

Nevermore

by Pearle

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A response to SouthernWitch69's chapter challenge. A mystery complete in eight chapters. Rating for later chapters. HPB compliant.

Chapter 8 – Epilogue – Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore"

A bit more information about Severus and Hermione, and a glimpse into the future.

This story is now complete.

Birds of a Feather Flock Together

Chapter 1 of 8

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## Chapter 1 Birds of a Feather Flock Together

"Snape, don't you think you should wait for the rest of the team to show up? You don't know what type of Dark Magic that mirror could contain." Harry glanced nervously at the ornate frame surrounding the dusty mirror. He'd had enough experience with the Mirror of Erised to know that even the most innocent-looking items could be dangerous.

"Of course it has Dark Magic. Isn't that why you called me? I know better than to fool with the ruddy thing. I can just make out a few of these runes." Severus glared at the young man, his tone turning snide. **"Now wait quietly, Potter, I need to examine this interesting mirror."**

Before Harry could answer, a blinding flash of red light engulfed the Professor. In front of his very eyes, the man disappeared.

"Snape! Snape?" Harry stared openmouthed. The Professor was gone; in his place stood a large black raven, his coal black eyes glaring defiantly at Harry. The bird's claw brushed against Snape's wand lying uselessly on the ground. "Snape?"

Harry watched horrified as the bird bobbed his head yes in answer to the question. "That's you, Snape, isn't it?"

The bird cawed raucously, his tone annoyed, as he appeared to be taking the boy who lived to task.

"Oh great. Wonderful, just wonderful. I told you to wait, but no, you had to prove you know more than anyone else. Just what am I supposed to tell Hermione? 'You know how you were wondering what to get Snape for his birthday? Unfortunately, your husband's been turned into a raven. How does a nice bag of sunflower seeds sound?' She's just going to love this."

The raven bobbed his head rapidly, pecking Harry's foot sharply before flying gracefully around the room. He circled around, coming in low to land on the top of the ornate frame, his black feathers shining oddly in the dim light of the chamber.

"Ouch! Stop that. It's not my fault you turned into a bird. I told you to wait." Harry rubbed his foot, desperately hoping they could find a way to turn him back quickly. Keeping one eye on the bird, he picked up the discarded wand and pocketed it.

Several cracks echoed in the outer hallway as the rest of Harry's team showed up.

"Wotcher, Harry. What do you have for us tonight?" Tonks moved toward Harry's side, stopping abruptly as the raven flapped his wings.

Bill Weasley nodded to Tonks as he greeted Harry. "Oi, Harry. Isn't Severus here yet? If this thing is really cursed with Dark Magic, I would much rather have him here to tell us how to break it. I may be good with curses, but Snape knows the Dark Arts better than anyone."

Bill, too, stopped some distance away from the mirror, thinking the bird sitting on it did not appear friendly. He had no desire to be pecked or clawed, considering the wicked curve to the talons currently bent around the top edge of the mirror. "Harry, why's there a raven on the mirror?"

The final member of the group, Thomas, a young wizard dressed in Muggle clothing, stood quietly to the side. "Harry, what's the bird doing here?"

Harry sighed. He had been working for the Ministry of Magic since he'd defeated Voldemort in what should have been his final year at Hogwarts. The Ministry had allowed him to form a new division, handpicking those he wished to have working with him. Harry's team was charged with investigating and defusing the Dark objects found after the remaining Death Eaters had fled their homes: a task that had kept them busy the last few years.

With a nod of his head, Harry gestured toward the raven. "The bird is... Snape." While not an official part of his team, Snape was often called upon to help neutralise the objects they investigated. The man was an expert in the area of Dark Magic. Much to Harry's annoyance, a hidden Pensieve, left with Dumbledore's Secret Keeper, undeniably proclaimed Snape's innocence, keeping him out of Azkaban by the skin of his teeth. To add insult to injury, Hermione declared feelings for the git. Even worse, Snape returned them.

Bill stared at him. "I must not've heard you right. I thought you said the bird was Snape."

"Yeah, that's what I said. I told him to wait, but no, he knows better than anyone else." Harry shot a harsh glare in the raven's direction. "And don't you dare peck me again."

The bird flapped his wings in Harry's direction, his black eyes shining angrily, but he didn't move.

"What happened? Why is he a bird?" Tonks tentatively put her hand out, seemingly mesmerised by the raven.

"I wouldn't do that, if I were you. He doesn't seem too happy at the moment." Harry quickly pulled her hand back. The Potions master shunned human contact, normally; he didn't think this new form would encourage touching any more than his human form did. "We were standing here, examining the mirror. Snape thought he could translate some of the runes around the edge. I'm not sure if he touched it or not, but I thought I heard him mumble something just before a red light shot out of the mirror. One minute he was standing there; the next minute, he was gone and the bird was there."

Tonks peered at the raven. "Professor?"

"Harry, what do we tell Hermione?" Bill was still staring at the raven, shaking his head.

"I don't know. I was sort of hoping we could figure out how to turn him back before she found out."

"How?"

"I haven't figured that part out yet."

"Professor Snape?" Thomas asked quietly.

The raven cawed loudly, his talons tightening on the mirror frame, flapping his wings furiously in Harry's direction.

"What d'you want from me? I told you not to touch the mirror. As soon as we can figure out what type of curse was on it, we can figure a way to change you back." Harry stood almost nose to beak with the bird, each glaring at the other.

"Can you understand him?" Bill asked in surprise.

"No, but he's not hard to figure out when he's angry."

Tonks circled around the back of the mirror. "Well, it has the same markings on the other side, too. First things first, shouldn't we find out what the mirror says?"

Harry nodded in agreement. "As much as I hate to say this, I think we have to take him home. Snape's personal library contains some rare books on Dark curses. I have a feeling we may find what we need to change him back, or at least how to decipher the mirror, there."

He eyed the raven. "You want to fly there yourself, or you want me to Apparate us there? Though I'm warning you, you dig those talons into my shoulder and I'll Bind you so fast you won't know what hit you."

The raven made a sound like a chuckle before gracefully flying into the air. He circled the group, slowing his decent before landing lightly on Harry's shoulder, his talons not even creasing the fabric of Harry's robe.

"Fine. All right, everyone. Ready? See you at Hogwarts."

Three cracks echoed almost simultaneously, and they were gone.

"Ready, Snape? Watch those talons." Harry looked at the raven. What the hell was he going to tell Hermione?

TBC

**Sorcerer's Stone** (Chapter 17 last chapter, used instead)

**"Now wait quietly, Potter, I need to examine this interesting mirror."**

A/N: The story is complete in eight chapters. Chapters six and seven are both alternate endings to the story. Chapter eight is an epilogue. I plan to post a chapter a day, posting chapters six and seven at the same time.

A grateful thank you to my beta, Nakhsh, for her corrections, suggestions, and never-ending supply of commas, she is truly the best of the best. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still mine.

Let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are most welcome.

Pearle

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#### SW69 HP Chapter Challenge Rules:

This has been influenced by Doomspark's 394 Challenge. The stories created from that have been amazing, so let's have a try again. I hope this doesn't sound complicated. I'll try my best to explain (A big thanks to NSS for the help with the wording).

Pairings? Hermione / Severus

1. Take the month and day of your numerical birth date and add them together(**06+29=35**)
2. Divide the sum by 2 to get a second number. Round all half numbers up to the higher number(**35/2=17.5 or 18**)
3. Open up *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's (Philosopher's) Stone* and use your SECOND number to figure out what chapter to open up to.
4. Use your FIRST number to find the sentence to use.(**Chapter 18, line 35**)
5. The first chapter should include that sentence.

**\*\*Note\*\*** In the case of an odd or two short sentence, you may use the one immediately before or after (include your sentence with it). I won't be going behind you to see if you have the correct quotes. If you'd like to include a cool sentence before or after your designated sentence, please do so. It's all about fun.

6. Continue the process with *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* following the same formula and the second chapter will be formed around this sentence.
7. Continue with PoA, GoF, OotP, and HBP in the same manner and in this order.

\*Each chapter must be 1000-2000 words long. No shorter and no longer\*

## Dr. Dolittle, Where Are You When We Need You?

*Chapter 2 of 8*

Hermione learns Severus's fate. Harry and his team attempt to return Severus to human form.

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Chapter 2 Dr. Dolittle, Where Are You When We Need You?

Tonks, Bill, and Thomas arrived together at the Apparition point, followed within minutes by Harry and the raven. He nodded silently to the group as they made their way to the main entrance. The castle seemed deserted as the odd group headed down to the dungeons, encountering no one on the way.

They knocked before a tapestry depicting a snake entwined around a cauldron, revealing the entrance to Snape's chambers. A smiling Hermione let the group in.

"Harry, it's good to see you, but what are you doing here?" Hermione looked over the group. "Where's Severus? Didn't he meet you?"

