

Garden of Eden

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Multifaceted Round Four Nominee: And on the eighth day there was temptation and knowledge reared its ugly head.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Author's Note: This story falls under the category of 'Alternate Universe'. It explores the relationship between Severus Snape and Hermione Granger using parallels to the biblical Garden of Eden. It is a serious story, not one of the light romps I usually write. Still, I hope you do enjoy it.

Disclaimer: Thank you JK Rowling for allowing me to take Hermione and Severus to another universe. However, I'm not sure they want to come back.

Ah, the pleasure she found in looking upon his body, day after day. The tautness of the skin as it stretched over his hip; the hollowness of the dimples in his cheeks that shifted with every step; the soft black down that covered his chest and stomach and played over the roundness of his buttocks: it tempted her to reach out and touch.

How long they had been there, she neither knew nor cared. Occasionally, her mind would ponder that question, usually when they were lying upon the soft, grassy hills spattered with yellow daffodils and white narcissus. They lay side by side on those lazy days, gazing up into the sky and watching the clouds fluffily tumble over each other like windblown cotton balls.

Snippets of what seemed like an era past haunted her, though what they were exactly she did not know. Perhaps they were only dreams, figments of an imagination sated with pleasure and pain. Faces would appear in her mind's eye for a second, maybe two, before they faded back into her subconscious. Her rust-colored eyes would fog muddily at the intrusion and she would find him, more often than not, looking at her with tense concern.

It was one of those times, as they curled together beneath the massive fruit trees, that he decided to finally broach the subject of her increasing melancholy. He trailed his long fingers over her milky white thigh, caressing the fullness of her hip, lulling her mood into complacency.

"Hermione." The timbre of his voice dipped to its lowest level. She shuddered as the vibrations strummed over her body, soothing away her anxiety. The things she would give up if only he spoke to her like this forever.

She hummed in response as his soft, pliant fingers massaged her curved belly. Half-lidded, her eyes met his. His glassy eyes enthralled her, always reflecting her questions, making her more introspective. She detected a promise of something more in those dark pools, especially when he believed himself to be unobserved.

"I am worried, Hermione. You have been restless of late, and it is interfering with your happiness."

What could she answer to that? It was true. Vaporous visions continued to niggle in the pit of her stomach.

"Please, tell me what is wrong. Maybe I can fix it," he pleaded. His touch roved upward past her lower ribs and felt the weight of her breast. How she wished the feelings he evoked within her would fix that which caused her anxiety.

"I don't know what's wrong, Severus." Her eyes closed completely as his thumb pushed and ground circles around her nipple. "I keep seeing images in my mind. There are people."

Her eyes snapped open. "There are people," she repeated in a whisper, "and I don't know who they are."

His thumb hesitated for a moment before continuing a little harder, the way she liked it. Her flesh rolled between his forefinger and thumb, pink deepening to red.

"Pay them no heed," he implored. "There is only you and I. Are you not happy with me?"

Her intensity softened at his insecurity. Of course she was happy with him. He was kind and paid her body *and* mind much attention. She suspected there was more to him, though; in fact, the suspicion hung like a dark cloud just out of her reach. Her logic told her she was merely being silly.

"I am more than happy with you. What more could I ask for?" The reassurance made him smile, albeit mischievously, increasing the tempo and pressure of his stroking fingers.

She reached over to comb her fingers through his hair. Next to his voice, the lustrous silkiness of his fine black hair distracted her nearly senseless. He was keenly aware of this and everything else about him of which she was fond. He could bathe in her desire for him if given half the chance. It was intoxicating.

"I simply don't understand," she continued to his dismay, "why I keep seeing faces of people when I know I've never seen anyone but you. I keep seeing a young man with round, cracked ... glasses? And it is the strangest thing, Severus, because I feel as though I should know who he is."

It was innocent, her remark. She was truly perplexed. But that did not stop his heart's swift descent into his stomach. She would have remained unaware of his discomfort if he had not pulled his hand abruptly away from her breast.

"Severus?" She was worried now. The sudden withdrawal felt strangely familiar, yet she could not place ever feeling this way before.

He stood up and looked down at her, his gaze hardening into granite. It caused her lungs to tighten in her chest and squeeze her heart. She sighed disappointedly as he stalked away, his muscles tensing across his shoulders, his flaccidness swinging mightily, mocking her unfulfilled physical need.

