

Wars of our Fathers

by labrt2004

Two war-weary individuals find the courage to face their past and find their future.
Written for Debjunk during the Autumn 2011 SS/HG Exchange.

Prologue

Chapter 1 of 2

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"Bloody hell, Hermione, give the books a rest, will you? You've been at them for hours already! Harry and Ginny are coming over soon," Ron said, plopping himself down on the couch next to her.

"In a minute," Hermione muttered. "First day in court tomorrow. The Lower Wizengamot." She flipped frantically through the evidence file. "It has to be in here somewhere!"

Ron crunched on an apple. "What do you reckon we should buy for James' birthday? Ginny said if she sees one more stuffed wizard, she'll cast an Unforgivable at it."

"Hmm," replied Hermione noncommittally. She continued to dig through her briefcase. "I remember coming across it when I went over the case with Smithson... ah, here it is." She pulled out a coffee-stained piece of parchment from the thick stack and waved a cleansing charm over it.

"Think he's too young for Exploding Snap?"

She shrugged, inspecting the parchment. "He's turning six, Ron. I expect you can buy just about anything for him and he'll be thrilled to pieces... It says here that Leland was already crossing into Muggle London up to three times a week as far back as 1997... Merlin, how did he manage that when Thicknesse was around?" Her fingers combed through her hair as she considered this new question. "Probably shouldn't be talking about this out of chambers. Just pretend you didn't hear anything, please?"

A soft clearing of a throat sounded beside her. Startled, she looked back up at her husband. He sat stiffly, his hands folded in his lap. Shaking her head slightly to clear her still ticking thoughts of Leland's London escapades, she inquired, "Ron?"

"Congratulations," he said in a strained voice.

"Thanks?" said Hermione sarcastically, irritation mounting.

His hand found hers, and he grabbed it tightly. Hermione resisted the urge to pull it back. "I'm happy for you. It's just... You live in your own barrister world, speak a language I don't understand... Ever since... the War ended, you've just never relaxed. You're moving too quickly, is all I'm saying."

"Ronald," she said coldly, "this is the way I've always been. I like working."

"Right, I know! I love that about you! But once in a while, we need to go out for a quick bite to eat, or poke around Diagon Alley a bit, or visit my parents..." After a pause, he added, "and visit *yours*."

She snatched her hand out of his and turned away from him, feeling the old, helpless rage overtaking her again. Putting a shaking hand up to her face, she shouted, "We are NOT discussing my parents!" Parchment fluttered down from her lap, knocked off by the violence of her motions. "What is this really about?" she said, voice muffled by her fingers. "You know how hard it is to advance in the legal profession. I *have* to work hard."

"Fine! But after you finished university, you were already prancing around with your fancy knowledge, speaking to me like I was a bloody first year! Now that you've started your courtroom training, I probably don't even qualify as fit company, do I?"

"*Ron!*" she choked, feeling betrayal lance through her. She whipped herself around to face him again, eyes filling with unshed tears. "How could you say that?"

Dismay immediately overtook his features. Pulling at his hair, he whispered, "Oh, Merlin hex me to hell, I'm sorry, Hermione, I really am. I need to be horsewhipped."

She shook her head, too shocked for anger. Conflicted, nastily twisted emotions roiled through her. Shame at what she'd become. Horror at what he'd become. But mostly unfettered, wild panic.

At seven o'clock sharp, Hermione Apparated to the front of the courthouse and sprinted madly up the steps, even though she still had a whole hour before court would be called into session by the bailwitch. Her case was the first on the docket today, so the room was mostly empty when she entered, the clicking of her high heels muted by the worn carpet. The only other people present were a young mother and her daughter in the public gallery. The little girl was wearing a pink dress, and her skin color alternated between green and blue as she sucked on a Chameleon Pop. They looked blankly at Hermione as she walked past them to the prosecutor's table. Feeling rather official, she pulled out one of the black, leather chairs and settled in, primly straightening her skirt. She carefully sorted through her briefs, mentally revising the details of the case. The courtroom smelled musty, like old paper and faded cleaning spells. She tried not to think about her fight with Ron last night. Licking her dry lips, she attempted to calm the nausea that was tying her stomach in knots. The door opened again, and her pupilmaster, Smithson, joined her at the table.

