

Affected Recollections

by little beloved

Hermione Granger is charged with the task of preparing Severus Snape's memories for trial.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 6

Hermione Granger is charged with the task of preparing Severus Snape's memories for trial.

A/N: Dear Reader. Along with all my other stories, 'Affected Recollections' was, for a variety of reasons, withdrawn from the internet back in 2010. Now, along with Denial, it is back. I have only done minor editing to what is a minor story, complete in six short chapters. It was originally written in 2008 as part of the SS/HG exchange. I hope you enjoy it, be it for the first time, or all over again. And thank you, every one of you, for the marvellous welcome I've received on my return to the fandom. I couldn't ask for a better, more encouraging group of gals.

LB x

Affected Recollections

Chapter 1

Hermione Granger took a deep breath as she stepped over the threshold of Azkaban prison. She'd been here twice before during the course of her studies, and despite the fact that the Dementors no longer guarded the wizarding reformatory, she'd always felt as though misery and despair had seeped into the very marrow of her bones each time she'd visited. Today was no different: even though the sun shone and the surrounding sea was calm and blue, she couldn't help but feel that a cloud of unhappiness hung over the jagged island that was home to Azkaban.

"Wand," said the fat, balding little wizard who sat behind the security desk.

Hermione reached beneath her robes and extracted her wand, handing it to the security guard with a frown. "I may need my wand in order to carry out my work."

The rotund man shrugged. "Rules is rules," he muttered, tossing her wand into a drawer beneath his desk. "What if the prisoner got it from you, eh? Right mess we'd all be in then, miss." He pushed a clipboard across the desk towards her. "Sign."

Hermione picked up the quill and scribbled her name.

"Who you seeing, anyway?" he asked.

She pushed the authorisation sheet back towards him and pointed at the name she'd written next to her own.

The security guard chuckled. "Good luck with that one."

She turned from him with an irritated flick of her curls and headed towards the low security zone, glancing down at the permit in her hand: Cell 157, it read. When she reached the door, she handed the permit to another, altogether more kindly-looking security guard, who read it with a crooked smile. He chortled as he fumbled for the key.

"You *are* aware that he's a miserable, bad-tempered old git, ain't you, love?"

"Yes," she said with a sigh. "I was unfortunate enough to have him as a teacher for six years."

"Ah, he's not nearly as bad as everyone makes out. Quite a sense of humour sometimes, and he's bloody good at those Muggle puzzles. He's kept me amused many a cold night!"

Hermione arched an eyebrow. "Are we talking about the same man? And what puzzles?"

"You know," the guard said, slipping the key into the lock, "them Sudoku things with the numbers, and the word ones ... Crackwords."

"Crosswords?"

"Aye, them's the one!"

"I see," Hermione murmured, thinking there'd obviously been some sort of mistake.

"In you go, love. And good luck to you! You just knock when you're done."

Hermione gingerly entered the cell and heard the door close behind her. The keys rattled in the lock, and she was trapped inside the room with her new client.

He was seated by the barred window, and she stared at the dark, familiar figure. He wore no shackles on his ankles, and he was dressed in simple robes of grey rather than the usual grey and white striped prison garb. She'd expected to find him bearded and bedraggled; gaunt and sickly. But he was none of those things. In fact, he looked healthier than he had at Hogwarts. Severus Snape would never be a handsome man, but he looked altogether better than the stern Potions master of her schooldays.

She watched him for a moment, her pulse rapid, her mind groping feebly for the introductory speech she'd rehearsed over and over in her head, but before she could speak, he raised his black eyes from the book he'd been reading, and they widened in horrified recognition.

"Albert?" he shouted, his eyes never leaving her face. "Albert!"

She could hear the speedy footsteps of the security guard outside the door and the rattle of keys. "Sir, Professor Snape, if you would just give me a moment to explain, I..." she began.

"Silence, Miss Granger," he hissed. "Albert?"

The kindly security guard flung open the door. "Whatever's the matter?" he asked with a scowl.

"Please escort this *child* from my room," Severus said.

"Child?" Hermione spat, her eyes wild.

"Get her out of here, *now*!"

Albert and Hermione exchanged a bewildered glance.

"But she's got a permit to see you, Severus. I can't just evict her!"

"Permit? What permit?"

Albert snatched the parchment from Hermione and held it up. "Signed by the Minister himself, giving her permission to interview you for two hours every day for the next three months."

"What?" Severus snarled. "What's going on? Surely they haven't sent a mere child to act as my legal counsel?"

"I've nothing to do with your legal counsel: I'm here on official Ministry business," Hermione explained.

Severus glared at her.

She glared right back.

Albert the security guard rolled his eyes. "The girl's here to help you, Severus, you silly bugger. You be nice to the lass, or you can forget that crackword I promised you!"

"Crossword," Hermione and Severus said in unison.

"Whatever it's called! Anyway," Albert continued, retreating through the door, "you'd think you'd be happy to have a nice, pretty visitor after all this time."

Severus grunted, and Hermione watched the guard close the door behind him. She turned to face her former professor.

"Might I have a seat?" she asked.

He ignored her question and stared, his brow furrowed, his arms crossed. "Do you still go by Miss Granger?" he asked, his eyes flicking to her left hand.

"Yes, I do," she said defiantly, taking the empty seat opposite him.

He smirked. "I recall reading you'd become engaged to Ronald Weasley, yet three weeks ago it was announced he'd married Lavender Brown. Why the change of heart? You grew tired of living with a Neanderthal? Or had he, perhaps, had enough of being constantly bettered by a mere slip of a girl?"

Hermione's cheeks grew warm. "I'm not here to discuss my ex-boyfriends, Professor Snape; I'm here on important Ministry business."

"So you've said. Well then, out with it. I haven't got all day: There are pressing matters such as crosswords to attend to, not to mention my customary two hours of staring through the bars of my window, yearning for freedom and a dungeon full of young minds to hone," he said, his voice heavy with sarcasm.

Hermione regarded him for a moment, feeling out of her depth. Taking a deep breath, she launched into the speech she'd prepared. "I've been charged by the Ministry with the task of preparing your memories for trial. You face the Wizengamot in three months' time, and your legal team have sought permission to use a number of the memories you ... gave ... to Harry Potter on the night of the final battle."

She had expected him to react in anger, or to at least betray a certain amount of discomfort, but instead he looked amused.

"As memories can be modified by the witch or wizard in whom they reside, or even forcibly implanted by a second party," she continued, "I've been given the task of verifying the authenticity of the memories that have already been harvested from you. In addition to this, both your Defence team and the Prosecution have requested access to a number of other memories. You would, of course, be within your rights to refuse, but should you acquiesce, I'm fully qualified in memory collection and verification."

His expression of amusement became a sneer. "Qualified in memory collection and verification? I would have thought you'd apply your knowledge to something a little more worthy, Miss Granger. Tell me, how does one become qualified in memory collection?"

Hermione sighed. He was not going to make this easy. "I've spent the last three years training to become an Unspeakable at the Department of Mysteries. I graduated last month, and I'm currently researching memory, loss of memory, and memory modification."

"How *fascinating*," he drawled, smirking. "I'm moved that the Ministry decided to place my freedom in the hands of a child who has only just graduated. What are you, Miss Granger? Twenty-one?"

"Twenty-three. Hardly a child."

"Hardly an adult," he returned.

"I'm a year older than you were when you began teaching at Hogwarts."

