

A Confusion of Corpses

by Owlbait

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Hermione's Detective Agency

Chapter 1 of 2

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A/N Written for deathofme in the 2011 SSHG Exchange, my first exchange and my first SSHG story. JKR owns the characters and world. Luvsev owns my sincere gratitude for sorting out my many errors.

It was late afternoon on a Friday in May, seven years after the end of Voldemort. Hermione sat at her desk in her office reading a scientific journal.

The office was part of a small suite of rooms on the second floor above Flourish and Blotts bookshop in Diagon Alley. At the top of a flight of stairs next to the bookshop was a small landing and a wooden door with a glass window. Neatly lettered on the glass were the words "Hermione Granger, Private Investigator."

The suite was comprised of a reception area where Hermione's assistant held the front lines, a photographic darkroom and file archive, a potions laboratory, and a loo. Behind the receptionist's desk was the door to Hermione's office, currently closed.

The office would have been spacious if not for the floor-to-ceiling bookshelves covering all available wall surfaces and leaving space only for two doors, a large window and a fireplace. A polished oak desk sat in the center of the room with two comfortable guest chairs in front of it and a luxurious leather office chair behind it.

A large window faced Diagon Alley; the blinds were up, allowing a beam of spring sunshine into the room where it caught a bevy of dust motes in mid-dance, shone on some flyaway tendrils of brunette hair, and sparkled on the silk stockings covering a pair of shapely legs and feet propped up on the oak desk. The stockings ended at the hem of a grey wool pencil skirt, topped by a tailored white blouse. Black pumps with modest heels lay under the desk, and a conservative black witch's robe hung from a wooden coat rack in the corner behind the desk.

The stocking feet stirred and shifted to a more comfortable position. Hermione turned the page of her journal and nibbled on a stray lock of hair absently as she focused on following the author's complex explanation of his most recent experimental results with Polyjuice Potion and its effects after death. She was not certain she agreed with the author as to what extent experiments on laboratory Pygmy Puffs could be extrapolated to human beings.

A knock at the office door broke the silence. Hermione lowered her feet and tilted her chair forward.

"Yes, Hannah? Come in."

A witch with soft brown eyes and blonde hair, neatly braided, entered and said, "You asked me to tell you when it was three o'clock, Miss Granger."

"Oh, yes, thank you. I have to get ready for the St Mungo's ball this evening. I'll see you there with Neville, shall I?"

"Yes, we'll be there."

"Good, why don't you take the rest of the afternoon off to get ready since I'm leaving now?"

"Thank you, Miss Granger. I've filed all your notes from the Polkiss case and deposited the check with Gringotts. Here is your appointment schedule for Monday. I'll see you later," Hannah said, leaving the schedule on Hermione's desk before going back to her own and retrieving her handbag from a drawer. She was a very efficient assistant, and Hermione was lucky to have her.

Hermione slipped her feet into her shoes, took down the robe from the rack and threw it on over her clothes. She never knew if she'd have to blend in with wizard or Muggle folk on any given day, so she dressed to be able to do either easily. Taking her own handbag from her desk drawer, she warded the fireplace and her office door, then Apparated home, leaving Hannah Abbot to do the same for the outer door.

Hermione appeared in her own living room and began stripping clothes on her way to the bath. Tonight was a charity function benefiting the Janus Thickey Ward which she was obliged to attend.

She ran the shower until the water was hot, then stepped in. Soaping up the flannel, she carefully cleaned the sweat and grime of the warm day from her, washed her hair and tamed it somewhat with creme rinse. This would be a dress robe affair, so after she'd dried herself, she applied a sizable dose of Sleekeazy's Hair Potion to her hair as well before she charmed it dry and up.

Hermione hadn't really needed to leave early to get ready. She'd been to enough of these things that she had it down to a science. She wasn't going with a date whom she needed to impress, she mused as she stood naked in front of her open closet, considering her dress robes. *That one*, she decided, pulling out a deep bronze bias-cut affair that she knew clung nicely. It had garnered several complements the last time she'd worn it which had been two or three events ago.

