

Faith Healing

by Celisnebula

Hermione has lost the memories of the last twelve years of her life – she's forgotten all about her daughter, Rose, or her life with Severus. All she remembers is the rough few years after the war, when she was desperately in love with Ronald Weasley.

Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 1

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I felt Rose's arms wrap around my waist, her small face pressed against my side.

"That bad?" I asked. I felt her body shudder as she sighed and nodded her head yes. "Want to talk about it?" She shook her head no.

"Well," I said, brushing a hand through her hair. "I know a bit of a cure-all."

"From Daddy?" she whispered.

I couldn't help but smile. Rose absolutely adored her father; she wasn't the only one. "Well, no, not from your Daddy."

She tilted up her face towards me, her brows drawn together and her nose scrunched up. "Then how can it be a cure-all?" she asked in disbelief.

"Magic."

"What sort of magic?"

"Muggle magic."

She pursed her lips. "Muggles don't *have any* magic."

"Oh, but they do," I assured her. "'Cause this is a magic my Mum used to do all the time for me when I was sad. And 'poof' whatever was that horrible seemed so much less so."

"Really?" Her skeptical tone gave way to one filled with awe and wonder.

"Really." I swallowed the emotional lump in my throat. "Shall I show you?"

She nodded. My heart squeezed; she looked so much like her father in that instant.

"First, we need some strawberries. Do you think you could get them for me?"

She hesitated for a moment, and then her arms unwrapped from around me. I reached into the overhead cupboard and pulled out a bottle of vodka. Setting it on the counter, I walked over to the pantry and started to gather the rest of the ingredients.

Rose solemnly set the strawberries on the counter next to the bottle of vodka, sugar, cornflower and white vinegar I had already set out. She briefly wrinkled her nose at the sight of the clear bottle of liquid while I added vanilla beans, a bottle of vanilla extract, some cream and six eggs to the pile.

As I walked by the oven, I set it to 150C and then continued over to gather the bowls and mixing utensils. Once everything was laid out, we both washed our hands.

"First," I said, setting down a rather large mixing bowl, "we start with the basics." I cracked the eggs against bowl, carefully dipping them so that only the egg whites went in. I took a fork and started brusquely beating them. "Can you add a pinch of salt?"

Rose turned to the counter and carefully poured a bit of salt into the cupped palm of her hand and held it out. "Perfect, drop it in." She brushed the salt from her hand. I beat the eggs and the salt until satiny peaks started to form. "Can you add some sugar for me?"

"How much?" she asked.

"About thirteen ounces," I instructed.

Her tongue darted out against her upper lip as she concentrated on measuring just the right amount of sugar. I kept my pace steady as she slowly poured the sugar into the bowl. Once the mixture started getting stiff, taking on a glossy sheen, I asked Rose to start sprinkling in the rest of the ingredients for this portion. "Three tablespoons of corn flour first, followed by a one and a half teaspoons of the vinegar. The vanilla, you'll have to add just a dash of."

"Now what?" she asked, skimming her index finger over the top. She popped the finger into her mouth.

"Now we bake this portion and start the next. Why don't you spoon it into the baking tray?"

She picked up the spoon and dabbed a dollop onto the pan. "Like that?"

I inspected her handiwork. "Maybe a bit more."

Rose nodded and proceeded to add a bit more of the mixture to her first spoonful. When she was done, there were six mounds about the size of an apple lining the pan.

"While this bakes, let's start on the next part," I said over my shoulder as I pushed the pan into the oven.

I reached into the drawer and pulled out a small butter-knife. "Why don't you start halving the strawberries?" I set the butter-knife on the cutting board beside her.

I must have swung around too fast because all of a sudden I felt dizzy. I grabbed the counter as the room started to weave around me.

"Mum?"

My head turned towards the sound of her voice and my body tilted; it was as if my legs could no longer support my weight. I vaguely recall Rose's high pitched scream, and then the frantic: "Daddy! Help, Daddy! Something's happened to Mum!", before everything turned black.

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I tried to blink; my lids felt heavy and useless against the bright light. I wanted to throw an arm over my face to protect myself from the abnormally bright glow that was burning through my eyelids, but nothing seemed to work right.

"Take it easy," a scratchy voice to the left of me said. I felt a warm palm pat my arm. "Can you dim the lighting? I'm sure it's too much for her to take."

"Yes, sir," came the reply in a feminine voice.

Where am I? I struggled to ask my head felt like I'd been on an all night bender with the boys but only incoherent sounds came from my throat. My brain felt panicky and my body sluggish, as if I were stuck in an entire body bind.

"Give it a bit," the scratchy voice continued. "Your eyes will need time to adjust."

"Will she be okay, daddy?" another, smaller voice queried from the left of me, just as I descended into the blackness again.

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The feel of the rough, calloused hand holding mine became a constant every time the world tried to come into a hazy focus. I figured it would be Harry he was always one for taking care of people when they were sick even a self imposed sickness, like too much firewhisky though deep down, I desperately wanted it to be Ron. But the soft, rasping voice that always said: "Slowly, Hermione," breathed against my ear told me another story.

I didn't know the owner of the voice at least I didn't think so, but every time I heard it, the painful, frightening lump in my chest eased a bit.

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I tried to open my eyes; my eyelids felt gritty and crusted with sleep, so things didn't come into focus as quickly as I would've liked.

A strangled gasp made its way out of my throat; my sluggish body tried to scramble up. The surreal vision of Severus Snape holding my hand hammered into my head.

I tried to pull away from him, my body moving in haltingly strange jerky movements. The hand his hand slipped from my grasp, leaving me feeling strangely bereft.

I tried to make my fingers work; groping around for my wand. Hysteria splashed through my brain as my fingers pulled at nothing more than bed linens.

What are you doing here? I tried to gasp out; it sounded like the strangled moan from an eviscerated animal.

"Calm down, Hermione." My fingers twitched at the sound of Harry's voice.

"I'm here, Hermione," Snape rasped, placing a pale, scarred hand on my arm.

My vision swam as a fuzzy blob moved around the room, and I heard a door creak open. "Matron, she's awake," said the blob in Harry's voice.

"Please..." I finally managed to whisper.

"Hold on, Hermione," Snape said in his altered voice, tucking my wayward hair behind my right ear. "Harry will have the Matron here in moments."

"Should I get Rose?" Harry whispered.

"No, I don't think that would be a good idea just yet."

The Matron bustled into the room. "Oh, good, she's finally awake."

"Which was the whole point of asking for you," Snape said drolly.

