

Joy Comes In The Mourning

by TeddyRadiator

While chasing a criminal in Knockturn Alley, Auror Granger discovers a ten-year-old secret... Chapter two is actually the extended version of the original Drabble, so please feel free to read the Director's cut...

Original Drabble

Chapter 1 of 2

While chasing a criminal in Knockturn Alley, Auror Granger discovers a ten-year-old secret... Chapter two is actually the extended version of the original Drabble, so please feel free to read the Director's cut...

□

A/N: Droxy challenged me to write a vampire!Snape drabble series. I hope she enjoys this little moonlit sonata. I own nothing you recognise. If I did, I promise you we'd all be a little happier.

Remind me again why you decided to be an Auror? Hermione thought to herself, as she dashed around the corner, the black cloak in front of her disappearing elusively through a doorway she'd never seen before. *As soon as I run this loser down, I'm turning in my resignation, and this time I mean it.*

It was bad enough that she'd allowed the boys to talk her into becoming an Auror. What was even worse was that she was good enough at her job to be in constant demand, which was why she was chasing a killer through Knockturn Alley.

The wizard had a string of offenses as long as her arm, and Hermione was tired of chasing him. He was abnormally unstable for a magical person, and the glee with which he had tortured and maimed his victims was a little too much in the "Bellatrix LeStrange" camp for Hermione's taste.

Hermione calmly followed him as he ducked and dived throughout Wizarding London, leaving a trail of bloodied, traumatized witches in his wake. Tonight, Hermione decided, his luck had run out. With chilling, smug certainty, Hermione made a decision. No more victims. Tonight, he would not be taken alive.

So intent on her gruesome thoughts, Hermione almost ran into him as she skidded around the corner. He was holding another wizard hostage at wand point, and Hermione put up her hand. "Rubens! You're making it harder on yourself. Let him go." Hermione's words died in her throat as the hostage turned to face her, and she found herself face to face with a dead man Severus Snape.

"What the hell?" she said, so shocked she all but forgot the reason she was here, deep in the belly of the beast, chasing a psychotic madman. Snape looked surprisingly unsurprised.

"Professor?" she said, and winced inwardly at the high-pitched sound of her voice. Suddenly, she was 18 years old again, looking down at his dying countenance, frantically searching for something, anything, to staunch the bleeding wound. She'd left him there, thinking he was dead, and ran to help her friends. She woke up crying

from the guilt of it for years.

But that had been a long time ago, and Hermione had put guilt and remorse long behind her. Seeing Snape here, infused with imperious, chilling calm even at wand point, was so surreal as to be some twisted joke.

"Miss Granger," he said, as if they met every day. "I take it you are the reason this philistine is trying to make an example of me?" He sneered, as if dealing with a recalcitrant first year, instead of a cold-blooded killer. "Will you ask this filth to unhand me?"

"Fuck off!" Rubens hissed, and Hermione, still stunned, realised she needed to focus on him.

"Let him go, Rubens," she said, but her bossy tone of voice was replaced by uncertainty. It was enough of a hesitation, and Rubens smiled his hellish smile, aimed his wand and shouted, "*Nex Inciderel*!"

Hermione felt a thousand knives slash into her body, and blood gushed from her mouth. With a pained cry, she fell onto her knees and looked up. Snape was throttling Rubens with the ease of a dog mauling a doll. The scream was horrible to hear, and as consciousness sparkled and danced almost out of reach, Hermione thought, *Well, I said he wouldn't be taken alive, didn't I?*

Strong arms encased her, and the wizard she'd feared, trusted, hated and admired said quietly, "Miss Granger, your renal artery is severed. It's too late for St. Mungo's. You're bleeding to death."

"No!" she tried to scream. Looking up into his dark, pitiless eyes, Hermione tried to tell him *No, I can't die! I have too much to do! I have unfinished business!* And deep in the back of her mind, a voice was insisting, *I can't die! No one has loved me enough!*

The dark man held her impassively, looking deeply into her panicked eyes, seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting her fear. "I can save you, Miss Granger. But you must give me permission." He took a deep breath, and his voice was soft, almost gentle. "You must ask for my help."