She'd tried getting out of these things. She offered to donate money instead of buying a ticket, but the Director had told her confidentially that her showing up was much more valuable to St. Mungo's than the price of her ticket. While she wasn't Harry Potter, she was still a famous hero, and plenty of people would spring for tickets and attend in the hopes of meeting her. For Neville's sake, Hermione felt obliged to do what she could, so she bought her ticket and promised to go.

Hermione lay the gown over the bed and went to feed Crookshanks. Crooks was getting on in years, but was still her most reliable companion, and she never trusted anyone who hadn't passed his smell test.

Essential chore done, Hermione chose shoes and jewelry to go with the gown and pulled them out. Then she picked up the trail of clothes she'd scattered through the living room in her haste to get clean and hung them up or threw them in the hamper, as appropriate. Finally, she pulled out clean knickers, and a bra that wouldn't show under the low-cut gown, and put them on. There were still two hours before she needed to be at the dance, so she threw a dressing gown over and settled in to read for a bit. She came back to reality when Crooks was headbutting her ankles to warn her she'd be late.

"Thanks, Crooks," she told him, heading back to the bedroom to finish dressing. Ten minutes later, Hermione was pinning on her earrings and surveying the total effect in her mirror. *Very nice*, she thought. She looked elegant, self assured, even sexy. She picked up her clutch and Apparated to the event hall.

All the usual suspects, I see, Hermione thought to herself, glancing around the room. The Shackletons were at the head table, with the Potters, the Weasleys, their son George and his date Katie Bell, Ron and Lavender. Molly and Arthur wouldn't have been able to afford to come, but George had given his parents tickets, both as a treat to Molly who was still depressed over Fred's death, and as additional support to St. Mungo's, whose staff had worked so hard to help his brother Bill. The joke shop was doing very well, and George had enough money to be generous.

Over at a table near the front, but against a side wall, were the Malfoys Lucius and Narcissa, and their son Draco with his date Luna.

Hermione's place was waiting for her between the Shackletons and the Potters. She picked up a glass of wine from a passing tray and took a sip.

"Hello, Hermione," Neville said, walking up with Hannah on his arm. "You look beautiful tonight, but then you always do." He leaned forward to kiss her on the cheek, then slipped his arm back around his Fiancée.

"Thank you, Neville. You look lovely too, Hannah. I hope you are having a good time."

Hannah smiled at her employer. "Thank you, I'm having a lovely time. I've been looking around for ideas for our reception. Only two more months, so much to do..."

"I'm certain it will be a wonderful wedding, Hannah."

"Miss Granger, so lovely to see you again," Lucius announced, bowing over her hand. He actually managed to sound as if he'd meant it. Hermione had been running into him at these events for years now. Any remaining dislike he may have felt for her was very carefully hidden; she was too important to snub, both in her own right and for having the ear of the Minister.

Hermione still didn't trust him, but he was a wonderful dancer not to mention a very attractive man, and she generally allowed him to partner her for one or two dances. Narcissa, she could see, was doing her level best to pretend she liked the Weasleys. No effort was too much where Draco's potential career was concerned.

Hermione put her wineglass down on a side table and put politics from her mind as Lucius effortlessly turned her around the floor, the silk skirts of her gown swirling gracefully to the music. He never said anything to make her uncomfortable, or touched her in any way not strictly appropriate. Of course his wife was sitting right by, but that never seemed to stop Arnold Peasegood, Hermione mused. Arnold was both a leech and an extremely competent Obliviator a combination that made Hermione uneasy in his company, even in a crowded ballroom.

The music came to a close and, with a graceful bow, Lucius thanked her for the dance and asked her to whom he should escort her.

"Harry, please."

Lucius brought her to the head table, rescuing her wineglass for her en route. Narcissa, deep in conversation with Molly, who was pretending not to see Hermione, smiled up at them as they passed around to reach Harry. Lucius bowed over Hermione's hand again and invited Mrs Shackleton to dance.

"Hi, Hermione, how's the detective business going?"

"Very well; we finished up a case just the other day. Honestly, you'd think a witch who'd thought better of marrying a Muggle could just leave him instead of ... Hello, Arthur! Congratulations on your new granddaughter. I hear little Victoire is over the moon about her new baby sister."