"Well, of course," she harrumphed. "Now, let's just see what sort of readings we get this time." I shrank back as she brandished her wand with a flourish. "Hold still, Deary," she admonished me. "I need you to be as still as possible while I do this spell."

"Mum!" a soft voice squealed. A small figure darted around the door and threw her entire weight on the bed.

She was a thin child, awkward angles and inky black hair that curled every which way it obviously had a mind of its own.

"Rosalynn Margaret Snape, you know better," Snape admonished the child. "Are you alright, Hermione? She didn't jostle you too much?"

"Really," the Matron muttered. "Off the bed." She shoed the reluctant child from my side. The girl Rosalynn climbed into Snape's lap. He wrapped a protective arm around her.

"Harry," I gasped out weakly. My head was throbbing. The lights in the room were entirely too bright. I felt off balance and wary. "Harry," I tried again.

"I'm here," he responded, moving closer to where Snape sat with the child.

"Why's ... here?" I was finally able to ask.

"Hermione," Harry said softly. "We're all here because you collapsed."

I wanted to ask so much more, but the words stuck in my dry mouth. "Water," I rasped.

The girl slid off Snape's lap and went to the bedside table where she carefully poured a small measure of water from the pitcher on it into one of the various cups arranged around it. "Here, Mum," she said, carefully holding the cup towards me.

That was the second time she had called me that. I shot a glance at Harry, but he didn't seem to find this as confusing as I did. My eyes wandered back to the girl her face was so earnest; she reminded me of myself at that age so very eager to please. I tentatively reached for the extended cup; my arms simply wouldn't work.

"Here, let me help," Snape said, reaching for the cup in the child's hand. His abrupt movements unnerved me; I tried not to flinch away from him as he wrapped an arm around my shoulders, helping me to sit up as he brought the cup to my lips.

The water was cool and refreshing, but I could barely move my mouth to take it in. I could feel it dribbling down my chin in my failed efforts.

"Easy," Snape told me as my throat worked at swallowing the water.

"Mr Snape," the nurse sternly, disapproval evident by the tone of her voice. "*I really* do need to scan your wife. I need you and your child to stand away from the bed." She brandished her wand and hovered above me. "This will only take a few minutes, and then I'll leave you to the tender ministrations of your husband," she told me.

"Husband?!" I rasped out. "I... I'm not married." The sentence seemed to take everything out of me because I slouched against the pillows, unable to support my own weight.

The room went silent; everyone seemed frozen in their respective places. Harry was the first to rally; he threw a look towards Snape, whom merely inclined his head slightly. "Rose," Harry said, reaching a hand out for her. "Let's go have a cup of hot chocolate while your Dad and Mum speak with the healer."

"Yes... I let me go get Healer Renwick," the Matron mumbled, stepping away from the bed.

I stared at the end of the bed, my brain too tired to process everything the idle thought of Alice through the Looking Glass flashed through my brain and I let out a soft snort.

"Hermione," Snape said softly. I turned my head to him and he reached out a hand towards mine. I... I wasn't ready for that sort of intimacy, so I let my hand flop against the bed, away from him. His mouth made a small grimace before his features smoothed out; he had a wicked poker face.

"How long?" I asked, because I couldn't help myself.

"Ten years."

"And that girl..."

"Rose," he supplied.

"Rose," I repeated dully. "She's... ours?"

He nodded.

There was a brief knock on the door, and then a younger wizard walked into the room without waiting for a response. "Mr and Mrs Snape," he said, letting the door close behind him. "Matron Mavis has given me her take on the situation." He strode to the bed. "If you don't mind, I'd like to conduct a couple of diagnosis scans myself, and then we can discuss my findings." He pulled his wand out and flicked his wrist. "If you would step outside, Mr Snape, I'd like to conduct the first scan with only Mrs Snape in the room."

Snape hesitated for a moment, his dark eyes searching my face, then he gave a curt nod and strode to the door.

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"Unfortunately, the diagnosis scans were... inconclusive, at best. We just don't know why she has suffered this way."

"What do you mean? My wife has been unconscious for weeks, and you've yet to even diagnose what has happened. Now she's awake, and it's painfully apparent that she's literally lost years of her memory, and again, you have the temerity to say you just bloody don't know?"

"No, we don't."

"Could you please not speak about me as if I weren't in the room," I rasped out.

The Healer paused and took a deep breath, as if to calm himself. "The brain is not something we can predict; her loss of memory could be a result of something traumatic or the result of a spell. We just don't truly know." Snape opened his mouth to speak, but the healer held up his hand, palm forward in a plea that kept him from saying what he wanted. "We did not find a magical signature that does not mean that this isn't of magical nature. However we cannot rule out that this might be a side effect of her initial collapse."

"Which you still haven't explained to my satisfaction," Snape snarled.

"I've run all the scans and tests we have at our disposal. It doesn't appear to be a magical malady - there is nothing to indicate that she was cursed, nothing to indicate that she was placed under a memory altering spell, or an Oblivate gone wrong..." Healer Renwick shifted his weight a bit and then sat down in one of the chairs beside my bed. "Sometimes, if a condition isn't inherently magical, it might be biological. Now, it's noted in Mrs Snape's file that she is a Muggleborn."

He held up his hand again to stop any protest I or Snape might have had at his bland pronouncement. "I don't say this to bring up inequities, but to bring up a point. I grew up much as Mrs Snape did from a Muggle family. My parents were Surgeons, so I'm going to talk about this from a non-magical standpoint." He drummed his fingers against his knee for a moment. "I think you might be suffering from retrograde amnesia. While most of the time, this condition occurs after a head injury which I can certainly see as a side effect of what happened to you when you initially collapsed in your kitchen it can also be caused by other, underlying conditions."

"What sort of conditions?" I asked weakly.

"We know that in certain circumstances, post traumatic stress can also cause problems with memory storage and retrieval," Healer Renwick continued in that low voice of his. "Something triggered your episode, and your brain has, for all intents and purposes, reset. Why, is anyone's guess especially since we have ruled out anything magical. This means that the underlying cause can only be a natural misfire either from some unresolved conflict or an injury."

"Does anyone ever recover from this sort of medical condition?" Snape asked to my relief. I truly wanted to know would my memory be Swiss cheese for the foreseeable future, or would I some day recall the last few years?

"That is not something I can answer, Mr Snape."

"Then what good is all of this?" Snape snapped.

Healer Renwick sighed. "There isn't an obvious answer. The only thing we can do is send Mrs Snape home and hope with a comforting, normal environment, surrounded by familiar surroundings, that she does regain the memories she's lost."

"And... if I don't?" My voice sounded timid even to my own ears.