"That's immaterial," he muttered, waving his hand. He gazed at her for a moment. "Have you viewed my memories?"

"Yes, I have," she replied.

"Seeing as you're so highly *qualified* on the subject of memories, Miss Granger, I'd be most interested to know what you made of them."

She reached beneath her robes for her beaded bag. She placed it on the table in front of him, and after rummaging around for a few seconds, she extracted a long, wooden box. Placing her bag beneath the folds of her cloak once more, she opened the box and turned it so that he could view the contents.

"You'll see that there are twenty numbered phials in total, each one containing an individual memory that you passed to us ... to Harry ... on the night you were ... attacked," she explained, her eyes moving to his scarred neck.

He nodded and gestured for her to continue.

"I've inspected the memories numerous times, and while some of them I've confirmed as bona fide," she said, pointing to the memories that were labelled with white tags, "a little over half of them have confused me."

Severus gave a wry laugh. "Those would be the ones labelled in red? How characteristically organised of you, Miss Granger."

She stared at him for a moment, wondering what was going on. She'd expected him to rant and rave. Having known him in her youth, she'd been prepared for him to be incensed by the fact that she'd viewed such intimate, touching memories. On one occasion, when she'd entered her Pensieve and had watched him kneeling on the floor of Sirius' bedroom, Lily's letter in his hand and tears streaming down his face, she'd been moved to tears herself. But now he sat before her, not betraying any emotion at all. There was a mystery here, and she was determined to get to the bottom of it.

"I've seen modified memories, Professor Snape. They are generally ridiculous in their quality: They're usually misty, difficult to view, and when sound or voice is involved, it's unnaturally amplified. The memories labelled in red haven't been modified, but they're not right, regardless. I'm sure that they were not forcibly implanted, as such memories always progress as if in slow motion, and are usually tinged with a strange, greyish light. But I can hardly explain what it is about some of your memories. They're slightly faint, and it's as if ... I don't know ... as if they're edged in silver or something. Like a Christmas card."

He raised an eyebrow. "Edged in silver like a Christmas card?" He chuckled. "Well, Miss Granger, I'd assume that after three hard years of study at the Department of Mysteries you've reached a conclusion?"

She felt her cheeks grow warm again. "The memories in question are all connected with Lily Evans. I wondered if it meant, perhaps, that those memories caused you pain. That they stood out because they were imbued with such emotion."

He gave her a shark-like grin. "Aw ... Did Miss Granger come here expecting to find a heart-broken, romantic hero? Well, let me shatter your illusions, young lady. First, I'm sorry to say your training has obviously been a complete waste of time. Second, you'll find no sorrow-filled Romeo in this room. The memories you've labelled in red are neither imbued with emotion nor modified. They are completely, one-hundred per-cent, fabricated. Albus Dumbledore and I dreamt them up between us, Miss Granger."

She gasped, and her hand flew to her mouth in shock. Severus smiled across the table at her, and she thought he looked like some large, grey-clad feline that was about to pounce.

"The false memories are of unusually excellent quality, if I may say so myself, due to my skills as both Occlumens and Legilimens. The truth is: I never really knew Lily Evans; I never liked her; and I *certainly* never loved her."

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 6

Hermione visits Severus again.

A/N: Quick note I believe someone asked me in review if Severus had been awaiting trial for five years, and I said yes. Actually, I was wrong at the end of DH (which JK Rowling has said was May), Hermione was 18 (almost a year older than Harry), and would have turned 19 in September. So this story is set four and a bit years after the final battle In this universe Severus spent an entire year recovering from his injuries at St. Mungo's, and then he was sent to Azkaban to await trial for just over three years. Hope that straightens out the Math! And thank you for your kind reviews. They make my day every time, so keep 'em coming!

LB x

Chapter Two

Severus Snape looked through the bars of the small, solitary window of his Azkaban cell and across the rolling grey waves of the North Sea. He spent at least an hour each morning thus engaged. It might have looked to the casual observer as if he was enjoying the monotonous view, but he was, in fact, otherwise occupied.

His gaze fixed upon a tiny island on the horizon, he spent this time completing psychological exercises of his own devising. The pursuit had helped prevent him succumbing to mental stagnation over the years. It had, he believed, kept him relatively sane. The Dementors might have been long gone, but many a prisoner had lost their mind to boredom and inactivity. He might never need it again, but he rather thought he'd keep his sanity for the moment, thanks very much.

When he had completed his intellectual workout, he gave a small shake of his head and pinched the bridge of his nose. He walked to the other side of his cell and glanced at the calendar on the stone wall. Today's date was circled in red ink, which meant it was the day Hermione Granger had said she would return to reconvene their interview.

Her reaction to his bombshell when last she'd graced him with her presence had greatly amused him, and he wondered what conclusions she'd reached in the meantime. As soon as he'd confessed that all the Lily Evans memories were false, Hermione had risen from her seat, her face scarlet.

"You mean to tell me," she'd said, her face aghast, "that eleven of these twenty memories are completely fake?"

"Indeed, I do," he'd muttered, his expression smug.

She'd stared at him in mute disbelief before slamming the box of memories closed and tucking it under her arm. "It would seem I've some work to do," she'd murmured, clearly mortified. "I'll return in one week."

That week had crawled by, but the day had arrived at last, and although he wouldn't have admitted it to anyone but himself, he was looking forward to her visit. She'd improved with the years: her unruly curls were no longer so unkempt, and she'd gained the generous curves of womanhood. It had been years since he had set eyes on an attractive woman, and she was easy on the eye. But more importantly, she offered some relief from the tedium of his usual routine, and he was longing for another opportunity to tease her. Like all Gryffindors, she was easy to rouse.

There was a tap on his door, and Albert the security guard poked his head into the room.

"Your young lady's just arrived at the front gate," Albert announced. "I hope you ain't intending making things difficult for her. She's a nice lass."

Severus rolled his eyes. "I'll behave myself, Albert. You have my word."

Albert gave him a curt nod and closed the door again.

Severus looked around the room, wondering where he should position himself. He took his seat at the table, but changed his mind and crossed instead to the side of his bed. No, that would look entirely too pathetic. Her voice came from outside the door, and he heard the rattle of Albert's keys, so he quickly moved back to the window, deciding it would look best if she found him gazing pensively at the sea.

She stepped through the door, and he waited for a moment before he turned to greet her.

"Good morning, Professor Snape," she said, an uncertain smile on her face.

"Miss Granger," he replied, inclining his head. He thought she looked exceptionally pretty today, her cheeks tinged pink by the breeze and her hair tied back in a ponytail. He returned her smile with a frown to ensure she could not sense his approval.

"May I take a seat?"

"You may," he muttered, joining her at the table.

She sat before him and extracted her beaded bag from beneath her black cloak. Taking the wooden box of his memories from within, she set it on the table between them.

"Before I ask why," she began, "I need to know how. How did you do it? There are people in the Department of Mysteries who've been trying to create convincing fake memories for decades. I've seen a few of reasonable quality, but yours far exceed anything they've produced. How did you manage it?"

He shrugged. "I'm cleverer than your colleagues."

"Have you always been this conceited?"

"I'm merely stating a fact," he said, an eyebrow raised. "Besides, I had plenty of practice, over the years."

"You've had practice? You've done this before?"

"Miss Granger, it was rumoured at one time that you were intelligent. Must I really spoon feed you? Why might I have needed a number of simulated memories at my disposal?" He watched as she lowered her gaze to the box of memories once more, her forehead creased.