"Thank you, Hermione. Bill and Fleur are hoping you'll be by Shell Cottage for a visit soon. Molly's been there all week, of course, but she's back home now," Arthur told her, looking a little awkward.

"I'll Floo them tomorrow and ask when to come around," Hermione said. Arthur thanked her and left, and Hermione returned to her conversation.

"Well anyway, Harry, it was just an ugly thing to do, and I'm glad the MLE has her now."

"I heard a bit about it. I was just as happy to be on another case when the Aurors were called," Harry told her. Would you like to dance? Ginny's a bit tired and wants to sit."

"I'd love to."

Harry had turned into a pretty good dancer. He'd had plenty of practice since he was asked to this sort of thing constantly since the war. Hermione stood and accepted his hand to lead her out.

"I'm sorry about Molly, Hermione. It's just wrong that she's still being so rude to you."

"Don't worry about it, Harry. I can take a little rudeness without getting upset. She's your mother-in-law; you need to keep the family peace."

"It's just a shame though; even Ron thinks she's going on too much about it."

"How is Ron, by the way?"

"Good. He's doing well at work, and he's seeing Lavender again."

"Isn't Lavender married?"

"She and McLaggan are separated."

"I'm sorry to hear it, although I wouldn't have wished McLaggan on any woman. I'm glad Ron's moving on; Lavender will appreciate him better than I could."

"Well, you know how I felt, I'd have really liked you and he to be together, but it was pretty obvious to everyone except Ron that it really wasn't going to work. So, are we ever going to see you going with someone, Hermione? You look absolutely stunning in this dress; it's a shame to waste it on all us married men."

Hermione laughed. "It's not a waste, and I'm having a good time ... I can't help it all the good wizards are taken. I'm too picky to settle, Harry, and I just haven't found anyone interesting enough."

The dance ended, and Draco came by, claiming her for the next.

"Hi, Draco, how's Luna?"

"She's fine; she wanted to chat with Ginny a bit so I thought I'd dance with you and make my parents happy."

"Luna a bit much for them?" Hermione asked Draco, grinning.

"She's not exactly their type, is she? Besides, she's a pureblood, and while they like that, they don't want to be seen liking it, if you know what I mean. They'd much rather have me involved with you, for the appearance of the thing," Draco told her, rolling his eyes.

"You should remind them she's Harry's friend. In the mean time, since you dance nearly as well as your father, Malfoy, I'll indulge your little deception," Hermione told him with a smile.

"It isn't a hardship, Granger," Draco told her and, grinning, took the opportunity to turn her in a particularly flashy move and dip her daringly at the end.

Hermione sat with Fleur in the living room at Shell Cottage, admiring the newest Weasley. She had her mother's blond hair, at least a few wisps of it, and looked to have her father's eyes, although it was too soon really to tell.

"Bill's muzzair has been to see us yestairday, asking if we would talk to you about Ron." Hermione and Fleur both rolled their eyes identically.

"Does she do that a lot?" Hermione asked.

"She's here pretty frequently," Bill told her. "Because of the children, obviously, but also because her volunteer work is nearby."

"Volunteer work?" Hermione asked.

"There is an orphanage just a few miles from here, for kids afflicted with lycanthropy.

"There are that many? Does Greyback go after kids with no parents now?" Hermione asked, shocked.

"Not exactly," Bill answered, looking very sad. "It's just that some parents can't deal with it, they actually abandon their children if they get turned very young.

"That's horrible!" Hermione said. Fleur cuddled baby Dominique to her and glared daggers at the very idea.

"You have to understand it was one thing when he was biting nine and ten year-olds, but now he's going after really little ones toddlers even. They don't have any understanding of what they've become, or how dangerous it is. They need special care that most parents just aren't able to give. Mum ... I know you've been on the outs with her lately, Hermione, and I agree she's been pretty awful to you, but she's doing a wonderful thing at the kids shelter. She really cares for those poor kids."

"It's because of you, isn't it? She can't help thinking about how close it came to her own children," Hermione said.