His reaction left her confused. She could not understand why he invited her to speak about what was bothering her, yet became upset when she did. It made no sense. The roiling in the pit of her stomach wouldn't let her sit any longer, and so she got up and stalked off in the other direction.

A walk always cleared her mind. A vague picture of long walks alongside a formidable forest played about the outskirts of her mind. She would have called it a memory, except that one could not remember something they had never experienced.

She snorted...a habit she had picked up from the only other person in her life. Memory. The word twisted upon itself and threatened to strangle her thoughts. She knew what memory was, and because she knew, she felt its loss most profoundly. The only memory she had was of Severus and this place.

What was this place anyway? Her contemplation deepened. It was certainly magnificent. It could be called nothing if not beautiful, and even that did not do it justice. The grass was green and the skies were of a blue so pure and luminescent that it struck awe in her soul.

Clouds flitted across the sky, always white. That bothered her at times, but only because she kept glancing upward as though expecting the brilliant whiteness to fade to gray, playfulness churning into a battle of wills, crashing in torrents of rain.

As it was, rain fell gently around them every couple days, but then only briefly, amidst rays of sunshine and resultant rainbows. It was almost surreal.

That thought caused her to stop and look out over the tops of myriad fruit trees, toward the most grandiose and wondrous tree of all, miraculously stretching its limbs for what seemed like eternity. This was her favorite place to think. She had never gone closer than this. Something always held her back.

Surreal? This was all that she had ever known. How could it be surreal? It was not logical to feel this way. She would not allow herself to harbor illogical feelings. There was only one thing to do and that was to prove to herself once and for all that all of this magnificence was nothing to be suspicious of.

She started down the hill and wandered among the familiar trees, her toes reveling in the softness of the slightly damp grass. Yes, today she would put an end to all those illogical thoughts.

As she neared the first of the great limbs, she looked up and saw that the tree stretched so high above her head that it seemed to dance with the clouds. Its leaves gleamed pearlescent-green in the light of the sun. Her mouth gaped in wonder. She had not expected beauty of this magnitude.

The further she walked, following the branch and its brothers and sisters as they formed a canopy over her head, the pricklier the grass became. She stopped once or twice to avoid a prickly weed and to stare at it questioningly. The carpet of biting grass and stinging weeds was in such stark contrast to the amazing beauty overhead.

As the branches thickened so did her reverence. The bark of the branches shone with a light that seemed to emanate from within. An occasional glistening red globe decorated the up-until-now uninterrupted blanket of green. Curiosity made her forget the tenderness of her feet.

The sun had traveled a quarter way across the sky before she approached the massive trunk. It was so thick that it stood like a wall as she stood next to it. Circling the perimeter, she lost count of her steps. Her arms stretched to their limit as she hugged the colossal column. Beautiful, magnificent, ominous: all adjectives that ran through her mind, yet all very dissatisfying.

This close, the branches seemed to reach down as if they wanted to catch her and envelop her in their soft embrace. This close, the ground was prickles and brambles, and her feet had begun to bleed from the sharp rocks that littered the surface.

She got dizzy looking up into the many levels of sticks and leaves and hordes upon glorious hordes of plump, ripe fruit. Her stomach growled persistently. It had been quite a length of time since breakfast, and the intense physical activity had made her quite hungry. Yet, when her fingers closed around one of the fleshy fruits, her stomach tensed in knots and she had to let go.

What was this? It was as though magic permeated this place, unseen to the naked eye. Her confusion threatened to consume her.

A slight rustle in the branches above drew her out of her thoughts, saving her from falling into a state of panic. She peered up into the maze of branches, peeking between the leaves, searching for the source of the sound. The movement of leaves took her attention, but she saw nothing at first. Squinting into the foliage, a hand shading her eyes, she finally found what she sought.

There, camouflaged among the green, slid a rather large snake, its scales glistening as bright as the leaves which surrounded it. She gasped as the head, nearly as wide as her own, swung around to face her. The eyes looked disturbingly familiar, although she couldn't quite place how.

It hissed at her in its sibilant tongue, and it took a while before she realized she actually understood what it was saying. She concentrated a little and focused on the whisper of its tone, not quite a voice.

"Why do you shun the touch of the fruit, human?" it seethed at her.

"I do not shun it," she stated in shock. "It shuns me. *I am* quite hungry, after all." It was the truth. The fruit seemed to repel her hand, no matter how much her hunger begged her to partake.

