Severus works to placate the Dark Lord, and Hermione receives some very disturbing news.

Disclaimer: Sadly, they are not mine.

SS

Rape.

Severus stares intently at the red glow emitting from around Hermione's sleeping form, silently berating himself for his earlier insensitivity.

The noble Potter, even worse than his despicable father... Not even taking the time to coerce the poor girl, instead just stealing what he wants.

Sighing heavily Severus begins to pace back and forth, trying to determine the best course of action. He is angry at himself for all the times he touched Hermione inappropriately and he hoped she would be able to easily forget it. Each of his caresses and grazes must have felt like sand in an open wound.

It is no wonder she held such fear in her eyes...

He snorts.

Yes, it was all because of this, not because you are a Death Eater holding her captive. I'm sure that had she not been raped, she would be begging to come to your bed.

Severus shakes his head as if that will clear the thoughts he doesn't wish to have. It doesn't work, and he is left wondering if he truly wants her to desire him.

Being a man quite capable of multitasking, Severus is able to muse silently over the recently discovered question while he sets about his newly decided task. He flicks his wand and watches as Hermione's clothes transform from boxers and a button down shirt into a silky green peignoir.

Another flick adds a few tears to the fabric and cut to Hermione's lip. She doesn't feel it, though, while being so far under sedation.

Severus reaches out and rumples the blankets beneath her, and then noticing the red glow has faded, he casts the spell again.

"Revelio actes sexuals!"

The glow returns and Severus concentrates hard on the scene before him, wanting it to be a clear memory. When he is positive it is etched permanently in his mind, he moves on transforming the peignoir into a black bra and panty set. He slightly heals the cut on her lip, making it look older and then adds what looks like red welts to her upper arms. He concentrates again.

Severus continues this for almost forty-five minutes, finally finishing with Hermione lying face down, back covered in fingernail scratches, and wearing nothing more than a hiked up pleated skirt and a Slytherin tie around her neck.

He makes enough memories to keep the Dark Lord happy for two weeks and to keep Severus feeling guilty for a lifetime. He doesn't feel guilty about *making* the memories;

after all, they are going to protect her as much as they will him. But he does feel guilty about his reaction to seeing her in those highly revealing outfits.

He runs his wand down her back removing any signs of the scratches and then gently turns her back over. He tries extremely hard not to look at her exposed breasts and fails. Severus quickly transforms her clothes back to normal and erases all the other bruises. He kneels beside her and places a hand on her cheek.

"I'm sorry."

Hermione shifts at his touch and turns her face further towards his hand. Severus sighs and wishes he could be the comfort her sleeping form mistakes him for.

HG

"Missy? Missy Hermione? It is being time for breakfast."

Hermione shifts groggily and opens her eyes, finding herself face to face with a very worried house-elf.

"Ah! Mazy, you frightened me." Hermione gasps.

"I is sorry, missy. That not being Mazy's intention. I was just wanting to inform you breakfast is ready."

Hermione sits up in bed and looks around, trying to recall going to sleep.

The last thing I remember is having dinner with Professor Snape... Shit! I must have fallen asleep because of how much I was pushing myself yesterday practicing wandless magic. I bet he is furious.

Hermione bites her lower lip and looks down at the nervous little elf next to the bed. Mazy is wringing the hem of her toga worriedly, watching Hermione for any signs of anger.

"Don't worry, Mazy, I know you didn't mean to scare me."

"Oh no," Mazy exclaims, letting out a sigh of relief. "I is just telling you that..."

"Breakfast is ready."

Mazy nods and rushes over to the table.

Hermione quickly swings out of bed and slides into her slippers. After a quick trip to the loo she follows the delicious smell of sausage and potatoes to the table.

"Is Professor Snape joining me this morning?" she asks, noticing the table set for two.

"He will be down shortly."

He must not be too angry then...

