

Hiding Away

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Chapter 1 of 1

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The first inkling Hermione had that things were not going to work out the way she wanted was when Ron didn't even look at her as he went to huddle with his family. Fred was not dead, but they weren't sure he was going to make it with all his limbs intact or with all his brain function. He had gone without oxygen for too long. She wondered why he didn't want her to comfort him; his mumbled excuse of "it's a family thing" hurt quite a bit, and so she decided to not bother him or his family again, at least not while they were huddled like that.

She turned away from the Weasleys to help find those who had been thought dead in the heat of battle. There were more of them than anyone imagined. It appeared that Bella's sadistic streak was enough for her to hope that many of the people she cursed would be buried alive. This was discovered when Remus Lupin started to stir after about three hours. It appeared the werewolf blood made him recover faster than the others.

Neville and Luna had found Headmaster Snape, poured the potions he had on him down his throat, (or on his throat, Neville let Luna decide what to do), cast a stasis spell and brought him to Madam Pomfrey. He was currently recovering in the Hogwarts Hospital Wing.

She cast the magical core revealing spell that Madam Pomfrey had taught them. *Magica Revelo!* It appeared Tonks was not completely dead either. There were a few more not-quite-dead people found before the day ended. It was well-noted by many that all three Malfoys spent quite a bit of time trying to find survivors.

The chaos was horrible, but soothing somehow, because of the hope evident once they realized not everyone was dead. People were starting to see that not all was lost.

Once everything had settled down, Hermione found herself out in what had been the garden at the Burrow with Ron. As much as her feelings had been hurt, Harry had come here, and so she had followed, same as she had for so many years. There were quite a few people about, as they wanted to help the Weasleys rebuild their home, so it was a beehive of activity.

"Hermione, I need to talk to you," Ron said.

Hermione got worried. This isn't what she thought would happen either. Somewhere deep inside she was hoping for a reconciliation, a dramatic recitation of devotion and errors made in grief. She didn't think she was going to get that anymore. She looked up into Ron's earnest face and waited for him to say something.

"I love you, you know. But I love you too much to think that I'm really what you want." He held up his hand to stop her protest. "Really. I want to get married soon. I want to take that bye that the Ministry is offering on our NEWTs. I want to play Quidditch. I want lots of children. And you don't want any of that right now. I can wait for you, but I'm going to get resentful. And then we will just be content and complacent instead of happy, and I don't want that. Not for either of us. So, before anything starts, I just want you to know that maybe we are just best off as friends." Ron then looked at her expectantly.

Hermione took a deep breath. This is certainly not what she expected. But if she thought about it, Ron was right. "You are right, Ron. We are probably best off as just friends." She was not going to cry. She wouldn't give him the satisfaction.

But it appeared that Ron meant what he said, and her response satisfied him. He gathered her to him, squeezed her tightly, released her gently, then walked back into the house.

Hermione decided that maybe she should go find her parents, since she had nothing holding her to Britain at the moment. She went into the house and explained this to Molly, who hugged her tightly and wished her luck, because like most mothers, she had seen more than she let on; afterward, Hermione quickly gathered her things and left.

Hermione never found her parents. They had perished on a boating accident one fine summer day. What she did not expect was that they had recovered their memories; they had found the local wizarding community and after finding out what was going on in Britain had realized what Hermione had tried to do for them. So they had thrown themselves into their new lives, finding new things to enjoy, and hoping that things settled down quickly so that they could reunite with their daughter. This was all in some documents that were left to her with the wizarding attorney in Sydney. He presented Hermione with a box of mementos, the letters and journal that her parents had kept for her once their memories had returned and quite a bit of money. Although Hermione now wanted for nothing material, her heart was broken. With nothing for her in Australia, she made arrangements to return home.

This is just too much! thought Hermione. *I really can't take it anymore.* No one had greeted her on her return from Australia. Harry was busy hiding from Ginny, Ron was snogging Lavender as though his life depended on it, and the rest of the Weasleys were obviously caught up in their own life dramas. The only person who had really seen her was Luna, and well, Luna saw too much.

"Hermione, I'm really sorry about your parents. You did your best you know," Luna had said.

Hermione could do nothing more than smile tightly and nod at her friend. She accepted the hug she was given graciously and returned it fiercely. Then she went up to her room, packed her bag back up, and headed out. Except for a sad glance from Luna, no one really noticed she was gone.