The raven lifted off his shoulder and headed for the bookcases. Harry nodded to Bill and Thomas to follow him before turning back to Hermione. "You might want to sit down."

"Harry, why is there a raven pulling books out of my bookcases? Where is Severus?" Hermione watched as the raven hooked several books with his beak, pulling each in succession off the shelves. Bill and Thomas picked up the heavy tomes as they fell to the floor.

"Hermione, the raven is Snape."

"Pardon me?" Hermione looked at him as if he had just grown another head. "What are you talking about?"

Harry gestured to the raven now hopping back and forth between Bill and Thomas on the desk in the corner. The books the raven had chosen were open before the wizards, each trying to figure out why the bird had chosen those particular volumes. He sighed heavily. "Something went wrong with the mirror we were inspecting. It turned Snape into a raven"

"You're telling me that bird is my husband?"

Tonks patted Hermione's shoulder awkwardly. "Was a raven Severus's Animagus form?"

Harry straightened up at Tonk's question. Animagus... of course. As far as he knew, Snape was not an Animagus, but maybe the mirror forced him to transform, anyway. "Good thinking, Tonks. Hermione?"

"Severus wasn't an Animagus."

"That's okay, maybe the mirror forced some sort of transformation. Tonks, go find Professor McGonagall. She might be able to tell us more about how to transform him back."

"Gotcha, Harry." Tonks took off at a run for the Headmistress's office.

Hermione trailed quietly behind Harry as he walked over to the group in the corner. "Any luck?"

Bill shook his head. "This book on potions listed antidotes to some of the faster-acting poisons, but it really has nothing to do with transforming into an animal."

Harry nodded. "Thomas? Anything?"

"I'm not sure. This most definitely lists some pretty Dark Magic. I'm just not sure if it applies or not"

"All right, just keep trying."

Hermione peered into the raven's black eyes. "Severus?" The bird regarded the witch for a minute before bobbing its head.

"Oh, my God!"

Three sets of eyes met over her head. "Uhm, Hermione, why don't we let them get on with their work? I'm hoping we can come up with an answer soon and change him back." Harry guided the shocked witch to the sofa. He called through the Floo Network to the kitchens and asked tea to be sent down to them. As an afterthought, he asked the elves to add some chocolate biscuits, as well.

"My husband is a bird." Hermione sat on the edge of the sofa, one hand clutching the arm for dear life as she tried to make sense of the situation. Hysterical laughter bubbled up. "You always said he was the bat of the dungeon. I guess he proved you wrong there, Harry." Absentmindedly, she accepted the tea and plate of biscuits Harry handed her. "I never got a chance to tell him...Oh, my God. Harry, he can't be a bird. I never got to tell him I'm pregnant!"

Hermione rushed back to the desk. "Severus, you change back this minute. No child of mine is going to have a raven for a father. D'you hear me? I'm pregnant. Stop this foolishness and change back."

Bill gently led Hermione back to the sofa. "Hermione, I don't think he can just change back. I'm pretty sure he wouldn't've stayed a raven all this time if he knew how to change back."

Hermione nodded in agreement. Her husband was a raven.

"Hermione?" Minerva surveyed the young woman she had come to think of as her daughter. "Hermione, are you all right, dear?" When Hermione had failed to answer her knock, Minerva had exercised her Headmistress privileges and lowered the wards. The sight of the young witch's tear-streaked face unnerved the stoic woman.

"Minerva, he's a bird. A bloody bird."

"Uh, Tonks, could you sit with Hermione? Minerva, over here." Harry waved at the Headmistress.

Minerva patted the witch's shoulder and joined the group gathered around the desk. Tonks had explained the unusual situation to her on the way to the Snapes's chambers. She raised one well-manicured brow as she eyed the raven. "Severus? Is that you?"

The raven cawed loudly, before bobbing its head.

"Harry, I think maybe one of these three books might hold the answer." Bill closed the books, showing Minerva the titles of the thick tomes *Advanced Rune Translation*, *The Dark Arts Outsmarted*, and *Unleash the Animal In You*.

"Where did you get those, Mr Weasley?"

"Snape pointed them out to us, along with these other books, but they don't seem to have any information we can use. Maybe you can find something." Bill looked toward the sofa. Tonks was sitting on the floor talking quietly to Hermione. The young witch was curled up, fresh tears shining on her face. He sincerely hoped they would be able to change Snape back tonight, for Hermione's sake, if nothing else.

"Severus pointed them out?" Minerva didn't bother to hide the scepticism in her voice.

Thomas nodded. "He pulled them out of the bookcases with his beak. Pretty smart, huh?"

Minerva stood stiffly. **"Of course, he was probably the most brilliant student Hogwarts has ever seen. Why should that change now? Exactly what happened, Mr Potter? Leave no detail out."** Minerva conjured a chair for herself and settled in to hear the details.

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"...and then the others showed up." Harry had started from the beginning, when his department had been first notified of the mirror, answering Minerva's questions as he went. "We're kinda of the theory that the mirror forced a transformation, even if he isn't an Animagus."

"And where is this mirror now? Did you copy the runes along the frame?"

"No, we didn't. I guess I wasn't thinking too clearly. I was more concerned with what I was going to tell Hermione. The mirror is still in the basement at Malfoy Manor. I'll go and copy the runes. I want to lock down the room, anyway. I'd rather not have to deal with any more transformations tonight." Harry stood to go.

"Harry? You're leaving?"

Hermione's soft voice cut him to the quick. While he might not like the git, he felt for Hermione. "I'll be right back. I need to lock down the mirror."

Her tearful nod broke his heart and strengthened his resolve to return Snape to human form as quickly as possible.

TBC

Chamber of Secrets

"Of course, he was probably the most brilliant student Hogwarts has ever seen."

A/N: For more information on runes and a translator that will translate your name into runic symbols go to <http://www.sunnyway.com/runes/>.

Unleash the Animal In You is a title of my own creation. For anyone interested, I will be signing copies of the aforementioned book at Flourish and Botts on the 30th of this month.

From The HP Lexicon-

Advanced Rune Translation - Hermione was reading a copy of this after her pre-sixth-year trip to Diagon Alley; presumably it is one of the N.E.W.T.-level Ancient Runes textbooks, but this is not stated explicitly.

The Dark Arts Outsmarted - The Room of Requirement contained a copy of this book during the DA's first meeting there.

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Settling In For The Night

Chapter 3 of 8

Harry and his team break for the night. Hermione recalls the beginning of her relationship with Severus. Annoyed, Severus makes his feelings known.

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## Chapter 3 Settling In For The Night

Night fell, and with it did not come the answers Harry had hoped for. The raven had given up helping them. It circled the room a few times before coming to land on the back of the sofa next to Hermione.

"Stretching your wings, dear?" Hermione cast a critical eye at the bird. "Well, a raven makes sense. Black always was your colour."

Tonks giggled. "I don't think I could picture the Professor in anything but black. Could you imagine if he'd turned into a blue jay or a robin?"

Hermione laughed along with the witch. "I'm sure he would have avoided turning into a cardinal, too. Too close to Gryffindor red."

The bird cawed loudly and flapped its wings with indignation.

"I'm sorry, Severus. I wasn't laughing at you, but this whole situation has unnerved me. How could you be so bloody stupid as to turn yourself into a bird?" Hermione's voice rose shrilly as she yelled at the raven.

The bird, in turn, cawed harshly at the witch.

"Don't you take that tone with me! I'm not the berk that turned himself into a bird. What happens if they can't change you back? Did you ever think of that?" The bird fell silent, dropping his head rather than look at Hermione. "Oh, Severus, what if they can't change you back?"

"It's getting rather late. Why don't we all take a break, I believe we can use one. I'll Floo the kitchen for some sandwiches. Don't worry, dear, we'll find the answer." Minerva smiled at the distraught witch.

"Severus needs something to eat, too."

"Yes, of course, I'll have the elves send up some nice rare roast beef. That should set him to rights."

"Maybe Remus can shed some light on what happened. He was the Defence Against the Dark Arts instructor; not only that, he transforms every month into a wolf. Any chance you know where he is, Harry?" Tonks helped herself to a sandwich and glass of pumpkin juice. She was surprised to find she was famished, but then they had missed lunch in all the excitement.

"That thought crossed my mind, too." Harry grinned crookedly. "Shouldn't you know where he is better than me?"

"I'm not the one who sent him out on his last assignment."

"Right, well, he should be checking in at the Ministry soon, then."

An uneasy silence fell as they watched the raven dig into the plate of roast beef Hermione had placed before him.

"Take it easy. I would rather you didn't choke on that before they get the chance to turn you back."

The bird looked up, his black eyes glittering angrily. He cawed loudly before returning to his meal.

Crookshanks surveyed the bird from his post on the hearth. The half-Kneazle had spent the day wandering around the castle, only to return home and find a strange bird roosting near his mistress. While he hadn't detected any harmful intent from the strange bird, the cat thought he should keep an eye on the raven anyway.