"For Lord Voldemort. You needed the memories there to guard what you really knew and to give him false information."

"At last, the girl actually uses her head. Well done, Miss Granger," he said, his voice heavy with irony. "Albus Dumbledore always believed the Dark Lord would return, and as a result, I spent many long years perfecting the technique of fabricating memories, as we believed Occlumency might be insufficient. It wasn't enough to block him from my mind; I needed *something* to show the Dark Lord, or I wouldn't have lasted a day."

"And he never suspected?" she asked.

"No. As you've noticed, there's a subtle difference between the false and the real memories when they're viewed in a Pensieve, but that difference is undetectable when the memories are viewed in the mind, through Legilimency. When those memories were made, I'd always assumed I would transfer them to Potter while I was conscious, through Legilimency, but unforeseen events necessitated that they be given to him in corporeal form and viewed in a Pensieve." His hand rose unconsciously to his injured neck.

Hermione extracted a length of parchment and a quill from her bag and quickly scribbled a few notes. "This is fascinating," she said breathily. "So Voldemort, despite the fact that he was an incredible Legilimens, never realised he'd been lied to?"

He shook his head. "I doubt I'd be sitting here if he had. In fact, I doubt either of us would be sitting here if he had."

She regarded him for a moment. "I'm afraid this is going to complicate your trial, Professor. I've already spoken to your legal team, and they were disappointed that the Lily Evans memories weren't real. Their entire defence revolved around the memories you gave to Harry."

Severus gave a grunt. "Yes, I'd a visit from that idiot, Pythagoras Trottering, yesterday afternoon. He most eloquently expressed his displeasure."

Hermione chewed at her bottom lip and then said, "Why did you do it? You said that you and Dumbledore concocted the Lily Evans story between you. Why?"

"Knowing Harry Potter as you do, don't you have a theory?"

"I've thought about little else all week. Harry distrusted you; worse than that, he hated you. And we all know Harry has a weakness for heroism. You were charged with the task of eventually telling him that he needed to die, and the only way he was ever going to trust you was if you convinced him of your reasons for having turned spy ..."

He slowly clapped his hands. "Brava. I needed him to trust me, and what better way to get a Gryffindor onside than to tug at the heartstrings with a tale of deepest romantic angst and tragedy. Tell me, Miss Granger: You've viewed those memories; you even thought that the vague, silvery instability about the edges was due to the depth and breadth of my emotions. Were you moved? Did you think me the bravest of men? The most romantic of war heroes?"

She didn't answer, but she blushed, and he could tell that she'd been taken in by the tale of Lily Evans.

"You are a complete and utter bastard," she muttered eventually.

He held up his hands. "Guilty as charged. Have you told the charming Mr Potter that the memories were fake?"

"No," she admitted, rubbing her brow. "I presume the whole story will come out during your trial; I dread to think what his reaction might be. I, for one, have no intention of telling him."

Silence fell for a moment, and then she picked up her quill once more. "So we can verify that the memories labelled in white are all true. Even the one with Lily Evans after your Defence Against the Dark Arts OWL paper?"

Severus gritted his teeth. "Yes."

"So, most importantly, all the memories concerning your reasons for ... ending Albus Dumbledore's life ... are real?"

He nodded. "Indeed."

"Well, that's good. You are, after all, on trial for his murder, so those particular memories are of vital significance. My only concern is that you might be judged on your reasons for turning spy rather than the death of Dumbledore itself. If the Wizengamot are not convinced that you really did renounce Lord Voldemort, you might be in trouble."

"Why would you care, Miss Granger?"

Her cheeks flushed again. "I just ... I'd hate to see you spend longer than you already have in this prison."

"Touched as I am," he said sarcastically, "don't confuse me with the fictional character in those memories. I am, as you've so rightly pointed out, a complete and utter bastard."

"Yes, but sometimes even utter bastards are innocent," she said simply. "Before I go, Professor Snape, might I ask why you turned from Lord Voldemort's service? If not for Lily Evans, why did you do it?"

"Bastard though I may be, Miss Granger, it does not necessarily follow that I am evil incarnate."

"You mean there was no reason, as such? You just ..."

"I was young; I was foolish; I hated my drunken, violent Muggle of a father. I joined the Death Eaters for misguided reasons, and I saw the error of my ways. ~~was~~ the one who carried the words of Sybill Trelawney's prophecy to the Dark Lord, and I deeply regretted having condemned an intelligent woman and her infant son to death. I turned to the light to repay my debts: it was as simple as that."

"I see," she murmured.

"I might be an unpleasant man, but it does not mean I'm evil. Conversely, there are many pleasant people who are not necessarily good."

"Your Defence team have requested access to a number of memories relating to Albus Dumbledore and your turn to the side of the light. I have an official list in my office, which I'd like to show you." Hermione scratched her forehead. "We have much work to do: Might I return tomorrow?"

He felt his heart soar at the news, so he quickly controlled his face and gave her what he hoped was a menacing scowl. "If you must," he growled.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 6

Hermione decides to brighten up her Saturday afternoon.

A/N: Please forgive Severus's language in this chapter. The silver doe is a rather touchy subject. ;)

Chapter Three

Hermione stared with unseeing eyes at the copy of the *Daily Prophet* that was spread across the kitchen table in her little flat. It was Saturday morning, and she was, quite simply, bored senseless.

Harry and Ginny were on holiday; her parents had gone to visit her Auntie Nora in Scotland; and although she'd become rather good chums with Susan Bones since they'd both started work at the Department of Mysteries, she knew Susan was more than likely curled up beneath a quilt with her fiancé.

Hermione had risen quickly through the ranks during her time as an Unspeakable, but her success had come with a hefty personal price-tag attached, and she was at a loss at the weekends.

A month had passed since she'd begun collecting memories from Severus Snape, and she'd spent two hours each weekday in his company. He fascinated her more every time she visited his cell. At the outset, she'd been certain he'd refuse to cooperate, and despite the fact that they had engaged in more than one screaming match over the weeks, she'd found him much more forthcoming than she would ever have believed possible.

When she'd first found out the Lily Evans memories were fake, she'd felt a kind of mixture of betrayal and humiliation. He'd fooled them all into believing he was a dashing, romantic hero, and, at first, she'd hated him for his duplicity. But as that first week had passed, she'd changed her mind. Severus Snape was, when all was said and done, still a hero; a spy who'd risked death many times to save the wizarding world. Yes, he was still an unpleasant, hook-nosed bastard. But a brave man, nonetheless. In the

end, she'd decided it was entirely more noble to have acted out of a sense of justice, goodness even, than to have done it all for the memory of a dead woman.

But what pleased her most of all was that he had tolerated her presence on an almost daily basis without throttling her. Yes, he'd snarled, and sneered, and scowled, and glared, but not once had he ordered her evicted from the room, and she suspected that the veneer of animosity was nothing but an act. He'd submitted to questioning; he'd provided her with almost every memory she had requested; and she was certain that behind the frowns, and the sighs, and the drama, he actually enjoyed her company. She knew, deep down, that it was nothing personal, that all she offered was a break in the monotony of his prison routine, but the thought still sent a thrill up her spine.

And here she was, on a Saturday morning, missing him. She was actually missing Severus Snape, the man who had shouted at her, had ridiculed and embarrassed her at school, and had never said a kind word to her in her life. But what kindness had he ever been shown?

