

Fading

by ader_snape

Severus is haunted by a memory. Will she be able to save him?

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 4

Severus is haunted by a memory. Will she be able to save him?

Fading: Chapter 1

A/N: Rowling is the genius behind the characters and any recognizable material in this story, not me. I just get to rearrange them for a bit. This story is canon through most of DH, but with a slightly different ending. Reviews, good or bad, always welcomed.

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She wasn't a ghost. She lacked the pearly colorlessness of a spirit trapped between the world of the living and the world of the dead. But nor was she real, alive. Severus was never sure how to describe her; not that he described her to anyone but himself.

She oftentimes perched herself on his desk; simply watching him and silently sharing time with him as he marked essays and tested his under-competent students' potion samples from class. But then there were the times she spoke to him. Sometimes, their conversations held nothing of real value; just passing time together as friends, or whatever their relationship could be determined as. Other times, she insisted upon talking about her son, the bane of his existence, going on about how proud she was of him and how thankful she was for Severus' protection of him. It made him smile to know she appreciated him.

Lily was the only good inside of him left.

This night in particular, she stood in front of the Headmaster's desk.

"You can't let the Carrows punish them, Severus. They are standing firm in the belief that Voldemort is wrong. You can't destroy them for it." Lily stood with both of her hands resting on the desk. Her voice was not filled with anger, but with quiet pleading. Severus put his head in his hands.

"But surely you do not think I can simply allow them to get away with breaking into my office and attempting to steal a school artifact," he sneered, with more venom than he intended. "That would cause suspicion! If I were to be found out, the idiot children would have much worse to deal with than Amicus and Aleo Carrow!" Severus took a deep breath. Damn Dumbledore for leaving him with the promise of protecting the students while leaving his true loyalties secret. It was near impossible.

But she was at his side.

"Send them into the Forbidden Forest with Hagrid. The Forest has always served as punishment before and you and I both know Hagrid would rather die than let anything happen to the students."

Severus sighed. He knew she was right. She was always right. He took the quill from the inkwell and began scribbling the details of their detentions on the parchment in front of him. As soon as his signature was completed at the bottom, the parchment disappeared with pop.

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They stood in the middle of the forest. It was bitterly cold and the darkness was almost tangible. He had carried out Dumbledore's wishes and had made sure Potter gained possession of the Sword of Gryffindor. He raised his wand and cast the Patronus charm. He heard Lily gasp.

"Sev, your Patronus is a doe. But that's my---oh." She stopped abruptly. Harry had just come into view from their spot of hiding, following the silvery doe as she walked toward the frozen pool. "My boy," she said in a sad whisper. She placed her hand on Severus' arm. He knew it was there, but he couldn't feel it.

"I must return to Hogwarts," he said in a clipped tone. "If I am gone for much longer, my absence will be questioned." He turned on his heel. But Lily didn't follow immediately.

"Aren't you going to make sure he finds it?" Her voice made him pause for only a moment.

"There is nothing more I can do. He mustn't know about me. Not yet. I must go. Now." He started walking again with more purpose in his steps. He knew Potter would be able to retrieve the sword from the pond, but he wasn't going to admit it out loud. As much as he had loved the boy's mother, Severus loathed Potter. He was a reminder of his tormentor during his school years and of the girl he never had the chance to call his own. With an ache in his chest, Severus Disapparated back to the grounds of Hogwarts.

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There were few times Lily was not at his side. His meetings with Voldemort were normally void of her presence; except tonight.

The Shrieking Shack was as desolate as it always had been. Deep scratches from many full moons adorned the walls. Dust was thick on the hard wooden floor. And it mingled with his blood.

Lily knelt at Severus' side as the wounds from the great snake leaked with his lifeblood. Suddenly, Potter appeared. This was the moment. He mustered all of his strength and lifted his wand to his temple.

He gave Harry his memories. The memories would save them all. And then, Potter was gone.

Lily, who had gone to the door with her son, moved back to Severus' side, grasping his hand.

"You've been so brave, Sev. Stay with the living. Please. You can be happy soon. Stay here." Her green eyes pleaded with him. He desperately wanted to obey her wishes, to stay alive. But he didn't have the strength left.

He fell asleep to her beseeching voice, praying that he would be able to comply with her request to stay alive.

