

Finding a Way Back

by sandlapper

Sequel to Where in the World. Severus wasn't the secret prisoner. Will justice be served and questions answered? Will everyone find a way back to their place in the world?

ONE

Chapter 1 of 4

Sequel to Where in the World. Severus wasn't the secret prisoner. Will justice be served and questions answered? Will everyone find a way back to their place in the world?

Thanks to my beta, peskipiksi. She keeps me on the straight and narrow! Don't own, just play. Now, on to part II...

The Astronomy Tower. Winds raged and thrust fingers of heat and damp into every corner, ripping at robes and hair. The sharp tang of ozone filled the electric air and lingered on the tongue. Green lightning flashed over and over, brighter and brighter. Feral laughter rang through the halls. Old eyes, their perpetual twinkle dimmed by fatigue, pled with his. Reluctantly, hatefully, he raised his arm, his hand, the holly wand trembled slightly.

"Harry...please..." the old man begged.

"Avada Kedavra!"

Harry Potter jerked from his sleep, screaming. It had been this way ever since he, along with Arthur and Ron Weasley, had opened the secret cell in Azkaban Prison six weeks previously. He and Ron had been suspended from the Auror Office pending investigation because of their part in holding a Ministry-declared innocent in the bowels of Azkaban, and to top this off, his wife had left him. Harry threw himself back on his pillow and tried to calm his racing heart and silence the voices in his head: Dumbledore pleading, Bellatrix Lestrange howling her demented laughter, Hermione crying. Of everything, it was the crying that tore at him the most; Hermione kneeling over Professor Snape, then her grandfather and accusing Harry of murder.

Harry scrubbed his hands over his face. Nights like this made him miss Ginny even more. "One more sin to lay at the feet of Severus Snape," Harry thought harshly. "Everyone I've ever loved has left me, and it's all Snape's fault."

And now, Severus Snape was somewhere in the world living his life while Harry once again had nothing. The unfairness of it all pierced Harry to his very heart. Snape, the murderer of Dumbledore and Sirius and so many others was alive and well, and Hermione knew something about it; at the very least, she knew in which direction to search for him. Harry knew he couldn't rest until he found her and in turn he would find the last enemy that needed to be destroyed. He wouldn't be whole again until his family had been avenged.

Once more, Harry had refused to admit his own weaknesses, his own culpability in how his life was turning out. It didn't matter that he had first pushed Hermione away with his insistence that his own brand of justice be dealt to Severus Snape. He had now pushed Ginny away with his anger issues, his obsessive need to locate Hermione and the fact that he was at work more often than at home. Ginny finally had had enough of his mood swings and had taken the children to the Burrow.

For the past few years, Ginny had grown increasingly concerned for her husband. He had been acting out of sorts ever since the day Hermione had left, and if she hadn't been secure in her marriage, Ginny would have been jealous. Harry's mood swings and issues had steadily worsened over time. He obsessively chased after leads to

Hermione's whereabouts declaring that nothing would be right until she came home, even going so far as to threaten George after he had finally returned to England. When Ginny challenged him on his newest obsession, Harry just told her that Hermione was his best friend and he deserved to know where and how she was. He never did understand why she left. He hated Snape and so took it for granted that every one of his friends would agree with him. At this point, Ron was the only one who still followed along.

Knowing that he wouldn't get back to sleep after the nightmare that woke him up, Harry made his way down to the kitchen to make a cup of tea. He reached for the soothing blend that Molly had given him, hoping that it would ease the tensions that had been a part of him for as long as he could remember. Cup in hand, he made his way up to the library and to his desk. He might not be working officially right now, but he could still do some research and work on the newest leads on Hermione's whereabouts. As soon as the sun came up, an owl arrived, tapping at the library window. Puzzled, Harry let the owl in and took the parchment tied to its leg. It was an official Ministry of Magic letter and Harry quickly ripped it open, hoping to find that his suspension from the Auror Office was over. He was ready to get back to work.

Auror Harry Potter (suspended)

12 Grimmauld Place,

You are hereby ordered to the Minister of Magic's office at 9:00 am to discuss your future with the Ministry and the Auror Office.

Signed,

Arthur Weasley, Minister of Magic

Gawain Robards, Head Auror

Harry grinned. Finally, he would be getting back to work, and then he could start really searching for Hermione again. Then Ginny could come home and everything would be back to normal. Harry dropped the parchment on the desk and took off upstairs. He didn't have long to get ready and get to Arthur's office. As he made his way to the bathroom, a Patronus interrupted his thoughts. Ron's voice excitedly asked if he had got a letter, and where did they want to meet prior to going into the Ministry? Harry sent off his own Patronus and went to finish getting ready.

Harry Potter and Ron Weasley stood in front of the Minister of Magic and the Head of the Auror Office. The tension in the room was palpable. None of the four men looked pleased to be in this particular meeting. The Minister broke the tense silence and began reading from a scroll.

"Auror Potter, Auror Weasley, you have broken a sacred trust and dishonored yourselves, the Auror Office, the Ministry, and what it means to be a member of Wizarding Society. You took it upon yourselves, along with two others, to destroy an innocent man in the name of revenge. Because of your actions, another innocent life was destroyed."

Ron flinched, but Harry remained impassive as Arthur continued to read the scroll.

"By Ministerial Decree and in accordance with Wizarding Law Fifty Six of 1345, you are sentenced to Azkaban Prison for a period of not longer than two years. As further decreed by the Minister's Office and the Auror Office, your suspensions from the Auror Office are hereby made permanent."