Knowing that she was overstepping the boundaries of professionalism, and already feeling foolish, she grabbed her jacket and handbag and fled from her apartment. After a brief stop at Waterstone's, she Apparated straight to the gates of Azkaban prison.

Albert looked up from his magazine as she approached cell 157 and peered at her over his little round glasses.

"Miss Granger!" he said. "What are you doing here of a weekend?"

She shrugged and tried to look casual. "I've a few extra questions for Professor Snape." She held up the paper bag in her hand. "I've brought him some puzzles in return ... you know ... to make up for the inconvenience."

Albert glanced at the door of the cell and dropped his voice to a whisper. "You know, lassie, he might frown a lot, but I reckon he'll be glad to see ye. He's been in much better form during the week, but at weekends, well, he's been bloody difficult." He rose from his seat and fumbled for his keys.

Hermione might have laughed out loud at the expression of surprise on Severus Snape's face if she hadn't been so busy trying to stop her hands from shaking. He was sitting at his table, a length of parchment before him and a quill in his hand. Albert closed the door behind her, and she smiled nervously as Severus quickly changed his expression from one of surprise to one of annoyance.

"What the devil are you doing here on a Saturday?" he hissed, dropping his quill.

She rolled her eyes, her nerves evaporating. "Charming as always. I've brought you a gift, and if you indulge me by answering two questions, it's yours."

His eyes flickered to the bag in her hand as she took her seat. "I've been answering your accursed questions for weeks, silly girl. Why couldn't it wait until Monday?"

"Why? Am I interrupting something important?"

He smirked. "Yes, I've just seen off an entire busload of visitors, and I'm taking this rare moment of solitude to answer some fan mail before I have tea with the Minister for Magic."

She laughed. "The two questions are not connected with my work, so I wanted to approach you in my own free time, and not when I'm being paid by the Ministry of Magic."

He crossed his arms. "Why do you want to ask these questions if they're not connected to your work?"

Hermione shrugged. "Mere curiosity."

After a moment, he sighed. "Do your worst," he muttered.

"Thank you," she said, lacing her fingers. "One of the real memories you gave to Harry refers to me, albeit in a very small and insignificant way. On the night you travelled to the Forest of Dean to pass the sword of Godric Gryffindor on to us, Phineas Nigellus called me a ... a ... Mudblood. You stopped him. Why?"

"It's an offensive term," he said simply.

"Yet one you used yourself while a student, and one I'm sure you heard used time and time again by your Slytherin students."

"I don't think I'm alone in having behaved immaturely in my adolescence, Miss Granger, and it would hardly have aided my cause if I'd been found admonishing the likes of Draco Malfoy for use of one of the Dark Lord's favourite words, would it? It's one thing for such term to be heard on the lips of an ignorant youth; it's another thing entirely for such a word to be used between two Hogwarts headmasters."

She regarded him. "I'm grateful you did it; I was touched."

"Yes, I'm quite the knight in shining armour. What's your second question?"

She smiled. "It's in connection with the events of that same night. I've wondered, this past week, about the silver doe, Professor. If you didn't have feelings for Lily Evans, it can't have been yours, so to whom did that Patronus belong?"

He rose rapidly from his seat, knocking over his stool. "The only memory that concerned the silver doe was among those that were false. It will have nothing to do with my trial, so why question it?"

She frowned. "My first question had nothing to do with your trial, but you answered that one."

"Yes, well, I refuse to answer this one," he snapped, turning his back to her to gaze through the bars of his window.

Realising she'd touched a nerve, she took a deep breath and continued. "I'm just curious, Professor Snape. If the doe Patronus was not yours, to whom did it belong? Did you have a helper? An accomplice?"

"Of course I didn't have an accomplice, you silly girl. Don't you think that after all the details and memories we've gone through you would have discovered before now if I'd had help?"

"But who Conjured the doe?" she asked, confused.

He turned to her, his brow creased in anger. "I Conjured the bloody doe," he spat.

"You created a fake Patronus?"

"It's impossible to create a fake Patronus, as well you know, Miss Granger."

She gaped at him. "So it was yours ... Your Patronus really is a doe ... But if the Lily Evans memories are all untrue, why is it a doe?"

"I have no idea," he said through gritted teeth. "It's always been a fucking doe. A doe! Can you fucking believe it? Quite the source of hilarity in my NEWT Defence Against the Dark Arts class, let me tell you."

She stared in disbelief. "Are you pulling my leg? It's just a doe, and that's all there is to it?"

"Would you like me to prove it?"

She nodded.

"Then I'll need your wand."

Her eyes widened, and she glanced towards the door. "I ... I can't ..."

"Oh, don't be ridiculous," he snapped. "I'm not going to take you hostage! They've let you take your wand in before, when you had to siphon memories; I presume you have it on you today."

She reached beneath her robes, but stopped and looked at him once more.

"Don't you trust me, Miss Granger?" he asked silkily, a challenge in his eyes.

She extracted the wand and handed it to him with a flourish. "Yes, I trust you."

He snatched the wand from her grasp and pointed it immediately at her chest. "How very naive of you."

She shook her head. "Spare me your theatrics, Professor Snape; I know you've no intention of harming me. Just cast the bloody Patronus."

He arched both eyebrows. "You think me incapable of causing you harm?"

"I'm sure you are perfectly capable of causing me harm, but I believe you are unwilling."

"Oh, really?" he asked, annoyed. "And why would I be unwilling?"

"Because I provide you with witty and scintillating conversation, and I'm the only woman you've seen for years. Now, cast the Patronus."

He glared at her for a moment, and then suddenly flung his arm to the left and cried, *Expecto Patronum!*"

She watched as the silver doe she'd seen in the Pensieve bounded twice around the tiny room before jumping through the bars of his cell window.

"Damn it!" he said, his hands on his hips. "I'd hoped it might have changed by now." He looked at her. "Pathetic, isn't it?"

She couldn't help it: she began to laugh.

"You find this funny?" he snarled.

"Yes," she said, her voice choked. She lowered her head to the table and thumped the wooden surface with her fist. This was priceless. She couldn't believe his Patronus was a doe. "So let me get this straight: your Patronus is a doe, and James Potter's Patronus was a stag? And you were in the same NEWT class, so everybody knew?"

He scowled at her for a moment and then nodded.

She started laughing again. "Oh, my sides hurt."

He took his seat at the table. "I'm thrilled to be such a source of hilarity. What's *your* Patronus?"

"An otter," she said proudly.

He snorted. "How apt."

"Apt because otters are clever and adaptable?" she asked, grinning.

"No, because they're insufferably nosey and have a large set of teeth."

She giggled. "I thought as much. Why on earth is your Patronus a doe?"

"How the hell should I know?"

"I would have expected a snake, or a raven, or a panther, or something," she said, still smiling. "Maybe because you're all ... you know ... dark and mysterious and nasty ... your softer, feminine side just expresses itself in your Patronus."

A smile tugged at the corner of his mouth. "Dark and mysterious and nasty?"

"Yes, and maybe if you tried to be a little bit nicer, your Patronus would become something a little more ..."

"Yes?"

"Rugged," she finished, grinning.

He sighed and looked towards the window. "Fucking doe," he muttered under his breath.

"Incidentally," she continued, "what was Lily Evans's Patronus. Do you know?"

He smirked. "A Rottweiler."

She started giggling again and covered her face with her hands. When she lowered them, she found him watching her, an amused expression on his face.

"Your wand," he said, handing it to her.