"Then you start life over from here," he replied grimly.

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The house... our home... was not what I expected. Then again, I'm not sure what I really expected (something a la the Burrow or Grimmauld Place, probably). Instead, the house was utterly amazing; modern and very Muggle looking, but with touches here and there that could only be gained by magic.

"I've had Rose move some of your things over to the other room," Snape told me as we dusted the Floo powder from our clothes. "I thought you might be more comfortable."

I hadn't even considered that when Healer Renwick had said it was time for me to head home. As his wife, of course I would share a room... and his bed... I swallowed audibly. "Thank you."

"Why don't you make yourself familiar and I'll see how Rose is coming along."

I could only nod. I was feeling overwhelmed. I watched as he walked up the stairs to the second floor, and then started to wander around. The house was truly marvelous.

On one of the bookshelves were various pictures of Rose... as well as myself and Snape, together and separate. One in particular caught my eye.

I stared at the picture I don't think I'd ever had that sort of expression on my face before. My hands rested on my very obvious pregnant belly, my lips curved in a small, secretive smile. Beside me stood Snape. He had a protective arm wrapped around my shoulders, and instead of looking straight ahead, he simply looked at me. Occasionally, the picture Snape would pull me closer and place a kiss on my temple, at which point, picture me would shift her head up so they could kiss properly.

It was like all of the pictures my parents took when they were young; the love they felt for each other was obvious to anyone who looked through their photo albums. I stifled a small sob and set the photo back on the shelf.

I turned so abruptly that I ran into a wall of black.

His hands were so very warm on my upper arms, and I could feel my body wanting to yield to slowly relax into him. I blinked up at him.

"Look, Snape..."

"Severus," he supplied, effectively cutting me off.

"Severus," I sighed. "This well seriously... I mean can you imagine how strange this is for me?"

He heaved a sigh and pinched the bridge of his nose. I braced myself for the vitriol of words; the Snape of my past used them as weapons throwing them out like neat little daggers that cut as sharply as any blade I'd used in potions class.

"Hermione," he said in a soft, tired voice. "I " He stopped, as if trying to grapple with the right words to say, and I felt the certainty of my position shift on its axis. This wasn't what I was expecting.

"You don't have to figure all of this now," he said softly into the silence that surrounded us. "We " He stopped and swallowed. I watched the lines of his neck, his Adam's apple pale and smooth, a marked contrast to the livid, red scars just a few inches to the left. I had the oddest desire to stroke the mangled skin; my fingertips tingled, as if I had already reached out to map the texture of his flesh and they wanted to do it again.

"This is hard on all of us, and I don't imagine there is going to be any quick fix to this. All I ask is that you try." He raised his hand to cup my cheek. "I know the woman I married is still here - you may have forgotten everything, but at the core, you are the same as you ever were." He tucked a wayward curl behind my ear. "We will get through this."

"How can you be so sure?" I whispered softly.

"Faith," he said softly. "I have faith in you."

And with those few words, he pulled away from me and walked from the room.

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Frustration knotted in my chest and I closed my eyes against the pain. My throat burned with bile, but I fought to calm myself down. Rationally I knew it was unkind, how I tensed each time Rose threw herself at me I was... am... her mother. Yet I couldn't remember. Years had passed for everyone else, but I was still lost in the aftermath of the war just finishing. I hated being touched unexpectedly, it reminded me too much of how Lestrange would grope and grab at me.

Rose deserved better. Oh so much better than me.

Snape could have all the bloody faith in me that he wanted, but the simple truth was: I was broken, in ways that I couldn't even begin to comprehend.

I paced the room, feeling like a caged beast. Everywhere I looked there were memories pictures and loving touches that I could see myself wanting, but couldn't remember doing.

I'd lost myself. And perhaps that was justice.

Hadn't I done the very same damn thing to my own parents? Hadn't I ripped away the very thing that made them who they were and forced them into being someone else?

With a small, desperate sob, I forced myself to the one place I knew would help.

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"Hermione!" Harry grabbed me by the shoulders and wrapped me into a fierce hug.

"Harry, I'm scared," I said softly into his shoulder. "Do you think this is my punishment?"

"Punishment? For what?"

I didn't say anything; I couldn't.

"You think this is about your parents?"

I nodded. "I've lost years - I can't even remember Rose; it's like she never existed in my head. And all I can think is *I deserve this*. It's no different than what I did to my parents."

"Bollocks." He pulled me away from him and forced me to look him in the eye. I was trapped by the dark intensity of them. "This isn't any sort of punishment, Hermione Snape." I flinched at the name. He stopped and took a deep breath. "You've got to get used to this - this is your life now, and despite everything you feel, every instinct you have to flee and to fight, it's been a happy life for you."

"Really?" I put as much disbelief into the word as I could. "With *him*?"

Harry sighed. "Yes, Hermione. With *him*." He gave me his patent cocked-head crooked-smile, his green eyes shining with sincerity. "I didn't think it was possible; but the two of you fit."

"And I don't remember," I grumbled.

"Well, we could start with what you do remember."

A sharp, bitter laugh escaped from between my lips. "What I do remember isn't pretty for me or for..."

"Ron?"

I nodded.

"You haven't asked about him."

"I don't know if I want to."

"Ah," he said sagely. It was quite maddening. I didn't think I could come to grips with this new, poised and self-assured Harry Potter.

"Don't pretend you know what's going on in my head "

"You don't know if you want to with the whole being married to someone else thing going on," he finished for me.

I gave him a glare. "I don't know if I could talk about it, Harry."

"So you're just going to ignore it?" He shook his head. "That isn't like you at all."

I pushed my hair back from my face in an impatient gesture. "And I'm *like* me now?"

"Hermione." He made my name sound like a scold. "You may have forgotten some things..."

I snorted.

"Okay, more than some things," Harry conceded. "But at the core, you are as you always have been."

"Then why am I feeling so lost? If I'm as I've always been, why I am having a hard time even conceiving the idea that I'm married to Severus Bloody Snape and have a child with him? And," I broke off, a sob catching in my throat. "What if I can't be that person anymore?"

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I stood in the doorway of the shop; it hadn't changed since the last time I had been in there. That was strangely reassuring. I wandered aimlessly through the aisles, feeling nostalgic for the days when I had (unsuccessfully) tried to convince Ron and Harry not to buy the Skiving Snackboxes to give them fake illnesses. I felt vaguely foolish an adult woman wandering around a store for children by herself. I could've brought that child... Rose *my daughter*, I thought with a painful twinge; but I wasn't ready to explore that aspect of who I was now just yet.