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Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 4

Hermione comes to Severus' aid.

Fading: Chapter Two

A/N: As always, I own nothing. Rowling is the genius. The story at this point is AU. DH compliant only through the Shrieking Shack scene. Enjoy!

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He looked so vulnerable, lying there on the cot in the makeshift infirmary. He was paler than normal, if that was even possible. It was such a contrast from the intimidating Potions professor she had grown to know in her seven years at school.

Hermione checked his pulse again. It was still faint, but present. The anti-venom, or whatever had been in the little glass vial, had been in his system for two hours now, and all she could do was wait and watch for any signs of improvement. So far, there had been none.

But he isn't getting worse, she thought, letting herself hope that he would live.

Three hours ago, she hadn't had much hope at all. She had gone back to the Shrieking Shack after seeing the memories with Harry and Ron. She had been beside herself with hopelessness, not knowing what to do to save the man who had risked everything to save them all.

She had been able to stop the bleeding with a few quick Healing spells, but that did nothing to stop Nagini's venom running through what little blood Snape had left in his slowly dying body. She had dug through her magically enlarged handbag and finally had retrieved the Blood-Replenishing Potion she had carried with them the entire year. She had quickly forced the liquid down her former professor's throat. And then the hopelessness, again, washed over her body.

Think, Granger! There must be something! She started to dump the contents of her bag onto the wooden floor, ransacking through all of the books, vials, and parchment. Nothing. She felt the tears of fear and frustration start to flow. Suddenly, as if the thought had come from somewhere else in the room, she started digging through the many pockets and compartments of Professor Snape's voluminous, black robes. Just as she was about to give up hope, she felt a hard lump under his ribcage. She tore at the buttons of his frock coat to find a small pocket on the underside with a slender vial inside of it. Written along the side in his spidery handwriting were the words *For Nagini*.

So he had seen this coming, she thought. She quickly uncorked the vial and dumped the contents of the potion inside of his mouth. The pained expression that had marked his pinched face faded slowly. She allowed herself a sigh of relief, however short-lived.

She had decided that it was probably safest to stay in the shack until she heard word that Voldemort was defeated. Ron and Harry knew where to find her.

As long as they both survive, that is. She shook her head. She couldn't let herself think that way. She waited for what seemed like an eternity, but in reality, was only an

hour, before Ron came bursting into the room, declaring that Harry had triumphed. The Dark Lord was vanquished and the wizarding world was safe once again.

Together, she and Ron had levitated Snape's body through the wreckage outside of the castle. Once he was assured that Hermione was unharmed and that Snape was safe, Ron left the infirmary to grieve the loss of his brother with his family. That left Hermione alone to grieve for the deaths of her friends. But, caring for Professor Snape kept her mind distracted from the hurt and depression.

He had risked everything to deliver the world from Voldemort's grasp, and he deserved to live as a free man for the first time in his life. And she would do everything in her power to make sure it happened.

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So this is what it feels like to be dead, Severus thought. His entire body ached as if he had been trampled by one of Hagrid's monsters. His throat felt raw and dry, and there was a throbbing in his neck. Surely, death would have brought relief. Perhaps this is Purgatory? Unless...

I'm not dead. I survived. He listened around him and heard murmurs of conversations. He heard crying. For a second, his mind reeled with the possibility that Voldemort had won. That Dumbledore's perfectly intricate plan had not worked. Or, that, as unthinkable as it was, Potter had run to save his own life. But then he heard the unmistakable sound of laughter.

It wasn't the harsh, cold laughter he had heard so often in the presence of the Death Eaters. It was a very innocent laugh. And he knew immediately that Lily's son had succeeded. The War was over and he was free.

He allowed himself to slip back into an easy slumber.

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A/N: Thank you so much to ks51689 for beta reading for me! Also much thanks to my Morgan, for all of her support and cheerleading. You ladies are awesome!

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 4

Severus wakes up and talks to Hermione.

A/N: This story is set in an alternate universe after the Shrieking Shack scene in DH. Nothing you recognize is mine. It all belongs to Rowling, who blessed us with the wonderful world of Harry Potter.