"Perhaps you lack the strength. Perhaps," the snake hissed at her, "you lack the desire to feed yourself. It is *you* who pushes away what the tree has to offer."

She glared at the serpent, noticing the challenging glitter of its beady black eyes. Something grew inside her chest at the accusation. It was heavy and it hurt. Was she going to allow an overgrown worm to impugn her character? Most definitely not. In defiance, her hand shot out and plucked a piece of fruit. The snake almost seemed to smile at her indignation.

She felt the orb try to evade her grasp, like the repelling poles of two magnets. Her fingers struggled to keep hold. No, she was not going to give up. She was hungry, and she was *not* going to let some reptile dissuade her from eating lunch.

With some difficulty, she brought the piece of fruit up to her lips and took a bite. The sweetness burst inside her mouth, flooding her senses. She had never tasted anything so pleasing, so pungent, so perfect. Her eyes fell shut in sheer bliss, aroused, as the flavor seemed to permeate her body. The flesh of the fruit completely consumed, she licked the juice from her fingers.

"Satisfied?" the snake taunted.

Glancing up in its direction, she jumped backwards, startled at its shifting form. The body of the snake seemed to draw into itself, thickening and paling all at once, changing into something more familiar.

Suddenly, a man was sitting upon the lowest branch. A man with greasy black hair. A man whose gnarled toes hung in her face, daring her to look up and meet his gaze. A man whose skin stretched tautly over his angular hips, his undernourished flesh revealing his sharp bones. A man who, when her eyes finally met his in shocked recognition, sneered at her with contempt.

"See, what you have done, Hermione?" His voice no longer soothed, but snarled. "What once used to be paradise is no longer. You will only see things for what they are now. Is this what you wanted?"

Slowly, memories filtered back into her conscious mind. Visions of black skies and storm clouds; images of warring wizards and randomly flying curses; flashes of light scarring the sky, mimicked by streams of silver and gold shooting from various wands and connecting with their intended targets. She stared at the angry red scars that laced her arms, her stomach, her breasts; and she remembered every single curse that had placed them there.

Faces, previously strange to her, revealed their identities. Silent bodies, lifeless eyes now surrounded by torn masses of bloody tissue, made her reel as grief washed over her in waves. She fell to her knees beneath the man in the tree and wept for her friends, the pain wrenching her soul, tearing away at her composure, leaving her naked.

"How many times do I have to do this, Hermione?" His voice had softened at her display of emotion. "How many times will I have to show you the past, and how many times will you beg me to take away your pain?"

He jumped down from the tree and pulled her into his arms, hugging her against his sunken and scarred chest. She let him cradle her, buffeting the blows her memory dealt at every turn of thought.

"Take it away, Severus," she sobbed. "I can't stand it. Make life beautiful again. Make ~~me~~ beautiful again. Make me forget."

He held her face between his hands and forced her to look at him. His eyes glistened with tears; he could not stand her pain. He would not deny her this, this respite from the harsh reality the world had shown her.

"My Hermione. You are always beautiful to me," he whispered, caressing an ill-healed scar upon her cheek.

She glanced down at the long cut that marred one of her breasts, the very breast he had so lovingly caressed just hours before. The various scars that crossed her palms, defense wounds as she had blocked the various curses thrown at her. Each one was a reminder of the friends who had sacrificed their lives to save her, accepting the curses meant to take her life.

Nearly consumed with panic, Severus had searched the ruined battleground for her body. When he had found her, only barely alive and half-covered by the broken, dead body of the boy who lived...once upon a very long ago time...he had collapsed and vowed that he would never leave her side again.

The Dark Lord now reigned, and they had been forced into hiding. Her grief could not be placated. Days turned into weeks, and finally tired of what her life had become, she had begged him to take away her pain, to give her a potion to end it all. Weary of her pleas and desperate to do something to help the woman he loved, he had finally given in. He wouldn't allow her to end it all, but he would give her the life she deserved.

With a grim expression, Severus silently held out the only thing that would help her forget once more: a small, black grape.

With shaking hands she accepted the gift, placed the small fruit on her tongue, and bit into sweet oblivion.

Further Author's Notes to Readers: I girl from Russia named Lena emailed me to tell me this story made such an impression on her she made a video and posted it to youtube. I include it here for your final viewing pleasure. I still have to find out what the song and the artist is, but the music is captivating and captures the angst perfectly.