Terrified, she nodded, trying to speak through the goblet of blood in her throat. "Please!" she managed to gargle out, clutching his shirt, noting with horror the spray of red mist she had aspirated onto his chest.

He inhaled and stroked her face. "Be sure, Hermione. This time, it is forever."

She was having trouble keeping awake, and she nodded and whispered, "Please, sir."

He looked down at her with something like amusement in his eyes. "Alright, Miss Granger, you have accepted my help of your own free will. I will admit, I have longed for this. Longed for *you*."

With an almost-fond expression on his face, he lowered his head, his long, midnight-black hair falling in her face, tickling Hermione and cutting off her vision. He was on the verge of touching her. "This won't hurt, Hermione," he whispered. In her dying state, his voice shimmered in the air. She could see the words buffet against the currents of the breeze, in dark colours of burgundy and clove, with the scent of patchouli.

Then his lips were nuzzling against her throat, and she whimpered in pain and humiliation, and her former professor laughed against her skin. "Here we go."

When it came, it was glorious. There was a sharp intake of breath, then a screaming shock of pain in her throat, and a murmur from his red, red lips not to be afraid, but to enjoy it, to remember it, because it would only happen this once.

And then it was ecstasy. A thousand orgasms, a thousand passions, rushing down into her body, causing her to fishtail in his strong arms and keen into the alley. Her screaming pleasure was accompanied by his answering moan, and he rocked her in his arms as he fed and sucked her dry.

She floated in a place with no space or time... she was a feeling, a scent on the wind, a scrap of litter blowing gently over the ground by a soft, careless breeze...

Hermione opened her eyes and looked up at her saviour, his eyes closed, licking his lips with ecstatic satisfaction, glowing with health and heat. She was a little dry husk, ready to be discarded. "You promised," she croaked, afraid he would renege. He was ever a will-o-the-wisp in school, giving with one hand and taking with the other. Would he deny her now; would he forsake her?

He smiled at her. "I know, *I will*," he soothed, his voice a promise itself. He drew open his black coat, revealing pale, perfect skin, caramel-colored nipples the size of pound coins, rock hard in the cool air. A quickly muttered spell, a thin light arching in the air, and a deep gash appeared just above his heart. Blood beaded like a cluster of rubies, and Snape gently adjusted his grip, holding her like a nursing infant.

"The rest is up to you, Hermione. Look at it. Do you want it?"

With her last rational thought, Hermione opened her mouth.

Ask a hundred people what an orgasm feels like; you will get a hundred answers. Hermione would have told you it was the moment she suckled against the wound at Severus Snape's chest. Her head reeled, feeling his life's blood flowing in her mouth. It tasted like dark, forbidden wine.

Snape crooned and petted her. She grew stronger, hungrier, childishly insistent and wantonly aggressive. He pulled her away from his chest, and covered her mouth with his own, and together they shared first blood. Hermione remembered, and forgot again, until the past and the present had a name: *Severus*.

He remembered nothing from the time of his death to when he awoke with this thirst.

"I should have come back for you," she fretted, guiltily.

"You couldn't have known. At least you mourned," he said quietly. "No one else did."

Rogue Death Eaters were his first meals, explaining a ten-year-old mystery. At first he thought of taking his own life, but this new undeath was sweeter than his old life. "Immortality is a terrifying concept," he quipped. Lonely, he thought of her, what a fine mate she would make. He followed her, thinking of himself as her protector.

Days passed; Hermione didn't care. He fed her like a waiting chick, sometimes from his own mouth, usually from his breast. He would come from wherever he fed, flushed

and ruddy and bloated, allowing her to drink until he himself felt dizzy. She was ravenous, and he promised her that would fade. He gave her chocolate, which eased the terrible hunger, and peaches, which took the bitterness away.

She slept by his side, his large bed covered in impenetrable curtains, encapsulating them in his own little world. He spoiled her. He did not worship her. He venerated and deified her.

On the fifth night they made love. It was hard and deep and fierce, and for a woman who'd always privately thought sex was overrated, it was the most life-changing moment since she died. Severus took her to greater heights, always backing off and starting again, until her climax came. When it did, she pierced his slender throat with her baby teeth, and he came with a shout that almost broke her starving heart.

He told her he loved her. She believed him. They moved quiet as wraiths throughout the world, satisfying their hunger, and healing their once lonely hearts.