"Good morning, Mr. Smithson."

"Granger," he acknowledged. "Are you ready? But of course you are." Pulling out a pair of wire-framed glasses from his pocket, he peered over her shoulder at the notes she had made. He grunted at the sight of her small, tortured script. "Overkill, as usual, but you'll do just fine."

Hermione tried to laugh collegially, but it came out sounding like a strangled squeak. She fidgeted with the gold stitching on her barrister robes, running a finger beneath the scratchy collar. "It's much too hot in here," she complained.

Smithson chuckled. Unlike her, he leaned back into his chair with a practiced ease, and for a minute, he seemed to be considering putting his feet up on the table. "It's just nerves. I was like that for my first case, too. Put on my best suit beneath my robes. The whole trial lasted barely an hour, but I was sodden by the time I was finished."

Hermione glanced at the 900-page binder. "I think this one may go on for a good deal longer than that!" Albert Leland had masterminded an elaborate, widespread scam that involving money laundering and Muggle-baiting. He'd managed to make millions of galleons before the Aurors caught up with him. It was a case she knew inside out. All the nights holed up in her room, studying briefs and preparing for moot, ignoring Ron, turning down invitations to visit with Harry...it was all for the chance to do this.

"Probably," he agreed, "but if anyone can put Leland away, it's you."

She gave her mentor a grateful smile, but her heart thumped painfully, desperation gnawing at the edges of her excitement. Law had been her salvation for the past five years, and she'd applied ruthless energy to studying it. It numbed her mind and kept her just distracted enough that she wouldn't have to think. About anything. It was how she quieted the battles that still took place inside her long after the War had ended.

"Pull it together!" scolded Smithson through her mental fog. "It's all about confidence. You can't open a case with a scrunched up, worried look like that, Granger. You've prepared six months for this moment. We wouldn't have handed you Leland if we didn't think you were ready!"

"Yes, I know. Fake it till you make it," she recited smartly.

"That's right. Now, White, Hall, and Ward are on today," Smithson said, referring to the magistrates of the Lower Wizengamot who would preside over the hearing. "Generally aren't too bad a lot. They tend to be more lenient about Muggle-baiting cases, though. You'll need to push extra hard to prove malicious intent, but that shouldn't be a problem."

Her quill flew across the margins of her notebook as Smithson spoke. "Got it."

"And *don't* tangle with Alexander Murray."

She looked up from her notebook. "Counsel for the defense?"

"Yes. Dandy type, lots of women. You're just the kind of thing he'd want to sink his teeth into."

Hermione quirked her lips. "Not likely to be a problem, but thanks anyway, Gregory. Any more advice about *the case*?"

"Focus on how much trouble Leland was for the good folks at Muggle Relations. Arguments about how Muggle-baiting harms *Muggles* aren't very effective, I'm afraid."

Hermione huffed. "Imagine that!"

The room was starting to fill with people. A tall wizard in immaculately pressed robes appeared at the defense table. He flashed a radiant, insincere smile at her. Must be the hazardous Murray, she thought. From the other side of the room, Albert Leland was led in by a uniformed guard. The small, beady-eyed man took his place next to Murray. Hermione barely glanced at him. Best to stay focused. There would be plenty of time to stare at him during cross-examination.

Finally, the massive door behind the bench opened and the bailwitch emerged. "Court rise!"

Everyone shuffled to their feet. Two wrinkly wizards and a venerable old witch filed out, dressed in the rich navy hues of the Wizengamot. White, Hall, and Ward. She had tagged along for many months with Smithson when he went to court and had seen magistrates enter hundreds of times, but today, her first time in the role of prosecutor, she felt unaccountably awed by their presence.

The bailwitch trudged to the center of the room. "Be seated! Case number 5498672. People vs. Leland. The defendant is charged with twenty counts of Muggle-baiting,

one count of unauthorized transport of magical objects, one count of securities fraud."

Madam Hall, who sat in the middle, leaned back, straightening her cravat. "Very good. Shall we proceed? Ms... Granger, is it?" she finished after sneaking a peek at her notes.