"She hasn't said, but I think so, yes. I think it's good for her. I've been worried about Mum. She's never really gotten over Fred's death. I thought she was finally starting to cheer up a bit, but the last few weeks she's gotten worse."

"What is she doing?"

"She's sad a lot; she doesn't seem to be taking joy in the good things and she harps on the bad ones. She goes on about you leaving Ron and Charlie refusing to settle down."

"That's sad, but it seems typical for a long as I've known her," Hermione told him.

"It's just some of the things she says don't make any sense, and she'll pop out with things at the strangest times. Like last week she got all sniffy and said Snape should be making Wolfsbane for the orphanage."

"Snape? But he's been dead for years!"

"I know, and so does Mum. It was just weird."

"Have you thought about having her see someone? Maybe at St. Mungo's?" Hermione asked.

"If we could think of a way to get her to agree. Last time we suggested it she said if we really cared about her we'd have stayed by poor George at the final battle instead of gallivanting around."

Hermione stared at Bill in shock. "I'm sorry, Bill; I hope she starts to get better soon. She's seeing a lot of Mrs. Malfoy lately. Maybe your mum will listen better to someone outside the family. Maybe you could talk to her?"

Bill considered. "I thought the Malfoys were just sucking up all this time, but you are right, Mrs Malfoy and Mum seem to be close lately. Mrs. Malfoy even gave her a bracelet, as a thank you for her kindness to Draco. Mum wore it all last week while she was here. I see Mrs. Malfoy at Gringotts from time to time, I'll try to have a word. Thanks, Hermione."

"I see Lavender has been teaching you to dance," Hermione remarked to Ron as he turned her carefully around the floor. It was Hannah and Neville's wedding reception, and she was having a good time. The wedding had been lovely, and the party was spilling over with the bride and groom's happiness.

"Yeah, she doesn't like me to embarrass her so she's made me take lessons," Ron said. "We go together though, and it's been kind of fun," he admitted.

He was not going to dance like a Malfoy any time soon, Hermione thought, but it was nice not to be in fear for her toes. It was even safe to let him lead without worrying about collisions. What a pity he couldn't have learned while they were actually dating, she thought a bit wistfully.

As Ron pivoted her, she gazed around the room at the many couples. Blaise and Seamus were looking particularly striking together, she thought. Neville had stood up for Seamus at their commitment ceremony, and Hannah had told her all about it. After they had exchanged rings and taken their vows, the lights that had flared green and red had made it look like Christmas. Hermione made a note to herself to dance with both of them and pay her compliments.

"How's your family, Ron? I heard from Bill that your mother is doing volunteer work?"

"That's right, at the werewolf orphanage. We think it's good for her to get out. Listen, Hermione, I'm sorry about what she said to you the other week. I think she'd had a bit much to drink."

"I know; it's okay, Ron. It was so sad how she was running on about Fred like that. I had hoped her volunteer work would get her out and thinking about other things more."

"We did too, but she's getting worse lately. She actually said if Moody had been there, he'd have saved Fred. It almost sounded like she blamed him for Fred's death. "

"She's been saying a lot of strange things lately. Have you considered ... well, getting her help?"

"Bill tried; he offered to bring her to a Healer himself, but she insisted she's perfectly fine."

"Bill was going to talk to Narcissa, we thought Molly might listen to her friend better, do you know if he did?"

"He tried, but Narcissa said there isn't anything wrong with Molly that a nice shopping trip wouldn't cure and offered to take her."

"Maybe she's right, and she only needs distracting away from her family for a bit. I'd send my best but, well, just tell your family I'm thinking of them, okay?"

When the dance was over, Ron walked her around the edge of the room towards their table, but she got caught up in conversation with Augusta Longbottom along the way, so he left her and went back to Lavender.

It was a dark, moonless night, which is rather overkill in Knockturn Alley, but the man waiting in the shadows there was meticulous about such things. If there had been moonlight, it might have shone off the multitude of silver spangles adorning his violet robe, or glinted on the half-moon spectacles perched on his nose. He pushed his long grey beard over his shoulder to make sure his hands were free and waited.