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As his eyes fluttered open, Severus began to take in his surroundings. Slivers of sunlight streamed into the window on his right. Although his entire body still ached, most of his pain was gone, and he was lying on a squishy mattress with slightly rough sheets pulled up to his chest. He blinked a couple times, and barely moving his head, he saw Lily sitting in a metal chair at the head of his bed. She was beaming at him.

"You did it, Sev," she said, moving out of the chair to kneel by his bed. "You stayed here, with the living. I'm so proud of you." She grasped his hand, and although he could not feel it physically, he felt it nonetheless. He smiled at her. When he attempted to speak, he found that he couldn't.

"Don't. You're still healing," she instructed gently. "Soon enough, Sev. Soon enough."

Severus tried to move his left arm, but discovered that it was immovable. He glanced down to find a mass of brown curls surrounding it. He was rather confused until the mass shifted, revealing that it was attached to none other than Hermione Granger. She had fallen asleep at his bedside.

Her petite figure sprang to an upright position, and it was apparent that she quickly regretted such a hasty movement. She had dark circles underneath her honey-brown eyes, and he suspected that she hadn't slept properly in a few days. But as she stretched to relieve some of the pain from being slumped over the bed, a small smile of relief washed over her features.

"You're awake! Don't try to talk just yet, Professor," she said quickly. "That stupid snake got your vocal chords and they're still healing. If you strain them now, you might risk losing your voice permanently." She reached over to the bedside table and handed him a piece of what seemed to be parchment, but it was rigid, like a piece of wood.

"I've added a Petrifying Charm to it so you don't need a hard surface to write on," she explained when she saw the questioning look on his face.

How clever. I have never thought of that, he thought, grateful for the witch's talent and sharp mind for possibly the first time in the seven years he had known her. She handed him a quill.

"It's self-inking, so you don't need an inkwell. And all you need to do is tap your wand on it to clear the surface." She really had thought of everything. He took the quill and quickly scribbled out the question that was plaguing his mind.

What happened?

"Oh! Well, after you gave Harry your memories, the three of us went to the Headmaster's Office to view them. Once we did, we knew exactly what you did and what we needed to do. Harry and Ron decided to try and find Nagini, while I returned to the Shrieking Shack to, well, see if you were still alive or not." She paused. He raised his eyebrow as if to say, "Well, get on with it!" and she quickly recounted the story of how she had saved his life in the Shrieking Shack.

When she ended her tale, he simply stared at her. She had loathed him just as much as he had loathed her. And yet, she had rushed back to save his life. She could have easily left him there to become a martyr of the war. But she didn't. She had found the flask of anti-venom he had created specifically for an attack by Nagini and healed his wounds. She must have acted quickly. Nagini's venom would have surely killed him within an hour. If they had viewed the memories first, that would have left her very little time to think and decide how to keep him out of death's grip.

It was at this point that he fully realized and appreciated Hermione's intelligence. Lily stirred at his other side.

"She reminds me of myself at that age. She's so bright. She had you healed up in no time. And she hasn't left your side in nearly two days." Severus looked at Lily and then closed his eyes for a moment. He picked up his writing parchment again and scribbled out his request.

Water, please.

"Of course, Professor! Are you hungry? I can have some broth sent up from the kitchens." Hermione looked pleased that he had shown interest in anything, and Severus felt his stomach growl.

Two days, Lily said. I haven't eaten in two days. Severus' stomach agreed noisily. He finally nodded to Hermione. As she turned away, he reached out and caught her wrist. She glanced down at him as he scrawled something else on his board.

Thank you. For everything.

She simply smiled and nodded. "I'll be right back, Professor," she said, placing her hand momentarily on his forearm. When she had turned away, Severus slumped back down on his pillow, exhausted from just a few minutes of interaction. He found his wand underneath the pillow, tapped it once on the hard parchment and watched as the words dissolved from the page. With one more glance at Lily's glowing face, he closed his eyes and, again, fell back into a peaceful slumber.

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Hermione reentered the hospital wing thirty minutes later with a tray holding a bowl of chicken broth and a water pitcher. She hadn't expected to be gone so long, but with the castle still in such disarray from the battle, getting down to the kitchens was something of a challenge. As she walked over to Professor Snape's bed, she noticed he had fallen back asleep. She set the tray down on the table next to the bed and placed a Warming Charm around his broth.