The office was deathly silent as Arthur allowed the scroll to reroll itself. A wave of his wand, a flash of blue, and the scroll was officially filed. Chief Robards ignored his former Aurors and turned to the Minister.

"Sir, you have fifteen minutes before I need to get the prisoners to Azkaban. I will leave you to it."

Arthur nodded and fell back into his chair. He closed his eyes and sighed deeply before facing his son and son-in-law. "Boys, I am sorry it came to this, but in order to put this behind us I had no choice."

Ron opened his mouth to speak, but he was cut off.

"Son! What you two have done is beyond wrong! I know you had your differences with Severus Snape, but the Wizengamot saw fit to exonerate the man. Dumbledore exonerated him. I don't even know what else to say!" Arthur pushed himself out of the chair, and he began to pace frantically in front of the ornate fireplace that dominated the room. "Yes, I do know what to say. You were told, by me, by your mother, by everyone who heard your opinions of Severus. You were TOLD by your best friend that what you were doing was wrong! Hermione was right when she said you were acting no better than Death Eaters. I cannot believe that you would turn your back on everything we have ever taught you. Ron, you and Harry are never going to come back from this. Against my better judgement, but at the request of the Auror Office and the War Crimes committee of the Wizengamot, the true details surrounding your incarceration will not be revealed. As far as the general public is concerned, there was a terrible accident involving the Auror Office and the Muggle world, and you two are responsible. The crux of the truth is there, but no one will know that you tortured someone and planned an assassination."

Ron dropped to his knees in front of Arthur and started sobbing. "Dad, I am so sorry. I never meant anything bad to happen, Harry and Mad-Eye were so sure, and I just wanted to make sure that our world was safe! Please, forgive me; tell me Mum will forgive me!"

Arthur dropped a hand to his son's head and whispered. "It wasn't your place, son. You have to go through the proper channels as Severus did. It was bad enough the treatment he got while awaiting trial, but you intended to hurt him because you just didn't like him. That is hard to swallow, Ron."

Harry had been silent throughout the entire proceedings and after Ron's outburst he stood. "Minister, I apologize for hurting you and your family and for breaking the Auror Office's trust. I will take my punishment, but I still believe Snape is guilty, and one day I will prove it. I will get him for taking everyone I love away from me."

Arthur simply shook his head. "Harry, let this go. You have already caused the torture and death of an innocent man. You HURT your best friend's grandfather! You've also broken the hearts of your wife and children. Nothing good will come from you dwelling on something that you are so wrong about. Can't you see that what you, Moody, Ron, and Kingsley did was wrong? I wouldn't be Minister of Magic right now if the guilt hadn't led Kingsley to commit suicide. He thought you and Moody were right to begin with until he sat down and really studied all the evidence and talked again to Albus' portrait. I read his farewell letter. He broke the Unbreakable Vow he swore to you because he thought it poetic justice. You HAVE to let this go. Use your time in Azkaban to come to your senses. Come home and be with your family and become the man you should be."

As Arthur finished, Gawain Robards re-entered the room followed by two Aurors. "Minister, I got approval for you to retain the wands of the prisoners. They can get them back from you as soon as they have completed their sentences."

He nodded to the Minister and then the two Aurors. "Time to go. I want to get this done before anyone alerts the press."

Arthur embraced both boys tightly and then Ron and Harry were escorted to the fireplace and Floo'd to Chief Robards' office. From there they were taken to Azkaban to start their two-year sentences.

TWO

Chapter 2 of 4

Sequel to Where in the World. Severus wasn't the secret prisoner. Will justice be served and questions answered? Will everyone find a way back to their place in the world?

Thank you to my beta, peskipiksi!

"You look worn out, my dear," Severus said as he joined his wife on the veranda.

Hermione nodded slightly, as she leaned back into his embrace. "I am a bit."

Warm arms cradled Hermione gently, yet securely, shoring up her rapidly dwindling energy. It had been a long day, indeed. Carlos Santiago had finally been brought home to rest with his beloved wife, Cordelia. The solitary grave had always looked so sad and lonely to Hermione that it hurt her to visit. Now, her grandparents were together and everything was at peace.

"May I ask something about your grandmother?" Severus questioned after a bit of shared silence. "I have been puzzled for a long time, but why is her name Welsh? I wouldn't have expected anything not completely Spanish."

Hermione laughed softly. "Ahhh... Well you see, Grandmother was born and raised here in Argentina, but she was completely Welsh. Her grandmother and grandfather emigrated from Wales. They lived in the main Welsh area south of here, but her mum and dad moved to the Rio Negro area. They eventually bought the orchards here and settled down. Grandmother met Papa in Buenos Aires when she went with her father to the markets there. Papa said he fell in love instantly and came to work for her family so they could be together." Hermione sniffled a little. "I always thought that was the most romantic story..."

Severus mused over this answer and then asked, "How did your mother and father meet?"

"Oh, mum got ill when she was small and Papa and Grandmother brought her to England for treatment. She always wanted to go back and decided to move to London for college. She met dad at medical school, and as they say, the rest is history."

Hermione turned in Severus' arms and hugged him tightly. "I am glad Mum chose college in London. Everything has been worth finding you and this life."

"I don't know if I would have chosen this path, but I can't disagree with the outcome. I never thought I would find happiness, Hermione, and I must admit I am more indebted to your papa than I could ever repay."

Another tight hug was his answer, and the two stood in silence again watching the sun fade quickly from the sky. He could feel her beginning to withdraw again and chose to disturb the quiet to keep her from completely turning in on herself. "The ceremony was beautiful; your papa would be pleased, I think."

Hermione smiled sadly at her husband. "Yes," she sighed.