With a soft sigh, I turned around. I figured I could quietly leave the shop; I hadn't found what I was looking for, and really, I didn't know if I should've found it. I nearly made it to the door when a soft, "Hello, Hermione," stopped me in my tracks. I closed my eyes against the wave of longing that reverberated throughout my body. I took a deep breath, plastered a smile across my lips and turned towards him. "Hello, Ron."

He hadn't aged at all. Funny. Looking in the mirror, I could see the years reflected in the lines around my mouth, and Harry Harry had definitely matured with the graying flecks of hair at his temples and the laugh lines crinkled around his green eyes. But staring at Ron... he seemed the same.

"Is there something I can help you with?" he asked at the same time I said: "It's good to see you."

"I didn't think you'd bother," he replied in a nonchalant tone.

"Are things that bad between us?"

He snapped his head up, pinning me with the intensity of his blue gaze. "I had heard you'd lost your memory, but..."

"Apparently," I said, cutting him off. "It's strange."

He shrugged, "Well, you do look good."

I gave him a small smile. "And you've gotten a bit better at lying."

He flashed me a smile and my heart seemed to squeeze. "Yes, well, getting older will do that, I suppose," he replied in a cheeky tone.

"You might as well come on back and have a spot of tea," he offered. "Mum would skin me alive if she were to learn I'd been impolite. Plus, it'll give me an excuse to make George man the front when he comes back."

"How is your Mum?"

"Better."

"Oh, was she ill?"

Ron gave me a hard look, and then shook his head. "Of course, you can't remember." He sighed. "It was touch and go after Dad died, but "

I sucked in a breath. "Arthur died? Oh, I am so sorry to hear that, Ron." I told him, placing my hand on his arm.

"It's different," he said. "But we're coping. It was hardest on Mum. I never realized how much they held each other together..." His voice trailed off. He shook his head, as if to dispel a thought he couldn't fathom. "It's odd, the things you learn about your parents once you're an adult," he said softly.

"I think we could apply that to life itself," I said in a wry tone. "And to think, we thought we were so bloody smart and knew everything there was to know..."

"Well you might not have known."

"Ha!" I scoffed, giving him a small smile. "You were as clueless as the rest of us... More so, in some cases."

Ron chuckled, the warm sound washing over me. "Okay, I'm sure you're right on that count." He grabbed my hand and gave it a gentle squeeze. "I've missed you."

"We are still friends, aren't we?"

He shook his head, his red, shagging hair flying about his face. "Not so much... but maybe that will change?" My heart contracted. His expression looked so hopeful.

"Definitely."

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I was sitting at the table, drinking a cup of tea when Rose came into the room. She tried to reach up into one of the cupboards, but wasn't quite tall enough. I pushed back my chair and walked over to her.

"Cup or bowl?" I asked.

"Bowl," she said quietly.

I handed her a bowl. She seemed to be doing fine with everything else, so I sat back down. Rose set the bowl on the table beside me, and then turned to get a box of cereal.

"I use to eat that when I was little," I blurted out when she set the box on the table beside her bowl.

She gave me what could only be considered a pitying look. "I know," she mumbled. I watched as she poured the cereal into her bowl, then suddenly she cocked her head towards me and asked, "Does it hurt?"

"Not remembering?"

She nodded.

I thought about lying, but I couldn't, so I simply said, "Yes."

"But... you remember some stuff." It wasn't a question.

"I do."

"Not me though."

"No," I said softly.

"You remember Daddy, though."

"I do but I remember his as a teacher."

"So you don't remember being in love."

"Not with your Daddy," I said. Because I could remember what it was like to be in love, just the person I remember being in love with was Ron, not Severus Snape.

"What about your secret books?"

"My secret books?"

Rose nodded her head. "The one you write the secrets of the world in."

"I'm not sure I understand."

Rose sighed and lifted herself up. She grabbed at my hand and tried to pull me out of the kitchen with all of her might. "Come on," she said, tugging at me.

We wound our way up the stairs to the second floor, past the bedroom I'd been using since I returned from St Mungo's and past her somber colored room. She boldly twisted the knob to Snape's room and pushed the door open.

"This way," she said when I hesitated just outside door frame.

"I really don't think we should go into there," I said softly. "It's... well... private."

She sighed, and had I been closer, I could've sworn she rolled her eyes at me. "It's your room too," she said with a huff, tugging on my arm. I reluctantly allowed her to pull me into the room.

The bed dominated the whole left side; it was quite possibly one of the largest I had ever seen. It was covered with a white comforter, and at the end of the bed there was a dark grey blanket folded in half. At the head board, there was an odd assortment of various pillows of all sizes. It was hardly the sort of bed I would imagine a man like Severus Snape climbing into - save for the sheer dominating size.

On the right side, flanking two enormous windows, were some large bookshelves. Two comfortable chairs with a foot ottoman between them sat in front. It was to the bookshelves that Rose pulled me. I could see knickknacks and other small personal effects lining different shelves along with various books - both magical and Muggle. I itched to pull one of the tomes down and settle into the inviting chairs to read, but I knew Rose had something specific in mind.

"Here," she said, drawing my attention back to where she sat, crouched on the floor. Rose handed the book to me... it was a journal. "You've a whole shelf of them."

"Rose's idea is rather brilliant," Snape said, shifting in the doorway. I hadn't heard him come up the stairs behind us and I was a little embarrassed to be intruding on his personal space. Rose sat up a little straighter; you couldn't miss the way she glowed with pleasure at his compliment. "You've always kept your letters and your journals; I know they gave you a measure of security that I could never give in regards to your own personal history."

"These are all mine?" My fingers caressed the outside of the book.

"Give or take one or two."

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Saturday, February 17, 2001

On the advice of Harry, I've finally decided to contact Severus Snape regarding the book I am working on. He *does* have a point, if I truly want a complete picture of both sides, Snape would be the best person to speak with. At least he wouldn't revise history to show himself in a better light, unlike Malfoy. And yes, in hindsight, perhaps approaching Lucius Malfoy for information wasn't the best idea ever...

I wonder if I can appeal to Shackbolt again in regards to interviewing some of the prisoners in Azkaban.

Anyhow, I shan't mention to Harry that I took his advice, he's already too sure of himself these days as it is.

It will be interesting to see if I receive any response from Snape.

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Dear Mr Snape,

I am currently working on an extensive set of volumes chronicling the rise of Voldemort and the ensuing two Wizarding wars.

It is imperative that the information from this time period be obtained from reliable sources so that the future of the Wizarding World - our children and their children - can learn from the mistakes that allowed such an atrocity to happen.