She straightened the blankets on his bed and thought about her friends' reactions to her somewhat odd behavior over the past two days. She had barely left his side. With the exception of mending his vocal chords, which Madam Pomfrey had made quick work of, Hermione had overseen all efforts for his recovery herself, tending to his needs like a mother to her sick child. Harry and Ron didn't understand her sudden need to take care of a man who had made it his mission to make their lives a living hell during school and questioned it often. But those memories had changed the way Hermione looked at Snape. He was a war hero. If no one else in the wizarding world thought so, she did. And he deserved to be attended to closely.

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When Severus awoke three hours later, he immediately looked to the metal chair next his bed where Lily had been when he had first opened his eyes that day. The chair was vacant. Emptiness crept into his chest. Lily had always been there when he was alone.

But, he wasn't alone for long. Miss Granger popped her head around the curtain surrounding his bed.

"You're awake! Are you hungry? I have your broth under a Warming Charm." Severus attempted to sneer at her cheeriness, but found that any movement of the general head area caused sharp pain, making him grimace instead. He reached for his writing parchment.

Pain-Relieving Potion please, he scrawled out with the Self-Inking Quill. The girl quickly nodded and chose a vial off of the bedside table, uncorking it before handing the medicine to him. He ingested it in one gulp. He picked up the quill once more.

I believe I will eat now.

Her smile grew larger, if that was at all possible. He resisted the urge to roll his eye at the young woman and permitted her to assist him into a sitting position. She set the tray over his lap, and to his great relief, she sat in a chair next to his bed, allowing him to feed himself. The Pain-Relieving Potion had been successful, and he was able to open his mouth and swallow with very little soreness. He found it faintly unnerving to have his former know-it-all student sitting next to him, watching him while he ate. But there wasn't much he could do, so he ignored her as much as he could. Finally, when he could take no more of the awkward silence, he thrust his hand toward the bedside table where his writing parchment had been set. She quickly handed it to him, along with his quill.

I cannot stand you simply watching me.

She blushed slightly. "Oh, sorry. Do you want me to leave while you eat?" There was slight hint of disappointment her voice. Severus rolled his eyes.

No. I do not wish you to leave. However, I do have some questions you might possibly be able to answer.

Hermione looked at the parchment and then at him with a look of mild surprise in her eyes. This was obviously not the answer she had expected from her greasy Potions teacher.

"Of course, Professor. Where would you like me to start?" She looked at him expectantly. He thought for a minute. There were so many questions running through his overtaxed brain, it was almost overwhelming. He finally scribbled out a question.

How did you heal my wounds?

She read the writing quickly and took in a deep breath.

"Well, once I began to suspect that Nagini was a Horcrux, I surmised that there was always the chance of one of us being attacked by her before we killed her. So, I tracked down the Healer at St. Mungo's who had been able to finally treat Mr. Weasley's wounds from the snake. He explained that they modified simple Healing Charms by mixing them with Finite Incantatem to counteract the curse left by Nagini's fangs. I memorized the hybrid spell, hoping that I would never have to use it. But, after almost a year of researching, I was never able to find the anti-venom. I wanted to consult you about it, but I honestly didn't know if you were loyal to the Dark or to the Light. Well, until I heard you only sent Ginny, Neville and Luna into the Forbidden Forest with Hagrid for detention."

At this point, Severus looked at the girl with a frown of confusion. *How could she have possibly known about that?* he thought to himself. But she continued without notice.

"But by then, it was too dangerous to approach Hogwarts and I just couldn't risk it. I was so relieved that you found it and kept it on you." She took a breath and let it out in a small sigh. He had already written his next question.

How did you know about the detentions?

She smiled shyly and looked somewhat uncomfortable.

"Oh, well, when we left Bill and Fleur's wedding, we went to Grimmauld Place. I remembered that the portrait of Phineas Nigellus was in one of the bedrooms, so I took it with us to, um, make sure he couldn't tell you where we were." She finished with a guilty look on her face, as if she were hiding something. He picked up the quill once more.

And to keep tabs on me?

She nodded with a note of apology on her face.

He had finished his broth and was beginning to feel the deep exhaustion in his bones again. The girl seemed to have noticed. His other questions would have to wait.