Severus tightened his embrace. "What's troubling you, my love?"

"I don't know." She shook her head. "It's silly, really."

"Talk to me, love; nothing can be that bad, and I can't help if I don't know what you need." Severus encouraged Hermione to continue.

She sighed deeply again. "It's just that now I have no one to call me mariposita any more. I mean, Papa's been gone for years, but it was always like he was coming back one day. Now, he really is gone... forever."

Severus held Hermione close as she sobbed out her grief. He stroked her back tenderly waiting for her crying to quieten. As her tears eased, he spoke to her softly. "Hermione, I can't -- I won't call you mariposita; that was your papa's place and his name for you. But I can call you my heart." He took a deep breath and plunged ahead. "Everyone always thought I was heartless, but they were wrong. I simply chose to conceal that part of me. I was hurt once, and I swore I would never do that to myself again. At least, not until the time was right. I realised you were the one when you came to me before my trial. No one had ever done anything for me before, not without strings. You are the first person in my life to do something for me just because you wanted to. You are my heart, mi corazon, if you prefer tradition. Mi corazon, no longer hidden, no longer alone..."

"You want to call me by a nickname and in Spanish, no less?" Hermione's eyes welled with tears at the implications.

Severus rolled his eyes and snorted softly. "My dear, you are doing a splendid job of imitating a watering can. I beg you, cease."

Hermione's snuffling was broken by a watery giggle. "I love you," she said. "I hope you know I wasn't intentionally teasing you. I just can't tell you what it means that you are willing to unbend so much to make me happy." She looked up at Severus' face and wrinkled her nose. "I know how you feel about nicknames and about silly things in general."

Severus merely shrugged and said, "You complete me. That is all I need to know. Everything else is just details."

He sealed this declaration with a gentle press of his lips to hers. For a long moment, both held on to this sweet touch, but it soon became heated. Lips and tongues duelled and caressed, fired and soothed. Fingertips explored and teased, tantalized and aroused. They broke away from each breathlessly, and Hermione suggested they retire to their bedroom. They made their way from the veranda into the office only stopping briefly for a steamy kiss. Hermione moaned softly and pulled back. "Please, Severus, no more waiting. Take me to bed."

Severus chuckled lightly and swept Hermione into his arms. "As you wish, mi corazon." She laughed delightedly when he began to press kisses onto her lips and throat as he strode boldly up the stairs. Reaching their room, Severus set Hermione on the floor, and he wasted no time in ridding her of the ceremonial robes she was still wearing. "You are beautiful, love. I am truly blessed that you chose to share your life with me."

Hermione reached up and caressed his face. "There was never a doubt in my mind, my love. You have done nothing but protect me for as long as I can remember. Besides, Papa thought very highly of you after only one meeting and that is all I needed to know." She ran her fingers through his hair, fingers scratching at the nape of his neck before pulling him down into another fiery embrace. He opened his mouth against her assault, and again the passion ignited between them. Severus could feel the trembling of Hermione's body as he dragged his lips from her mouth to her throat and its sensitive hollow.

"Hermione, bed, now." Severus groaned.

A whispered Nox and a groan of her own was Hermione's answer.

The next day, the exhausted couple finally made their way downstairs, Hermione to the office and Severus to the kitchens. He quickly put together an impromptu picnic and then followed his wife to the office. "I hope you aren't too hungry, love. We don't have much other than fruit and tea. I believe it is time to visit the shops."

Levitating the tray to the tea table in front of the windows, he turned to find Hermione staring at the newspaper. At first, he thought she was laughing, but Severus quickly realized that it was sobs shaking Hermione's shoulders. He moved swiftly to her side and took the paper in one hand, wrapping his other arm around her. "Sit; drink this," he demanded curtly, pouring a cup of tea and pushing into Hermione's hand. "What's wrong? It isn't Arthur or George?"

Hermione caught her breath and took a drink of tea then shook her head. "Read it, please. Aloud -- I didn't get past the headline."

Severus nodded, opened the paper and took his own deep breath. The *Daily Prophet* wasn't something that the Snapes usually subscribed to, but George would have Arthur owl copies or he would bring them when he visited if there were important happenings in the paper. This headline was enough to throw the Wizarding World into a furore for sure, and Severus began wondering how their lives would change from here.

'Aurors Potter and Weasley Sentenced to Azkaban'

Magella Wolfswift reporting --

The Wizarding World was shocked today when Minister of Magic Arthur Weasley announced that Harry Potter and his partner, together two thirds of the Golden Trio, were sentenced to a term in Azkaban. This comes on the heels of reports that a Dark Artifact smuggling ring had merged with a Muggle drug operation. The Statute of Secrecy was broken, and several Muggles were killed in a raid that went wrong. Aurors Potter and Weasley, lead Aurors in the magical investigation, took full responsibility for the disastrous happenings. When asked about having to punish both his son and the Boy Who Lived, Minister Weasley was quoted as saying, "No one is above the law. Isn't that why we fought against You Know Who? Aurors Potter and Weasley willingly submitted to the punishment demanded by our laws and those of the Muggle Authorities." We will follow this story and see of the Minister is as steadfast as he says when his son and son-in-law are locked in a cell.

Severus finished reading the story and looked at his wife. She had stopped crying, but tears still welled in her eyes. "Arthur did this for me, didn't he? We would have heard about any incidents involving the Muggle world. He said he would make sure that Papa would be given the justice he deserved."

"I don't know. We knew that in order to bring your grandfather's body home with no questions, Arthur had to let the Governing Council of the Wizengamot know everything that happened. It is possible that they are behind this."