I am currently interviewing select individuals regarding their recollection of this time. Your intimate insights on both eras would be an invaluable asset; one that I hope you'll deign to share with me.

At your convenience, I would like to schedule an interview with you.

Thank you for considering my request, and I hope we can spend some productive time together in the near future.

Sincerely,

Hermione J Granger

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Granger,

While I concede that your innate need to be bothersome and meddlesome allowed your bloated ego to conceive this overreaching glorification of Potter pandering, I hardly think you need anything from me. No doubt there are many who would gladly jump at the chance to throw away their integrity to give you the scintillating aspects your gossip mongering rag would require.

Find some other victims to bother. I prefer to leave those sordid details where they belong, in the past.

S. Snape

~~ ~~~

Tuesday, February 20, 2001

I don't know what I was expecting. No, scratch that. I do know. In the few days since I sent off my initial letter to Snape, I had convinced myself that he would see the brilliance of my project and agree.

Of course, we are talking about Severus Snape.

He obviously believes that I am simply trying to write something to glorify Harry. I shall have to disabuse him of that notion.

~~ ~~~

Dear Mr Snape,

If I wanted to "Potter pander", as your last letter suggests, I would *hardly* take the time to write to you. Your biased opinion of my friend is *anything* but positive.

I am trying to create a definitive, and I dare say, honest look at what happened in the Wizarding World when Voldemort tried to rise to power. No doubt parts of it will be brutal, but it is something that needs to be written about.

Surely you can see the worth in such an endeavor.

Please respond with a date and time that is convenient for you so that we may begin the interview process.

Sincerely,

Hermione J Granger

~~ ~

Granger,

How about this side of never and when hell freezes over? Or is that too nebulous for your practical brain to handle?

S. Snape

~~ ~

Do you really want the likes of Rita Skeeter to be the voice of that time? Or, have I completely been mistaken in my assessment of you?

~~ ~

Really? Charming your letter to electrocute me might be a bit of puerile fun, but it really doesn't come across as an intelligent rebuttal to my more than reasonable request.

Perhaps I was wrong in thinking that you might object to being vilified or glorified by Rita Skeeter's imagination and her audacious purple prose pen.

~~ ~

Wednesday, February 27, 2001

That *infuriating* man! He charmed his letters to attack me!

Well, if he thinks that will dissuade me from pursuing his knowledge, he has another thing coming.

I've no choice.

Shacklebolt simply will not allow me to interview any of the inmates at Azkaban. Or rather, they won't agree to speak to the likes of me, and he won't, rightfully (I suppose) force them to.

I'd do a follow up interview with Lucius Malfoy, but I don't fancy the idea of dodging his verbal innuendoes or trying to shuffle the actual truth from the dregs of his attempts to re-establish his reputation. Politicians have always been my least favorite people, and Lucius is a consummate one.

No, Severus Snape is the person I need...

~~ ~

Granger,

Stop the stampede of musical grams. If I have to hear George Weasley's voice singing *Talk to Hermione* off-key one more time to the tune of *Die Walküre*, I'll not be responsible for my response.

S. Snape

~~ ~

Give me an hour of your time, and I'd be more than happy to cease those lovely arias.

~~ ~

Damn it, Snape. Turning me blue is going too *bloody* far!

~~ ~

The color will fade... eventually.

~~ ~

Monday March 5, 2001

That bastard turned me blue. Blue! Even my hair - which is disastrous. And then has the audacity to say that it will eventually fade?!

I don't know what is worse though, the fact that I feel like I'm engaging a war with Fred and George Weasley when they were at their most mischievous or Ron's reaction. He seriously wanted me to make a report to the Aurors office regarding a dangerous substance that Snape infected me with via the postal mail.

Thank goodness Harry had a more 'sedate' reaction - he just laughed his arse off at me then proceeded to ensure I got pissed.

I'd rather deal with Harry's reaction over Ron's any day of the week.

Of course, I've offended Ron's delicate sympathies and now have to apologize profusely for not taking his concerns and allegations regarding Snape's mental condition into serious consideration.

I still haven't gotten Snape to agree to meet with me...

~~ ~

I'll settle for even a half an hour. I know, you'd much rather think about anything else but that time period, but you really are the best person to speak with.

~~ ~

Granger,

In all seriousness, why should I even consider your offer? As you've pointed out, you're not the only person intent on creating their revisionist view of what happened. Why should I believe that you're going to write any more honestly than the likes of Rita Skeeter or Xenophilius Lovegood?

SS

~~ ~

Wednesday March 14, 2001

I *finally* received an appropriate response from Snape. It's challenging and frightening all at the same time. How do I articulate why this is so very important? There are so many reasons why I'm doing this... the question is does he want all of the patient, excellent, and public reasons as to why I've started this endeavor, or does he want the stark, honest truth?

If I answer incorrectly, I'll never get the information I crave.

~~ ~~

Snape,

There are many reasons why I am doing this - all of them justifiable and worthwhile.

I want to write this as historically accurate as possible because I believe we need that sort of realism captured; Wizarding history has a tendency to be too... slanted towards the greatness of the Wizarding culture as a whole. That isn't anything new in regards to how civilization records their histories - the ones in power often write their own revisionist versions of history to suit their personal doctrines... but there is often other documentation to view as well that isn't so skewed towards those who have conquered and that helps us have a clearer picture of what might have actually happened.

Yet, this still doesn't address the why of it all. Why...

Because I believe that everyone should know what happened. I want to be very clear about the prejudices and the hatred that allowed such a travesty to begin, and how it allows it to happen again and again in the Wizarding culture. It is only by delving into that pain, studying the suffered injustices, that we as a part of humanity can understand its roots and hopefully learn how to eradicate it.

I want this because no one - absolutely no one should ever have to suffer as I... as we did... to be chased, killed, or dehumanized because one didn't fit into the acceptable ideas of what was "right".

Which means I have to look at every aspect of the war as honestly and as forthrightly as I can - because if I don't, how can any of us be sure that we won't fall into the abyss of horrendous behavior in the absence of any ethical law?

So, I am doing this for me - despite any other justifiable reason I can give. So that I can feel we are at least moving forward in a way that will ensure that this never happens again.

H. Granger

~~ ~~

Granger,

Be at the Prince Apothecary Shoppe on Monday, March 19th at 10 a.m. sharp. If you are late, you shall not be admitted and you will not be issued another invitation.

SS

~~ ~~

Monday March 19, 2001

I followed Snape's directions to the letter; actually I was early, but I made myself busy with the other shops in the area until the designated time.