Banner by Sempraseverus

Director's Cut

Chapter 2 of 2

While chasing a criminal in Knockturn Alley, Auror Granger discovers a ten-year-old secret... Chapter two is actually the extended version of the original Drabble, so please feel free to read the Director's cut...

□

Anti-Litigation Charm: None of the characters belong to me. They belong to JK Rowling, who let my entire reason for reading the Harry Potter series bleed to death on the floor of the Shrieking Shack. I'm building a better world.

I was asked for an expanded version of chapter 1, so here it is. I tried to post it as a separate fic but it got rejected. Hopefully it will go through here!

Special thanks to the queen of the betas, stgulik, who always knows how to make me sound just a little more intelligent than I really am! And, of course, spot the Easter eggs!

Also, many thanks to my darlings Sempraseverus and Mimimanderly for their stunning artwork for this drabble turned short story.

Remind me again why you decided to be an Auror? Hermione thought to herself, as she dashed around the corner, the black cloak in front of her disappearing elusively through a doorway she'd never seen before. *As soon as I run this loser down, I'm turning in my resignation, and this time I mean it.*

It was bad enough that she'd allowed the boys to talk her into becoming an Auror. What was even worse was that she was good enough at her job to be in constant demand, which was why she was chasing a killer through Knockturn Alley at midnight.

The wizard had a string of offenses as long as her arm, and Hermione was tired of chasing him. Bertram Rubens was abnormally unstable for a magical person. The glee with which he had tortured and maimed his victims was a little too much in the "Bellatrix Lestrange" camp for Hermione's taste. She had been assigned to him months back, and found him to be slippery as an eel and deadly as a viper.

Not since the time of the war had there been so much fear in Wizarding Britain; Rubens had struck in virtually every corner of the country, and was always one maddening, taunting step ahead of Hermione and her team. She had doggedly followed him as he ducked and dived throughout Wizarding Britain, leaving a trail of bloodied, traumatized witches in his wake.

Tonight, Rubens luck might have just run out. He had cornered a middle-aged witch, who'd surprised him by hexing the living shit out of him, giving Hermione time to track him down.

Hermione was tired. She was discouraged, and what's more, she was sick of coming back to the Ministry empty handed, to be chided by her fellow Aurors for not being clever enough to bring Rubens in. Harry and Ron were often the hardest on her, teasing her that she was slipping, that she was losing her touch. What the fuck did they know? Harry was too busy siring the Weasley of the Week, and Ron was out shagging anything with a pulse. Both of them were virtual strangers to her now, even if she did see them every day.

There was no 'Golden Trio' anymore, not since the final night of the Battle of Hogwarts. That night, the invisible cord that had held them together literally through life and death had snapped; the next morning the three of them looked and acted as if they barely knew one another. Harry blamed Voldemort; Hermione blamed Dumbledore. She and Ron had already been drifting apart when she announced she was returning to Hogwarts to finish her studies, and Ron had soon renewed his affair with Lavender Brown. Hermione found that her own apathy about their relationship bothered her more than Ron's infidelity.

Hermione sighed as she thought of those first years after the war. Survivor's guilt; that's what it was called. It felt like being buried alive. Hermione had thrown herself into her new job with her typical fervor; now it felt not only like being buried alive, but being buried alive in a purgatory of shady characters, villains and demons like Rubens, who had made her a laughingstock for months now. The thought of losing track of him again depressed her almost as much as well, as much as catching him.

And why should she risk her neck trying to bring him in alive? He was as bloodthirsty as any Death Eater Hermione could recall. He loved seeing his innocent victims suffer. He got off on their pain and their misery. Why should Hermione waste her time and the good citizens of Wizarding Britain's Knuts, Sickles and Galleons catching this cur, keeping him locked away in Azkaban, or more likely, back on the streets due to some slimy solicitor's machinations and technicalities?

Scum like Rubens didn't deserve to live. *What the hell*, Hermione thought. *I've got my license to Avada* With chilling, smug certainty, Hermione made a decision. No more victims. Tonight, Rubens would be unfortunately put down while trying to assault an Auror of the Ministry. Self-defense, pure and simple. Tonight, Rubens would not be taken alive.