"Oh, but I feel so bad." Hermione began crying again. "I should have tried harder to talk to Harry and Ron. There has to have been something I could have done..."

Severus closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He knew that whatever he said now could potentially hurt Hermione and he didn't want that, no matter what. He sat beside her, grasping her hand lightly as she got herself under control. "Hermione, there was nothing that you could ever have done to change what happened. Potter was always suspicious of me, and Weasley followed along with Potter no matter what. And I did kill the Headmaster, even if I didn't want to. I have come to terms with my past, mostly because of you, and I don't want to see you dwelling on what could have been. All that will do is destroy you."

Hermione nodded and squeezed Severus' hand. "You're right, but it breaks my heart to know that if I had only tried harder, Papa wouldn't have been trapped in Azkaban and you might never have been so ill."

"You did all that you could. Potter always was hot-headed and stubborn."

Hermione opened her mouth to speak, but Severus cut her off. "Hermione, I know I wasn't the easiest teacher OR person to be around, but you can't pretend that Potter tried to be any better. He was given leeway to do things for which any other student would have been expelled. He never took responsibility for anything."

"I know. I didn't always agree with what the boys did, but I followed along for damage control. They never had a plan, just rushed headlong into the fray every time." Hermione shuddered at the memories that came flooding over her.

"All right, that's enough of that. We need to move on to other things. I will Floo-call Arthur and let him know we saw the paper. Perhaps he can come to visit soon and tell us exactly what's going on. For now, let's just carry on as normal. Starting with you eating your breakfast."

Hermione rolled her eyes and pinched a peach from the basket on the table. "Yes, dear," she drawled.

Three weeks later found Hermione and Severus waiting for Arthur to pay them a visit. His schedule had been so full as a result of Harry and Ron's incarceration that it had taken him weeks to sneak away. The fire in their office flared green, and Arthur stepped through in a shower of soot and a flurry of sneezes. "Ahhhchoo, pardon; I always manage to stir up too much soot!"

Hermione just laughed and waved her wand, cleaning both the carpet and the Minister and reached out to hug the man she considered a second father. "Oh, Mr. Weasley, it's so good to see you. Welcome back to Argentina."

Arthur embraced Hermione back matching her enthusiasm. "Hermione, it's Arthur, and I am thrilled to be back. Maybe this time I can see more of your winery and orchards?"

Hermione nodded, eyes sparkling. "Oh, yes, I would love to show you around and I am sure Severus might even be persuaded to let you sample some of the brandies."

Arthur rubbed his hands together gleefully. "That sounds a treat, but let's get this other business out of the way first. I want to have as pleasant a visit as I can. First, I apologise for not making it here for your grandfather's funeral. Dealings with the War Crime Committee and the Governing Council have been quite heavy recently. Secondly, I wanted you to know that I would have broken my vow and told the Wizarding World the details of what happened this past ten years, but the Council decided that we should punish the boys without destroying everything we have built since Voldemort's fall."

Severus nodded in agreement. "True, if it came out that the destroyer of the Dark Lord was edging towards using his methods, even in only one situation, all the good we had done would be for naught."

"I wanted to be the one to tell you that Harry still maintains that you are guilty of murder and whatever else he can think of, Severus. He told me that he would prove it when he got out of prison. I just wanted to warn you."

"Severus was exonerated; Harry needs to let go of the past," said Hermione huffily.

"Yes, but you know how determined he can be. Now, you show me this empire George is always going on about, and let me tell you about the family..."

THREE

Chapter 3 of 4

Sequel to Where in the World. Severus wasn't the secret prisoner. Will justice be served and questions answered? Will everyone find a way back to their place in the world?

A/N Thanks, peskipiksi, for keeping me in line! I don't own, just dabble!

Dear Ron,

This is the first contact I have had with you in ten years and, I daresay, it will be the last. I am finally putting the past aside completely as I welcome the next stage of my future with open arms. We've been friends for so long, I feel that I owe you the truth. For a time after I read the letter that told me that Papa had been trapped in Azkaban all these years, I hated you. I hated you as much as I had ever loved you. You were an important part of my childhood and with one action you almost destroyed me. I am not writing to hurt you now or to make you dwell on the past.

Ron, my brother, my friend, I forgive you, unconditionally. I know in my heart that Papa forgives you. I am happy, more than I can say, and it came from the actions of you and Harry, Mad-Eye and Kingsley. As painful as losing Papa was, I gained something as precious in return. I wish you all the best in the future.

Hermione

Ron Weasley, dressed in his prison uniform, held his head in his hands and cried. He was almost halfway through his two-year sentence, and other than visits from family, this was his first contact with the outside world.

"George, have you seen Hermione? Is she really OK?" Ron couldn't help but ask through his tears.

"I saw her recently. She asked me to give that letter to you as soon as I could. I didn't keep it from you."

"Thank you, George." Ron took a deep breath and looked at his brother. "I can't write back to her, but could you let her know that I am sorry for everything and if I could change it all, I would. I'm really happy that she is moving on. Maybe one day she will come home?"

George looked at Ron sadly. "I'm afraid Hermione won't ever come back to Britain, but I'll give her your message. Little brother, we love you and Mum and Dad want to have a chance to see you, so I'm off. See you when I am home next. Oh! Happy Christmas, such as it is!"

The brothers couldn't touch, but the emotion in the room was enough and George ducked quickly through the door. Moments later, Arthur and Molly came through the door and seated themselves at the table in the centre of the visiting room. Even after ten months of prison visits, it took Molly a few moments to gather herself together. As soon as she did though, she was all 'mother'. "Ron, are you getting enough to eat? Are you warm enough? Do you need anything?"