Hermione sat heavily in one of the two chairs facing the fireplace, wrapping her arms around her as she shuddered. "What if you can't turn him back?" she asked softly.

"We'll figure it out, Hermione. I promise. It may take some time, but *wewill* figure it out."

The group returned to the far side of the room, gathering around the desk again.

Hermione watched the raven finish his meal. He ate ravenously, tearing viciously into the rare beef. When the plate was picked clean, he glided over to the other chair and perched on the arm. He met the witch's stare with a slight nod before turning to the task of grooming his claws and feathers.

A single tear made its way down the young woman's cheek as she watched the raven perform his ablutions.

Her husband was a bird.

It was sometime later, aroused from her stupor, that Hermione became aware of the group breaking up.

"Hermione, it's rather late. I really think we should stop and get some rest. Tackle this in the morning when we're all fresh and Remus can join us. I'm sure by this time tomorrow you'll have Snape back, surly as ever." Harry couldn't help but flinch at the haunted look in his friend's eyes. While he thought Snape was entirely responsible for the situation he had gotten himself into, he still felt he should shoulder some of the burden himself. Snape would not have been at the Manor if he hadn't called him. "By tomorrow, all this will be a bad memory. You'll see."

"If you like, Potter, I can have the elves prepare guest rooms here in the castle, or you may accompany me to my office and use the Floo if you wish to return to the Ministry." Minerva tried to look everywhere but at the raven and failed miserably. She could just imagine Severus's anger when he was restored to human form.

"Thank you, but I think I'd rather return home tonight. Really, there's no reason I can't Apparate."

"If you're tired..."

"I'm fine. Tonks, Bill, Thomas?" It was generally agreed they would all go home and return to the Snapes's quarters at nine the following morning.

"Uhm, you, ah, might want to leave the window open tonight. I know he's Snape and all, but he still is a... well, physically, he's still a bird." Harry blushed, not sure his meaning was clear.

The raven cawed loudly, glaring at Harry.

"Right, well, time to go," Harry stammered awkwardly.

"Very well, I'll walk you to the main entrance. Hermione, if there's anything you need, just call me. I'll leave the Floo connection open between our quarters."

"Thank you, Minerva, we'll be fine. I'll see you all tomorrow." Hermione hugged each as they left, nodding graciously as they assured her they would find a way to turn her husband back into a human being. The raven cawed loudly to the chorus of goodbyes sent his way.

Hermione closed the door on the group and silence filled the room. She leaned back against the door and glared at the raven. "I can't believe you did something so stupid as to get yourself turned into a bird. What were you thinking?" Her voice rose in anger as she closed the distance between the door and the bird.

The raven sat quietly, looking at her, his black gaze meeting her glare. An almost imperceptible shrug of his shoulders seemed to say: "Obviously, I wasn't thinking. What can I tell you?"

"I'm tired. I'm going to bed. I suppose..." Hermione watched the raven hop from foot to foot. "I suppose you'll perch wherever tonight. Crooks, mind your manners and leave Severus alone."

Hermione cast a modified Portkey spell on the enchanted window. The spell would transport the bird directly to the Astronomy Tower. Their quarters were located under the lake. Opening a window would only serve to flood the room.

"There, just make sure you use the same window to come back. It's keyed to your magic signature." Her voice softened as she raised her hand to tentatively pat the sleek black head of the bird. "Be careful, Severus, I don't think I could take it if something else happened to you."

The raven nuzzled her hand, nodding his understanding. With a loud caw, he took off for the enchanted window and disappeared from sight.

Dejectedly, Hermione got ready for bed. It would be the first time in three years she had slept alone. Curling up with Severus at the end of the day was something she looked forward to. The bed felt large and foreboding as she lay there alone, tears slowing running down her cheeks. She missed her husband. What if they couldn't turn him back?

Tenderly, Hermione stroked his pillow before pulling it to her. His scent clung to the silk fabric, making her loneliness all the more unbearable. She thought back to the first time she had visited Severus in his quarters.

*It was two years after the war had ended, Hogwarts had finally been restored to its former majesty. The fighting at the final battle had taken its toll on the ancient castle. It had taken all of Harry influence, plus his status as the boy who lived to defeat the Dark Lord once and for all, to get the Ministry to agree to reopen the school. Harry was determined to honour Dumbledore's memory. What better way then to reopen his beloved school? Ron and Hermione had joined in the cause, the Golden trio together once again.*

*The Welcoming Feast that year was a major event. The Order members turned out in force, as a show of solidarity for Headmistress McGonagall and as a tribute to Dumbledore's memory. After the students left the Great Hall, the members gathered together for coffee, reminiscing about Hogwarts and the Headmaster. Harry knew McGonagall had rehired Snape as the Potions master. The man had been cleared of all charges, a fact that still galled him. But it was seeing the way Hermione watched him, her eyes devouring the dark man, that set his teeth on edge. Both he and Ron vowed to watch their friend, sure that no good could come of her obvious infatuation with the Potions master.*

*It was while keeping an eye out for her that he happened to see Snape and Hermione standing off to the side talking quietly. Harry watched in horror as the wizard leaned in and kissed his friend.*

*"Did you see that?" Harry hissed, nudging Ron. "Snape kissed her. And she seems to be kissing him back."*

*"Blimey, Harry, that can't be right. That corner's dark. They can't be snogging, must be a trick of the light. It's...Snape, for God's sake!"*

*"Oh, yeah? Look!"*

*Hermione appeared to welcome his advances and, by all outward appearances, she seemed to be returning the sentiment, as well.*

*Harry shook his head. Something was wrong here. **They didn't see what they thought they saw!** It couldn't be. Hermione and Snape?*

*"Must be a lust potion. We need to get her away from him."*

*"Yeah, I'll bet you're right. He snuck something in her drink, the bastard. Let's go." Harry and Ron made their way through the assembly, intent on rescuing their friend from the clutches of the evil git.*

*"Harry, the castle looks wonderful. I can't believe it. You did a great job." Hermione smiled happily at her friend.*

*"Uh, yeah, the place looks great," he nodded in agreement, all the while eyeing Snape.*

*"Severus was just going to show me the new gardens."*

*The dark man offered her his arm; with a curt nod, he acknowledged their presence. "Potter, Weasley."*

*"Hermione, wait." How the hell were they supposed to get her alone?*

*Hermione shot the pair a look. "I'm fine, Harry. We'll be back in a little while."*

*There was nothing more either one of them could say without accusing Snape of something outright. Harry and Ron watched the pair leave through the side entrance. They sat watching the doorway, waiting for them to return, but they never did.*

*Severus showed her the rose garden, pulling her into a shadowed corner to snog her senseless.*

*Hermione could feel her blood boiling in her veins as he ravished her mouth, his hands roaming slowly over her back. She moaned as he left a trail of kisses down her throat, alternately kissing and nipping at her heated flesh. She melted against him as he stoked the fire raging within her.*

*He suggested moving to somewhere more private. A doorway leading to his quarters was located around the next corner, if she was interested.*

*She was.*

*In fact, Hermione actually saw very little of his quarters that night. They never returned to the gathering, choosing to spend the night and early hours of the morning lost in the exploration of each other. It wasn't until later in the morning, stomachs rumbling, that she actually got a tour of the place. They ate breakfast leisurely, basking in each other's company before returning to the bedchamber, again.*

*Hermione had returned home that evening to find an angry Harry Potter waiting for her. Before he could get through his rant, she let him have it.*

*It was her life. Who the hell did he think he was? He had no right to tell her who she could and couldn't see.*

*Or love, for that matter.*

*And if Snape was the one for her, so be it. Harry'd better accept it if he knew what was good for him. Or else.*

*"After one night?"*

*"We're right together. Period. End of story."*

*Harry had no choice. He either accepted Snape or lost his best friend.*

*Six months later, they were married.*

*And now her husband was a bird.*

TBC

### **Prisoner of Azkaban**

**"They didn't see what they thought they saw!"**

A/N: A grateful thank you to my beta, Nakhsh, for her corrections, suggestions, and never-ending supply of commas, she is truly the best of the best. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still mine.

Let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are most welcome.

Pearle

## Curses, Foiled Again!

*Chapter 4 of 8*

Harry and his team try again. Remus joins in, and Hermione pulls herself together.

Nevermore by Pearle

Summary: The war is long over and life has settled into a comfortable routine. Harry and his team of specialists have been charged with tracking down and dismantling Dark objects. While not part of the team, Harry has had occasion to call on his best friend's husband to help them. What started out as routine turned out to be anything but. One question remained: how was he going to explain to Hermione her husband had been turned into a bird?

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~~~ Nevermore ~~~

Chapter 4 – Curses, Foiled Again!

Morning dawned, bringing with it storms and high winds. Hermione studied the overcast sky wondering where her husband had gone off to.