She reached for it, noticing the hungry look in his eyes as she took it from his hand. She felt a stab of pity for him: how awful it must have been to live without magic for so many years.

"Your gift," she countered, pushing the paper bag across the table.

He lifted the edge of the bag and extracted the four books. "Sudoku and crosswords?"

Hermione shrugged. "I thought they might keep you busy." She watched as he turned the first book over in his hands.

"'Better than sex', according to the reviewer from *The Times*." He raised his eyes to hers. "Would you agree, Miss Granger?"

She blushed. "Maybe it depends on the partner," she replied, reaching for the book.

He held it out of her reach. "Oh, dear," he muttered. "You make it sound as though Mr Weasley was hopelessly insufficient in the bedroom."

Her colour deepened, and she snatched the book from his grasp. "Maybe he was, maybe he wasn't." She opened the first volume of puzzles, extracted a quill from her handbag and pointed to the second volume. "I'll give you a race. First one to finish an expert level puzzle wins."

He picked up his quill and opened the second volume. "Challenge accepted, but I'd rather hear more about your inadequate ex-boyfriends."

She met his teasing gaze. "If you beat me, perhaps I'll tell you."

"Deal," he said, frantically beginning to scribble numbers into the grid.

Hermione smiled as she lowered her gaze to the puzzle. This was definitely the most entertaining Saturday she'd had for quite some time.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of 6

Severus's trial draws near.

Chapter Four

Severus Snape sighed as he crossed another day off on the calendar by his bed. Today was the first of May: there were only four weeks remaining until his trial.

The thing was, he didn't really know which to dread more: freedom or continued incarceration. After a year-long convalescence in St. Mungo's he had, at first, been dismayed to find himself ordered to Azkaban to await trial. Despite the fact that the wizarding prison was no longer guarded by the Dementors, it was enveloped still by a thick atmosphere of stagnancy, of depression.

In the initial weeks of his imprisonment, he'd suffered from frequent bouts of anxiety owing to the loss of his wand. He'd always been an antisocial creature, so it was not loss of society, but loss of magic that had affected him most deeply. But his burgeoning friendship with Albert had helped to snap him out of his self-pity, and he'd begun to employ Occlumency as a manner of keeping depression at bay. Coupled with the psychological exercises he practiced each day, the Occlumency had kept him more than sane: it had kept him reasonably happy. He supposed he had become institutionalised, and it was also likely that the fact that his first taste of freedom from the reign of the Dark Lord, having taken place within the prison walls, had made him more amenable to the place than might otherwise have been the case.

Whatever the reasons, he was more relaxed than he had been while acting as spy, not to mention the miserable years he'd spent playing the role of Potions master. Merlin, how he'd detested teaching. Adolescents were nauseating. Lounging around a reasonably comfortable prison cell with access to books, puzzles and newspapers, thanks to the generosity of his friendly guard, was infinitely preferable to spending his days surrounded by hormonal teenagers and being at the beck and call of Tom Riddle and Albus Dumbledore.

In many ways, he feared leaving his prison cell. What life did he have beyond its walls? Oh, he had plans: If ever he was freed, he would sell his Spinner's End home and use the money to start a Potions business. It would be a solitary pursuit; he would possibly even enjoy it. But he'd undoubtedly be forced to socialise, at least with his own clients, and the mere thought was more than he could bear. Perhaps continued incarceration was preferable.

There were, however, two problems. The first was magic. He could not do without it. His three years in Azkaban had improved his wandless magic: he could Levitate small items without difficulty, and he could, on occasion, Summon similarly sized objects from within his own room. But he yearned for his wand with every inch of his being. He longed to feel that familiar warm tingle in his fingers that only the wood of his own wand could bring; he craved the feeling of power that came with the performance of even the simplest of spells. The day he'd taken Hermione Granger's wand and Conjured his Patronus had reminded him painfully of what he had lost, and he wanted it back.

The second problem was a little more awkward: it was Hermione Granger herself. Either way it stood, he could not win. If he continued as a resident of Azkaban after his trial, she would have no reason to continue her visits. His trial would signal an end to his dealings with her. And even if he was declared a free man, why would she want anything to do with him in the world outside these walls? He was just a client; someone with whom she'd been ordered to deal by her superiors. Surely she wouldn't give him so much as a second thought once her professional interest in him had waned?

He knew that, in part, his fascination with her stemmed from the fact that she brought a little colour into the grey monotony of his days; and he knew that his interest in her had been caused by the total lack of females in his life. She was pretty, despite her objectionable mane of hair and her goofy smile; he liked to look at her, even though she reminded him of his previous existence; he enjoyed her company, although she was still, on occasion, the infuriating know-it-all he remembered from Hogwarts. And although he found it distressing to admit, he knew that he would have liked her as an adult even if they had met outside these cold walls and unusual circumstances. She'd begun to invade his dreams and fantasies; she'd hijacked his thoughts; she held his mind hostage, and every day he counted down the minutes until he would see her again. How could he live without that?

He heard light footsteps approach at the end of the corridor, and he knew by the position of the sun outside his window that it was time, and that she had come again. And this was the very thing that made his chest swell with hope: it was Sunday. She had no reason to be here, yet she'd visited him every Saturday and Sunday for the past month, sometimes staying long after her requisite two hours had elapsed. Why? Why would a clever, beautiful young woman desire his dour company? The mind boggled.

He rose from the edge of his bed and schooled his features to disguise his delight at seeing her once more. As Albert opened the door and Hermione entered behind him, Severus drank his fill of her. She was dressed casually today, in jeans and a pretty white linen blouse, her errant curls pulled into a plait at the back of her head. When she met his eyes, she gave him the uncertain smile that was her customary greeting. Albert retreated and closed the door behind him.

"Hello, Professor," she said, taking her seat at the little table.

"Miss Granger," he murmured, inclining his head. He continued to stand, scrutinising her.

"What?" she asked, raising her hand self-consciously to her hair. "Is something the matter?"

"Haven't you somewhere more exciting to be? Surely a young girl must have something to do on a Sunday other than torment her clients?"

She grinned and shrugged. "I've just had Sunday lunch with my parents, and I managed to pilfer some crosswords from my dad's study. They were all completed, of course, but a quick ink-removing spell soon remedied that." She extracted a few small paperback books from her beaded bag and tossed them onto the table. "I don't know what you like to read, but I brought some poetry, too."

He scowled and crossed his arms. "Why?"

"Well, I thought you might be the poetic type ..."

"No, Miss Granger, I mean why are you here? Why do you do this?"

She looked embarrassed. "It's just that ... well ... I don't like to think of you cooped up in here. You're intelligent ... It's a shame that you're just ... sort of ..."

"Going to waste?" he finished for her.

"Yes. It's like keeping a really clever Kneazle cooped up in a little cage for no good reason. It's cruel."

He raised an amused eyebrow. "Well, delighted as I am to be likened to a clever Kneazle, it's my painful duty to inform you that I quite enjoy being cooped up in my little cage."

Hermione frowned. "Yes. I can tell you're reasonably content here: that's what's kept you from succumbing to depression like most of the other inmates. I don't understand it. Wouldn't you rather be free?"

"What is there worth being free for?"

"Oh, Professor! There's so much worth being free for! I'm sure you miss your wand, for a start."

He grunted. "My wand may be the one exception, but I cannot tolerate the company of complete imbeciles; I'm much better off without the inconvenience of having to deal with wizarding society."

"You tolerate my company," she pointed out.

"You're not a complete imbecile."