The alley was damp, smelly, and strewn with garbage. It led to the back door of one of the seediest pubs in Wizarding Britain.

He gripped his wand and tensed at the sound of footsteps, but did not move. There were two sets of footsteps, a couple walking. He relaxed a bit and returned to waiting.

After a long while, the pub door could be heard opening, and a single set of footsteps sounded on the cobbles of Knockturn Alley. They turned the corner into the alley and there was a dim glow of wandlight. The grey bearded man saw the glow brighten as came closer, the wand held by a hooded figure in a dark robe. He readied himself.

The figure came closer and slipped the hood down.

"You! What are you doing he...?"

"Avada Kedavra!"

The cracked walls and the garbage around the man lit momentarily in a flash of green light, then he slumped forward to the floor of the alley, which was once again in total darkness.

Whose Corpse Is It?

Chapter 2 of 2

Magical forensics expert and private investigator Hermione Granger is hired to solve the mystery of a most unexpected corpse. Skilled and resourceful, Hermione produces results. Unfortunately, the results are more mystery and serious jeopardy for someone who only wanted to be left alone.

Midmorning in Diagon Alley, Hermione sat at her desk or, more accurately, leaned back with her feet up reading another journal. The article was on magical forensics of hair with particular regard to identifying lycanthropes. Fascinated, Hermione turned the page, but her reading was disturbed by the entrance of visitors to the reception room outside.

She heard Harry and Draco greet Hannah, who knew to show them right in. Hermione hastily sat up at her desk and slipped her stockinged feet into her shoes. She looked expectantly at them as they entered her office.

"Hullo, Hermione."

"Good morning, Harry. Draco. You're here on business, I presume?"

"That's right, Hermione," Harry told her. "A case has come up, and the MLE needs your particular skill set. There was a body found this morning; we're pretty sure it was the Killing Curse. Based on the identity, we think the case is going to be pretty hot and will need the best minds available. Can you come?"

"Whose corpse is it?"

"Albus Dumbledore," Harry told her.

Hermione barely blinked before answering, "Snape did it.

"That will be two hundred Galleons. My minimum billable time is an hour, so if you have anything else, you might as well ask me."

"Hermione, the body is fresh, not dead eight years. You'd better come see."

Hermione's eyebrows shot up. "Really? I guess I better had, then. You don't really think it's him, do you?"

"I haven't been there, but I don't see how it's possible. I...we both saw him die."

Hermione nodded. "So, transfiguration or illusion then, or possibly..."

Standing up from her desk, she took the witch's robe from the rack and threw it over her office clothes, then took her gloves and handbag from her drawer and went to the outer office, followed by Harry and Draco.

"Hannah, I'm going with these gentlemen to a crime scene; please call Hector and have him meet me at..." She turned to Harry and looked questioningly.

"Knockturn Alley, by the Witch's Tit," Harry said.

"By the Witch's Tit, then." Hermione said. "Have a seat here and wait a moment, Harry; I need to get a few things to bring with me."

Harry and Draco sat in the comfortable chairs in the outer office while Hermione went back into her office and returned with a book, flipping through it as she walked. Finding what she wanted, she marked the place with a scrap of paper and shoved it into her bag. "Let's go."

The three of them turned together from Diagon to Knockturn Alley towards the pub. Hector, Hermione's favorite photographer for these sorts of occasions, was already waiting for her near two trainee Aurors who had been dispatched to guard the crime scene. Harry nodded to them, and they stepped back to allow Hermione and the Aurors into the alley. Hermione beckoned Hector to follow them.

About the middle of the alley lay a crumpled heap of purple and grey. Approaching more closely, Hermione could see that it was indeed a body that looked exactly as she remembered Professor Dumbledore in life. She'd seen him wear that very robe countless times at school. He was lying prone, and his face was partly hidden by his hair and beard, so she couldn't see it very clearly. His right arm was out to the side, with a wand still in it; his left hand was under his body.

She turned to look up at Harry and Draco. Harry was obviously shaken, and Draco looked like he might be sick at any moment.

"Is that... the Death Stick?" Hermione asked in a shaken voice.

"Can't be," Harry said. "He wouldn't be dead now."