She would have gone on and on if Ron and Arthur would let her. "Molly, dear, let the boy speak. You don't give him a chance to answer one question before you are asking another."

Ron laughed a bit sadly. "Mum, Dad, I love you. Happy Christmas."

"We love you, son," Arthur said. "And Happy Christmas to you."

Molly just nodded tearfully. "What's that in your hand?"

Ron looked down at the crumpled paper clutched in his fist. "Oh, yeah. It's a letter from Hermione." Both Weasleys looked surprised. "She's forgiven me, for everything. You have no idea how that feels." Ron started sobbing again. "I helped kill her grandfather and she forgives me. Mum, Dad, I've been doing a lot of thinking. I don't know what I will do when I leave here, but I've got to make up for how I've been. I've always tagged along, been in the shadows. I've got to make my own way."

Arthur smiled at Ron with pride. "Son, just be yourself. Everything will work out. Oh, did George tell you he has reopened the shop? He has even opened several more in different countries. One is in America! And I wanted to let you know that we will be gone for Christmas this year. I am taking your mum on a well-deserved holiday. Unfortunately, that means we will miss your visitation day. I've gotten special permission for us to bring Christmas dinner and everything on Boxing Day instead. George didn't tell you that either?"

"No, he didn't! Why wouldn't he tell me? That's brilliant! And Christmas goose, here? I think I can wait until Boxing Day."

"Maybe George didn't want to say anything since you got that letter," Molly offered.

"Yeah, probably. I am really happy for him. I know he's had a hard time what with Fred being gone."

The rest of the visit went quickly, and Molly and Arthur promised to see him again the next month with Molly asking what she could bring him.

"Nothing, Mum, I'm fine, thanks."

Arthur knocked on the door to alert the guard, and as the door opened, Ron spoke up. "Dad? Have you seen Harry at all?"

Arthur shook his head and Molly sniffed a little. "No, he still refuses to see anyone regularly. As far as I know, Mad-Eye was the last one to see him. He only came for the first few months and then he was committed to St Mungo's." Arthur held out his hand towards Ron in a helpless gesture. "We can't force Harry to see us. He won't even accept letters from the children. I fear for his mind."

Ron nodded slowly. "I'm more worried about what he might do when he gets out of here. But, Dad, keep trying, maybe he'll change his mind."

On the other side of Azkaban, a dark-haired man paced a cell all the while muttering to himself.

Hermione stood in her living room, directing the placement of the Christmas tree. Severus was becoming irritated with her indecision on whether it should go by the fireplace or in front of the large window. "Merlin, woman, make up your mind! It looks fine wherever you put it."

Hermione's eyes welled up at the exasperation in his voice, and immediately he pulled her into his embrace. Rolling his eyes, he wiped her cheeks and kissed her lightly on the lips. "I just want everything to be perfect," she said.

"I know you do, but the Weasleys are family. They aren't going to be disappointed if your house looks like a home."

Now the tree was finally placed and the last ornament hung. Holly, ivy, and candles decorated the mantelpiece and windowsills. This was Hermione's one connection with

her former home. Even though it was warm outside, she had a traditional British Christmas. Finally, she was satisfied and headed to the office to wait for her guests. Rather than Flooing, George had decided to surprise his family with a Muggle trip. Hermione could only imagine how excited Arthur was to fly on an aeroplane the first time. She just hoped he could control himself somewhat. Luckily for George, the Christmas dinner with Ron meant that the Weasleys would Floo back home to the Burrow.

They didn't have very long to wait before the wards alerted them that George had arrived. Hermione met them at the front door, squealing like a little girl when she saw Ginny. "Ginny! Oh, Happy Christmas!" The redhead was just as girly as she grabbed Hermione and squeezed her in a bone-crushing hug. "Oh, Merlin, Hermione, I have missed you! Happy Christmas to you! Thank you so much for allowing me to finally come see you. And the children, you don't have to worry about them. Dad put a charm on them that won't allow them to say anything about this place until he lifts it."

Hermione grinned broadly. "Allow? You must be my Christmas gift, because I didn't know you were coming. And look at those babies! I think it is brilliant that you brought them!" Hermione knelt down to meet the little boy and girl standing nervously behind their mum. "Well, I'm Hermione and welcome to Argentina. Would you like to come in and see the Christmas tree?"

The two children grinned and began to talk at the same time. "I'm James, she's Lily. Why is it hot here? When will it snow? What kind of tree do you have?"

The adults laughed and Hermione ushered her guests into the house. Hermione turned to George and hugged him and then Molly and finally Arthur as they all exchanged Christmas greetings. "Let's go into the living room and sit down. There's a lot I need to tell you."

Once everyone was settled, Molly looked at Hermione. "Dear, you are looking wonderfully well. Argentina suits you."

"Thanks, Mrs..."

"Molly, dear, just Molly. You are still a part of this family no matter what. And before we get too blubbery, we all know everything that happened. Arthur told me what he could and George filled in the rest on the way here. Where is your husband?"

Like he had been summoned by the question, Severus stepped into the living room, levitating a tray. "Hermione insisted that we have mulled wine, so please, enjoy."

Just as he set the tray on the table nearest to the Christmas tree, Severus was nearly bowled over by a very emotional Molly Weasley. All at once, she was apologising and thanking him for what he had done for George and Hermione and, Severus was sure, for things that had to do with things he would rather forget. Surprisingly, he hugged Molly back and extracted himself gently. "Molly, I neither need nor want your apologies or thanks. George and Hermione saved me, not the other way around."