She had not slept well the night before, worrying until she heard the flap of the raven's wings in the outer chamber. Knowing he was back and safe helped to ease the loneliness she was feeling, if only for a little while. The sound of fluttering wings became louder as the black bird swooped into the bedchamber and landed effortlessly on the footboard.

"Have a nice time, dear? I'm glad you're back, I was beginning to worry."

The bird cawed softly, shuffling from foot to foot.

Hermione yawned, sinking back into her pillow. "Love you, too. 'Night." She slept uneasily; eerie images peppered her sleep, images of a curly dark-haired child playing with the raven.

When she'd awoken this morning, he was still sleeping on the footboard, his head tucked under one wing.

She rose early, as was her custom, and ordered a tray from the kitchens. Tea and toast for her, red meat for him.

Hermione sipped her tea, watching the bird tear into the meat. "You know, you really should watch your cholesterol. All that red meat can't be good for you."

The raven raised its beady eyes to the witch, a tasty morsel of beef still clinging to its hooked beak.

Hermione held up one hand. "Fine, do what you want. I'm too tired to argue with you." Even in bird form, she knew that look.

A loud knock echoed through the chamber.

Hermione looked toward the doorway. "Good, that will be Harry and the rest. I hope Remus is with them. Maybe he can help."

The raven cawed loudly, flapping his wings in protest.

"I don't care if you don't like Harry or Remus. The least you can do is be nice to them. You got yourself into this mess." Hermione hurried to the door.

"Morning, Hermione. Everything all right?" Harry hugged his friend before moving out of the way. The rest of the group offered their greetings as they entered the chambers.

"Hermione, are you okay? Tonks told me what happened." Remus followed the others inside.

"Oh, Remus. He's a bird!" Hermione allowed her old friend to engulf her in a hug, drawing strength from his presence. "What am I going to do?"

"We'll find a way to bring him back, don't worry." Remus looked around the room. "Where is Severus now?"

Hermione looked around. "He was here a minute ago. Severus?"

"He was here?"

"**Yes...he was at breakfast," she said.** "We'd just finished when you knocked. He's doing this to be difficult. It would serve him right if you just left him as is."

Harry nodded agreeably. "I'm sure he'll be back soon. Why don't we get down to work? Thomas, will you show Remus the books you and Bill were working on last. Uhm, Hermione?"

Hermione's voice could be heard from the bedchamber. "Severus Snape, you come out this minute. Where are you? I've had enough of your foolishness. Show yourself," she demanded.

Remus and Harry exchanged a look. It was Tonks that spoke up. "You two go on. I'll talk to her."

With a nod, they turned back to the task at hand. Harry unrolled the scroll he was holding. "These are the runes on the mirror. I went back to the Manor last night when I left

here and copied them down. They're the same on the front and back of the mirror."

Remus studied the markings. "You might want to ask Hermione to look at these. If I remember right, she was pretty good at Ancient Runes."

"I thought about that. She's just so...out of it."

"Can you blame her? You may not like the man, but he is her husband. Did you hear what she said yesterday? She's pregnant, and you turned her husband into a bird." Bill looked pointed at Harry.

"I did *not* turn him into a bird. The bloody bat did that all himself. I told him to wait, but did he listen to me?" Harry slumped down into one of the empty chairs. "Actually, I think it's a bit of an improvement, even if she doesn't see it that way. At least I don't have to listen to him."

A series of loud caws seemed to fill the room. The raven glided majestically through the enchanted window and hovered over the desk before coming to rest on the stack of books piled in the corner.

"Severus?" Remus peered into the bird's black gaze.

The raven seemed to gently flap his wings in answer. His eyes swept the desk, cawing loudly as he noticed the runes on the open parchment. The bird jumped off the stack and hopped around the paper.

"Get off of there, Snape, you'll rip the parchment. I had enough trouble copying those. How else do you expect us to figure this out? Really, you're not helping." Harry tried to shove the agitated bird away.

The raven pecked at him in annoyance. There had never been any love lost between the two and the situation seemed to make matters worse.

"Severus?" Remus watched the raven. "Uh, Harry, why don't you go tell Hermione he's back?"

.xx.

Harry was reluctant to draw his friend into the search, worried that focusing on her husband's problem would only make matters worse. Hermione, however, had always been an excellent researcher.

She agreed to help, hoping to bring her husband back sooner, rather than later. It soon became apparent, she should have been the one leading the investigation from the start.

The raven hopped from stack to stack before landing gracelessly on a pile of books that seemed to defy gravity. The rapid flapping of his wings sent the papers atop the desk fluttering.

"Really, Severus, if you're going to bother me every time you have a thought, we'll never find a solution. What is it now?" Hermione hadn't bothered to look up from the book she was skimming through.

This was the third time in the last hour the raven had landed on the desk in such a state of agitation. The first time had been cause for worry, until he took off with the parchment she had been decoding. It was several minutes, and quite a few spells later, before Hermione was able to retrieve the document. The second time just caused the witch to snarl angrily at the black bird.

"Yes, yes, have a nice flight, Severus," Hermione responded absentmindedly.

The raven cawed noisily before flying out the enchanted window.

"Honestly, I know he wants my attention, but he can be such a child at times," she muttered.

Remus suppressed a chuckle. Some things never changed.

TBC

Goblet of Fire

"Erm...yes...he was at breakfast," she said.

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Pearle

I'd Like To Buy A Vowel, Please

Chapter 5 of 8

Progress is made on decoding the runes and we get to see part of the spell.

Nevermore by Pearle

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A response to SouthernWitch69's chapter challenge. Challenge rules follow chapter one.

By lunchtime, they had managed to fill in two more words. Minerva and Bill had got into a heated debate on whether it was a curse or a spell that had transformed Severus. Tempers were already starting to run high when Hermione blew up. "Who the bloody hell cares whether it was a spell or a curse? It was Dark Magic. My husband's a bird! A ruddy bird."

"Well, this looks like a good time to take a break. I'll Floo the kitchen for some sandwiches." Knowing better than to try and calm Hermione's ruffled feathers, Harry sent an order to the kitchens for lunch.

They had been able to decode two more runes. The parchment now read:

A _____ used for common _____ might not

bring _____ _____ out as I can

They were able to determine the second rune had a 'P' sound, but could not decipher anything past that point.

Darkness fell and still they pressed on. The raven would circle the room periodically, flying out the enchanted window and back in again, stopping now and then to nuzzle Hermione's hair.

Tonks pointed excitedly to a symbol in the book she was holding. "I think I may have found the word for the tenth rune."

Hermione nodded. "That's definitely a 'Y' with an 'O', but the end doesn't match. You? Your? Yours? Young? Youth? I don't know."

Remus looked from the book his wife was holding, then back to the parchment. "It could be any of those."

The raven hopped excitedly across the parchment.

"Severus, do you know what curse this is?" Hermione's face flushed as she watched the bird circle the room, knocking down three books in the process. "Harry, quick, bring those here. Maybe they have the answer to the curse."

Three more books joined the growing stacks around the desk. Hermione handed Remus and Tonks a worn, black leather-bound book titled *Magick Most Evile*. The book let out "a ghostly wail" when Remus opened the cover.

The raven cawed loudly, pecking at the pages, causing the book to moan louder.

"Severus, stop it. I can't quiet the book if you pull at it." Remus waved his wand over the moaning book, hoping he could stop the unearthly sounds. ***Silencio!***

The raven continued to open and close its sharp beak, but no sound came out. Both the bird and the book had fallen silent. The crowd around the desk broke out in laughter.

"Well," said Remus smiling, "Two for the price of one."

The raven glared daggers at him, flapping his wings in righteous indignation, his beak still opening and closing soundlessly.

"All right, I'm sorry. Hold still so I can end the spell."

A wave of his wand, a muttered *"Finite Incantatem"*, and suddenly a series of loud caws filled the chamber again.

Hermione rounded on the enraged bird. "Stop it! He did tell you to leave the book alone. Just like Harry told you to wait for the rest of the team before examining that mirror. This is all your fault! Everyone here is giving up their time to help you. But are you appreciative? No, you flap around here shifting the papers, dropping feathers all over the place, and shouting at the top of your lungs. A thank you now and then wouldn't hurt. Wouldn't surprise me if the lot washed their hands of you and shipped you off to St Mungo's." Hermione's eye blazed with anger, daring the raven to contradict her.

The room had gone quiet, everyone glancing between Hermione and the raven.

Somehow, the bird managed to look contrite. He walked over and rubbed his beak softly against Hermione's hand before moving to the side and grooming his feathers as if he hadn't a care in the world.

"You could apologise to the others, too."

The raven looked up and offered her a glare that said: 'Don't push your luck.'

"It's fine. Hermione, the book?" Harry gestured to the over-sized green book she was holding.

"Sorry, Harry. I guess the last two days are catching up with me. Here."