"This way," he said when I arrived, and I was promptly led to his back workroom. There were cauldrons of various sorts bubbling away, but I kept my curiosity in check and did not go and peek at them. Trust me when I say this was not an easy thing to do - as at least one was giving off a strange orange glow.

He gestured to a stool set next to a work table, and I took a hesitant seat.

"I am still debating the merits of this," he said, giving me a penetrating glance. "While I do see your point, what you ask is... painful to recall." He turned and walked to one of the cauldrons, his fingers closed over an iron stirring rod, and he set about stirring in three decisive clock-ward measures.

I sat as still as I could; I even tried not to breathe hard, because something told me that if I did anything to startle him, this chance would be gone, and I'd never have another.

He set the stirring rod back down on the table beside the cauldron and turned to face me. "I do not find it beneficial to give anything away not even out of *the kindness of my heart*," he said with a slight sneer. "Therefore, if you truly wish to have access to my knowledge, you will have to work for it."

I think I may have opened my mouth to object, but he quelled me with a glare.

"This is not up for debate."

"What sort of work?" I asked him. I was genuinely curious, because this wasn't something I expected. But then, I should've known not to expect the usual when it came to Severus Snape.

"I require an... assistant of sorts," he told me. "Someone to prep ingredients, haggle with vendors when I'm not available, and deal with whatever I need of you."

"I already have a job," I told him.

He merely gave a Gallic shrug. "If you want information, then you will be here to do what I require." And with those words, he ushered me out of his shop.

The question remains... do I want his knowledge enough to sacrifice myself on the altar *of his* needs? Merlin only knows what those would be...

~~ ~~

Granger,

I've not heard from you in regards to my proposal. Shall I assume that you are not interested?

SS

~~ ~~

Snape,

It's been less than 24 hours; good manners dictate that you at least give me a few days to consider all of the options. Plus, if (and I haven't said I am) I do take you up on your offer; I will have to make other arrangements. I will let you know one way or another by Friday. Is that acceptable?

H. Granger

~~ ~

Thursday March 22, 2001

I talked with both Ron and Harry about Snape's proposal. I originally wasn't going to since I could practically script their responses out in my head without even broaching the subject.

Ron, of course, has added a new low to his characterization of the evilness that is Severus Snape. He apparently thinks that Snape is an old pervert whose only goal in this whole thing is to make me vulnerable enough to take advantage of.

I swear I don't know where his mind is at... as if we hadn't already faced the worst the Wizarding World has to offer and survived.

If (and I honestly do believe this is highly debatable) Snape were to take this as an invitation to ogle me and push me into a corner, I think I am quite capable of fending off such advances, were they ever to appear.

Harry was supportive. Though he did remind me (ad nauseum) that Snape has a tendency to be sarcastic and exacting (as if five years with him as our Potions Master didn't already clue me in).

Neither was truly helpful in giving me the reassurances I wanted.

What if I accede to this request and Snape only gives me the surface of what I want? It does me no good to have him repeat what is already common knowledge.

But... I suppose that is a chance I'll have to take.

~~ ~

Snape,

I've decided to accept your offer, however there are some caveats. There are certain things that I just will not do - anything that compromises my idea of fair and moral play... and while I concede that you probably wouldn't ask anything of me that would test those beliefs, I do want it stated that I will not comply with anything that compromises them.

Also, my hours with you will be Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays - I still have to support myself, and that means I do have to work. I can't be at your beck and call whenever, so we will have established hours.

Finally, I want assurances that you will actually give me honest, in-depth information. Common knowledge is all well and good, but I need intricate details and information - if you cannot honestly participate, then this endeavor is for naught.

Are these terms acceptable?

H. Granger

~~ ~

Given the nature of the information you require, and the time constraints you've placed on my requests, I do hope you aren't going to be brash and expect me to regurgitate my knowledge for you to swallow down like watered baby food immediately. I will speak as I feel compelled to... and not a moment sooner.

Report to me Monday, April 2nd. We shall begin then.

SS

~~ ~

Tuesday May 15, 2001

I can hardly believe it's been nearly a month and a half since I agreed to this arrangement with Snape! It all goes by so quickly. In some ways I feel as if I've become his apprentice... though at least now I think he's gotten to the point where he's assured enough not to loom over me while I'm chopping and sorting the ingredients he'll need to use that day.

Mostly I get bits and pieces of his vast knowledge not only in potions making, but also in the various ways to protect against the Dark Arts... rarely does he talk about that time period, and never for very long.

Were it not for the fact that it is clearly hard for him to talk about, and the horrifying aspects of some of what he's revealed; I would've considered this a one-sided bargain in his favor. But... in all honesty, maybe he's asked too little of me.

I'm coming to appreciate the complexity that is Severus Snape.

Never would I have dreamed the sort of things he had to cope with... I thought Harry, Ron and I had it bad. I honestly do not think *any* of us would've survived with our sanity intact had we needed to participate in or witness even a fraction of what Severus did. The very fact that he did, and isn't psychotic, is a testament to how very much he can withstand. I don't know anyone else that could've done so.

~~ ~

Friday July 13, 2001

Just had a horrible row with Ron. Again. It seems like all we do is fight any more.

If it isn't about the fact that he won't actually find a paying position (and no, being a celebrity is not an actual job despite what he and Harry may think), it's about when I'll settle down to say "yes" to his proposal, or when I'm going to drop being at the "bloody git's" beck and call (I am hardly at Severus's beck and call) and settle down to be a "proper" wife (in other words be a clone of his mum, Molly).

It's as if we're both speaking a foreign language to one another these days. I have clearly defined ideas of what I want to happen, and realistically until I've finished with my work on the book, everything else is on hold, as it should be.

How can I go about planning a future and children when they may be subjected to the same situations and prejudices that I experienced as a Muggle-born child at Hogwarts? How can Ron even think that *our* children wouldn't be affected by this?

The Wizarding World likes to pretend that these horrible things don't happen, and the history books at Hogwarts all support this... I have to finish what I've started so that the truth exists somewhere.

And then, as if I would stop being me if we actually married? And trust me when I say that I'm not too keen on the idea of marriage if it means that I give up who I am to become what Ron thinks I should be. I'd sooner shear off my ovaries first, because I'll be damned if having children with Ron means I give everything else up because he believes I should.

Reading over that last paragraph, isn't that what I'm asking of Ron? I want him to be one thing, and he isn't that... he wants me to be one thing, and I'm not, nor could I ever be that.

I wish I could talk with my mum about this, somehow I think she'd have good advice.

I just don't know what else to do.