Making such a bloodthirsty decision filled Hermione with a perverse sense of calm, and that *did* bother her. Funny, that; to be so peaceful at the thought of another person's

death. Maybe it would make her feel more alive. Where was the eager, fresh student who'd been heralded the brightest witch of her age? Where had her passion gone the night Harry defeated Voldemort and saved the Wizarding world? Hermione thought she might have an inkling of an idea, but it depressed her, because if it were true, she was surely lost to the world.

So intent was she on her pleasantly brooding thoughts, Hermione almost ran straight into Rubens.

She had skidded around the corner, wand at the ready, a crippling hex on her lips when she saw him. "Oh shit," she said, under her breath. Rubens was holding another wizard hostage at wand point. He grinned at her manically, and dug the tip of his wand into the neck of his human shield.

Hermione knew she had to be careful. Rubens had been cornered before, in an almost identical situation, and had gleefully killed his hostage and escaped. The worse part had been that it was totally unnecessary; the poor hapless witch could have gone free. Rubens had killed her because he liked killing. If Hermione screwed this up and added another innocent victim's blood on her wand, it might cost her sanity, not to mention this job. Hate it though she might, she had no desire to have a dishonourable discharge on her record because of this bellend.

Hermione lowered her wand. Something in her almost made her turn her back on him and walk away. Only the thought of the innocent wizard between them held her in place, and gave her courage enough to try and reason with him.

"Bertram, let's be sensible about this." Her voice carried just the right amount of warning and pleading in equal measures. She put up her hand in a supplicating gesture. "You're making it harder on yourself. Let your hostage go, and I promise I'll make them go easier on you." In reality, Hermione just needed him to shift over to the right a little, and she could AK Rubens, Confund the hostage and have a beer before midnight.

Hermione smiled inwardly at the thought. "C'mon, Rubens. Let him go." Her words turned to ash in her mouth as the hostage turned his head to face her.

Hermione felt her throat close and she gasped for air. She actually took a step backward, and felt faint.

She was looking at a dead man Severus Snape.

"What the hell?" she breathed, so shocked she all but forgot the reason she was here, deep in the belly of the beast, chasing a psychotic madman.

The last time she'd seen Severus Snape alive was the night he died well, the night she *thought* he died; the night of the Battle of Hogwarts. She, Harry and Ron had left his dying body in the Shrieking Shack and gone to finish the battle. Later, when the shock of it all had worn off and Hermione could once again think clearly, she made the others rush back down to the Shack, only to find it empty. All that remained of their former professor was a floor drenched with dark blood. Rumour had it that the Death Eaters had come to take the body away to defile it.

"We should have taken him with us," she had whispered, her teeth chattering. The boys had looked at her as if she'd gone mad.

"Come on, Hermione," Ron had countered, "we thought he was the enemy."

"He didn't deserve this," she said, feeling sick to her stomach. Watching him die had been hideous, but to know his body had been carried off to do Merlin knows what to it made her want to retch. "He didn't deserve this. We should have done something."

Hermione had dreamed about him for months afterward. She'd awake from a deep sleep, crying from the guilt of it, begging his spirit for forgiveness. She'd chastised herself for years for leaving him there, running away with the boys like scared first-years. Ten years later, looking into his dark, unreadable eyes, she wondered how she'd ever thought he could be dead.

He stood in front and slightly to the left of Rubens, not fighting the deranged wizard, but not exactly helping him, either. He merely stood, gazing at her calmly, and Hermione realised both men were waiting to see what she would do.

"Professor?" she said, and winced inwardly at how high-pitched and childish her voice sounded. Suddenly, she was eleven years old, setting fire to the hem of his cloak. She was thirteen, hiding behind his voluminous robes as he protected her against a werewolf. She was fifteen, being hexed by Malfoy to grow huge teeth, and being told by Snape, "I see no difference." She was seventeen, scrabbling through DADA class while he threw every spell at the book at her, giving her a disdainful look that made her cheeks burn. She was 18 years old again, looking down at his dying countenance, frantically searching for something, anything, to staunch the bleeding wound.