Hermione stood and made her way around the table to take her place before the bench. Turning to face the magistrates, she happened to look for a brief moment at the assembled public. With a start, her eyes were arrested by the sight of a mousy, brown-haired woman sitting slightly crookedly in a wheelchair. The woman wasn't old, but the vacantness in her eyes and the disheveled state of her hair gave the distinct impression of life slowly seeping away.

"Ms. Granger? We are waiting." She was distantly aware of Madam Hall's voice speaking to her, but it sounded oddly muted, like Hermione was stuck underwater.

She struggled to tear her gaze away from the woman. She knew the woman was just an inconsequential member of the wizarding public, perhaps someone who had been swindled by Leland. She took a half step backward. *Of course* this woman wasn't her mother.

"Granger! What in blazing hell is the matter?" Smithson whispered urgently. Hermione hadn't noticed he had crept up beside her.

Sweat beaded at Hermione's temples. She took in great gulps of air, but it still felt like she was being smothered. Finally, she yanked her eyes off the woman and turned fully to the magistrates, getting a glimpse of Madam Hall's stony-faced expression.

She blinked rapidly to clear her mind. Faces seemed to swell in magnitude around her everywhere she looked, floating menacingly in her vision.

She opened her mouth to speak, but no sound came out.

"Mum? Dad? It's me, Hermione!" she shouted to their unresponsive faces.

She batted her hand across the empty air beside her head, trying to chase away the sound of the unbidden memory. She wanted to say something, anything, but her head was filled with a dull-sounding roar and she couldn't remember a single word of her opening statement.

"Granger, sit down! Now!" Smithson roughly grabbed her by the arm and shoved her back toward the table.

Murmuring rose from everywhere in the courtroom.

Hermione froze, gripped by a different sort of trepidation. She had failed, utterly and truly failed.

Reviews are much appreciated!

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Severus Snape, headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, was not pleased. He paced irritably, robes aswirl. He had all his robes special ordered with a flutter charm, of course. It wouldn't do for him to appear as if he were wearing drapery. The robes made a satisfying *swoosh* sound every time he turned around, which he knew held idiot menaces like Harry Potter in thrall, thus giving Severus time to think.

"C'mon, Snape, you know I'm right," Potter wheedled.

Somewhere in the whole of Britain, Severus imagined, there must exist one other person who could teach Defense Against the Dark Arts. Potter was currently sprawled in a chair on the other side of the headmaster's desk, wearing an insolent smirk that made Severus' fingers twitch on his wand. Ten years had elapsed since the fall of Voldemort, but Potter still persisted in being a thorn in Severus' side. The fact that the boy now made Severus' life a living hell as his employee rather than his student represented no improvement. Not even death (however temporary) had succeeded in checking the boy's Gryffindor arrogance.

Severus cast him a glare. Respect for one's superiors was never one of Potter's strong suits. "Preposterous, and asinine, even for you."

"But why? Hermione would be perfect! Don't you remember how good she was in Potions?"

"I seem to recall a freakish ability to regurgitate the textbook," Severus sneered.

Potter had the gall to chuckle. "Get over it; she was brilliant. Who else in our sixth year class could have prevented Neville from accidentally sterilizing himself that one time he brewed the Contraception Potion wrong?"

"Please do not remind me. And even assuming a glancing competency in potions brewing, just what exactly would qualify Ms. Granger to take on the position of Potions mistress here?"

Potter blinked once behind his owlish spectacles and looked at Severus as if he had grown an extra head. "Are you serious? Um, let's see, how about the fact that she's worked in the potions lab in the Ministry's Department of Mysteries for four years, holds patents for two classified brews, and she got certified as a Master two years after Hogwarts, which is the only real requirement to be Potions mistress here, anyway?"

Potter was too gallant, of course, to mention that Granger had achieved Master status faster than any other apprentice in guild history, including Severus himself. Not that he needed it pointed out to him. "Be that as it may, Ms. Granger studied law, not Potions. She is not properly credentialed to teach it."

The boy scoffed. "Semantics and snobbery. You're headmaster! You make up the bloody credentials; why don't you just change them?"

"Faulty logic, as usual, Potter. The Board of Governors decides upon the prerequisites for each faculty position. I have little say in the matter."

"Jealous git," Potter muttered under his breath.

Severus stopped pacing and leaned over his desk. "The answer is no. Perhaps it is your own employment that ought to concern you more," he growled. "Unless you wish to submit your curriculum summary for the Ministry review, kindly remove yourself from my office."