Hermione returned to her parents' house, set up some basic wards, and got to work. She went through all the business contacts and found their attorney. She contacted him, presented the death certificate and will that had been left in Australia, and had him sell the surgery and any other business related items. She remembered a family trip to Scotland when she was a child, to a small town called Pitlochry in Perthshire, and decided to contact an estate agent to see if there were any cottages available there. She also had them look for a storefront. One of the letters from her mother had reminded her of their joke/dream of moving away from it all and opening a bookshop. With everything she thought she wanted completely out of her reach, she decided to return to that dream.

The Ministry offered NEWTs for all those eligible to take them the first week of July, two weeks from the day Hermione started a search for her new refuge. She signed up for them, even though she did not have much time to review. But she had taken her texts with her on that horrible camping trip, and if after everything she had been through, she could not pass, she was not going to worry. Had Harry or Ron heard her say that, they would have probably worried about what was wrong with her. Had Snape heard her, he would have decided that the little Know-It-All was growing up. That test week at the Ministry was the first time she had interacted with anyone from wizarding Britain since she had gone on her futile trip to find her family. She was pleased to see a few people she knew, including Neville, Hannah Abbot, Susan Bones, Pansy Parkinson, Draco Malfoy and some others. She greeted everyone, including the Slytherins, who, although surprised, greeted her back. At the end of the testing period, Hermione felt a small sense of accomplishment. When her results arrived, mostly O's with a few E's, she decided she was pleased. She had taken the tests, and no one could say she wasn't a fully qualified witch.

She returned home to find a letter from her estate agent, stating that she had found both a small cottage and a storefront in prime locations. Hermione quickly set up an appointment to look at them. She also contacted the solicitor to put her parents' house on the market.

When Hermione reached Pitlochry, she was enchanted. The storefront was wonderful, the street it was on not only attracted tourists, but the locals as well, and they seemed quite interested in having a bookshop available. If that was not enough, the cottage would have won over the hardest heart. It was beautiful: cozy but airy, with a large sitting room, many windows and enough bookshelves to make the most dedicated bibliophile happy. The kitchen was a good size, and there was a beautiful garden with room for flowers, herbs and vegetables. She turned to the agent and told her to buy both places. Hermione knew she was finally home.

Over the course of the next two weeks, Hermione set up her bookshop, and in addition set it up with a computer corner for connections to the internet and a television nook with a brand new DVD player and some sofas to play her favorite movies. She filled the shelves with her favorite genres of books (pretty much everything), a wide selection of non-fiction and in the back a tasteful erotica section. She also set about to make contacts so that she could provide, to order, a service to find rare books. Rarely had she worked so hard, yet been so satisfied.

She set up her cottage, thrilled to have found a wonderful set of furniture at an estate sale. A new mattress, some new appliances, and she was ready to go. She woke up every morning, quite pleased with the way she felt in the morning. Once everything was set up, she sent an owl to Luna with explicit instructions to not tell anyone where she was unless they asked.

As with everything else, Hermione threw herself into her new life wholeheartedly. She rarely thought about what she had left behind. After a while, it seemed like a dream or one of the novels in her fantasy section. It didn't matter, though. She was happy and at peace, and she rather liked it.

It was a different story at Hogwarts. Once Severus had recovered, he had to try to get Hogwarts rebuilt and ready for the new year. He saw the results for all the students who had taken their NEWTs in July. He was pleased to see that Draco had passed with very high scores. They were closely followed by Miss Granger's, then the rest, all of whom had met the minimum requirement of two NEWTs, and were all qualified. He did not quite understand Minerva's great distress when she saw the results.

"What is wrong, you old cat?"

"Miss Granger must be devastated. She did not get all O's! She only tested out second. I do hope the dear child is well."

"Minerva, Miss Granger's scores are excellent. Maybe she has grown up a bit, and no longer needs to have praise heaped upon her to be happy."

"I certainly hope so, Severus. She doesn't seem to have any of the support she should have expected." If Minerva was hoping for a helpful response, she was not going to get one. "You don't know?"

"Know what, Minerva?"

"Never mind, Severus. I know you do not like gossip."