"Why not? He had it before, but was killed," Hermione answered. "At least, I think he was."

"Harry and I were both there," Draco answered. "He was dead. Snape..."

Hermione stepped aside for Hector to take pictures; she wanted them from all possible angles before disturbing anything.

"That's odd," Harry said distractedly, looking at Dumbledore's feet where they stuck out from the hem of his robe.

"What is?"

"His socks match."

"Hmm. So they do. Be sure to get a picture of that, Hector. Can I turn him, Harry?"

Harry nodded, then took a deep breath. "Unless you want me to," he offered gallantly.

"It's okay, I'm not the squeamish type," Hermione said. Squatting down, not wanting to kneel in the filth of the ally, she took the body by the shoulder and turned it over onto its back. That was Albus's face all right. Her brow furrowed in concentration, then she reached down and pushed up both sleeves. "Look!"

"I see arms," Harry said.

"Exactly. Two of them. His arm was cursed when he died, remember?"

"That's right! From the ring," Harry answered. "What do you think happened?"

"This can't be Albus Dumbledore," Hermione said seriously. Standing, she reached into her bag and took out the book she'd shoved in it before leaving. Ignoring Harry and Draco, she flipped it open to the place she'd marked and read it over, looking up from time to time at the corpse before them.

Sticking the journal back in her bag and handing it to Draco to hold for her, she took her wand and faced the corpse. Concentrating carefully, she moved her wand in the motions described in the journal and recited an incantation under her breath.

The body before them shimmered and started to change shape, becoming shorter and more muscled. One leg vanished into the robe, and the face became scarred and worn, an eye and part of the nose vanishing. In a few moments they all recognized whose body was before them...

"Mad-Eye Moody!" Harry and Draco said in unison. Hermione stared with them.

Hector piped up, "Have we really just gone from one fresh corpse that should have been years rotted, but isn't, to a different one? Wicked!"

Hermione rolled her eyes but answered. "Yes, Hector, that about sums it up.

"What now, gentlemen?" she asked, turning to Harry and Draco. "It would appear that Alastor Moody has not been dead all these years. It is very odd, but I find it more plausible than that the Headmaster was alive. You saw Alastor fall, Harry, but you didn't see him die. What is wildly strange is that he was wearing Albus's clothing and had transformed himself with Polyjuice Potion at the time he was killed."

"How can it be Polyjuice?" Harry asked. "It would have worn off by now, and we'd have just found Moody's body in Dumbledore's clothes."

"I read an article in a journal on magical theory a few months ago. It included an abstract on experiments done with Polyjuice and lab animals. Apparently, if the subject dies before the potion wears off, the change stays permanently unless it is countered. The working theory is that the potion draws on the drinker's magic so Polyjuice wouldn't work for a Muggle at all, by the way to both do and undo the transformation. If the drinker dies, his magic is gone and the body is just stuck that way, unless a live witch or wizard helps it get back.

"Of course, the author only experimented on animals, so he could only speculate on the effect in humans. I'll have to write to the journal that his theory was correct."

"But if the potion needs magic, how did it work on animals?"

"He used puffskeins and the like."

"How did he get a puffskein to drink the potion?"

"You probably don't want to know. Are you gentlemen finished with me? Do you need me to keep working, or will the MLE handle it from here?"

Harry and Draco looked at each other. Harry, as the more senior Auror, responded for the team.

"I think we'll want your help checking Moody's body for evidence. Nobody even knew he was alive; we don't know where he lived or why he'd want to stand around Knockturn Alley in the middle of the night pretending to be Albus Dumbledore."

"All right, then. Hector, we'll need pictures of the new body, please."

Hector repeated what he'd done before, snapping pictures of Moody from all angles. When he was finished, Hermione closed Moody's eyes, then examined him closely. She found a clot of mud stuck to the side of his shoe which didn't match the dirt of the alley and scraped it into a sample jar for testing.

Several hours later, Hermione stood in her lab with her blouse ruffled and her hair hanging in strings from sweat. She pushed it behind her and straightened her back at the sounds of someone entering the outer office and Hannah Abbott's voice greeting him.