Molly tried to protest, but Severus would have none of it. "Would anyone like a drink?" he asked, changing the subject. As he began serving the wine, he stopped and stood listening intently. With a slight smile he looked at Hermione. "My dear, I think that you had something you needed to do upstairs before much longer? We will be fine here for a while."

Hermione jumped up from her seat and started towards the door. "Ginny, want to walk with me?"

Ginny nodded and followed her friend from the room. They made their way upstairs and Hermione grinned at the thought of the reaction she would get from this surprise. She opened the door at the end of the hall and beckoned Ginny inside. "This is MY surprise!" Hermione practically glowed. "Meet Cordelia. We named her after my grandmother."

The nursery was decorated in white and soft greens and yellows. Lying in a beautifully wrought cradle was Hermione and Severus' one month old daughter. She was a tiny thing with fine, jet black hair and intelligent eyes. She lay quietly, staring out towards the voices she heard coming into the room. Ginny stared at Hermione. "Why didn't you TELL anyone? She's beautiful!"

Hermione shrugged a bit sheepishly. "Well, I was going to, then when we started making plans for you all to come for Christmas, I decided to wait. You're not cross, are you?"

"Cross? NO! I am so happy for you!" And Ginny promptly burst into tears. "I am so sorry, I'm not normally this bad anymore, but Harry... well, it still hurts even though I was the one who left. You know, we were planning on having another baby; he wanted a son to name after Dumbledore. But Hermione, I just couldn't deal with everything that was going on. I had to get away."

Hermione embraced her friend. "We will talk about this later, just us, I promise... it's certainly overdue, but right now, what's say we go introduce Cordelia to her godfather and honorary grandparents." Hermione looked slyly at Ginny. "She already met her godmother." Another squeal and hug was the answer to that.

Cordelia was duly fed and changed and handed to her newly minted godmother. "Let's go surprise your mum." And down the stairs they went.

FOUR

Chapter 4 of 4

Sequel to Where in the World. Severus wasn't the secret prisoner. Will justice be served and questions answered? Will everyone find a way back to their place in the world?

A/N: Thanks to my beta, peskipiksi, who is brilliant even when I am not! Dabbling, not owning!

Hermione stood in the doorway of her office and watched as Severus read to their daughter. His deep voice soothed the child as she drifted in and out of sleep against his chest. The dozen or so years since the end of the war had ultimately been good to the Snapes, and Hermione could only wonder when it would end. She was shaken from her reverie when Severus got up from his seat to take Cordelia upstairs for a bath and bed. Hermione offered to take her, but Cordelia wasn't interested. "Daddy do it!" she shrieked. Severus rolled his eyes and Hermione shrugged. She let them pass and then went to her desk and tried to get some work done.

"That child drools more than a troll." Severus came back into the office half an hour later, buttoning up his shirt. "I had to change into another shirt." He looked pointedly at Hermione. "You get to read her to sleep next time."

Hermione smiled and leaned back in her chair. Then she sighed. "I'm concerned, Severus. Harry and Ron are out of Azkaban, and when they are allowed to leave Britain, I know at least Harry will start looking for us again."

"We'll be fine, my heart."

"Severus, he almost located us several times in the past ten or so years. Then, he had a job and family to interfere." Hermione was getting agitated now. "If it were just the two of us, I wouldn't care if Harry found this place. Now we have Cordelia and another on the way. I don't want to take the chance that he will hurt one of them to get to you." Her hands went subconsciously to the small roundness of her belly.

Severus watched her hands move in quick circles over their unborn child. Making a quick decision, he went to the roll top desk sitting between the French windows and poured a splash of brandy into a snifter. He pressed it into Hermione's hands and urged her to take slow sips. "This will help calm you." He watched as she took several small sips. "We will keep our family safe. We've at least another six months before we have to start watching."

"We need a plan. I refuse to leave anything to chance."

"Yes, my heart, and I have some thoughts on that."

Harry Potter was planning his next move. He and Ron had been released from Azkaban and were now at the end of serving six month's probation. Ron had returned to the Burrow and could only go between there and his new job with George. Harry refused to go anywhere but Grimmauld Place, and he refused to communicate with anyone other than Arthur, and that only once a week when he and Ron had to check in with the Ministry. Now, it was the day of the final visit to the Ministry, and Harry Floo'd into Arthur's office. He was joined by Ron, Arthur, and Chief Robards.

Arthur shook each man's hand and started the final proceedings. "Mr. Potter, Mr. Weasley, you have served your time in Azkaban and have now finished your probation. Each of you is now allowed to have the restrictions removed from your wands and your movements. Chief Robards, do you have anything to add?"

The Chief looked at Harry and Ron, then back to Arthur. "Minister, I have nothing to say. These two are officially removed from the Auror ranks, and I'm simply here to supervise the return of their wands."

"Thank you, Chief Robards."

Ron and Harry remained silent as the Chief Auror said his goodbyes and left the Minister's office. After the door was closed, Arthur invited the boys to sit down. "It is time to move on with your lives. Ron, I am proud of you for doing what's been required of you. I hope that you will find your way in your new job. Harry, I don't know what to say to you. Please know that you are always welcome at the Burrow."

Ron nodded to his dad, thanking him for standing by him. "I'll just see you at home then, Dad. I need to go and get ready to leave with George in a few days."

Harry also stood up to leave and stopped when Arthur called his name. "Please, Harry, let us help you. The children, Molly, Ginny, we all miss you."

Harry just shook his head and followed Ron out of the door. He followed Ron for a little way before finally calling out to him. "Ron, wait. I need to talk to you."