That had been ten long years ago, and Hermione thought she'd gradually put her guilt and remorse behind her. Seeing Snape here, infused with imperious, chilling calm even at wand point, was so surreal as to be some twisted joke, and she knew she was no closer to forgiving herself than she was the night she'd knelt beside him and rose from his body with the coppery smell of his life's blood in her nostrils. That guilt had been fresh, innocent. This guilt was the product of ten long years of brewing, and it was potent and rich and more poisonous than the snake that had torn out his throat.

"Professor?" she said again, willing him to answer, to prove to her that he wasn't some demented figment of her imagination, some twisted ruse Rubens had conjured up to fuck with her head.

Snape looked surprisingly unsurprised. "Miss Granger," he said, as if they met every day. It was the same voice that had haunted her for ten years. "I take it you are the reason this philistine is trying to make an example of me?"

"Oh, wonderful, Auror Granger!" Rubens cooed, then laughed the irritating giggle that Aurors in Hermione's team imitated to piss each other off. "You two know each other? Oh, that's just too good!" He adjusted his wand, so that it pushed into Snape's pale neck, just above the jugular. "Looks like I got a two-fer tonight! Buy one, get one free!"

Snape, who had listened to this little speech with all the stillness of a statue, sneered, as if dealing with a recalcitrant student, instead of a cold-blooded killer. "Auror Granger, shouldn't you be asking this filth to unhand me?"

"Fuck off, mate!" Rubens hissed, and Hermione, still stunned, realised she needed to focus on him.

"Let him go, Rubens," she said, but her normally authoritative voice was laced with uncertainty and fear.

"And what will you give me if I do, Auror Granger?" he replied with maniacal glee.

"A trip to Azkaban instead of St. Mungo's morgue, Rubens," Hermione hissed.

"Go ahead, Hermione," Professor Snape said, his voice smooth as glass. "Kill the little shit. Do it."

"Shut up!" Rubens screamed, and as if in slow motion, Hermione saw Rubens flash his hellish smile and aim his wand at her chest. Before she could rouse herself from her stunned stupor, Rubens lashed out at her, moving his wand in a large "Z" pattern, shouting, "*Nex Inciderel!*"

Hermione felt a thousand knives slash into her body, and blood gushed from her mouth. With a pained cry, she fell to her knees. She heard a sound like rain on cobblestones, and realised it was her own blood splashing the pavement.

Faster than it seemed possible, Snape turned in Rubens' arms and bent down to the shorter man, as if he were about to tell him a secret. Hermione heard an inhuman scream of pain, and had enough presence of mind to look up, just in time to see Snape clamp down on Rubens' throat like a dog mauling a doll.

The scream was horrible to hear, and as consciousness sparkled and danced almost out of reach, Hermione thought *Well, I said he wouldn't be taken alive, didn't I?*

The world tilted on its axis as Hermione slumped to the ground. She tried to think of the things she had been trained to do in emergency situations, but for the life of her, she couldn't remember a sodding one of them. All she wanted to do was lie still for a moment and catch her breath. She felt very tired.

Strong arms encased her, and Hermione looked up into the face of the man she'd watched die all those years ago. He looked remarkably hale for a dead man.

"I'm glad you're not dead," she said, her voice thick and slow, as if she were speaking under water. She couldn't feel her legs.

For a moment, Snape held her; then the wizard she'd feared, trusted, hated and admired said quietly, "Miss Granger, your renal artery is severed. It's too late for St. Mungo's. You're bleeding to death."

Bleeding to death. I know what that means, don't I? Hermione tried to make her sludgy brain work, replaying the words in her mind. *Bleeding to death... bleeding to death... bleeding to -*

"No!" she tried to scream, but it came out more like a weak whisper. Consciousness and clarity snapped sharply into focus, and adrenaline and fear caused her to bleed out her life faster. Looking up into his dark, pitiless eyes, Hermione tried to tell him, *No, I can't die! I have too much to do! I have unfinished business!* And deep in the back of her mind, a voice was insisting, *I can't die! No one has loved me enough! Mum and Dad, oh, Gods! No, I'm not ready!*

"I don't want to die," she whimpered, pitifully.

The dark man held her impassively, looking deeply into her panicked eyes, as if seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting her fear. "I don't want you to die, either. I can save you, Miss Granger. But you must give me permission." He took a deep breath, and his voice was soft, almost gentle. "You must ask for my help."