The book was larger than normal, its frayed edges looking purple and almost bruised in the candlelight. The gold-stamped letters of the title along the spine had frayed in spots, giving testament to the age of the volume. Harry could just make out the title: *Dark, Darker, Darkest - The Edge of Light*

Hermione closed *When Chocolate Isn't Enough* and reached for the third tome, *Magical Hieroglyphs and Logograms*. Not fifteen minutes later, her startled shriek broke the silence surrounding the group. "This is it! This is the sixth rune. And look here..." She jabbed excitedly at the page. "...This is the tenth rune." The rest have to be here, too. Now all we have to do is decipher the curse and we can come up with a counter-curse."

Hermione reached out and hugged the startled raven. The bird squawked indignantly. "You'll be human soon, Severus." With renewed vigour, she set out to decode the remainder of the curse.

TBC

Order of the Phoenix

"Silencio!"

The raven continued to open and close its sharp beak, but no sound came out.

A/N: Alas, we are coming to a close. Dual endings will be posted tomorrow, the epilogue, which will go with either ending, will be up on Monday. Look for the quote, "Nevermore" to be buried in the final chapter.

Dark, Darker, Darkest The Edge of Light and *When Chocolate Isn't Enough* are titles of my own creation. For anyone interested, I will be signing copies of the aforementioned books, along with my best seller, *Unleash the Animal In You*, at Flourish and Botts on the 30th of this month.

From The HP Lexicon-

Magick Most Evile - Refers to Horcruxes in its introduction, but only to call them "the wickedest of magical inventions" and to say that the book will not speak of the subject further. At that, this book was the only book Hermione could find in the Hogwarts Library, including the Restricted Section, that referred to Horcruxes at all; that particular copy let out "a ghostly wail" when Hermione slammed it shut in irritation

Magical Hieroglyphs and Logograms - The book was on the top of Hermione's "tottering pile of Ancient Rune books" in Order of the Phoenix.

Actually, as stated in *HBP*, Fred and George have developed a wizarding version for sell: Reusable Hangman Spell It Or He'll Swing! A toy for playing Hangman - not on paper, but with a tiny wooden man and a real set of gallows to scale, where apparently the little man will march up the gallows steps as the game progresses. Since Tonks's father is Muggle-born, she may have spent time with the Muggle side of her family and know the game.

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Pearle

Through the Looking Glass - Alternate Ending One

Chapter 6 of 8

Two very different solutions to the same problem.

Nevermore by Pearle

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~~~ Nevermore ~~~

Chapter 6 Through the Looking Glass

### **Alternate Ending One**

Hermione's hands shook as she turned the page. "That's it, that's the last rune."

"Inner animal?"

"Not animal, animal. See how the line crosses at the middle, not the top. And the bar has no tail. It's inner animal, not inner animal. Let me see that, Remus." Hermione stared at the completed parchment.

### **A spell used for common transfer might not**

#### **bring your inner animal out as I can**

"Inner animal. It has to be some kind of Animagus transformation spell. Bill, you're the curse-breaker. Any ideas?" Hermione look hopefully at the wizard.

Remus beamed proudly at his wife. "You were right, Tonks, it had to do with Severus's Animagus form."

Tonks blushed a brilliant shade of fuchsia. "So, how do we turn him back? Minerva?"

Between the two, Bill and Minerva were able to determine the layers of curses and spells the original curse created. The raven complained loudly, cawing almost continuously as he was poked and prodded with their wands.

"Please stop that racket. You're giving me a headache." Hermione sat back, rubbing her eyes, a headache threatening to overtake her. "Do you want to turn back into a human, or not?"

Crookshanks sat on the hearth, tail twitching, his eyes alert as he watched the humans waving sticks around the bird. There was something not quite right about the raven, he just couldn't figure out what it was that bothered him about the black bird.

Hermione glared at the completed parchment. "Inner animal. Only Malfoy would think to turn someone into an animal against their will."

"D'you think Severus'll be able to transform back into a raven now that he knows his Animagus form?" asked Tonks.

"I doubt it. It was the mirror that actually forced the transformation, not Severus." Hermione watched intently as Bill and Minerva worked through the counter-curse.

"All right, ready for the final layer?" Minerva raised her wand and looked at Bill. "On three. One...Two...Three!"

Witch and wizard recited the final incantation to break the curse, in tandem. A bright light shot from the ends of their wands, fusing together in a cloud of smoke and engulfing the squawking bird.

When the light and smoke cleared, there sat...the raven.

**"Nothing," said Harry gloomily.**

Hermione threw herself down on the couch, tears streaming down her face. "It didn't work, he's still a bird."

Tonks tried to comfort the distraught witch. "Well, look at it this way, he'll be good at teaching your child how to fly, and think of all the money you can save on owl treats if Severus delivers your letters."

For some reason, the young woman's comments made Hermione cry all the harder.

"I don't understand it. That should have worked." Bill waved his wand over the raven in a series of intricate movements, each designed to seek out and identify a curse or spell. "Here's the problem, this sequence should've been performed first. There's still one spell left. Minerva, you need to stand back. This part's rather tricky."

They watched in tense silence as Bill concentrated on breaking the final curse. The spell was chanted at almost a whisper, his wand movements precise as he broke through the final barrier. Again, a blinding flash of light, enveloped in smoke, shot from the tip of his wand and surrounded the raven. The young man staggered back with the force of the magic he'd cast.

When the light and smoke cleared, there, in the middle of the desk ... sat Severus Snape.

"Severus!" Hermione shrieked, running to her husband.

He barely had time to register where he was before his overjoyed wife tackled him.

"You're back. I didn't think you'd ever be human again." She was peppering his face with kisses, hugging him fiercely.

Severus hugged her back, still slightly disoriented from the transformation. "I am quite happy to be back. Do you think it possible I can move off this blasted desk and sit on the sofa for a minute?"

"Professor!" Tonks squeezed his arm as he moved off the desk.

Each happily patted or touched the dazed man as he moved to the sofa. All the while, Hermione refused to relinquish her hold on her husband. She settled next to him, still not believing he was human again.

"Thank you all, I can't believe you were able to turn him back." Hermione prodded her husband, still not believing he was real. "I was so afraid you would stay a raven."

"I'm sure he's overwhelmed with transforming." Remus said, smiling.

"I'm glad you're back, Snape." Harry nodded at the wizard.

"It's your fault I spent the last two days as a ruddy bird," he growled, glaring at Harry.

"How is it my fault? Didn't I tell you not to touch the mirror? That you should wait for the others? It's your own damn fault you transformed."

"Harry! Severus! That's enough. It doesn't matter whose fault it is. The important thing is you're human once more." Hermione glared at the two men.

"It wasn't my fault," Harry muttered. He reached into his pocket and pulled out the wizard's wand. "I think this belongs to you."

Severus nodded stiffly. "Thank you."

"Well, I guess you'll have to teach your child how to fly the traditional way now, riding a broomstick like everyone else instead of just flying next to them."

"My child? What do you mean my child?"

Tonks's smile faded. "Well, Hermione said she was..."

"Severus, were you able to understand what was being said when you were a bird?" Hermione asked, cutting off the young woman in mid-sentence.

"Yes, well most of it. Some words didn't seem to translate. What is Tonks talking about?" Severus peered intently at his wife.

The other people in the room seemed to lean forward, listening closely for Hermione's answer.

Hermione looked around the room. "Don't you all have something to do? Shouldn't you be going?"

Minerva smiled. "No, we're fine."

"Oh, for God's sake, she's pregnant, Snape. You have a little Snape on the way." Harry glared at Severus.

"Harry!"

"What? You went crazy yesterday shouting: 'You can't be a bird. I'm pregnant.' We all know you're pregnant, so does he, even if he doesn't remember you shouting it at him."

Severus's mood darkened. "Potter..."

"Right, get mad at me again. She told you countless times over the last two days she was pregnant."

"I was a bird, how was I supposed to remember what she said?"

"You can't remember that your wife is pregnant, but you remember I turned you into a bird?" Harry had had just about enough of the Potions master.

Severus smirked. "You admit it?"

"I didn't turn you into a bird. But I have to say, I liked you better that way. Tonks, Bill, Thomas: first thing tomorrow, we need to dismantle that mirror. I don't want anyone else transforming into an animal accidentally, again." Harry cast a glare in Severus's direction. "Time for me to leave you two 'love birds' alone."

"It is rather late. I think it would be a good idea if we all left." Minerva smiled at Severus. "I'm glad you're back to normal, and congratulations to the two of you."

Severus nodded at his friend and colleague, a sad look passing between them, both of them thinking of Albus and how thrilled he would have been at the happy news.

"All he ever hoped for was for you to be happy. You will come and tell his portrait about the baby, won't you?" Minerva asked.

"I'm sure he'll blind me with all the twinkling he'll do." His voice softened as he thought of his friend. "I'll stop by your office tomorrow; right now, I need a hot bath and a proper night's sleep."