The first year passed quickly. Hermione corresponded regularly with Luna, who was completing her final year at Hogwarts. Through her she learned that Harry and Ginny had split by the end of the summer. Harry had gone off to "find himself." Luna wrote to Hermione that she was unsure how he was going to manage that if he had not noticed that he was himself. Hermione had to smile at Luna's commentary, even as she was hurt by the fact that he failed to tell her himself. Interestingly enough, there were the occasional notes from Molly Weasley, motherly sorts of things, which Hermione responded to through Luna.

Lavender managed to torpedo any chance of ever becoming Molly's favorite when Molly discovered that she had addressed Hermione's invitation to Harmony Grange. But

since she did not want to hurt her son, she told him that Hermione was unfortunately out of the country and could not attend his nuptials. Ron just shrugged and took it good-naturedly. Considering it was a bit of a wand-point wedding, he had other things to think about.

Hermione had warded her home and had created a small potions lab in what normally would have been a garden shed. So she was able to do small bits of magic, hone her potions skill, experiment a bit, and play with Arithmancy and Runes. But she had found a deep, abiding love for her bookshop and the peace that running it brought her, and so her magic was just that, something to enjoy. Other than a few occasional owls from Luna, and the even more occasional visit, she had completely lost touch with the wizarding world. She no longer defined herself as a witch first; she was just Hermione Granger, bookshop owner. Although she occasionally missed her childhood friends, she found that she was fulfilled on her own.

The years started to pass more quickly. Seven years after the final battle, Severus decided that he had enough of Hogwarts. He had spent thirty four years of his life there and found that he was yearning for a change. He spoke to Minerva, who understood.

"You know, Severus, I remember a lovely little town near here. It is called Pitlochry, and they have a wonderful hotel with an amazing restaurant. It is totally Muggle, but relaxing."

"I believe I have heard of it, Minerva. It may be a good place to start a new phase of my life."

Severus arrived at the hotel, pleased by the luxury of the rooms. He was surprised by how much affinity he felt for what he had seen of the town. He had not brought anything to read, and so he asked the concierge if there was a bookshop.

"Oh, yes, sir! Down the main street of town there is a wonderful bookshop. If Miss Hermione doesn't have what you are looking for, then she will get it for you right away!"

Severus started a bit at the name. *Miss Hermione? It couldn't be Miss Granger, could it?* He decided it didn't matter and headed down the road.

The small bell over Hermione's door tinkled, and she looked up from the book she was reading at the counter, a smile on her face and a ready greeting. Due to the way the sun was shining, all she knew was that there was a rather tall man in her doorway.

"Good morning! Can I help you with anything?"

Severus was astounded by the changes in the witch. She was lovely. Never a classic beauty, she was a shade too plump for modern tastes, but somehow she shone. "I was just planning to browse, Miss Granger. I assume that is allowed?"

Hermione almost dropped the book she was reading when she heard the familiar voice. She shaded her eyes, stood up and came around the counter to stand in front of him.

"Headmaster! How are you doing? Is everything all right at Hogwarts?"

"I have left Hogwarts to those more interested in her than I, Miss Granger. I see all these years away have not stopped your incessant questions." Severus regretted his words almost immediately, more so when he saw the effect they had on Hermione.

Her shoulders slumped a bit, and she blinked her eyes rapidly before visibly shoring up her courage. Taking a deep breath, she replied quietly, "As you wish, sir. I will not bother you any longer. I will be at the counter if you have any questions. Feel free to browse all you want." She then returned to the book she had left behind the counter, made herself comfortable and began to read.

Severus perused the shelves leisurely, looking at Hermione out of the corner of his eyes. He noticed the beautiful smile that greeted every customer, the happiness in her voice and her mannerisms that were evident when she spoke or rang up a sale. She helped those who had specific questions, made recommendations to those who didn't, and humored the 97-year-old farmer who asked her to marry him, apparently for the 364th time.

"One of these days she's going to say yes, Sonny, just wait and see!"

"How did he manage 364 proposals, Miss Granger?"

Hermione blinked at the sound of that familiar voice so close to her.

"He proposes once a week. He has since the first time he came in here. I had to special order the magazines he wanted, but he's a faithful customer."

Severus waited for more exposition, or even more questions, but he had obviously offended the witch with his earlier comment, and although she responded to him when he spoke to her, she did nothing more. He found he wanted the easy banter she shared with her other customers, and there was a twinge of something more.

"My apologies, Miss Granger."

"What are you apologizing for, sir?"

"For my comment as I came in. I imagine that you would have questions after seven years of not seeing someone, and I was rude."

