

# Roses for a Stone

*by BlazenPaths2*

"Nobody said it was easy / No one ever said it would be this hard." - Coldplay's The Scientist. Hermione agrees to a task that tests her in ways she never expected.  
Written for teshara in the 2012 Winter SSHG Exchange.

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

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Author's Notes: Thank you to my beta.

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Prompt at the end.

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Part One- Poppies for a War Hero

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It was very early in the morning when Hermione stepped through the archway trellis that marked the entrance to the graveyard. The sun was just beginning to rise, casting everything in a yellow glow...including the mist that hung low in the air.

She made her way past the headstones that marked the burial sites of those who had died long before she was born, searching for more recent ones.

Dumbledore's wasn't in the graveyard, of course. He had been buried in a fashion more than the others.

He was in a ostentatious tomb of white marble.

She shook her head and continued through the rows marking the deaths of children and teachers.

She hadn't visited the graveyard in the past few months; she hadn't been terribly close to anyone buried there, and the last funeral for victims of war had been over six months prior. Not much had changed since then, beside the seasons. It wasn't autumn any longer, but the beginning of spring. Though the ground was still scattered with old, decayed leaves, patches of grass, the trees were showing the first signs of new, green life.

But today she was headed up to the castle at Harry's behest. It seemed as good a time as any to visit, especially given what she was meeting Harry for.

She found the headstone she was looking for behind a large weeping willow, nearly obscured by its branches. She knelt down and touched the granite marker, dragging her fingers across his name lightly.

She pulled her bag off her shoulder and reached inside it, wrapping her hand around a small bouquet of poppies. She placed them on the marker and slung her bag back to her shoulder.

Hermione stood up slowly, taking in the way the light of the sun seemed to hang in the misty air around her. She inhaled deeply, and let it out slowly.

And just as quietly, just as slowly, she walked away from the headstone and the name it bore.

*Severus Tobias Snape.*

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Nearly an hour later, Hermione finally reached the castle. She was still too early for her meeting with Harry, but she knew Professor McGonagall wouldn't mind her intrusion.

She made her way through the corridors some still in the process of being rebuilt and its magic restored and eventually reached the Headmaster's office.

It wasn't *the* Headmaster's office any longer. In fact, she knew that McGonagall would be moving into it once the restoration of the castle was finished. But still, it held... memories.

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Several hours later, she walked out of the office with several scrolls and books weighing down her bag.

She had expected to need to research intricate portrait-Charming, and the painter affirmed that it was a necessity. In fact, from what she understood, Professor Flitwick wouldn't have been able to do it. He was a skilled Charms Master, but portrait-Charming was still above his skill level. That was part of the reason why he'd chosen to move into the teaching field instead of the world of research and endless wonder.

He told her just as earnestly as Harry had, that she had the skill and the drive to do it if she truly wanted to.

She was still unsure if she could take on the task, unsure if she really was as talented as they seemed to believe her to be. But Snape would not get a portrait for several years in the least if she did not help, and she knew he deserved it.

From what little the painter and her former professor had told her, she knew it normally took six months with the subject to gauge the appropriate mannerisms and personality.

Six months with the living person to make their portrait.

It could still be done after they died, of course. It was just much, much harder.

The painter had told Hermione that he should be done with the painting by the beginning of June. She had roughly three months to figure out how to charm it. And yes, she could admit to herself, she was afraid. If she could not properly immortalise the essence of him in that painting, could others? Would anyone even notice?

Hermione opened the door of the Entrance Hall and looked out at the horizon. Mid-morning at Hogwarts in early spring was a truly beautiful time. Everything was new, anything was possible. Maybe she could do this after all. With a smile, she made her way out.

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Part Two - Quills for a Scholar

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It was the perfect summer Sunday. The sky was blue and the sun was shining.

Of course, holed up in her apartment trying to make the best of her first day off in nearly two weeks, Hermione could see none of this. She had started her job at the Ministry of Magic only two days after Harry and herself had made the deal on Snape's portrait with the painter. Her work with the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures was exhausting, and she had no doubt her willingness to work extra and work *hard* at her job was why she was constantly scheduled for six-day weeks.

She liked her job, of course, but she wondered if she could really *love* it. Her parents had always told her that dentistry was a true passion for them. But working for the RegCoMC was just that for her...work. It was satisfying at times and certainly held some appeal. But was it enough?

She hadn't had much time to work on studying the portrait magic in the past few weeks, but she did make use of her spare time to read as much as she could. It was fascinating, really.

Today was the date the painter had told her he'd be done with the portrait, and as excited as she was to see the finished work, she was a little leery of it. She'd never heard of the painter in fact she couldn't even remember his name most of the time and Harry had set everything up. Taking advantage of Harry would be an easy thing for the man to do, and she expected it to happen before long.

The knock on the door startled her from her thoughts.

She pulled herself off her couch and went to open the door.

Harry stood there, a wide smile on his face and a package wrapped in brown paper in his arms.

Within ten minutes, the two of them had it unwrapped and sitting in a frame of dark mahogany that was more simple than ornate.

It was Snape, through and through.