Bill cleared his throat, grinning at Severus and Hermione. "You know, I didn't say anything before because you were so upset, but Fleur just found out she's expecting, too. Just think of it, our children'll start Hogwarts together. Any possibility you can make it a Weasley, Snape, and Potter trio, Harry?"

"Any chance I can have another go at that mirror before you dismantle it, Potter?" Severus dragged a hand wearily across his eyes.

"Severus!" Hermione glared at her husband.

"I believe I'll go home and see what I can do, Bill." Harry smiled evilly at the dark man.

In the end, Severus thanked everyone for their efforts, still maintaining it was Harry's fault, before disappearing into his bedchambers. Hermione once again expressed her thanks as she let everyone out.

"Hermione?"

"What's wrong? Are you all right?" Hermione entered the bathroom, bringing with her a gust of cool air into the steamy room.

Severus was stretched out in the tub, his hair damp at the edges as he leaned back against the rim. "Why don't you join me?"

It didn't take any more convincing on his part; in just a minute, he was helping her into the tub to settle between his legs. He pulled Hermione back to rest against his chest, hugging her to him.

"I can't tell you how happy I am to be back in human form," he whispered in her ear.

"I think I can tell. Something pretty solid seems to be poking me in the bum." Hermione wiggled back against his erection, eliciting a groan from her husband.

Gently, he stroked her stomach. "A baby. I can't believe it. How did this happen?"

"I think the usual way."

"I know that, but we always cast contraception charms. How could you have gotten pregnant?" His hands had moved to her breasts, rolling and tweaking her sensitive nipples.

Hermione moaned; her body seemed to have a heightened sensitivity these days. "I think we might have been a little careless on our anniversary. I know we've never really discussed children. Do you mind?"

"Do I mind? It will be our child, how could I mind? I don't want a Quidditch team, but one or two might not be too bad."

"Might not be too bad? I'm already pregnant, Severus. One is already a foregone conclusion." Hermione was finding it hard to concentrate. One talented hand was fondling her breast, playing with her now sensitised nipple. The other hand had found its way between her legs and was stroking her clit.

"Turn around. How about we practice working on number two, then?" His black eyes gleamed in the candle-lit room.

Hermione shifted around, straddling his lap before impaling herself on his cock. "God, I've missed you."

Severus pulled her forward, capturing her mouth in a searing kiss. Hermione was almost weightless in the water as she moved against him. His hands under her bum helped to raise and lower the witch as she rode his erection.

"Hermione." Her name was ground out between clenched teeth as he tried to hold on. A slight tightening of her muscles, the first signal of Hermione's approaching climax, was all the encouragement he needed to let loose. Holding her to him, he thrust up into her heat with abandon, his strokes hard as he reached for his own release. He came just moments after she did, reflexively thrusting into her as he rode out the aftershocks of his climax.

"Care to take this someplace drier?" Hermione leaned forward and captured his lips in a gentle kiss. "I'm so glad you're you again."

It was quick work to dry off and move into their bedroom, sliding nude between the cool sheets. Severus sighed; he hadn't realised how tired he was.

Hermione snuggled into his side. "Tired?"

"Mhm. Just glad to be back to myself again."

"Harry's been wrong all these years."

"Pardon me?" What the devil was she talking about now?

"I didn't marry the bat of the dungeon, I married a raven, not a bat," she said with a giggle.

"Hermione."

"Sorry."

"You can't be that sorry. You're still giggling. Besides, you did marry me for better or worse," he reminded her.

"Yes, but not when you're a raven."

"I believe that falls under the worse category," he said with a smirk.

"And the baby?"

Severus's voice roughened with emotion. "The better category." Softly, he placed a gentle kiss on the top of her head. "Definitely the better category."

TBC

Please continue on to **Alternate Ending Two**.

### ***Half-Blood Prince***

**"Nothing," said Harry gloomily.**

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Pearle

# Through The Looking Glass Again - Alternate Ending Two

Chapter 7 of 8

Two very different solutions to the same problem.

Nevermore by Pearle

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~~~ Nevermore ~~~

Chapter 7 Through The Looking Glass Again

Alternate Ending Two

Hermione's hands shook as she turned the page. "They're not here. Why aren't the rest of the runes here?"

Bill had taken it upon himself to try and break the curse, even though the original meaning was not fully known. With Minerva's help, they had been able to detect several layers of spells and curses. Diligently, they attacked each layer, hoping they could still turn Severus back to human form. The raven complained loudly, cawing almost continuously as he was poked and prodded with their wands.

"Please stop that racket. You're giving me a headache." Hermione sat back, rubbing her eyes, a headache threatening to overtake her. "Do you want to turn back into a human, or not?"

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Hermione watched intently as Bill and Minerva worked through the counter-curse.

"All right, ready for the final layer?" Minerva raised her wand and looked at Bill. "On three. One...Two...Three!"

Witch and wizard recited the final incantation to break the curse, in tandem. A bright light shot from the ends of their wands, fusing together in a cloud of smoke and engulfing the squawking bird.

When the light and smoke cleared, there sat...the raven.

"Nothing," said Harry gloomily.

Hermione threw herself down on the couch, tears streaming down her face. "It didn't work, he's still a bird."

Tonks tried to comfort the distraught witch. "Well, look at it this way, he'll be good at teaching your child how to fly, and think of all the money you can save on owl treats if Severus delivers your letters."

For some reason, the young woman's comments made Hermione cry all the harder.

"I don't understand it. That should've worked." Bill waved his wand over the raven in a series of intricate movements, each designed to seek out and identify a curse or spell. "Here's the problem, this sequence should've been performed first. There's still one spell left. Minerva, you need to stand back. This part's rather tricky."

They watched in tense silence as Bill concentrated on breaking the final curse. The spell was chanted at almost a whisper, his wand movements precise as he broke through the final barrier. Again, a blinding flash of light, enveloped in smoke, shot from the tip of his wand and surrounded the raven. The young man staggered back with the force of the magic he'd cast.

When the light and smoke cleared...the raven was still sitting there, unchanged.

"It's late. Let's call it a night and pick back up in the morning. Don't worry, Hermione, we'll find a way to turn him back." Harry hugged her tightly. "I promise you, I'll find a way to get him back. We're close, I can feel it."

They left quietly, and for the second night in a row, Hermione was left to contemplate the future while staring at the raven. She cried silently, not wanting to let her tears upset the bird. It was sometime later she fell into a troubled sleep.

Morning came, and once again Hermione ordered breakfast for the two of them. The sound of their side door banging against the stone wall, followed by a snarl, startled her. Quickly, she drew her wand and moved into a defensive stance. "Who's there?"

"Hermione?"

The sight that met her eyes took her breath away. There stood Severus Snape, tired, dishevelled, and sporting a two-day growth of beard, but alive...and human.

"Severus?" she asked, not daring to believe her eyes. "Is it really you?"

"Of course it's me. Who were you expecting? I'm going to kill Potter when I get my hands on him."

Hermione launched herself at her husband, hugging him fiercely. "Oh God, I can't believe you're back."

Severus held her tightly; glad to finally be home. "Hermione, why is there a raven eating breakfast on the coffee table?"

Hermione looked from Severus to the raven, and back again. "If you're you, who's that?"

"Pardon me?"

She pointed at the raven. "If that's not you, than who is it?"

Severus raised one brow questioningly. "You thought the raven was me?"

Hermione sat on the couch and regarded the black bird. "Harry said there was a bright light and you disappeared. The raven was standing where you had been, so naturally we all assumed it was you. If that's not you, where *have* you been the last two days?"

"Russia."

"Russia?"

"The mirror was an illegal Portkey. Malfoy must have created it as an escape hatch. It transported me to a cave in the Ural Mountains. It took almost two days to figure a way out of there without my wand. Fortunately, Durmstrang was within Apparating distance from the cave. I was able to arrange an emergency Portkey back to Hogwarts this morning." Severus eyed the raven. "There were several birds in the cave. This one must have got caught up in the transfer of magic. The mirror must have transported him here when it sent me there."

"It's funny, the raven seems almost human. I mean, he seems to understand what I ask it."

"I'm not surprised. The raven is one of the most intelligent birds; it even seems to possess a sense of humour. The fact that this one lives in a magical world may enhance that intelligence."

"Well, at least we can stop trying to decipher the runes now." Hermione looked at the partially translated spell.

Severus glanced at the parchment. "This is 'travel', not 'transfer'. The line crosses the bar too low for it to be an 'F'. Also, that should be 'you', not 'your'. When the rune is missing the ending curve, you don't add the 'R'."

Hermione stared at him in amazement. "Since when do you read ancient runes? Do you know what it says?"

"Of course I read ancient runes. Some very old and powerful potions were recorded this way." Severus studied the parchment for a moment. "It says:

A spell used for common travel might not

bring you as far out as I can!

The seven of them had spent two days pouring over countless volumes struggling to decode the runes, and Severus breezed through it as if it were nothing. Hermione hugged her husband again. "I don't believe it. I'm so happy you're you. Wait till Harry and the others see you."