"Miss Granger is in the lab, Mr. Potter; if you'll wait a moment, I'll see if she can step out?"

Hermione stepped out. "It's okay, Harry, I'm done in here for now. I'll tell you what I've learned, but it doesn't help much."

"That's okay, I've got some information for you that might help."

"Good, I could use some," Hermione told him, smiling. "Come into my office."

Harry followed Hermione into her sanctum and sat down in one of the chairs at her desk while she walked around and sat behind.

"You first, Harry."

"Sure. Ginny and I had dinner at the Burrow last night, and we told how you'd discovered Moody's body. You'll never believe this, Hermione, but Molly knew Moody was alive."

"She knew? And she never told anyone? Why?"

"He made her promise not to. She'd run into him entirely by accident. You've heard how she's been volunteering at this orphanage for were-kids, right?"

"Yes, Bill told me when I was there a few weeks ago. It sounds really good for her."

"It has been, but it does take more than your average parenting skills to help out with the kids there. She said it happened a few months ago. One night one of the kids ran away. She was very little, only four or so, and she wanted to find her real mother. Problem was, it was very close to the full moon."

"Wow," Hermione said. She may not have been on the best of terms with Molly since her breakup with Ron, but there was no questioning her bravery, especially where little ones were concerned.

"Exactly. So anyway, she was chasing after this kid and you know after raising Fred and George, there's no way any four-year-old is going to evade her for long she followed her into a very sketchy neighborhood."

"Why'd the kid go there?"

"Looking for her parents. Molly doesn't think she came from right there, but probably another poor area that looked like it. Anyway, she saw Moody there. Recognized him in an instant. He couldn't see her coming because he'd lost his magical eye."

"So what did he tell her? How did he survive the fall, and how'd he stay hidden?"

"He didn't tell her much, only that he was in hiding from a surviving Death Eater. He made her swear not to reveal that he was still alive. Molly didn't exactly say, but I got the impression she owed Moody a lot and he called in the chit on it."

"I guess I can see her agreeing under those circumstances, although she must have found it very hard keeping the information from you, knowing how you'd felt about Moody's death."

"Yeah," Harry said uncomfortably. "It hurts a bit that she didn't tell me, but I guess I understand. So, what were you going to tell me that you learned?" Harry asked, changing the subject.

"The clump of mud from Moody's shoe I broke it up for testing and found a couple of grey hairs embedded in it. I had just finished the protocols when you came in."

"And?"

"They are werewolf hairs."

"Wow, that's... interesting," Harry said, sounding as confused as Hermione felt.

"Interesting, yes, but I don't know how much of a lead."

"Hey," Harry said. "Maybe it means he was around the neighborhood of that orphanage recently?"

Hermione brightened. "That could be. In that case, maybe he shopped regularly in the area Molly met him. He must have gotten his Polyjuice Potion somewhere, or the ingredients to make it, from a dodgy apothecary. Do you know where it was she met him?"

"Yes, in the town a few miles from Shell Cottage. Draco and I will go, or maybe I'll send Draco alone. He'll have better luck with dodgy shopkeepers than you or I, and it will help keep your bill to the Ministry in bounds," Harry told her with a wink.

Hermione smirked. "Take a photograph of Moody with you he probably wasn't using his right name and ask if anyone's seen him.

"That much I can figure out," Harry told her, rolling his eyes, but smiling. "I'll come back with a report as soon as we learn anything."

Harry didn't return, but he did send an owl. *One of the Ministry owls*, Hermione thought with a pang of grief for Hedwig. She gave the owl a treat from the dish she kept by the window to cover her regular correspondence, retrieved the roll of paper from its leg, and sat back at her desk to read it.

Hermione, we have a lead on Moody. Draco found a guy at a black-market shop who admitted to recognizing the picture. You were right, he'd been buying boomslang skin. The shopkeeper knew him as Jack Cameron.

Unfortunately, the trail goes cold there. 'Cameron' always paid cash and picked up his supplies in person. I've checked the Ministry records, and that name isn't listed in any of the registries not for property, or employment records, or anything. There's no Gringotts account under that name either. He must have been using a different alias for his regular living, but I don't know how we're going to learn what it was.