She beamed. "Thank you!"

"Most of the time ..."

"Most of the time? And just when did I behave like an imbecile?"

"When you became engaged to Ronald Weasley."

She gave a short laugh. "Yes, you might have a point there."

He watched her for a moment as she rummaged in her bag, refusing to meet his eyes. "Tell me, Miss Granger: What did you see in him?"

Hermione extracted her quill and sighed. "He's not the worst sort of bloke," she began. "I suppose I confused friendship with something more. And then there was his family. I was an only child; it was lonely. Whenever I stayed at the Burrow with the Weasleys, I just felt part of something so warm and happy, and I guess I just wanted to belong to something like that."

He continued to study her as she picked up the first book of crosswords. "Charming though the Weasleys might be," he said sarcastically, "I fail to see how an intelligent girl could have believed herself suited to that idiot. Why did you agree to marry him?"

She looked up from her book. "We all make mistakes, Professor. But as you've so neatly proved, some of us make up for them. Luckily I realised before it was too late that we were incompatible."

Severus looked on as she returned her gaze to her puzzle, her cheeks slightly flushed as they often were when he questioned her about her personal life. He finally took his seat opposite her. "Do you enjoy your work as an Unspeakable, Miss Granger?"

"You're inquisitive today." She put down her quill. "I suppose I enjoy it, most of the time. The hours are long and my office is small, but it keeps me busy. With the exception of Ginny Weasley, I've never gotten on well with girls my own age, and since Ron and I broke up, my relationship with her and Harry has been a bit strained, so I welcome the distraction that my work brings."

"You see, Miss Granger," he said. "We're not so very different after all. You have your own private little prison cell at the Ministry of Magic that keeps you safe from tiresome, tedious social situations."

She stared at him, chewing the end of her quill as she considered his words. "Perhaps," she murmured eventually.

He reached for one of the crossword volumes on the table.

"May I ask you a question?" Hermione asked.

"You're actually asking my permission?"

She nodded. "I always ask your permission when it's a personal question."

He groaned. "Go on, then."

"You don't wear the usual striped prison clothes; you've access to books and newspapers; yesterday when I left, Albert was bringing you in a large cappuccino. Why the preferential treatment?"

"Do you suspect me of foul play? Do you think I have managed to Confound poor Albert without a wand? The answer is simple: I've behaved; I'm lucky enough to have a decent soul as my guard; and I can be very persuasive. Despite the charges against me, the powers that be decided to award me an Order of Merlin and put me in the lowest security sector of this prison. It has all made for a relatively easy life."

She regarded him for a few seconds longer and then smiled. "Well, I'm rather glad. I was pleasantly surprised when I walked through that door for the first time and you looked so well."

She immediately lowered her eyes to her book once more, her cheeks suffused with pink, and he tapped the tips of his fingers against the table, unsure of how to respond. A comfortable silence fell between them, and he turned his attention to his book.

Almost half an hour had passed when she finally spoke again. "Four across: Beethoven's only opera. It's on the tip of my tongue, but I just can't remember the bloody name."

"Fidelio," he muttered without looking up.

She stared at him, her eyes wide.

He raised his gaze to hers. "Problem?"

"How did you know that?"

"You're not the only know-it-all in this room, Hermione Granger."

Hermione smiled. "Say that again."

"Fidelio?"

She giggled. "No, not Fidelio: my name."

He looked at her as if she were unhinged. "Miss Granger."

She rolled her eyes. "No, no. The Hermione part."

He narrowed his eyes at her, wondering what the hell this was about. "Hermione," he said slowly.

She sighed and picked up her puzzle again. "You've such a lovely speaking voice."

"You're an incredibly strange young woman," he said, shaking his head.

Of course, he frowned at her, but on the inside he was grinning like an ape.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 of 6

The evening before Severus's trial arrives.

Chapter Five

Hermione regarded her reflection critically in the mirror. She'd taken an unusual amount of care with her appearance, and she'd dressed in her favourite burgundy robes. An hour with a bottle of Sleekeazy's had done wonders for her curls, and she pressed a trembling hand to her butterfly-filled stomach, as if it would somehow quell the rising tide of fear she could feel as though it were a physical entity. The day she'd dreaded for many weeks had come at last.

Tomorrow, Severus Snape would stand trial for the murder of Albus Dumbledore, and after tonight, she would no longer be in possession of a permit to allow her access to him.

She'd behaved despicably, irresponsibly, and she knew she could lose her job for having acted in such an unprofessional manner. She'd allowed her very first client to become so much more than a subject of scrutiny, and she knew it was very wrong to have formed an emotional attachment to her ex-teacher. But she couldn't help it. He was incredibly intelligent; he was amusing in his own dark, sarcastic way; he made funny things happen to her insides when he fixed those black eyes on her; and that voice was like velvet. He'd become her focus, her *raison d'être*, and she had no idea how she would fill her days without him.

With one last look at her own troubled face, she turned and walked from her bedroom, picking up the small folded piece of parchment she'd prepared from her dressing table. She left her apartment and walked to a secluded spot further down the street. The sun was beginning to set, and the birds were singing gaily in the trees, making the setting feel far too cheerful for her perturbed state of mind.

Turning on the spot, she Apparated to the gates of Azkaban. She remembered feeling as though a cloud of unhappiness had hung over the prison on the first occasion she'd visited Severus, but over the weeks, that impression had vanished as her enjoyment of his company had increased. This evening, however, that foreboding sense of doom had returned as if reflecting the inner turmoil she felt.

When she reached Albert's desk, she gave him a small, sad smile.

"Hello, Albert."

"Hello, young miss," he replied quietly. He glanced towards the door of Severus's cell. "Might I have a quick word?"

She nodded, surprised, as he rose from his seat and motioned for her to follow him down the corridor.

"I'm worried about Severus," Albert whispered. "What do you think his chances are at this trial?"

"I've no idea, Albert. You know I was Muggle-raised; I've never really understood the workings of the Wizengamot. But the evidence that he's innocent is irrefutable ... I think even if they do give him a sentence, it won't be a long one."

Albert sighed. "I think I'm more worried about him going free, to be honest, miss. I can look after him if he's in here, but I can't look after him if he's on the outside. I just wanted to ask: would you check on him now and again, if they let him go?"

Hermione fumbled for something to say. "I ... I don't know if he'd want that, Albert. I'm not sure he likes me ... I think I drove him nuts at school."

Albert shook his head. "He's a hard man to read, I'll grant you that, but I know him well by now. He paces that bloody cell for hours before you arrive, and last week, when I was on night duty, I heard him calling out your name in his sleep."

She could hear her own heart thumping in her chest. Could it be true? "I'll do my best, Albert. If he lets me, I'll help him in any way I can."

Albert patted her arm and smiled. "Good girl. I think you're just what he needs."

She followed him to the door of the cell, her hands starting to tremble once more in anticipation of seeing Severus Snape for what might be the last time.

When she stepped through the door, he was standing on the opposite side of the room, facing her, his hands clasped behind his back. He often greeted her with a scowl of

annoyance or a deep frown of irritation, but tonight, although she couldn't read the expression in his dark eyes, his face was impassive. She thought he seemed almost sad.

"Good evening, Miss Granger," he said quietly, his eyes never leaving her face.

"Hello, Professor Snape," she replied, swallowing rapidly. She heard the clunk of the door behind her as Albert locked them in.

"I wasn't sure if you'd come tonight. I'm certain we have exhausted every question and every memory."