"Harry and the others. Care to have a little fun?" Severus smiled evilly.

"What did you have in mind? They've spent the last two days trying to bring you back. I should think you might thank them for their effort."

"I will, I will. But first..." Severus cast a *Disillusionment Charm* and disappeared from view. "...I think Severus the raven should talk to them."

Hermione laughed. "All right. But only for a few minutes."

A knock at the door signalled the arrival of Harry and his team.

"Just follow my lead and pretend nothing's changed," the disembodied voice of her husband told her.

Hermione opened the door and let the others in.

"All right, I think I know what I did wrong yesterday." Bill addressed the raven. "Hold still, Severus, I'll have you back to human form in no time."

Once again, he cast the counter-curse on the squawking bird. Light and smoke shot out from the end of his wand and engulfed the angry raven. When the smoke cleared...there sat the raven, still unchanged.

"I don't understand why it didn't work."

"I will thank you to not singe my tail feathers," the raven said, Severus's voice appearing to come from the bird.

"Professor?"

"Severus?" Hermione said, looking surprised.

Harry nodded toward the bird. "Keep trying, Bill, maybe this is the first stage."

"Well, look at it this way, even if Bill doesn't change him all the way back, at least he can talk to you and the baby now." Tonks smiled encouragingly at Hermione.

"Baby? What baby?" Severus shimmered into view. "Hermione, what's she talking about?"

"Professor!" Tonks shouted happily.

"Snape!"

"I told you I was pregnant, well, I thought I was telling you, who knew you weren't that ruddy bird." Hermione smiled up at her husband. "Severus, I'm pregnant."

Severus hugged his wife, too shocked for words.

"I never meant to tell you like this, but when you showed up I was so excited to have you back, I guess I forgot to mention it." Hermione buried her face in his chest, drawing strength from his presence.

"Have him back? Where were you? How long have you been here?" Harry's voice rose in anger. "What's going on? If you're you, who's that?" he asked, pointing to the raven.

"That seems to be the question." Severus sat wearily on the couch, the last two days taking their toll on him.

"I was transported to a cave in Russia. The mirror is an illegal Portkey. I only made it back about ten minutes before you showed up."

Hermione summoned tea while Severus related the details of the last two days.

Harry nodded at the wizard as he spoke, noting the circles under his eyes and the state of his clothing.

"It's your fault I spent the last two days trying to get back here. You didn't even try to find me," he growled, glaring at Harry.

"How can it be my fault? Didn't I tell you not to touch the mirror? That you should wait for the others? It's your own damn fault. We thought you were transformed into the raven, so why would I look for you?"

"Harry! Severus! That's enough. It doesn't matter whose fault it is. The important thing is he's back." Hermione glared at the two men.

"It wasn't my fault," Harry muttered. He reached into his pocket and pulled out the wizard's wand. "I think this belongs to you."

Severus nodded stiffly. "Thank you."

"Well, I guess you'll have to teach your child how to fly the traditional way now, riding a broomstick like everyone else instead of flying along next to them," said Tonks with a smile.

"My child."

"Actually, you missed Hermione yelling at you: 'You can't be a bird. I'm pregnant.' Now that we know that's not you, it's rather funny." Remus chuckled at the image.

Hermione made a face at him. "Don't you all have something to do? Shouldn't you be going?"

"I have to say, I liked you better as a bird, even if it wasn't you. Tonks, Bill, Thomas: we need to dismantle that mirror. The cave will need a thorough going over, too. No telling what else it could contain." Harry cast a glare in Severus's direction. "Time for me to leave you two 'love birds' alone."

"I think it would be a good idea if we all left. I have a substitute taking your classes today. I'm sure you can use the time to rest up from your ordeal." Minerva smiled at Severus. "I'm glad you're back, and congratulations to the two of you."

Severus nodded at his friend and colleague, a sad look passing between them, both of them thinking of Albus and how thrilled he would have been at the happy news.

"All he ever hoped for was for you to be happy. You will come and tell his portrait about the baby, won't you?" Minerva asked.

"I'm sure he'll blind me with all the twinkling he'll do." His voice softened as he thought of his friend. "I'll stop by your office tomorrow; right now, I need a hot bath and some sleep."

Bill cleared his throat, grinning at Severus and Hermione. "You know, I didn't say anything before because you were so upset, but Fleur just found out she's expecting, too. Just think of it, our children'll start Hogwarts together. Any possibility you can make it a Weasley, Snape, and Potter trio, Harry?"

"Any chance I can have another go at that mirror before you dismantle it, Potter?" Severus dragged a hand wearily across his eyes.

"Severus!" Hermione glared at her husband.

"I believe I'll go home tonight and see what I can do, Bill." Harry smiled evilly at the dark man.

In the end, Severus thanked everyone for their efforts, still maintaining it was Harry's fault, before disappearing into his bedchambers. Hermione once again expressed her thanks as she let everyone out.

"Hermione?"

"What's wrong? Are you all right?" Hermione entered the bathroom, bringing with her a gust of cool air into the steamy room.

Severus was stretched out in the tub, his hair damp at the edges as he leaned back against the rim. "Why don't you join me?"

After missing her husband and thinking she would never see him human again, Hermione thought joining him in the tub was an excellent idea.

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Crookshanks watched his mistress hurry off to answer her mate's call. He eyed the raven pecking at the leftover biscuits on the tea tray. While the raven did not radiate evil, as did some of the other creatures and humans the half-Kneazle had come in contact with over the years, there was still something...different about the bird. His tail switched back and forth; he would bide his time.

The raven devoured the remaining biscuits on the tray. These were the best accommodations he had ever experienced; he just hoped it would last. Cawing loudly, he stretched his wings and flew out through the enchanted window for a bit of exercise.

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They made love slowly, enjoying each other's body, each expressing their love for the other with actions instead of words.

Both spent, Hermione leaned forward and captured Severus's lips in a gentle kiss. "Care to take this someplace drier?"

It was quick work to dry off and move into their bedroom, sliding nude between the cool sheets. Severus sighed; he hadn't realised how tired he was.

Hermione snuggled into his side. "Tired?"

"Mhm. Just glad to be back."

"What are we going to do with the raven?"

Severus stroked her back absent-mindedly. "Well, we could keep it as our messenger. I'm sure that's what Malfoy used it for."

Hermione nodded. "And you're not upset about the baby? Do you mind?"

"Do I mind? It will be our child, how could I mind? I don't want a Quidditch team, but one or two might not be too bad." Gently, he stroked her stomach. "A baby. I can't believe it."

"Severus, one is a given; I'm already pregnant." Hermione leaned back to look at him.

Pulling her back down, he gently kissed the top of her head. "Let me take a nap. We can practice for the next one when I wake up," he said sleepily.

It was good to be home.

TBC

Half-Blood Prince

"Nothing," said Harry gloomily.

A/N: Just the epilogue to go; it's worded as such that both endings will tie in with it.

A grateful thank you to my beta, Nakhash, for her corrections, suggestions, and never-ending supply of commas, she is truly the best of the best. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still mine.

Let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are most welcome.

Pearle

Epilogue – Quoth the Raven, 'Nevermore'

Chapter 8 of 8

A bit more information about Severus and Hermione, and a glimpse into the future.

Summary: The war is long over and life has settled into a comfortable routine. Harry and his team of specialists have been charged with tracking down and dismantling Dark objects. While not part of the team, Harry has had occasion to call on his best friend's husband to help them. What started out as routine turned out to be anything but. One question remained: how was he going to explain to Hermione her husband had been turned into a bird?

A response to SouthernWitch69's chapter challenge. Challenge rules follow chapter one.