Terrified, she nodded, trying to speak through the goblet of blood in her throat. "Please!" she managed to gargle out, clutching his shirt, noting with horror the spray of red mist she had aspirated onto his chest.

He inhaled and stroked her face, his hand cool and gentle. "Be sure, Hermione. This time, it is forever."

She was having trouble keeping awake, and she nodded. Tears streamed from her eyes as she whispered, "Please, sir. I don't want to die."

He looked down at her with something like amusement in his eyes. "Alright, Miss Granger, you have accepted my help of your own free will." He stroked her face again. "I'm so glad. I will admit, I have dreamed of this. Longed for it; longed for you."

With an almost-fond expression on his face, he lowered his head, his long, midnight-black hair falling in her face, tickling Hermione and cutting off her vision. He was on the verge of touching her. "This won't hurt, Hermione," he whispered. His large nose nuzzled against her neck; it was cool, and she shivered as much from his cold flesh as from loss of blood.

"Keep your eyes open, Hermione. Watch me." In her dying state, his voice shimmered in the air. She could see the words buffet against the currents of the breeze, in dark colours of burgundy and clove, with the scent of patchouli.

Then his lips were sliding against her throat, sucking hard against her skin, drawing the bruise up to the surface; marking her. Hermione whimpered in pain and humiliation, and her former professor laughed against her skin. "Here we go, baby." Hermione's last mortal thought was how incongruous it was to be called 'baby' by Professor Snape, yet how sensuous the endearment sounded, coming from him...

When it came, it was glorious. There was a sharp intake of breath, then a screaming shock of pain in her throat, and a murmur from his red, red lips as she alternately pushed him away and pulled him closer. "Don't be afraid, my love... enjoy it... remember it, because it will only happen this once, sweet one..."

And then it was ecstasy. A thousand orgasms, a thousand sensations, rushing down into her body, causing her to fishtail in his strong arms and keen into the alley. Her screaming pleasure was accompanied by his answering moan, and he rocked her in his arms as he fed and sucked her dry. She felt the drawing, pulling feel of her blood rushing to his mouth from all points of her body, as if called home by his beautiful voice.

She floated in a place with no space or time... she was a feeling, a scent on the wind, a scrap of litter blowing gently over the ground by a soft, careless breeze...

Hermione opened her eyes and looked up at her saviour, his eyes closed, licking his lips with rapturous satisfaction, glowing with health and heat. His pale skin was tinged pink and looked stunning. Against this blood-flushed wizard, Hermione felt like a little dry husk, ready to be discarded. Would he deny her now; would he forsake her? He had ever been a will-o-the-wisp in school, giving with one hand and taking with the other. "You promised," she croaked, afraid he would renege.

He smiled at her. "I know, and I will give you what I promised," he soothed, his voice a promise itself. He drew open his black coat and then his bloodstained shirt, revealing pale, perfect skin, caramel-colored nipples the size of pound coins, rock hard in the cool air. A quickly muttered spell, a thin light arching in the air, and a deep gash appeared just above his heart. Hermione watched helplessly as blood beaded like a cluster of rubies just above the little dark nub.

Snape gently adjusted his grip, holding her like a nursing infant. He looked down at her, and cupped her chin in his hand. "The rest is up to you, Hermione." He looked down at the wound at his breast. "Look at it. Do you want it?"

With her last conscious thought, Hermione opened her mouth, and he made a sweet little sound as he guided her onto his breast like a babe at first suck.

Ask a hundred people what an orgasm feels like; you will get a hundred answers. Hermione would have told you it felt like suckling against the wound at Severus Snape's chest. Her head reeled, feeling his life's blood flowing in her mouth. It tasted like dark, forbidden wine.

Snape hissed and writhed as she fed from him. "Greedy little baby," he crooned breathlessly, and there was pleasure in his voice. He brought her hand to his mouth and kissed her fingers as she licked and drew the life-giving nourishment into her body. He continued to pet and baby her as she grew stronger, hungrier, childishly insistent and wantonly aggressive.

Just as she thought she would burst apart, he pulled her away and covered her mouth with his own, and together they shared first blood. She could taste her blood on his lips, mingling with his own blood from hers. His kiss was hungry, full of passion and fire, and when her tongue sought entrance to his mouth, he moaned longingly, and held her close in a lover's embrace. It was the most erotic moment of her life.