"It is no matter, sir. You never did like me. I should not have been so familiar. Now, not to be rude myself, but I am going to close up to go to lunch. If you wish to purchase something, you need to do so now, or you will have to wait until I come back."

Something about this more mature, self-aware Hermione intrigued Severus. He had not felt this kind of interest in anything or anyone in quite a while. He decided to do something about it. The Severus Snape that had run Hogwarts for seven years would never admit a wrong or apologize. He had already changed that, so he determined to follow through.

"In the interest of starting over, Miss Granger, might I accompany you? I would be happy to buy us lunch."

Hermione gazed at Severus thoughtfully. He met her gaze steadily, not wavering. Just as he was certain that he had ruined any chance with yet another Gryffindor witch, she smiled again, as brightly as she had when he first walked in, and nodded.

"Very well. I usually have a meal of soup, bread, and fresh cheese at the little bakery down the road. Mrs. Bowden makes the cheese herself from the family flock of sheep."

"That sounds lovely, Miss Granger."

Severus watched as Hermione locked up for her lunch hour; she bustled about with an economy of movement, doing something to the machine she had at the counter to make it go dark, turning off the lights, then following her as she went to the front door, hung a sign that said "out to lunch," then locked the door.

He offered her his arm, which she took with a smile, and they began to walk down the road. Hermione smiled and waived at many of the people they passed, greeting them by name. Severus found he enjoyed having such a vivacious and popular witch on his arm.

They came to a small bakery/cafe about two blocks down the way from Hermione's bookshop. Severus held the door open for her, which made Hermione smile again, then followed her to a table near one of the front windows.

"I like watching the world go by from here."

"There is not much world here, Miss Granger."

"No, there isn't, but I rather like it that way."

"I can see that. I find it incredible that the witch billed as the brightest of her age is content in the middle of nowhere running a bookshop." Unfortunately for Severus, Hermione heard the derision he was unable to keep out of his voice.

"It was a childhood dream, Headmaster. Before I found out about Hogwarts, before my life became a seven-year heart attack waiting to happen, before I was tortured for existing, I wanted to have my own bookshop. I could be around things I loved and have time to do research or experiments or something. And I have that here. Only two people have tried to stay in touch with me over the last few years, Molly Weasley and Luna Lovegood. I thought I would miss it, but I don't. I was pleased to see you until you insulted me, just because it was good to see you so healthy. You offered to start over and I accepted. Now you insult me again. I believe I have had enough of that, sir. If you want books you may go down to the store in Perthshire. I would rather not see you anymore." With that rather incredible statement, Hermione got up, asked Mrs. Bowden for her meal to go, gave her the regular amount for it and left.

"Ye know, laddie, insulting a pretty girl is not the way to get her to pay attention to you. It sounds like she gave you a chance once already today. Ye should have kept yer opinions to herself. Ye might have found out something surprising. Instead ye are here talking to a nosy old biddy."

"Just how much did you hear, madam?"

"Don't you worry, Severus Snape. Your secrets are safe with me. My husband, God rest his soul, was like you and the young Missy. We were never blessed with children, but I stay in touch with those friends I had. I know what is going on, and don't you pull that wand out at me. Young Miss Granger warded this place, and if you begin to cast, she will back here, and I really would hate to see what would happen."

Shocked down to his core, Severus sat in the bakery slowly eating his meal and ruminating over his day. He returned to the hotel quietly.

I have been in charge of children too long. I have forgotten how to deal with an attractive, adult witch. Miss Granger is lovely. I do not know why her choice of career felt like such a disappointment. Severus spent some time trying to figure out what had made him insult the first person other than Minerva genuinely pleased to see him in years.

The next morning, he ate a full English Breakfast, then headed over to Hermione's shop.

She looked up with a smile, as the bell rang, but her face quickly changed. "I asked you not to come back, sir. I have left my previous life behind, and you, well, never mind. Please leave."

"Please hear me out, Miss Granger. I spent most of yesterday wondering why the fact that you are content here bothered me so much that I insulted you. I imagine it is the fact that I cannot see the child I knew happy with this type of life. Obviously you have grown into someone I do not know. But from the small bit of time that I spent with you yesterday, I would like to know you. Your smiles yesterday were some of the few genuine ones I've had in years. I cannot throw that away. I beg of you, please allow me to get to know you."