Ron stopped and turned around with a smile. "Thank Merlin, I thought you were going to just ignore us for the rest of our lives. Do you want to come back to the Burrow? Mum was cooking dinner when I left. I know the kids would love to see their dad too."

As Ron was rambling, Harry just shook his head. "No, Ron, I'm not coming back there. I do need your help though. I need to know where George has been going. That should give us an idea of where he might be meeting Hermione. Then we can go together and talk to her."

Ron looked at Harry with a frown. "No, I'm done with all that. Hermione is happy, and I'm not interested in making her angry or upset. You need to let this go, and maybe one day she will at least come to visit."

"I am NOT going to drop this. She knows where Snape is, Ron, and I'm going to get what I need with or without your help. I thought we were friends and now you've turned on me just like Hermione." Harry hissed angrily. "You know where she is, don't you? Don't you?"

Ron shook his head fiercely. "No, I don't. I did a lot of thinking while I was in Azkaban, and I refuse to interfere anymore. I'm sorry, Harry, you are my best mate, but I can't help you. I won't help you." Ron watched sadly as Harry stormed off. He followed more slowly, reaching the bank of Floos after Harry had already disappeared. Ron sighed and decided to let George know he needed to watch out for Harry.

Harry Floo'd into Grimmauld Place, wildly angry. He immediately began to throw things and scream at the top of his lungs. "I can't BELIEVE these people. Am I the only one who understands? Snape has to pay for what he's done to me!" As Harry raged, his magic got out of control, and the last thing that he saw was a flash of light before he collapsed to the floor.

The Burrow was dark. It was the middle of the night and Harry found himself standing at the front door. He reached out and tapped the doorknob, muttering, "*Alohomora*" under his breath. He braced himself for alarms to sound or the wards to flare, but nothing happened. He breathed deeply when he realized the wards were still set for him. He made his way into the house, through the kitchen and up the stairs. He skipped the fifth and eighth steps, the ones that squeaked like mice when trodden on. His first stop was to Arthur and Molly's bedroom. He placed a Silencing Spell on the door to keep them from being alerted as he made his way on up the stairs. As he reached the next floor, he realized Ron's door was open. He assumed it was a result of being locked up for over a year, and he carefully made his way past the room. Down the hall, he stopped in front of Ginny's room. He placed his hand on the door and bowed his head. He let the anger simmering inside him surface for a moment, but then got it under control. Another "*Alohomora*" and Harry was staring greedily at his estranged wife. Squeezed into the bed with her were Lily and James, both holding tightly to their mother. Harry watched his family until Lily whimpered and turned over. Before he could get caught, Harry was out of the room and the door was shut. Several moments later and Harry was down the stairs, out into the yard and gone his mission accomplished.

Hermione sat in her office enjoying the fire burning merrily in the grate. Cordelia was at her little table colouring and reading. Severus had gone for supplies, and she was expecting him back at any moment. She was getting close to the end of her pregnancy and was having a hard time getting comfortable. She had just shifted her position once again, when there was a persistent knocking on the front door. Telling Cordelia to sit at her table, Hermione went to see who was there. She opened the door to find Harry Potter standing on her porch.

Harry didn't speak at first, just stared in shock at the friend he had not seen in more than twelve years. "You're pregnant," Harry said.

Hermione snorted. "You took the trouble to locate my home just to tell me that?" The sarcasm fairly dripped from her question. "What do you want, Harry? I'm sure this isn't a social call." She huffed a bit. "Would you care to let me know why you are so far from home? We haven't spoken in years and all of a sudden you want to visit?"

Harry was taken aback by the tinge of hostility edging Hermione's voice. "You've certainly changed, 'Mione." He cringed a bit when he realized how he sounded. "Can I come in?"

Hermione stepped back from the door and gestured for Harry to come in. She turned and walked down the hall and back into her office. Once there, she called to Cordelia and took her to sit in the chair closest to the fireplace. She invited Harry to sit on the sofa opposite her.

The silence was deafening until Harry asked, "Is that your kid, too?"

"Stating the obvious again, Harry?" Hermione cuddled her daughter, who was nodding off on her mother's lap. "Could you excuse me for a moment? I need to put my daughter down. It's past her naptime. I'll be right back, so I would appreciate it if you would stay right here until I return." Hermione pushed herself up and awkwardly carried

Cordelia out of the room and up the stairs. While she was in the nursery, she pulled out her wand and sent off a Patronus. "Harry is here," was the message. Now all Hermione could do was stall and wait impatiently.

She made her way back downstairs and into the kitchen. She took her time preparing a tea tray, and then she slowly levitated it back to the office. Harry was at the roll top desk, looking through the brandy bottles, and he started when she came back in.

"Did you find what you were looking for, Harry?" Hermione inquired stiffly. "First you come into my home, unannounced, and frankly, unwelcome and now you are snooping through my things? I hope you have a good reason."

Harry turned furious eyes on his former friend. "A good reason? I have a DAMN good reason. You are hiding Snape and I want him. I suggest you tell me what you know."

Hermione calmly sat back in the chair by the fire and settled the tea tray. She poured two cups of steaming tea, then spoke. "Why would I tell you anything? What would I get in return? My Papa, perhaps? Can you change the fact that you murdered my Papa?"

Harry flinched and then spat at Hermione, "You won't blame that on me. If anyone killed your grandfather, it was you. You were the one who Polyjuiced him so Snape could escape his punishment." Harry got steadily louder. "How could you betray me like that? Snape killed my family and Dumbledore, and it's his fault Ginny and the kids are gone. He took everything away from me. He is going to pay for what he's done!"