Hermione leaned back at her desk, tapping her cheek with the rolled up note. She had a few resources the Ministry didn't. *No point wasting time*, Hermione thought, standing. She went to the fireplace and tossed a handful of Floo powder in. "Granger residence" she announced and stepped through to her parents' living room.

Hermione's parents had been understandably shocked and upset when she had returned their memories. They had been estranged for some time, but that was years ago now. The Grangers had returned to England, and Hermione was again on good terms with them.

Over tea, she asked her father for help finding a reputable Muggle investigative agency. He didn't know offhand, but had a dental patient who was a criminal attorney. A few phone calls later, and Hermione had an appointment with Michael Cox at his office for the next day.

As it turned out, Michael found Moody via the dustbins which Hermione thought rather ironic. He had to pay council tax, which included emptying the bins, so he was on the electoral role.

It had taken several weeks; Jack Cameron was not exactly an uncommon name, and with Moody being the paranoid sort, he'd have paid cash as much as possible. Michael had had to visit quite a few council offices to review the records, as they weren't online. He had found three Jack Camerons who seemed to be likely candidates, reclusive and with no known means of income. Two, he observed and photographed; Hermione held the pictures of two strangers in her hands. Michael was not able to find the third Jack Cameron; no one entered or left the remote hunting cabin in Cornwall which was his legal residence.

It had all amounted to quite a bit of travel and work, which Hermione was thankful she didn't have to do herself. She mentally translated the figure into Galleons and added it to her growing bill for the Ministry. Hermione then wrote up the results so far and sent an owl to Harry.

Harry and Draco arrived in Hermione's office shortly after receiving her owled message. They brought a detailed map of the area surrounding Moody's cabin. Hermione was putting together a sampling kit. She told them she had also owled Hector to come.

When Hector arrived, they Apparated together to the vicinity of the address and walked up to the door.

It took Hermione the better part of an hour, with Harry and Draco's help, to dismantle the wards. Eventually they succeeded and were virtually certain that all the traps were now dormant. The three looked at each other; then Harry opened the door. When nothing happened, they stepped out of the bright sunshine and into the gloomy cabin. Nothing untoward happened as they stood waiting for their eyes to adjust to the gloom. When she could see, Hermione gasped in shock.

The entire cabin looked like some weird shrine to Severus Snape.

Every available wall surface had photographs and newspaper clippings pinned to it. Hermione turned slowly in place. Everywhere she looked, Snape sneered at her, or smirked, or just stared with fathomless eyes. Most of the pictures were clipped from the *Daily Prophet* and still attached to articles about him how he had murdered Albus Dumbledore, his career as Headmaster, his tragic demise on the day of the final battle. Tragic in the sense that it deprived the Wizarding world of the satisfaction of trying him and condemning him to life without parole in Azkaban, according to the articles immediately following the battle. After those came the exoneration. Harry had shown Snape's memories to Kingsley and had spoken for him, as had others. When all the evidence had come to light, Snape had received an Order of Merlin, First Class, Posthumous.

She'd read all these articles, of course, when they'd been published. She'd grieved, first for Albus, and then for Snape. Even if he'd been guilty, he'd met the most horrible end. She'd felt almost... bereft at the time. When his medal had been awarded, she'd actually cried.

Harry and Draco were both staring around at the walls, equally stunned.

Hermione shook her head. It was just bizarre to see the life of Snape laid out like this in chronological order *But... wait... they were in order. There was his death, and his Order of Merlin, and ... some more to the right of it.* No more newspaper articles; over there it was photographs and handwritten notes. Hermione walked slowly towards that wall, her heart thudding in her chest. There was a photograph of a tall, thin, dark-haired man in trousers and a shirt standing in a garden outside a cottage on a windswept bit of landscape. The man didn't move; it was a Muggle photograph. He looked extremely familiar, despite the setting and garb. Hermione removed the thumbtack and looked at the back. Her heart skipped a beat when she saw the date there April 2003.

Hermione turned to meet Harry and Draco's eyes; they could both see the shock in hers. "Snape... He's alive!"