Hermione stared at the painting for several minutes before looking back to Harry.

"I think this will do just fine, Harry. I really do."

It wouldn't take long to charm his physical attributes and mannerisms; his painting itself did a great deal of that. But using objects of which he was familiar with...a worn book, a letter from a childhood friend...through touch and empathetic magic, she could charm those much faster and stay much truer to his character.

She started her work, smiling as she ran her Charmed fingers across a well-used quill. She'd found it sitting on top of a stack of potions journals, but the dried red ink on its nib told more stories than she expected to find.

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Part Three - Vials for a Potioneer

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It was quite a while before she got a chance to start charming his personality into the canvas. She hadn't had much free time between her ever-increasing busy schedule. Work often left her too drained to think, let alone figure out how to put Snape into a painting.

She had a few days off in late August, and she took advantage of them.

She had a box of his personal things. She'd used several when charming his mannerisms, but it would take a much deeper look in order to charm *him*.

She settled down on her couch, the box at her feet and the painting leaning against her coffee table. She applied the empathy spell to her fingertips and picked up the first set of letters from the box.

She cleared her throat and began to read aloud.

*Severus,*

*We're off to Hogwarts! Isn't it wonderful? Hearing your constant blabbing about it can't even compare - I hardly feel prepared!*

*I just know we'll be in the same House!*

*Your best friend forever,*

*Lily*

She felt an inescapable sense of sorrow then, heightened by the charm. She knew that if she kept reading, she would see a friendship breaking apart, a boy falling into darkness, and more sadness than peace.

The letters he wrote her were in his belongings too.

She wiped at her eyes with the back of her hand and continued with the next letter.

Several hours passed before she was finished reading their correspondence during school years. As the dates passed, Lily's letters grew shorter and sparser between, until finally they ended...whereas several of his seemed to come back unopened.

Hermione wondered briefly why he would keep all these letters, all these promises and secrets and regrets.

And then she remembered the look in his eyes from that night.

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*Look at me.*

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Hermione turned to the section of the box which held his potions journals and notes. The quill had been sitting on this pile, though she knew he hadn't used it for those. It seemed odd, of course, that he'd keep the same ratty quill throughout his teaching years, but somehow she knew he had.

With a shake of her head, she turned back to the task at hand. She opened the first journal...a well-kept edition of *Potions Weekly* from June 14th, 1981.

*Featured Article: Ameliorating the Elixir to Induce Euphoria - S. Snape, Potions Master*

She read the article aloud, pausing to let the words sink in. The Snape in the portrait looked up with a sneer, but still did not speak.

*Was she doing something wrong?*

She went on to read several other articles he'd written...including his first *Ars Alchemia* article on creating the Draught of Divinity based on potions journals translated from Old Norse.

But still, with the transferral and empathy charms set like she'd researched, the portrait Snape did not utter a word. He certainly looked the part, sneering and floating about in his robes.

*Why was it not working?*

She'd spent nearly seven hours straight on the bloody charms and readings, but nothing seemed to work!

Frustrated, she dug through the box, looking for *anything* to get him to start speaking.

"Hah. A dirty vial. This going to get you talking, *sir*?"

"It's only to be expected a stupid chit like you wouldn't recognise first century Phoenician glass."

His voice startled her. It was lower than she remembered. And *sharper*.

Was this possible?

"You're speaking!"

Her excitement did not last long, as he did not say another word after that. He seemed to be refusing to speak to her again.

She read several more articles, and pressed several more vials against the painting before she called it a day. It was nearly supper she'd missed lunch and tea and it was a bit late for dinner but she knew she had to eat.

But she wasn't as frustrated as she had been, knowing that his silence was not the fault of lacking wandwork.

She didn't have much of a measure on his personality imprint yet he needed to speak for that but at least his snark was there.

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The next morning she started fresh. She cleared away the box of his things and pulled out her school trunk.

She didn't keep clothes or books in it any longer. Just her old assignments and essays. She knew it was probably silly, but she couldn't just throw them away. She'd never been able to throw away her schoolwork...even back in primary school.

Of course, her primary school works were gone now. She'd burned them the night she changed her parents' memories.

She had to.

She settled in front of the portrait again. Smiling at Severus Snape's sneer.

"Good morning, sir. Allow me to read from my first Potions essay. . ."

She was halfway through the first foot of parchment when he interrupted her.

"Did you just quote the blasted book at me?"

"I *cited* the book, sir."

---

He argued with her over her essays, most of his initial comments matching the ones scrawled in red ink on the parchment.

And they argued over potions for most of the day. He stopped her at tea and refused to speak unless she ate a sandwich first. "I can hardly have you passing out from hypoglycemia before I can drill into that thick skull of yours just how utterly *idiotic* your opinion of Tworthy's Wolfsbane decanting is."

It was just before dinner when they finished discussing and arguing over her final sixth-year Potions essay.

"I do hope your first assignment of your final year actually befits the standard of seventh years, Granger. Even if Hogwarts students are all incompetent brats."

Hermione couldn't look at him. Her mouth felt like it was full of cotton, and her chest felt tight.

"Granger?"

She sat her final essay on the floor in front of him.