Hermione was quite surprised. Here was Dumbledore's spy, pleading with her to allow him to do what, she wasn't certain. But she could not see herself as the cause of him bending his neck to anyone. Her heart, the same one that championed house-elves and gave her childhood to a small boy with a scar, bled for this man. She did decide to lay some ground rules, though.

"Well, Severus. If you want to get to know me, my name is Hermione. Miss Granger makes me think of those days long ago in uniforms and castles. That is no longer my life. I am happy here. I am quite willing to be your friend, but you cannot think you know better than I what I want or need out of life."

"Very well, Hermione."

Severus spent some time browsing that day. He bought quite a few Muggle novels and returned to the hotel. He had planned to stay for only a week, not thinking anything would keep him in Scotland for long, and so he was leaving Saturday. He only had 5 more days to lay the foundation for his relationship with Hermione.

The next day, he spent some time rambling about the countryside. He was met for lunch by Hermione holding a basket at the top of a dell filled with sheep. It was quite picturesque. The two made themselves comfortable on the blanket she pulled out of her bag. Severus turned to look at the lovely witch who was enjoying her bread and cheese and fruit.

"So, why do you stock so many Muggle Romances?"

"Mind candy."

"What?"

"They are mind candy. The boys had Quidditch, you have sarcasm, I have romance novels. By the way, stay far away from the ones written by Maggie Weatherby."

"Why would I do that?"

"You will find that Molly Weasley has quite an imagination. I believe the one titled 'Tall, Dark and Mysterious' uses you for a model."

"Please tell me you are bloody kidding, woman?"

"Not at all. Easy reads. A bit disconcerting to find that she uses almost every man she knows as a protagonist. This includes all six of her sons, and Harry as well as Kingsley, Remus, Sirius and (Lord, help me) Moody. I can see why she and Arthur seem happy though. That is either one heck of a sex life or one heck of an imagination."

After Severus stopped giggling, he responded, "A little bit of both, I imagine."

Hermione burst into giggles, then looked up at Severus through her lashes. He found he rather liked that, and smiled at her tentatively.

"Oh, you must do that again!"

"Do what, sweet?"

Hermione smiled inwardly at the endearment. She was very pleased to find that he was relaxed enough in her presence to call her sweet. Even if she wasn't sure she liked that particular phrase. It made her think of sherbet lemons for some reason.

"Smile, Severus. Your whole face changes. I quite like it."

"You mean to tell me you don't like my face if I am not smiling?"

Hermione stopped short. She looked at him carefully, then decided to throw caution to the wind. "I like your face all the time, Severus, but I like it particularly when you

smile."

Severus's lip twitched upward. "Ah."

They lay on the blanket in quiet companionship for a long while. Severus looked over and found Hermione fast asleep, her impossible hair everywhere, her head pillowed on her arms. He realized just how much he craved the sort of easy camaraderie that he felt these last couple of days with the little witch who trusted him enough to fall asleep in his presence.

He reached over to shake her shoulder a bit, calling her name softly.

"Hlaiaarahr?"

Severus snorted. "What language was that, exactly?"

"Snorkack!"

"Snor-what now?"

Hermione laughed. "Luna is always looking for Crumple-horned Snorkacks. I imagine that is what they sound like, don't you?"

Severus rewarded Hermione's whimsy with a deep belly laugh. It was a delightful sound.

They walked back to the store, where Hermione re-opened after the picnic. Instead of heading out like he planned, Severus settled down in the movie corner to watch a few things that interested him. He realized after a little while that the thing that interested him the most was the proprietress. He turned back to the telly, bemused by his thoughts. Most of the time, when he found a woman interesting, he would compare them to Lily, and most would fall short. For the first time in more years than Severus cared to remember, this was not the case.

She is loyal. More so than Lily. She is not turned by money or fame. She is forgiving, she was quite willing to give me a second, then a third chance. She is lovely. I know she doesn't think so, but I like women that look like women. Curves are good; even if they are reflected in that wild hair. She is so intelligent, I can't see how she is completely content solely running a shop, but she seems to be. I hope she is willing to give me a chance for more. I wish I had more than a week here.

"Severus! Severus! Are you there?"

Startled out of his thoughts, Severus replied, "Yes, I'm here. What did you need, love?"

Hermione decided she liked being called love far better than she liked being called sweet.

"I am about to go home. I have a potion that needs some work that I am going to do while the roast is roasting. Would you like to join me?"