"I think we exhausted every question and memory quite some time ago, and I certainly wasn't going to leave you all by yourself tonight above all nights." She continued to hold his gaze, trying to tell if there was something there, if anything she felt was reciprocated.

The sun had sunk below the horizon, and suddenly the candles on the walls blazed into life, casting a golden glow around the grey room. She watched, her mouth dry, as he lowered his eyes to the robes she'd so carefully selected.

"Shall we sit?" he asked, indicating the pair of chairs at the table.

"Yes, thank you," she muttered, taking her usual seat. "Have you spoken with your legal counsel today?"

"I have," he replied, sitting opposite her, placing his clasped hands on the table.

"Did they seem optimistic?"

He shrugged. "They appeared noncommittal. They don't think I can formally be found guilty of murder, given the circumstances, but they agree that a sentence for manslaughter is likely."

She couldn't help it, her face fell. "Oh, I see."

"Might we talk about something else?" he asked gently.

"Yes, of course," she replied, lacing her fingers together in her lap.

They talked for hours, covering all kinds of topics from potions to politics. Gone were the puzzles and the quills, and with nothing else to draw their gaze, their eyes rested on one another more than they had ever done before. Hermione hungrily examined every detail of his harsh face, every plane and angle of his features, committing them all to memory lest it was the final time she should see him like this.

"I know you don't want to talk about tomorrow," she said eventually, "but I've wondered if you've changed your mind about freedom. Would you really still prefer to continue living here?"

He looked at her, considering his answer. "I'm still unsure: I've no idea what to expect from life outside."

"If they let you go, Professor, if you walk away at the end of next week a free man, what will you do? Where will you go?"

"I own a small house in the East End in London ... in Spinner's End. Not the most desirable of addresses, but I'm sure the house is worth something. If ... when, eventually, I'm released, I'll sell it and use the money to start a business as a Potion brewer. I have the ability to concoct potions that others cannot; I'm sure my draughts would be very much in demand."

Hermione grinned. "Conceited as always, oh Half-Blood Prince."

He smirked. "I simply speak the truth."

She laughed. "Where will you live?"

"I've no idea."

"Would you continue to live in Britain?"

He shrugged. "I don't know. Do you care?"

She looked at him, her expression serious, her heart beginning to pound again. "Yes, actually, I do care."

"I believe I would continue to live in Britain, yes," he said after a heavy pause.

"What will you do if you're sent back here to Azkaban?"

"Perhaps I'll spend my days as captive authoring a bumper volume of Sudoku puzzles, make a small fortune once they're published, and hope fervently that *The Times* will pronounce them 'better than sex.'"

She giggled. "A worthy occupation."

"Indeed," he drawled. "Although what I'll do without your daily interrogations is beyond me."

She shot him a piercing glance, trying to tell whether he was serious or whether he was just teasing her, but his expression was, as ever, unreadable, and she silently cursed his ability to hide his emotions so very well. "But you're allowed visitors for an hour each Saturday," she said, endeavouring to keep her tone playful. "Perhaps I'll pop along and interrogate you then."

Severus gave her an amused half-smile. "And if I'm set free?"

She gulped, summoning her Gryffindor courage. "Maybe I'll hunt you down: I happen to be particularly gifted at Tracing Spells."

He regarded her for a long moment, but just as he opened his mouth to speak, there was a knock at the door and a rattle of keys.

Albert's head appeared around the door. "Sorry to interrupt, but you've had over three hours now, and I'm afraid it's time for the young lady to leave. It's almost time for lights out, and you've a long day ahead of ye tomorrow."

They looked at one another, and Severus stood.

"It would seem it's time to say goodbye," he murmured.

She nodded and rose shakily from her seat. "I'll be there ... tomorrow ... at your trial. I'll be there every day until it's over." She reached inside her robes and extracted the piece of folded parchment. "And I wanted you to have this." She held it towards him, her hand visibly quivering.

He took it and unfolded it. "Your address," he said, surprised.

"Yes," she said, her cheeks colouring. "I thought, maybe, if they send you back here, you could write, if you want. But don't feel like you have to, or anything ... Perhaps I'm just being silly. Or if they free you ... You'll know where I live, just in case ..."

"In case I need help with a crossword," he finished.

She gave him a nervous smile. "Precisely." She glanced towards the open door where Albert waited patiently. "Well, goodbye, Professor Snape. I wish you the very best of luck. I know you don't really know if you want to be free, but I hope you soon will be." She extended her hand, and, to her delight, he grasped it in both of his.

"Thank you, Miss Granger. For everything you've done these past months. I'm most grateful."

Her eyes filled with tears. "You're welcome. It's been a pleasure."

Their hands lingered a little too long, and then she turned and walked away from him, towards the open door. But before she could step over the threshold, he stopped her.

"No! Wait!" he cried, striding across the room and grasping her by the arm. He glanced at Albert and then lowered his gaze to hers.

"Hermione," he whispered. "I need to know: Do I have something worth being free for?"

He searched her face frantically, and she could read the look in his eyes for the very first time. It was one of desperate longing.

"Yes, Severus," she said. She pressed her hand to his chest. "You do. You *know* you do."

They stayed like that for seconds, staring into one another's eyes, until Albert gave a loud cough.

Feeling as though her heart were breaking, she dropped her hand from where it was pressed against the grey material of his robes and turned to leave. With one final glance at his forlorn expression, she fled along the corridor, tears streaming down her cheeks.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 of 6

Severus faces the Wizengamot.

Chapter Six

Severus looked around at the faces in the courtroom. The numbers in the chamber had increased with each day. Once the topic of the fake memories had come up and had been reported in the *Daily Prophet*, there'd been a veritable avalanche of interested spectators. This morning, on the day when the Wizengamot was due to deliver its judgement, the room was packed to capacity, with a throng of witches and wizards standing in the viewing bay, many of them using Omnioculars to get a better look at him. He scowled at them; wizarding society hadn't improved since last he'd been exposed to it.

The first day of his trial had been entertaining: there'd been a loud gasp when the Prosecution had first brought up the subject of the fake memories. Harry and Ginny Potter had been among the onlookers that morning, and Severus thought the look of complete astonishment on the young man's face had almost been worth everything he'd gone through to save him. It had been most amusing to watch them when Hermione Granger had been announced as the collector and verifier of the remaining memories, and the accusatory glances the Potters had thrown her way had not gone unnoticed.

Hermione had hidden behind the safety of her curls for the rest of that day and most of the next, and he'd experienced a faint stab of remorse that he'd been the cause of such trouble with her friends. She'd been called to the stand to verify the authenticity of the additional memories she'd collected over the months, and the beaming smile she'd given him upon her dismissal had made his heart skip a beat.

The second day had looked promising: his Defence team had spent most of the day going through his memories of all that had transpired between himself and Albus Dumbledore, and he'd felt a sensation of hope begin to grow in his chest. For twenty-four hours, he'd truly believed that he might, at last, be about to become a free man. The members of the Wizengamot, many of them friends of Albus Dumbledore, had seemed sympathetic to the story of the prearranged death, and the Prosecution had done little or nothing to discredit his story.

He'd lain awake for hours that night, wondering what sort of life awaited him outside the prison walls, allowing himself to imagine a happy ending for the first time since his incarceration. And the highlight of that happy ending involved a scene where he gathered Hermione Granger in his arms and kissed her senseless.