Hermione busies herself by preparing her tea just the way she likes it, with a dash of milk and two lumps of sugar. The familiar actions soothe her nerves slightly, and she finds herself less agitated when the room dings, notifying her of her visitor.

Snape sweeps in, morning paper tucked under his arm, and nods curtly at her as he takes his seat.

"Good morning, sir," Hermione says sheepishly while staring down at her plate.

"Morning. I trust you slept well?"

"I am so sorry, Professor," she rushes to say, looking up at him. "I did not mean to fall asleep in the middle of dinner last night."

Snape arches an eyebrow at her and picks up his cup of tea. After a long sip and a pointed look he finally responds.

"Just don't let it happen again. My time happens to be very valuable, and I have many other ways I could be spending my time aside from entertaining a captive Muggle-born." His voice is the cool condescending tone Hermione is used to from class.

Hermione feels her cheeks flush and finds herself too angry to hold her tongue.

"I am oh-so-sorry to encroach on your *very valuable* time," she huffs sarcastically. "Here's an idea: let me out of this miserable dungeon, and you'll no longer have to *entertain* me."

Snape's eyes flash.

"Or perhaps," he offers, "I could leave you down here to starve and rot."

Hermione chooses not to respond and instead stares intently at her plate as she picks at breakfast.

Great work on being nice, she chides herself.

Oh shut up.

Professor Snape is the first one to break the silence.

"I brought you the *Prophet*. There is an article I think you'll be particularly interested in." He slides the paper across the table.

Unable to control her curiosity, Hermione reaches out to take the paper. It doesn't take long for her to find the article.

Oh no.

Overwhelmed, tears start streaming down her face uncontrollably. On the front page is the headline "THE BOY WHO LOST" stamped over a sickening image of Harry's lifeless body on display in a glass coffin near the Great Lake. Hermione tries to read the article but only manages to barely skim it. Bits and pieces stick out.

The Dark Lord proclaims triumph...

Worthless teenager no match...

No more human shields could protect him...

But by far the worst are the closing lines: *"Potter's body will remain on display permanently. His decomposition will be proof that he was no more than a foolish boy with a large amount of dimwitted followers willing to die protecting him."*

Hermione throws the paper onto the table.

"I'm going to be sick," she gasps, getting up to rush to the bathroom.

SS

Sounds of the girl emptying her stomach echo out of the bathroom, putting Severus off his breakfast.

Nice work, he sarcastically congratulates himself.

If he were to admit it, Severus finds her response rather confusing. He had assumed seeing the humiliating fate of her rapist would bring her peace.

He sighs loudly, snatching the paper from the table and incinerating it with his wand.

Leave it to Granger to feel pity for those undeserving of it. She did after all, momentarily, consider your innocence.

Slow, careful footsteps alert Severus to her return.

"Excuse me, I am...erm...sorry, about that display," she offers, looking anywhere but at him with her bloodshot eyes.

He can tell from the expression on her tearstained face that she is moments from another "display."

"Despite all of his... *faults*," Severus grinds out, "you did, for whatever reason, view Potter as a... friend. Your response is understandable."

Granger glances up at him.

"However," he stresses, "I will not tolerate these outbursts so graciously in the future. If you expect me to keep bringing you news, you must learn to control yourself."

She remains silent.

"Do you understand me?" he asks.

"Yes, sir," she answers quietly, returning her gaze to the floor.

"Good. Seeing as I no longer have an appetite, I'll be on my way. I will see you at dinner."

Then, without giving her even the slightest chance to respond, Severus stalks out.

Author's Note: Please, please, please forgive the ridiculous amount of time it has been since my last update! A lot has happened to keep me away. My husband and I started trying to get pregnant around the last update, and we were very quickly successful. My pregnancy was a very rough one which kept me in bed most of the time, feeling sick. Then I had my son, and he has been keeping me very busy the last 8 months. The next five chapters are already written and will be up very soon. Please review and let me know what you think!