"I would love to."

Hermione again closed everything down under Severus's watchful gaze, then they headed off toward her cottage.

When Severus entered the place, he felt like he had come home. He helped Hermione get the roast and veggies prepared, then followed her out to her lab. He was thoroughly surprised by the well-stocked, well-kept, well-used lab. He looked into the cauldron she was getting ready to remove from the flame and just about had a heart attack.

"Are you insane, witch? Many potions masters have died trying to get this particular mixture to work. The adder's blood reacts badly with the belladonna, but if you can get it all to work with the other ingredients you have here, it is a very potent healing draught. How are you planning to do this?"

"I have done my calculations. I have been experimenting with stirring Runes into the potions. The ancient Celtic seem to work the best. So, step back and set a shield." She very carefully moved the cauldron; then as the reaction began to occur, she began to stir. The odd movements corresponded to the magical Celtic runes for stability, strength and health. She repeated this pattern of three runes seven times, then the potion started to settle. She quickly pulled out the stirring rod and stepped back. After twelve seconds the healing potion shimmered, then turned a beautiful pale blue with an opalesque shine.

Severus was astounded. The sheer beauty of the potion was overshadowed by the beauty of the magic. It was incredible.

"Please tell me you have published this, Hermione. That is Master-level work!"

"Why thank you, Severus. Yes, I'm sure you have seen the articles published under the name Maya J Grey? Those are mine. I spent a few years just playing at magic, but I found I missed it, but I wanted to be tested for my merits, not because I was Hermione Granger. I like the anonymity."

They went back in, because by this point the roast dinner was ready, and settled down to eat. They ate their meal in companionable silence, but it was obvious that Severus was thinking.

"You did not leave the Wizarding World, entirely, then, did you?"

"Of course not, Severus. I wanted to. I even managed for a while. But, I am a witch. I will always be a witch, and I love to learn and experiment. But I could not find a way to do that as Hermione Granger. Even that small amount of time I was around after the Battle, people would not leave me alone. 'Tell us about Harry! Why aren't you with Ron?' It was exhausting. Here I can be happy doing what I love." Hermione looked defiant, and her hand was on her wand.

"Please, Hermione, don't Obliviate me. I was just trying to understand. I can see the appeal."

"I need to ask you to promise not to tell anyone. I like my life. Luna checks in on me between her adventures, and Molly tries very hard to not ask what I am doing. No one else ever seemed to care, and I find I like it like that. It is peaceful. I wasn't expecting you to show up out of the blue."

Severus promised and, after kissing Hermione almost absent-mindedly on the cheek on his way out the door, decided he had to think about things.

Watching Severus walk out her door, Hermione figured that he was never going to return and resolved not to get depressed about it; she had spent these last few years without a wizard in her life, and she would manage again.

Severus went back to his hotel contemplating what had just happened. He had figured that he would have a nice dinner and then maybe manage to bed the witch. They would both be pleased, then they could part without regrets. But now--now she was someone he could envision being around for a very long time, and that made things difficult for him. He was unsure how to proceed. Before Hermione women were either maternal, like Minerva or Poppy, completely sexual, as the rather forgettable women he had bedded to scratch an itch, forgettable, or Lily. Hermione was unlike anyone else, she was complete and content, and she seemed to like him.

To make everything even more difficult, he was completely entranced by what she had accomplished by combining the different types of magic. She was creating a whole new way of seeing things, and it was beautiful. He could spend the rest of his life studying her techniques and seeing if they could improve on them. Severus had thought he would travel the world to see what he could find of unusual magic. He now wanted to either take Hermione with him or stay with her and spend the rest of their lives together creating all sorts of magic. He went to bed, having decided his strategy.

The next morning, Severus woke up with a feeling of anticipation the like of which he'd never had. He couldn't wait to get over to Hermione to see what she thought of his plans. He went over to Mrs. Bowden's and got some fresh scones and clotted cream and tea. He hurried over to the bookshop to surprise his witch.

The bell over her door rang rather early. Hermione looked up from her computer and blinked. There was Severus Snape in a pair of dark grey wool trousers, a grey shirt and a lovely ivory colored Irish Fisherman's sweater. He was holding a tray from Mrs. Bowden's with her favorite scones, cream, jam and tea. She decided to pinch herself to see if she had fallen asleep at the keyboard.