*How could she tell him?*

*How could she tell him that not only did she NOT graduate from Hogwarts, she didn't even attend her final year? How could she explain that after the dead were buried and the restoration of Hogwarts restarted, she began a job with the Ministry and no schooling to fall back on?*

"There are some... issues... I need to tell you about. I'll be back."

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Hermione escaped to the comfort of her little kitchen. She pulled a glass from the cupboard and filled it with water from the tap, drinking it quickly and going back for more.

How could she tell him about the war? How could she foist that upon him now?

He was brilliant and talented. How could she continue to turn him into the embittered man he ended up dying as?

She wanted him to stay as he was.

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She didn't leave the kitchen for nearly an hour. Her heart was heavy as she walked back out to the portrait.

"Severus. There are some things I need to tell you."

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He didn't respond at all for several weeks after that night. He didn't even move or react to her charming and reading. Her questions went unanswered.

But the night of her birthday, things began to change.

She had left the flat early that morning and didn't return until late. But she certainly had a good day and came in with her arms full of potions journals and advanced Arithmancy books.

She sat in front of the painting, the newest edition of *Ars Alchemia* in her lap.

"It's my birthday. I'm twenty-one today. I was supposed to go out with Harry and Ron and celebrate, but I don't much feel like it. It was a good day, but... My parents, they're still gone. I didn't tell you this, but I Obliviated their memories of me when I was seventeen. You know, the war, it felt like my responsibility. But it never should have been, I never should have felt that way. I know that now. It's just... Harry and I? We'd do anything for each other. It's not even romantic. He's my best friend. And we've really grown up together. Ron was there too, and I know Harry would include him but I don't. He and I were never as clo..."

The portrait cut her off.

"Is that the issue with the Liberation Libation?"

She looked at the man in the portrait.

"Well, yes... "

"Well, get on with it, Miss Know-It-All."

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Their conversations continued. She read to him and showed him the worn pictures of Lily he'd kept shoved between his letters. She talked of work, and how she was tiring of it.

Before long, autumn was coming to a close.

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#### Part Four - Roses for a Stone

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She had spent several weeks with his portrait, knowing that all her charmwork was truly done.

But she wasn't ready to give him up. She'd only just gotten him to open up. Now that she'd finally figured out which charms triggered the connection between the person and the portrait, which objects that charming reacted best with when it came to connecting to the portrait...now that she'd done that, they would expect the portrait to be brought to Hogwarts and placed alongside the other former Headmasters and Headmistresses.

So she kept telling Harry that she was still working on his charms. That she didn't have a lot of time between working and sleeping.

She had asked for three weeks off in December. She was granted the request and spent the entirety holed up in her flat, talking and laughing and arguing and reading with him.

It was almost an obsession. She *loved* him. She knew she did. So she kept him to herself.

Would anyone else know? Would they understand?

She didn't know if anyone could. So she hid him, in whatever ways she could.

She was *happy* with him, and before she hadn't known how *unhappy* she was.

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Everything changed on the first Sunday in January.

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"I love you."

She hadn't even realised she spoke them aloud. She'd been saying that to herself, in his presence or in her bed, for weeks.

But his sudden stop in the middle of an academic tirade paralysed her.

"I didn't mean...! I just...!"

She tried to explain but nothing would come out right. She stumbled over words and tripped over phrases.

She fell to pieces in front of a memory encased in paint.

A memory of a man she learned to love after he was gone.

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Several hours later, the portrait was wrapped in brown paper.

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*"I don't love you, Granger. I cannot. I never will be able to."*

---

She made it to Hogwarts just before dinner and met the Headmistress at the door.

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*"Even if you hadn't given me Lily, I could not love you."*

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She handed off the portrait with very little words. The wind was picking up, and she needed to get as far away as she could before she changed her mind.

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*"I am... but a portrait."*

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She was back on the Hogwarts grounds two days later.

But she wasn't heading towards the school. No, the graveyard called her name.

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Just as she stepped through the trellis at dusk, it started to snow.

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She stopped at each marker of someone she had known. She laid poppies on their graves.

By the time she reached his, her boots were soaked through from the snow.

She didn't care.

She kneeled in front of his headstone, kissing her fingers and placing them on his name.

*Their first kiss, their only.*

She reached into her bag for the last bouquet of flowers.

They weren't poppies. Her purpose wasn't to honor a hero, though she had before.

No. She was grateful. For being in his life, for him being in hers.

They were roses...dark pink tea roses.

And she meant them.

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The next day, she took a job in Magical Law Enforcement. Within a few months, she accepted an offer for a date. Within a few years, she was married.

And every ninth of January, she placed dark pink tea roses on his headstone.

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End

Notes:

Flower meanings-

Poppies: consolation, remembrance

Hybrid Tea roses: "I will never forget you".

Dark pink roses: appreciation, gratitude, "thank you for being in my life".

Original Prompt: {After the events in Book 7, but before the epilogue, Hermione helps Harry requisition the portrait of Headmaster Snape. Hermione is given the job charming the portrait and finds herself in the company of the Professor as his personality emerges and she learns more about him. Unrequited love.}