For reasons unknown, Potter smirked again. "Fine, have it your way, then. Here's her vitae. Don't forget Ginny wants you to drop by for dinner next weekend. Albus Sevvie misses you."

"Out!" As if sensing Severus' displeasure, the office door opened on its own accord. Wordlessly, Severus pointed to the door. With a negligent wave, Potter departed.

Severus sat slowly, kneading his temples. The demise of Voldemort had the perverse effect of elevating the mundane to the apocalyptic. With threats of imminent death no longer quenching everyone's thirst for drama, wizardom had found new crises with which to occupy itself in record time. He pointed his wand at the piles of rolled up parchment on his desk, contributions from his staff for the Ministry of Magic Decennial Budgetary Review. Flicking his wrist impatiently, he banished all the documents. It mattered little what priorities were proposed in them; the result would still be interview requests from nosy journalists, owls from irate parents, and blustering calls from the Minister.

Staffing decisions qualified as another hubris-ridden nightmare. With Horace retired, he needed not merely a Potions Master, but a new head for Slytherin House. Right now, the responsibility defaulted to him, and it would be too much. Granger could hardly be Head of Slytherin, with her blood running red and gold, he thought, reaching across his desk for the manila folder. It slid easily across the clean, polished surface.

Clearing the desk had been one of his first acts as headmaster. He had wanted none of the useless artifacts that had cluttered Albus' workspace. Not only did the various tinkling and tooting gadgets drive him to distraction, the overwhelming presence of his predecessor permeated everything, from the empty phoenix perch down to the curled accents of the hideous Baroque furnishings.

He closed his eyes. They were nothing but distant memories now, the years he spent at the mercy of his benevolent tyrant. Every now and again, he would still be reminded of the man who'd kept his grip around Severus' soul, even after death. But in the dark days right after... He'd had house-elves scourge the place. Only the towering bookshelves remained. And the portraits. He wasn't certain he could remove those, even if he wanted to.

Raising his head, he glowered now at Albus' sleeping form. "Well, old fool, is this another one of your blighted plans?"

The portrait showed no signs of having heard him and continued to snore lightly. Severus wasn't fooled. "As if you ever did anything as normal as sleeping," he said disgustedly.

The folder sat before him, still unopened. Severus' brow furrowed. Hermione Granger. It had been years since he had last spoken to her at the post-war Order of Merlin banquet and even longer since he had last taught her. But like all of Granger's professors, he had no trouble recalling her. A plain child with unruly hair, who by accident of circumstance had befriended Harry Potter. More to the point were her prodigious academic talents. Eleven O.W.L.s. followed by just as many N.E.W.T.s.

The last thing Severus needed was a swotty know-it-all to go with Potter, whom he already had on his staff. Not to mention Longbottom, hired through a foolhardy experiment in which Severus had blindly picked the highest scorer on an Herbology aptitude exam. At this rate, Ronald Weasley would show up demanding a faculty appointment of his own. He was running a school, not a rehabilitation program for war heroes.

Fingering the crisp edges of parchment, Severus opened the folder and idly considered its contents. He wondered why she had chosen to cloister herself in the bowels of the Ministry labs when any number of lucrative positions were available to her. He scanned the lists of dates on the document and was startled to discover that she had managed to obtain master certification while she was still in law school. Not all that shocking after all, he amended in retrospect. What was *actually* strange was that Granger had abandoned law. Or that she had abandoned anything, generally. For all Minerva's effusive chatter at the staff table throughout the years, one would have expected Granger to be Attorney General already. Severus inspected the vitae more closely. In spite of himself, the beginnings of curiosity flitted through his mind.

"No."

"Hermione, stop being an idiot!" Harry pleaded.

Hermione pushed the sugar bowl across the table to her friend. He scooped four lumps into his tea then stirred, spilling the liquid sloppily over the rim of his cup. A crease of frustration appeared on his forehead in the place of his faded scar, which was barely visible now. Ten years had wrought many changes in Harry, including the beginnings of a receding hairline, but his green eyes remained as striking as ever and could still stare unnervingly at her.

"Why? I have a job!" she replied mulishly.