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc., of the Harry Potter series are not mine; they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

~~~ Nevermore ~~~

Chapter 8 Epilogue Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore"

### **Eleven years later:**

"All right, everyone, quiet down." Headmistress McGonagall called for calm as another year at Hogwarts began. "Professor Snape, will you please bring in the first-years for Sorting?"

The Deputy Headmaster glanced at his wife before nodding to the Headmistress. His oldest daughter was among the first-years waiting nervously in the Entrance Hall. Katherine had witnessed the Sorting many times over the years, but she had been a nervous wreck, arguing with her brothers and sister earlier in the day, now that it was her turn to face the Sorting Hat. Severus had to laugh, he didn't know who was more nervous, his wife or his daughter.

"Welcome to Hogwarts," said Professor Snape. He caught his daughter's eye, nodding slightly in an attempt at reassuring her as he launched into the traditional speech given to the first-years. "The start-of-term banquet will begin shortly, but before you take your seats in the Great Hall, you will be Sorted into your houses. The Sorting is a very important ceremony..."

Severus had been saying the same speech for the last ten years. He could recite it in his sleep and not miss a beat. He looked over the faces gazing nervously up at him and almost groaned as he spied his daughter's two best friends standing on either side of her.

Devin Weasley had the traditional red hair and freckles of the Weasley clan, mixed with his mother's startling blue eyes. While not quite the troublemaker his twin uncles were, Devin still seemed to have led his daughter into breaking more than a few rules as they were growing up. Standing on the other side of Katherine was James Sirius Potter. His unruly black hair and bright green eyes a gift from his father and grandparents before him.

Severus had to laugh; even Ginevra's genes were not enough to overcome Potter where their son was concerned. Their daughter and younger son had the bright red hair and freckles so characteristic of the Weasleys, but James was a Potter through and through. And just as much trouble, as far as Severus was concerned. Both Bill and Harry had taken up residence at the castle shortly after their children were born: Bill teaching Ancient Runes when Professor Ganesvoort retired, and Harry taking over the Defence Against the Dark Arts classes.

"...I hope each of you will be a credit to whichever house becomes yours. Move along now, the Sorting Ceremony's about to start." Severus escorted them through the main doors of the Entrance Hall, his robes billowing out behind him in trademark fashion. They stopped before the High Table, the patched and worn Sorting Hat sitting silently on its four-legged stool.

The group fidgeted as they waited for the Hat to finish its welcoming song. "...Wherever you should go, the right thing you must do, and with that thought in mind, I want to Sort out you!" The Sorting Hat fell silent once more.

Severus pulled a scroll from the depths of his pocket. "When I call your name, you will put on the Hat and sit on the stool to be Sorted."

"Laura Adams." A tall thin witch walked hesitantly forward and placed the Hat on her head as she sat on the stool.

It took the Hat only a moment to decide.

"RAVENCLAW!" The Ravenclaw table broke into applause as the young witch ran to join them.

"Edward Aldridge."

And the Sorting continued.

"James Potter."

James squeezed Katherine's hand before walking to the stool. He settled the Hat firmly on his head and waited. His father rarely talked about his own Sorting, but he had heard what to expect from his many uncles.

"Well, well, it seems we've come full circle. Loyalty, a decent mind, but above all courage. Yes, as both your father and mother were..."

"GRYFFINDOR!" shouted the Hat, and the Gryffindor table stamped their feet and cheered.

Harry beamed as he watched his son sit at his old table.

Hermione caught her daughter's eye and smiled encouragingly. James Potter in Gryffindor, well that was no surprise, nor would she be too surprised if Devin was Sorted into Gryffindor, too, as had been every Weasley that ever attended Hogwarts before him. She was fairly sure Katherine would be Sorted into Gryffindor along with Devin and James. The young witch was very much like her, a fact that she needed her husband about unmercifully.

Their son, on the other hand, would most likely be Sorted into Slytherin, a fact Severus brought up every time she teased him about Katherine. And the twins? Who knew where they would be Sorted. She and Severus had debated their talents many times over the years, neither one sure where their youngest son and daughter might eventually end up. Her best guess was Ravenclaw, joking they would become ravens like their father. For some reason, Severus didn't see the humour in her comment. Only time would tell. Her daughter's name drew her attention.

"Katherine Snape"

Katherine put the Sorting Hat on her head and sat down. "Ah, two such powerful forces run through you, but one outshines the other."

"GRYFFINDOR!" shouted the Hat, and again the Gryffindor table went wild, stamping their feet and cheering.

Katherine jumped down from the stool and smiled broadly at her father before taking her place with her new housemates. A quick glance at the High Table showed her mother and Uncle Harry smiling at her.

Severus nodded to his daughter in what he hoped was an encouraging way. Gryffindor. A Snape in Gryffindor; well, he always knew she was just like his wife. That Katherine should be Sorted into Gryffindor was almost a given, the same as he was sure Nicholas would be in Slytherin.

"Devin Weasley."

The Hat did little to hide the wizard's bright red hair as the young man waited for it to proclaim his fate. "Another Weasley, but not quite like those before you, a new generation, then. Well, no matter."

"GRYFFINDOR!" shouted the Hat, and the Gryffindor table applauded loudly as the final first-year of the night joined them.

Severus rolled the parchment back up and took his seat at the High Table between Professor McGonagall and his wife. Katherine was seated between Weasley and Potter, laughing at something one of them had said. He could only hope that she would view the two as brothers, not become romantically entangled with either of them. Then again, having famous parents was difficult at best, but having friends with the same problem probably allowed his daughter to grow up as normally as she did.

Hermione squeezed his hand. "Are you okay?"

"With Katherine being sorted in Gryffindor? Was there ever a question, with Weasley and Potter dogging her every step all these years? No, I think I would have been surprised had she been sorted anywhere else."

The plates magically filled with food as the Headmistress called for the feast to begin.

"Not even a twinge of regret?" she asked playfully.

Severus smiled. "I shall be asking you that next year when Nicholas is sorted into Slytherin, my dear wife, so enjoy yourself now. Next year, it will be my turn to gloat."

"I'm sure." Hermione poured pumpkin juice for the two of them. "I still don't have a clue where the twins will end up."

"I think the odds are four to one for Ravenclaw; Flitwick is offering ten to one for one to end up in Gryffindor and one in Slytherin, twelve to one if you specify who ends up in which house. Hufflepuff is considered the real long shot at twenty to one." Severus helped himself to the roast beef.

"Severus!"

"What?" He looked at his wife's surprised expression. "You had to know the staff was betting on where our children would be Sorted?"

"No, I didn't."

Severus shrugged. "Well, Katherine and Nicholas are even money, no contest there, it's the twins everyone is wondering about."

Hermione sighed. She should have known. Flitwick had run a pool on the day and time Hermione would give birth. And the number of children they would have. "Maybe we should send them to Beauxbatons?"

"Are you kidding? Our retirement is riding on the twins' placement. A few years and I think I can get the Hat to place them in the two houses."

"Not Hufflepuff?" Hermione couldn't believe she was having this conversation with her husband.

"Hufflepuffs? Never." Severus refilled his glass, before gesturing to hers. "More?"

"Please." Hermione nodded. Maybe she should get in on the action? After all, they were her children. She would have to start talking to the Hat when she was in Minerva's office, perhaps it would give her a hint as to what the outcome would be. "Well, only time will tell. I still say Ravenclaw."

Severus shook his head. "I doubt it."

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**One year later:**

"Nicholas Snape."

Severus watched his son stride confidently forward and place the Sorting Hat on his head. He sat less than a minute when the Hat called out:

"SLYTHERIN!" The table exploded with cheers.

Nicholas smiled at his father and waved to his mother and Uncle Harry as he walked to join his new housemates.

Severus took his seat as the Headmistress started the Welcoming Feast. His smile was broad as he leaned toward his wife. "Ssssssslytherin."

"Very funny, but we both knew Nicky would be Sorted there. So now, both Gryffindor and Slytherin have a Snape. There's still the twins." Hermione smiled. "I still say Ravenclaw."

Severus just smiled.

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**Five years later:**

"Alexander Snape."

Severus watched as his youngest son placed the Sorting Hat on his head. The silence was deafening as the High Table seemed to be straining to hear the results.

"RAVENCLAW!"

Severus closed his eyes - his son was a raven. Quickly, he looked at his son, hoping the young man hadn't noticed his momentary loss of control. He nodded encouragingly as Alexander smiled at him before going off to join his new housemates.

There was still Melinda, but the twins were so alike, the odds of her not being sorted in Ravenclaw, now that the Hat had placed her brother there, were quite slim.

"Melinda Snape."

The Hat nestled down onto the young witch's curls, obscuring half her face. Severus watched his daughter's lips curl up into a smile.

"RAVENCLAW!"

Well, after Alexander, that wasn't much of a surprise.

Severus called the remaining names before joining Hermione and the other staff at the High Table. A few of the instructors looked overjoyed, several more looked less than happy. Watching the twins grow up, Flitwick had changed the odds through the years. Ravenclaw was almost even money at the end of the last school year.

"I don't want to hear one word. Do you understand? Not one word," Severus said as he settled into his seat. He regarded his wife's smirk; sure he would hear plenty about it later, alone in their chambers. For now, he just wanted a few minutes of peace. Ravenclaw. They were both ravens.

Severus heard it before he registered the sound.

"Caaaaw."

He turned abruptly to see his wife's smiling face.

Caw, indeed

~~Finis~~

A/N: So we reach the end, Severus, Hermione and their brood seem happy, regardless of where each was sorted. Ending two seemed to be the favorite, hands down.

The title of this chapter is, of course, from the poem *The Raven* by the great Edgar Allan Poe, as the title of the story is also in reference to the line in the poem. If you look closely, you will find Severus saying, Never More (I do know it should be nevermore, but consider it artistic license on my part, if you will) in this chapter.

A grateful thank you to my beta, Nakhash, for her corrections, suggestions, and never-ending supply of commas, she is truly the best of the best. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still mine.

Let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are most welcome.

I thank each and everyone of you, dear readers, for staying with me until the end, and hope you enjoyed the story.

Pearle February 13th, 2006