"Betray you? This has NEVER been about you. This is about doing what's right, not what's easy. But that's always been your problem, hasn't it? You wanted easy. The only reason you were ever my friend is because of what I could do for you. I kept you from getting expelled because of that troll, and that is the only reason you and Ron made friends with me. That, and I let you copy my homework. As long as I did what you wanted, everything was fine." Hermione steadily got louder and louder. "Well, not this time Harry. I'm done with being used by you."

As Hermione shouted, Harry was looking around the room. Things he'd noticed as he snooped around finally clicked in his head, and he shouted back, "You don't just know where he is, you MARRIED him! That's Snape's kid upstairs and you're having another one! How could you betray me like that, Hermione? Where is he? Tell me now and maybe I'll let you stay here instead of going to Azkaban yourself. If you don't start talking, we'll see how long it takes him to look for HIS family. I'm going to get even with him for killing Mum and Dad, Sirius and Dumbledore. He is going to pay for everything he has done to me." Harry's eyes were wild and his hands were shaking.

Hermione turned white and swayed where she sat. In a deadly, low voice she said, "Harry, if you even THINK about touching my family, I will kill you myself. You are acting like a Death Eater, threatening me to get what you want. Shall I call you 'My Lord'? Maybe you want me to bow before you?" Hermione taunted. "I know the Horcrux in your scar is gone, but I have to wonder if the Dark Lord influenced you much more than we thought. What hateful things did he whisper to you when he was part of you? It stands to reason; you could've picked up more than one of his habits or attitudes since you gained part of his power including the very rare ability to speak to snakes."

Harry spluttered in anger. "I'm NOTHING like him. He killed people for power and pleasure. He was evil. I've been an Auror and I fought for the Light." Harry paced furiously back and forth across the room. "I am NOT like Voldemort."

"Right, you never kidnapped an innocent man and held him or tortured him, just for revenge. You didn't hate a man because you were an orphan, and you blamed him for it. You didn't hate someone because they were from a specific House or a specific bloodline. What's the difference between you and Draco Malfoy? You hated him because he was Slytherin, and he hated me because I'm a "Mudblood"! I told you all those years ago that you were becoming what we fought."

Harry pulled his wand out and pointed it at Hermione. "SHUT UP!" he screamed. "Shut up; I am NOT like Malfoy, and I am NOT like Voldemort; I'm not him at all. I fight for good, not evil."

Hermione just looked at Harry. "You are exactly like him in a lot of ways. Orphaned, horrible childhood, strength of magic. You told me once that the Sorting Hat wanted to put you in Slytherin. You've become precisely like Tom Riddle!" She took a deep breath when Harry moved closer aiming his wand directly at her. "Your choices are what made the difference. At one time, you knew that. At one time, you made the right choices. That's why you CHOSE Gryffindor over Slytherin. Now, I don't know who you are, and I don't think you know either."

Harry stepped forward again, intent on Hermione, but before he could do or say anything, a wand was pressed into the back of his skull.

"I understand you have been looking for me, Mr. Potter. I suggest you refrain from harassing my pregnant wife any longer or I may forget that I AM one of the good guys." Severus' voice spilled over the tense Hermione, and she relaxed back into her chair as her husband took over the situation. "Please, have a seat."

He took the wand from Harry's outstretched hand and pushed him into the nearest seat. Severus towered over Harry, glaring coldly at the former Auror. Before Harry could react to facing his nemesis at last, two hands kept him seated and he looked up to see Arthur and George standing above him as well.

"Harry, we heard everything. I agree with Hermione, and I am afraid we have no choice but to protect you from yourself."

Harry looked at Arthur. "I told you I would find him. He killed them all! I want him dead! It's Snape you have to take care of. Let me go!"

Arthur looked at George and then said to Harry, "Come on, son, we need to get you home." Harry struggled as they pulled him out of the chair and started for the fireplace. George palmed his wand and muttered, "*Stupefy*". Arthur cast *Mobilicorpus*, and George threw *Floo powder* into the fire. Calling out "St. Mungo's", Arthur and George took Harry and left.

Severus heaved a sigh and knelt beside his wife. "Are you all right, my heart? I am more proud of you than I can say. I know that had to be difficult, but with everything Harry said, Ginny will be able to have him committed to St. Mungo's for treatment. Besides seventeen years of the Dark Lord's subtle influence, I think that having the Horcrux ripped from his psyche the way it was damaged him. Hopefully, St. Mungo's will be able to help." Severus looked at Hermione who wasn't speaking. "Hermione, are you all right?"

Perspiration was beginning to bead on Hermione's forehead. "Severus, you need to get Molly. The midwife is unavailable this week." She started panting.

Severus looked at Hermione in shock. "Are you sure? You still have several weeks..." He could see the pain in her eyes.

"I'm sure. Get Molly."

"Merlin's blessings upon you, George Santiago Snape." The elderly witch gently caressed the sleeping infant's head. She smiled broadly at the group attending the Ritual of Naming and announced, "Now it is time for the good part: Dos Mariposas brandy and plenty of food. *Por favor*, don't be shy!"

Severus glared after the old witch. He was left alone holding his newborn son as his guests dispersed to partake of said spirits and food. He watched his wife and daughter as they led the others into the house, then turned his attention to his son. "Well, my boy, you seem to have acquired a permanent name. Hopefully, your mother will use it and not one of those ridiculous nicknames she has become so fond of making up."

The baby appeared to agree, waving his arms wildly before suckling fiercely on his fist. Severus chuckled. "So, the old *bruja* wasn't the only hungry one? Well then, let's go and find your mum."