"You are awake, my dear. If you are not, then we are dream-walking, and I have never been very good at that." That said, Severus walked up to Hermione, set the tray down on her sales counter, took her face in her hands and kissed her deeply. After a couple of seconds of being frozen in surprise, she kissed him back with enthusiasm. They broke apart slowly and smiled at each other.

"I thought I was never going to see you again, Severus. You have surprised me."

"As you have surprised me. Here I thought you were wasting that prodigious mind. Instead you are pushing the boundaries of known magic. I would love to see your notes, if you would allow it."

"Of course, Severus."

"Are you interested in some travel, Hermione?"

"No, Severus. I was quite put off of traveling after the fiasco that was the search for my parents. I am happy here. But I would never hold you from doing what you wish."

"What I wish is to spend time with you. In my entire life, I have never spent such a week. I have eaten well, rambled the countryside, watched some amazing magic be performed and kissed a lovely witch. I may travel a bit; I do have some plans to see the wizard-monks in Tibet next week, and I wanted to go by the library at Alexandria, but I find that I now want to share my adventures. I hope you do not find me too forward."

"Not at all, and now you've intrigued me. Alexandria?"

"Would you be willing to come with me?"

"I think I could close the shop for a week. When are you going?"

"As soon as I return from Tibet. I was going to go straight there, but now that I have someone to return to, I will come here first."

Hermione was quite amused and rather secretly thrilled at the enthusiasm that Severus was displaying. But she worried that she would be found lacking next to the vivacious Lily.

"And how do you know that you have someone to return to?"

Severus's face fell. "I have presumed to much, I imagine. I am sorry, Miss Granger."

"Oh, Severus. I do not mean to hurt you, but you have jumped into this with such uncharacteristic enthusiasm. I have told you about my dream here, but I do have another. I want to be the first person that a man considers. I do not want second place. I know how much you loved Lily, but I need to know if you mean this. I cannot afford another broken heart. It would end me."

Severus had frozen at her statement, the blank face he used to protect himself had appeared, but he did consider her words.

"I have compared every woman in my life to Lily, true. You are the only one to surpass that memory. You are kind, you are loyal and you are forgiving. You are beautiful. I could see myself enjoying a life here, with you, in the bookshop and in the lab. Do you think you would be willing to give me a chance?"

Hermione was dumbstruck by the profoundness of his simple statement. She, more than most, knew that a life could change on a decision made in moments. The last few days they had spent together after their first few bumps were some of the most delightful of her life. Just as when she found the shop and the cottage, Hermione just knew.

"Oh, yes, Severus. Yes."

Nineteen Years After the Final Battle

Hermione and Severus were walking their oldest to the train at Kings Cross. Selene was an oddly beautiful girl, black curly hair, tall and lean with brown eyes. She was a lovely combination of her parents.

"Do you think I will make friends?" Selene asked.

"Of course you will, sweetheart. And if not, just hex them all and call it a day."

"Daddy!"

"Severus!"

Severus just smirked at his two favorite women.

"That's right, Dad! Anyway, I will be there in a couple of years. Then you won't be alone, 'Lene!"

"Thanks, Seb."

"Headmaster Snape, Hermione!"

The two turned and saw Luna coming toward them. She had her oldest son in tow.

"Selene! I didn't know you were going to be here!"

"Lukas, I thought you were going to Durmstrang!"

"Mum convinced Dad to send me here. I thought you weren't starting until next year."

"I got my letter early. My birthday is in October; anyway, I'm not much younger."

The two children chattered happily all the way to the train.

Hermione looked around and saw Ron and Lavender with their youngest, and Harry and Gabrielle with their middle child. Ginny and Dean were there, as was Draco, although no one knew where his wife was. She nodded at all of them, but the connection they had as children was long gone.

She turned to her husband, and her heart swelled. She hadn't realized, the day she'd walked out of the Burrow, that she was starting a new adventure, one that would make those of her childhood feel like a story in one of the books she sold.

Many thanks to my beta, Southern_Witch_69!

This was written for the SS/HG exchange.

Recipient: antisocial_nerd

Warnings: EWE

Summary: Hermione is disappointed by life in the Wizarding World and makes her own way with an old dream.

Original Prompt: Hermione has moved to a small town and cut herself off from everyone, but otherwise is still the same bushy haired know it all. She owns a bookstore and Severus Snape walks in one day.