~~ ~~

"These came for you," he snarled, throwing the letters onto the counter. I could tell by the sloppy handwriting that they were from Ron. I hadn't seen Ron since the encounter at the toy store, though a part of me wanted to.

"You have no idea..."

He threw the tea cup that was sitting on the counter; the sound of it shattering cut me off.

"I have no idea?!" His voice was deceptively calm and even. "I have to hold our child as she cries each night because you can't be arsed to even try and remember her. I'm the one that has to reassure her that there isn't *anything* at all wrong with her, and that her mother does truly love her, because she's worried and scared and thinks it's all her fault that you've forgotten everything."

"That's not fair!"

"No, Hermione, it isn't fair." He paced the kitchen. "Nothing about this situation is fair to you, to me, or for our daughter. But it is what it is."

He stopped in front of me. I tried not to flinch as he raised his left hand. His warm fingers splayed across my cheek. "I love you, Hermione," he said softly, dropping his forehead against mine. "I want to rage against everything there is because you can't remember that."

His fingers slid down to my chin. "It hurts even more to think that you are at the point where you still might be in love with *bloody Ronald Weasley*." I opened my mouth to make a response, but he stopped the words with the tip of his fingers. I didn't dare to breathe. I was wrapped up in the spell of his words, the warmth of his body.

"Everything in me tells me to attack... but there is nothing to attack." His fingers tilted my chin up, and I felt his breath fan across my lips as he said, "There is only you and me and the memories you've lost."

My heart skidded to a halt as his lips brushed against mine, the touch just barely there. My hands somehow landed on his arms, my fingers digging into the material that covered his biceps as his mouth settled against mine. I swear I gasped as his tongue slipped out and teased my lower lip. My knees felt weak as he deepened the kiss slowly. I would've bolted had he gone faster.

My body remembered everything I had forgotten - the taste, texture... the feel of him. I tilted my head and timidly touched my tongue to his. I heard him groan, and I wanted more. I willingly opened my mouth to him, feeling a surge of heat as our kiss deepened.

And then he stopped.

I wanted to cry out, but I didn't. I just stood there, chest heaving with the effort it took to breathe.

"I do love you, Hermione," he said at last. He turned to walk away from me.

"Where are you going?" I asked desperately.

"Harry has graciously offered Grimmauld Place to us for the time being."

"So you're just taking Rose and... and leaving?"

He sighed. "I think it's the best option for all of us right now."

"But I... we..."

"I can't do this Hermione. I just can't. Not right now. I have Rose to consider. She, more than any of us, is suffering. I can't keep exposing her to this."

"And so you're leaving as if everything you've told me has been a lie."

"What more do you expect me to do?"

Stay and fight for me! I wanted to scream. But I said nothing. I couldn't. Because, despite everything, I wasn't sure. And that was horrifying.

"I can't make you remember, Hermione," he said softly. "I can't force you to love me though everything in me says to do so." He closed his eyes, his face so starkly miserable. "I need you to finish your diaries, and you need to do what you can to find yourself. And if that means meeting with Ronald Weasley, then you do so. But I can't be here. I..." He stopped and took a deep breath. "I am unaccustomed to sharing you and I am irrational when it comes to this so it is better if we... Rose and I... go for now."

And then he left me... alone. I sagged against the counter.

The parchment that had started the whole argument was only an arm's reach away. From my vantage point, I could clearly see Ron's spiky handwriting.

I was unexpectedly caught by the feelings I still have for you. And, I think you might still feel those things too. Why else would you have come to find me? I think we...

Those few slight words that could be seen were damning and I felt a huge flash of anger at how irritatingly insensitive the whole situation was.

Ron knew I was still married. What did he hope to accomplish by sending such a missive to me, especially here, at my home? I shoved the letter from me, not bothering to read it. Clearly, he hadn't matured with age.

~~ ~~

Wednesday August 22, 2001

I've done it. I've broken things off with Ron.

Even though it has been coming, I'm shattered. Completely and utterly.

Ron's never understood my project; he's not a fan of Severus Snape, and my spending so much time with the man - well, let's just say that is only a small tip of the iceberg that has finally ripped us asunder.

He slept with Pansy. In our bed.

I could forgive him almost anything, but not that.

I don't know what I am going to do. My relationship with Ron has always been a defining part of me - part of my relationship with Harry. Who am I if I am not with Ron Weasley?

Who am I indeed?

~~ ~~

I could feel the words rolling around on my tongue. The harsh, "absolutely not," teasing the edges of it as I moved my mouth, but instead of the sharp, biting tone, it came out as a soft denial.

"But... Hermione!" my companion whined.

There were times when I wish I had the austere, cold and unassailable façade that I often recall Professor McGonagall affecting when dealing with some of the more unpleasant students housed in the Gryffindor Tower. I straightened to my full height, which unfortunately, still left me at a disadvantage, and angled my head so that I looked down my nose at him. "I *said* no. How much clearer do you need me to be, Ronald?" I huffed.

"No need to be peevisish," he replied, raising both hands up in front of him in what was meant to be an appeasing manner. But then he had to go and ruin it by continuing, "It isn't as if it'd be hard for you but if you're going to get your knickers in a twist, Harr "

"Knickers in a twist?" I seethed, flexing my right hand just so. His eyes widened as my fingers deftly twirled my wand. "I really think you might want to reconsider that thought."

He swallowed hard, the action causing his Adam's apple to bob uncomfortably along the line of his throat. "I err... that is... Harry suggested that "

"Oh, I see," I said, cutting him off. "This entire incident is Harry's fault? He somehow stripped you of clothing and pushed your prone form into bed with an equally naked Pansy Parkinson and then what? Copiously cast the *Imperius Curse* on the both of you so you'd rut like two cats in heat?"

"That isn't what I meant!" he shouted. His face had two bright red splotches on each cheek that blended into the reddish fuzz that desperately tried (and failed) to be a proper five o'clock shadow, overall he looked like a blotchy, balding orangutan. I crossed my arms and waited for him to continue.

"Look, Mum doesn't know that..." he shrugged and gestured helplessly.

"You've fucked Pansy every which way but sideways?" I supplied.

"NO!" He sighed and shifted his weight. "Don't be like this, Hermione!" he cajoled in a whiny tone.

"Really, Ron," I said with more force than I intended. "How else am I supposed to *be*? I mean truly... I walked in on you and that... that *person* in our bed. **Our bed!** And you expect me to what? Pat you on the head and tell you that it's all right? I don't think so." I felt weary in a way I hadn't felt in years. I turned away from him the more I looked at him, the more I just wanted to claw the flesh from his red, splotchy face. "Just go," I told him. "Leave. You're not welcome here any longer."