Hermione Vanished the food tray from his lap and assisted him back into a lying position.

"You need to rest, Professor," she stated as she drew the covers up over his chest.

He would have swatted her hands away if he had the energy, but he didn't. He glanced at the metal chair Lily had occupied earlier. It was still empty.

The girl started speaking again. "I'll answer any other questions when you wake up. You still have about three hours for your Pain-Relieving Potion. If you need something before that," she pulled out a Galleon from her pocket, "just tap this with your wand, and I'll be alerted that you need something and will be here shortly." She set the golden coin on his bedside table, along with his writing parchment and quill.

He quickly fell asleep, but this time it was not as peaceful. His mind was racing with the question for which he had no answer.

Where was Lily?

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Thank you so much to my wonderful beta, Ks51689, for her great insight and eye for grammar mistakes. Also to my Morgan, for all of her encouragement and cheerleading. You two are awesome!!

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of 4

Severus must set aside his pride. It's more painful than he thought.

A/N: I own nothing, nor do I make any money.

He was back at Godric's Hollow. Stumbling through the wreckage of what was once James and Lily Potter's home, Severus found himself in a nursery. And there was Lily, lying dead on the floor. Her beautiful green eyes were still wide with fear and sadness. Severus fell to the floor as his legs gave out beneath him.

His eyes snapped open. His breath came in shallow, hard pants, and his skin was soaked in a cold sweat. And then he heard the voice that soothed his innermost fears.

"Sev, you're alright. It was just a dream. You're safe. Please calm down." Lily was back at his side. His breathing returned to normal, but he was suddenly cold with the dampness covering his body. He pulled the sheet up to his chin in an attempt to stop the shivers ripping through his body. He needed a blanket. He grasped for his wand, but he was shaking so violently that he couldn't conjure what he so desperately needed.

"Call her, Sev. She can help you," Lily said softly from the side of his bed. He shot her a glare. "Don't use your evil professor look on me, Severus. It doesn't work, remember? Now, call her. There is no shame in asking for help." Her voice was stern but laced with concern.

"No," he stated in a harsh whisper. Pain ripped through his throat. Tears pricked his eyes. He knew he shouldn't have spoken, but Lily was being so insistent. He didn't need the Granger girl.

"For someone so intelligent, you're being awfully stupid, Severus." With that, Lily stomped off. The pain was now coming from his chest. Lily had left him *lt's your own fault. If you weren't so damn stubborn, she probably would have stayed*, his inner monologue informed him.

And then, with a start, he remembered the memories. Potter knew about his love for the boy's mother! The Granger girl had said the entire Golden Trio had witnessed them. Fear and vulnerability overtook his already weak body. He had to know who else knew.

He huffed with annoyance and defeat before reaching out for the coin sitting on the bedside table. His shaking hand knocked it to the ground on the first attempt. His long arm swooped down and retrieved it easily on his second. He found his wand again and quickly tapped the fake Galleon once before collapsing back onto his pillows.

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Hermione woke with a start. Something had forced her awake. Her hand seared with heat as she realized that the charmed coin was alerting her that Professor Snape needed something. Hoping that it was nothing too serious, she hastily rolled out of her bed in Gryffindor Tower and threw her robes over her jeans and T-shirt.

She quickly made her way to the hospital wing and then to Professor Snape's bedside in the corner. As she opened the curtains, sympathy ran through her body. He was visibly shaking and his trembling hand was clutching his throat.

Hermione went to the cabinet to retrieve a blanket and placed a Warming Charm on it. As she placed it around his shaking body, she looked at him with stern disappointment.

"You tried to talk, didn't you?" He simply nodded at her. After pouring a Pain-Relieving Potion into his mouth and assuring he swallowed it, she began chiding him. "I specifically told you *not* to speak! Do you want to lose your voice?" She huffed as she ended her tirade. She handed him the writing tablet and quill before sitting on the edge of the bed.

There is no reason to rebuke me like a child, he wrote quickly. He turned to her with a sour look.