"You mean you have a nine-to-five gig that you go to every day where they make you do boring grunt work, take credit for all your ideas, and won't promote you even though you're a Master brewer because you're a girl!"

"I have my two patents..."

"Only because Ron threatened to tell the Minister that your boss was doing his wife!" Then he took a sip of his tea and gagged. "Aw, hell, Hermione, I'm no good with this tea thing, be kind to a bloke and give him some butterbeer, all right?"

Hermione sighed at the mention of her ex-husband, Ron. For all his failings as a husband, he had always been her champion and protector.

Getting to her feet, she headed into the kitchen, her thoughts troubled. She wasn't blind...she could see as well as anyone what a hash she'd made of her life. Her marriage had disintegrated after the disastrous Leland trial. Unable to set foot in a courtroom again, or even speak publicly without descending into mindless panic, she retreated into the quietness of a Ministry job.

Harry followed her from the drawing room. "This isn't still about your parents, is it? You can stop punishing yourself for that, you know."

"Oh, you are one to talk," she shot back. Sheespecially did not want to think about that.

Harry cocked his head.

"You don't get to have an opinion about other people's choices after you willingly stepped in front of a Killing Curse." Hermione cleared her throat and opened the refrigerator. Even ten years later, saying it aloud still made her chest feel unnaturally tight.

Draped over the open refrigerator door as she rummaged through the drawers, Harry rolled his eyes. "It was the only way."

She lifted her head and met his gaze. "Still..."

"This isn't about me," he replied gently. "Your parents..."

Hermione glared at him, then pointedly returned to fishing the butterbeer out of the drawer and canceling the shrinking charms that had been applied to them.

Harry reached out and touched her arm, demanding her attention again. "You like Potions. You're brilliant at it."

She sighed and simply shook her head. Law had been her chosen daytime vocation, and Potions was merely supposed to be her lover in the night. She could always lose herself in the secrets of a brew, immersing herself for hours on end in the fragrant fumes that rose from the cauldron. But devoting her life to the pursuit of justice was supposed to be the catharsis that would purge her of all the things that had gone so terribly wrong. It simply never occurred to her that she would fail.

"So my job is a joke," she conceded to Harry as they ambled together back into the drawing room. "But Potions mistress at Hogwarts? Really? Working for *Professor Snape*?" That should shut him down, she figured. How many times did Harry come over to her flat just to complain till her ears bled about Snape?

To her surprise, Harry paused in the midst of twisting off the butterbeer cap and sat up a bit straighter. "Hermione," he said, leaning forward earnestly, "I know I come in here all the time to harp on about Snape. But the truth is, he's not a bad man. Sure, he has insane criteria for awarding House points, and yes, he's partial to the Slytherins in a way that makes me want to throttle him. And yes, he's a complete git for banning the Yule Ball. But the thing is, he's decent at his core and fair. I don't need to explain to you the whole thing with my mum or his role in the War or what he did to keep the school together. And here's what else..." Harry paused, as if looking for words. "He's the first person after the War who wanted to give me a job not because of who I was, but because of what I could do. That meant a lot to me."

Hermione listened with faint amazement. "That's great, Harry," she said sincerely. "But even if Snape's a saint now, I can't do it." She could never undertake a teaching job, least of all, for Snape, even if he *was* shiningly on the side of the Light. She'd had more than a lifetime of humiliation already.

"You *can't* or you won't?" demanded Harry harshly.

Berating herself for the slip, Hermione crossed her arms. "Does it matter? I'm not going to do it."

"Why on earth not?"

For a brief moment, Hermione considered pouring out the whole truth. That she'd left the barrister training program in disgrace, that she'd been the worst kind of failure, and that she could never string two sentences together before a roomful of students, let alone teach them Potions. The confession sat at the tip of her tongue, eager to be spat out like sour milk. It had weighed her down for half a decade, but she'd never been able to divulge it to anyone, not even to her own husband. The mere memory of it had always been unbearable, enough to destroy her hard-won, fragile peace.

Even now, she couldn't tamp down the urge to flee. "I don't think I owe anyone an explanation," she said stiffly. "I have to go check on one of my experiments at the Ministry. You can let yourself out when you're done."

"Hermione..."

Feeling all of about two inches tall, she walked out of her flat, letting the door click softly behind her.

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