Hermione forgot who she was, then remembered, then forgot again, until the past and the present had a name: Severus.

"Do you remember what happened after we left you in the Shack?" she asked him, later.

He shook his head. "I remember waking up, ravenous and thirsty, and hearing voices." He smiled. "For some reason I felt the need to hide, so I disillusioned myself and sat in the corner. It was you and Potter and Weasley, coming back to check on me." He told her how he watched her face crumple with guilt and shame, and how her words, "He didn't deserve this!" rang in his ears until hunger drove him out of the Shack to find sustenance.

"I should have come back for you," she fretted, guiltily.

"You couldn't have known. At least you mourned," he said quietly, touching her arm. "No one else did."

Rogue Death Eaters were his first meals. This ended a ten-year-old mystery for Hermione. In those first few months after the war, they had disappeared, one by one, seemingly off the face of the earth. Not even their wives had ever heard from them again. To Severus, it seemed the most poetic justice he could think of at the time; a good a source of guilt-free nutrition.

It was so difficult for him at first. Life had been a misery for as long as he could remember, and the thought of having to spend eternity as a vampire dismayed him. "Immortality is a terrifying concept," he quipped. At first he thought of taking his own life, but he soon came to find this new undeath was somehow easier, sweeter than his old life. For the first time in his life, he felt free.

"I learned how to care for myself, and I learned the pleasure of solitude," he said, shifting to make room for her on his old sofa. It was almost feeding time, and Hermione could be as charming as a stubborn three year-old when she got hungry. "I had grown used to doing everything alone, but the idea of forever alone was a bit sad."

In the lonely hours, he explained, he thought of her, the look in her eye when she cried, *He didn't deserve this!* He started to read about her exploits in the Daily Prophet. He attended her graduation, under a glamour, of course. He began to fantasise about her, about what a fine mate she would make. He started following her, especially after she was assigned to the Rubens case. Severus began thinking of himself as her protector.

He knew he would never take her; he admired and respected her too much. No, he would watch from a distance, he would read about her promotions with pride he would love from afar. He vowed to never interfere with her life, until the night Rubens doubled back and ran straight into him in Knockturn Alley. He watched in horror as the psychopath sliced her open, and his fury drove him to tear Rubens apart. By the time he had come back to himself, his beloved girl was bleeding to death in the alley, and all he could hear was her voice lamenting, *"We should have come back... he didn't deserve this..."* Neither, Severus thought, did she.

Days passed; Hermione asked if anyone was looking for her. Severus confirmed that Wizarding Britain was on high alert for any information on her whereabouts. She was, after all, a war hero and star of the Ministry. Hermione could not bring herself to care. "Am I supposed to?" she asked, rather indifferently.

Severus shrugged. "It depends," he smiled, and pulled her close, and stroked her face, his touch sweet. It occurred to Hermione that she had lain in his bed for three days, naked as the day she was born, and felt completely at ease about it.

"Severus?"

"Hmm?" he answered absently, chasing the moonlight across her skin with his fingers.

"Are we dead?"

He thought for a moment. "It depends."

"That's the second time you've said that." Hermione frowned. "Depends on what?"

He smiled. "On how alive you want to feel." He suddenly grasped her hand, and brought it to his mouth. Hermione hissed as he nuzzled the inside of her wrist; her breath caught as his warm tongue darted across the blue vein in her wrist, traveling up to the middle of her palm.

When he looked at her, his eyes were fiery and full of heat. "Do you feel that?" His voice was like his blood, warm and deep and rich. "Does it stir you?"

Hermione could barely nod. He replied, "Then you've chosen to live. Live with *me*, Hermione."

He fed her like a waiting chick, sometimes from his own mouth, usually from his breast. He would come from wherever he fed, flushed and ruddy and bloated, allowing her to drink until he himself felt dizzy. As she fed, he would stroke her face, and call her sweet names. He baby-talked to her, he kissed her forehead and did anything she asked of him.

She was ravenous, and he promised her that would fade in time. At the end of the week, he arrived as always, his pale skin pink with repast, smelling of patchouli and uncertain sweat and perfumes that she didn't really want to know about.