"No reason! No reason? I only restricted you on this one thing and you ignored it! I am trying to ~~to~~ help you, Professor! Why couldn't you just listen to me?" She shook her head and rubbed her eyes. She couldn't have been asleep for more than three hours when she had gotten his summons. Hermione was running off of adrenaline and caffeine and had been for days. She was beyond exhaustion, but refused to ignore Professor Snape's needs. And she had no idea why. But she couldn't push past the feeling of annoyance that she had had to come to the hospital wing in the middle of one of her first chances at sleeping in a week. And she didn't try hiding it in her voice.

She looked back at the man beside her. "Is your pain easing?" she asked in a matter-of-fact tone. He nodded. "Are you warm enough?"

He started scribbling again. *I am, thank you* He paused, and then took up his quill again. *Please forgive me for waking you.*

A stab of guilt washed over Hermione's body. Hadn't she told him to call her if he needed anything? He had risked his life to save Harry, and even herself, time after time,

and she couldn't sacrifice some sleep to help him? She felt ashamed of herself. She hung her head and whispered, "No, Professor. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have yelled at you." She saw him writing again.

You have not slept properly. When was the last time you slept?

Hermione let out a humorless laugh as she replied, "At all? Or straight eight hours like a normal person?" He gave her a stern look. She sighed. "I catch catnaps every chance I get. Before you called, I had four straight hours," she lied. There was no need to make his guilt any deeper. She quickly changed the subject. "Who were you talking to anyway?"

He scowled at her and then began writing once more. *No one. I awoke from an unpleasant dream. But that is not important. May I ask a question of you? Or would you prefer to wait until morning?*

Hermione paused for a moment before answering. She once again was racked with guilt. He had not knowingly used his voice. It was simply an involuntary reflex caused by a nightmare. With a pained expression on her face, she decided that she owed him whatever answers she could provide to his questions.

"Of course, Professor. Ask anything you want, and I will answer anything that I know." She smiled slightly and repositioned herself so that she could see his tablet better. He instantly began writing.

You mentioned that both you and Weasley were with Potter when he viewed my memories. Have you told anyone of them?

There was a look of desperation and, Hermione noted, a hint of fear in his eyes. Her forehead knitted in confusion. Of course they had told people. Those memories had proven that Dumbledore had ordered Snape to kill him, that the Headmaster was already dying from the cursed ring that had held a part of Voldemort's soul when Snape had sent the Killing Curse at him. And that Professor Snape had always been true to the Light, never to the Dark Lord.

"I don't understand, Professor. Those memories proved your innocence. Of course we explained them to the others. Just the members of the Order, though. We thought..." But she ended her thought as the realization struck her like a Bludger to the gut. *He means his relationship and love for Harry's mum, Lily.*

"You mean Lily," she managed to say. He only nodded with embarrassment across his features. "No. No one knows about that but the three of us. We agreed that it should be your decision to make that information public. It's just too private." He visibly relaxed in relief, but he was pointedly avoiding her eyes.

Hermione felt uncomfortable with this knowledge. It was somewhat awkward knowing that a man she had once thought incapable of any warm feelings was in love with a dead woman. But it also pained her. While Harry and all of Lily and James's friends were able to mourn in public, Professor Snape had kept all of his turmoil inside. She heard the scraping of his quill.

You said my innocence has been proven?

"Oh, yes!" she answered, a grin emerging upon her face. "Kingsley has been appointed Minister temporarily, and we've had a meeting with him about your role in the war. He sees fit to account all of your actions as necessities of war. You will not be charged with anything. In fact, you've already been counted amongst the heroes of the war."

Indeed, was his only reply. Hermione smirked at the curled lip that accompanied his answer. He was still Professor Snape, that was for sure.

"You should try to go back to sleep. The sooner you are healed, the sooner you can go back to terrorizing Potions students."

He rolled his eyes at her obvious attempt at a joke, but did not protest when she pulled the blanket up over his chest and put his quill and tablet on the bedside table next to his fake Galleon.

"I'll be back in the morning. If you need me before then, use the Galleon. I'm also going to give you a Dreamless Sleep Potion this time to prevent any more accidental use of your voice."

He nodded his assent as she chose a vial from a drawer in the table. He took it in one swallow.

"Goodnight, Professor. I will see you tomorrow." His eyes were closed before she even slipped out of the curtains around his bed. She was glad he had called.

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A/N: Many thanks and hugs to my wonderful beta, ks51689. She makes my run-ons readable.