But on Wednesday afternoon, it had all gone badly wrong, just as Hermione had predicted it might. The Prosecution, realising that their case was slipping away, had raised the issue of his turn to the light, and the public did not seem eager to accept the simple account of regret and remorse. His Defence had valiantly argued that his defection from the ranks of the Death Eaters was not the matter under scrutiny, but the Wizengamot had upheld the Prosecution's right to follow such a line of questioning, judging it to be relevant to the case. And just as public belief in his innocence had evaporated, so his hopes had plummeted.

Since then, he'd met Hermione's anxious eyes across the courtroom as often as he'd dared, and the pinched look of concern on her face had increased his fears. She had access to the newspapers and to the wizarding wireless and was more aware of how public opinion had evolved during the week, and her apprehensive expression did little to ease his mind. As the Prosecution and Defence made their closing arguments, he allowed the lank curtains of his black hair to fall forward, obscuring his face and allowing him to watch her unobserved.

He could tell she'd dressed with great care today, and her usually unruly mop of hair had been charmed into sleek waves, framing her pretty face. He wondered why she'd gone to such trouble, if she'd done it, perhaps, in anticipation of the possibility of his becoming a free man.

It was finally announced that the Wizengamot was to retire to consider its verdict, and Severus rose slowly from his seat, locking gazes with Hermione as he did so. She flashed him that small, uncertain smile he knew so well, and he gave her a brief nod in return. He turned to follow Albert from the huge chamber into the small holding room behind the dock.

"Will I fetch you something to eat, Severus? Or a cup of coffee?" Albert asked, concerned.

Severus shook his head. "No, thank you, Albert. I've not the appetite." He began to pace the tiny room.

"You need to be keeping your strength up," Albert insisted.

Severus stopped in his tracks, rubbing his brow. Four months ago, he would have been perfectly calm; it would have mattered little to him whether he'd been convicted or proclaimed innocent. The only thing he'd stood to lose was his wand, but now, there was so much more at stake. Yes, he wanted his magic back, but what he wanted more than anything in the world was Hermione Granger, and he couldn't have her if he was behind bars. The situation had once seemed trivial, but now it felt desperate.

Albert watched him above his little round glasses. "If it's any consolation, Severus," he said, dropping his voice to a whisper, "the young lady has begged to see you time and time again during the week, but they've denied her."

Severus folded his arms and scowled at the old man. "What young lady?"

Albert rolled his eyes. "Severus Snape, stop playing the fool. I ain't blind, you know, or deaf. I was a happily married man until my wife passed on, bless her. I know love when I see it!"

"You know *what* when you see it?"

"Love, you stupid old bat. I've seen the way she looks at you; I've seen the glances the pair of you have shared all week."

Severus stared at him for a moment, and then his shoulders sagged in defeat. He sank into the seat nearest the door. "It's hopeless, Albert. I'll be convicted of manslaughter, if not murder, and I'll return to Azkaban. I cannot expect a beautiful, intelligent young woman to sit around pining for me. It would be kinder to reject her, to let her go."

Albert shook his head and tutted. "I'd imagine the young lady will do as she pleases, and if she wants to pine after you, she will."

They remained silent until a tap at the door announced it was time to return to the courtroom for sentencing.

Severus examined the faces of the Wizengamot, but their expressions gave little away. Most of them seemed neither pleased nor displeased, so he assumed they'd reached something of a compromise. He exchanged a glance with Kingsley Shacklebolt, and the apologetic look the Minister shot him confirmed his fears. His gaze flew next to Hermione, who was chewing nervously on her bottom lip. Her hands rose to cover her eyes as Kingsley Shacklebolt started to speak.

"It is the opinion of the Wizengamot that the charge of murder cannot be considered, owing to the insurmountable evidence that the death of Albus Dumbledore was brought about by prior arrangement, and with his consent."

There was an outbreak of muttering among the spectators, and Severus knew a brief moment of hope.

"However," Kingsley continued, raising his booming voice to command silence, "it cannot be denied that a life has been taken, and that in order to cast the Avada Kedavra curse, one needs to mean it. There are no precedents in Britain for this case; there has never been, as far as we can establish, a case where one wizard has ended the life of another under such unique circumstances. And while we believe all we've heard from Severus Snape's Defence, we cannot allow such an act to go completely unpunished, lest it be interpreted that such actions are deemed acceptable. With that concern foremost in our minds, we've no option but to find the accused guilty of manslaughter."

There was a renewed murmuring among the throng, and Severus locked gazes with Hermione, whose hand was clapped over her mouth, her eyes wide. Although only a second or two passed before his sentence was read out, it felt like hours as he looked upon the girl who had captured his soul.

"We hereby sentence the Defendant to five years in Azkaban, to include the three already served awaiting trial. Case dismissed."

He rose from his seat as if in a dream, aware of nothing but the thought that he had lost her; that his happy ending had slipped away. And as Kingsley Shacklebolt banged his gavel and stood to leave, the vast chamber suddenly erupted into chaos: There were flashing light bulbs as reporters took pictures for the papers; there was applause from members of the public who thought he'd gotten what he deserved; and there were cries of protestation from those who either believed he was innocent, or that his sentence had been too lenient.

But above all the noise and all the shouts, a screeching, distressed cry of, "No!" rang out around the courtroom, and Severus Snape looked up to see Hermione Granger spring to her feet and scramble desperately to the front of the seats.

Every head had turned her way, and when she reached the front of the public section, she angrily shrugged off the protesting arms of his Defence team and flew across the space towards him. She climbed onto a now empty chair and clambered over the wooden barrier separating him and his guards from the rest of the people in the room, and before he could do or say anything, she had launched herself at him.

No longer caring that they were under the scrutiny of hundreds of witches and wizards, and not giving a damn what a single one of them thought, he tangled his hands in her glorious curls and brought his lips to hers.

He kissed her passionately, frantically, as if she was the only woman in the world and as if he might never see her again.

The courtroom fell completely silent, and some part of his brain vaguely registered the flash of a camera to his right, and he knew, but he did not care, that their embrace would make the front page of the *Daily Prophet*. All that mattered were her hands entwined in his hair, her body pressed against his and her warm lips upon his own. Nothing else really seemed important.

After a moment, the murmuring of the crowd began again, and he felt a firm hand upon his arm.

"Severus," Albert hissed, "I think we need to leave now, before there's a riot."

Reluctantly, he pulled away from her, his gaze fixed upon her tear-filled brown eyes.

"I'll wait for you," she said, her voice choked.

"Hermione," he whispered, "two years is an awfully long time."

"I don't care," she insisted, her arms still around his neck. "I would wait ten years for you, Severus Snape. Even twenty."

The prison guards prised them gently apart, but his gaze did not leave her face.

"I'll write to you," he said, his voice ragged. "As often as I can."

"I'll visit you every weekend," she said, tears running freely down her cheeks.

"And I'll think of you every minute of every day," he said as they led him backwards through the door.

The door closed, and she was lost from sight, and when he turned around, Albert was beaming at him.

"Told you so," the old man muttered.

And as they led him back to Azkaban, he thought that two years wasn't so very long after all, not when he had something worth waiting for.

The End.

A/N: Yes. THE END. I mean it. No sequel. Rest assured: all was well, in the end. They let Severus out of prison eight months early for spectacularly good behaviour, and he and Hermione had hot steamy sex on a very regular basis for the rest of their lives.

To every single one of you who reviewed, a massive hug. Now go read *Denial* - only 27 chapters to go! :)