He brought a paper bag, and conjured a cutting board. Hermione watched in rapt fascination as he produced a block of shiny, dark chocolate from the bag. He broke off a piece and placed it on her tongue like the Host. "There we go, baby," he crooned, stroking her face with both hands as she smiled at the dark cocoa solids bursting on her tongue. Immediately, the almost painful hunger cramps eased. "Seventy percent solids," he said smugly. "Your favourite."

When she asked *how* he knew, he simply replied, "Blood doesn't lie."

The bag also contained a large, fragrant peach, the colour of her first grown-up dress robes at the Yule Ball during her fourth year. With the deftness and precision of the Master Potioneer that he was, Severus sliced the ripe fruit into wafer thin slivers, and laid each one elaborately upon her waiting tongue.

"This will take the bitterness away," he said, cutting a slice for himself, balancing it on this thumb. Hermione enjoyed watching his jaw move as he ate with evident enjoyment. He solemnly watched her watching him. He swallowed. "Oh, Hermione." He leaned toward her. "I am so happy you are with me." He kissed her lips, smearing juice into her mouth, coupled with the smoky darkness of the chocolate. She found herself thinking the same thing. Blood doesn't lie.

She slept by his side, his large bed covered in impenetrable curtains, cocooning them in their own little world. She lay spooned against his back; her arm thrown around his waist, her hand gripping his wrist.

He was not the man she had watched die; he was the man she had watched give her life. He spoiled her. He did not merely worship her. He venerated and deified her.

On the fifth night they made love. He had fed her, and was lying back against the bed, recovering. Hermione could feel her heartbeat, swift and strong, and so could Severus. Before she knew it, her wand was in her hand and she had spelled his clothing from his body, leaving him as naked as she.

It had been all the invitation he had needed, and as he rolled her over onto her back, he kissed her reverently. For the first time in the week they had been together, he touched her breasts. "When you take my vein, you will be able to nourish me as well. Your body will know me, and I will be able to suckle from you."

Hermione could not have him fast enough. It was hard and deep and fierce, and for a woman who'd always privately thought sex was a bit overrated, Hermione discovered that fucking Severus was the most life-changing moment since she died. He was skilled and perfect, wanting her to enjoy his body, and over and over he took her to increasingly greater heights, before backing off and starting again, until her climax came.

As he drove hard into her body, Hermione suddenly saw his body open to her, transparent and stunningly erotic. Veins and arteries, running under the skin like a roadmap to his soul. Blood racing through them, driven by his strong, loving heart.

"I see it!" she cried, feeling her orgasm cresting. His vein glowed, even as his body labored over her. "I want it, Severus!" she shouted, exultantly. "I want it!"

"Take it then," he growled, his eyes dark and wild. He, too, was almost gone. "Take it, take it now!"

Hermione's climax washed over her, and even as he begged and commanded her, she pierced his slender throat with her baby teeth, and his essence flooded into her mouth. She wrapped her body around him possessively, and he came with a shout. As she fed for the first time on her own, he shivered and cried and whimpered, even as

his come sprayed hot and red into her womb.

Later, after the sweet sleep took them, Hermione awoke to the soft, snuffling sound of her lover, nestled against her, latching onto her breast, tugging at the nipple possessively. To her astonishment, the blood flowed from her breast into him, his own true milk. With a grunt, he settled against her and nursed until he was sated, and her swollen nipple came away from his skilled mouth with a little 'pop'.

He was her lover, her provider, her slave. She was his diety, his armour, his validation. Perhaps he had deserved more. Perhaps, in the end, he had found what he had always wanted. Hermione thought of her old life, and knew she should at least let someone know, but in the end she couldn't be bothered. She belonged to Severus now. She was his Venus, the Lady of the Lamp in the tumbling constellation of his limited heaven; how could she go back to being plain old Hermione Granger?

Severus told her he loved her. She believed him. He told her he would forever be her nourishment, and she let him. Those who occasionally caught sight of them recognised nothing of the human beings they once were. All they saw were the creatures they had always wanted to be, and even the eyes of Magical folk slid past them as they walked the streets, a pale and slender couple, holding hands, protecting and protected by each other.

They moved quiet as wraiths throughout the world, satisfying their hunger, and healing their once lonely hearts.