"But I live here!"

"Not anymore." I looked at him over my shoulder. "This is my flat and it will remain my flat."

"And just where am I supposed to go?"

"I don't really care... Go to Harry's... Go home to the Burrow. Hell, go to Pansy's for all I care. Just go."

"You can't do this!" he yelled, his body braced for confrontation.

I grabbed my wand, and whirled on him. "You've got two choices here, Ronald Weasley." I took a step towards him. "The first is to do the proper thing and leave whilst I am out." I twirled my wand through my fingers. "The second is for you to still be here when I return." I brushed past him and forcibly opened the door. "You *really* don't want to be here when I return."

The door made a lovely sound as I slammed it shut.

~~ ~~

"Ron, what are you doing here?"

"I just had to see you, Hermione." He shifted his weight from one foot to the other; he was drenched. "Can I come in?"

"It is rather nasty out there," I conceded, letting the door swing open. "Why don't you come into the kitchen to dry off and then have a cuppa I'm sure you could use one. I know I could."

"Sure," he said offhandedly, as if he hadn't really paid any attention to what I had just said. He stepped in, dripping rain water all over the floor.

"The kitchen is just around the corner," I told him as I shut the door.

He grabbed my shoulders and pulled me in close for a bruising kiss. I broke his hold on me and pushed him away.

"What made you think I'd be receptive to this?" I screeched. "I'm married, Ron; you know this. I might not be able to remember all of the damn particulars, but I *will* honor the vows I made."

"How can you honor something you don't even remember?"

"It doesn't matter if I remember them or not; it doesn't change reality. I am married. I have been married for quite a few years and I have a child. How dare you think I would..." I broke off, unable to even continue. I was seething.

"You're being ridiculous!"

I balled my fists, clenching each hand tight enough to feel my nails biting into the palms of my hands. "I'm being ridiculous?" I took a step towards him.

"Yes, ridiculous. Snape doesn't deserve you. He never did. And you..." He grabbed my chin. "You still love me, I know you do."

I pulled away from him. "I'm not going to lie and say I don't feel something for you; I always have. But he's my husband, and I " I stopped speaking, unwilling to voice to Ron what I should be saying to Severus, that as confused as I felt, I had feelings for him as well. "Besides," I said, deflecting myself. "I don't think I could go back to you after Pansy, even if it weren't for Severus."

"Pansy," he gasped. "You you remember?"

I sighed. "It doesn't matter what I remember, Ron. You need to go. Just go now."

"But, Hermione..."

"No buts. Please go, before you ruin any sentiment of friendship I might still have for you."

~~ ~

Wednesday January 2, 2002

My head is killing me! I can't bloody believe how much I drank last night - and whatever was in those cocktails Luna made is seriously making me feel like I licked the inside of an ashtray.

I wonder if I have coffee in the house; tea just won't cut it today...

Addition: There were two bottles of hangover potion sitting on my kitchen counter. I didn't think Severus had paid any attention when I said I was going out with the girls. That man is a life saver.

~~ ~

Tuesday March 5, 2002

I loathe being sick! My brain feels like it's stuck in a vise, my body is sluggish, and I'd rather not move. Sad thing is, this is better than I've been in days.

Severus has been... lovely. He brought over some Pepper Up potions that didn't taste as vile as I remember them being from school, and he made me soup. And it wasn't from a tin. It's a good thing he mentioned he was only doing this to get me back in the workroom; else I might start thinking he cared.

How silly would that be?

~~ ~

The house felt strange without Rose or Snape in it. I should've felt relieved. I didn't have to live with the pressure of their disappointment every morning when I awoke and couldn't remember. Yet, I only felt a sense of loss.

The whys no longer mattered.

Everywhere I looked, there were my memories for me to find. Pictures of us as a happy family; I couldn't doubt what I could see with my very own eyes. And didn't this sense of loss mean that I was missing them, even if I couldn't truly remember them myself?

So... the question I had to ask myself was whether or not I wanted to remake that happiness? Even if I couldn't remember, could I embrace this life wholeheartedly?

I heard the distinct *pop* of someone Apparating nearly inside the house by the spell's loudness. I grabbed my wand off the table beside me and raced down the stairs.

"Snape," I said breathlessly, skidding to halt just outside of the sitting room. "You startled me."

"I wonder," he said in a wry tone, ignoring the fact that I had my wand pointed at his head. "Is my first name on the list of things you've forgotten?"

"I *do* know your name," I snapped. He just scared ten years off my life by Apparating in unannounced and he wanted to quibble over his name? I sheathed my wand.

"Ah, so then you simply cannot pronounce it?"

"No," I replied with a scowl.

He arched his left eyebrow. "Then say it... it isn't hard at all."

"Why are you here?" I growled.

"S...eeevv...eer...us," he sounded out his name phonetically, as if I hadn't asked the question.

"Why are you here?" I repeated.

"Say my name, Hermione."

"Fine," I huffed, crossing my arms over my chest. "Severus. There, I've said it. Happy now?"

"Immensely." He stepped closer to me, taking up a huge portion of my personal space. "Now, as to why I'm here, well..." I could feel his eyes rake down me almost like a physical caress. "You really should put on something more appropriate first."

I narrowed my eyes. "What's wrong with what I have on?" Granted, it wasn't the pinnacle of Muggle or Wizarding fashion, but there was hardly anything wrong with what I had on.

"Don't be difficult," he cautioned me.

"Difficult?!" I spluttered. "I'm not the one who's come, unannounced, I might add, wanting me to go and change. Besides, without knowing *why you're here* I can't even gauge what would be remotely *appropriate* to change into."

He dipped his head down, his mouth close to my ear; I shivered in response. "I can give you a minor hint," he said huskily, his breath fanning against the contours of my ear and neck. "Think warmth."

"Warmth..." I stammered, taking a step back. He had come entirely too close and I could feel myself responding to his closeness with desire. I wasn't ready to acknowledge that I felt desire for Snape.

"Warmth," he repeated, giving me a look that said he knew fully well how my body was reacting to his presence.

I backed up even further, eager to escape the feelings his presence aroused. "Fine," I muttered. "I'll just go..." I gestured to the stairs. He moved back and I raced past him. It took all my willpower to not look back over my shoulder to see his expression.

He was sitting in one of the lounge chairs, reading a book when I came back downstairs twenty minutes later dressed in a pair of jeans and a black jumper.

"You'll want a warm coat," he told me as he stood up.

"I doubt I'll need it, it's the middle of July and the weather is nearly 30.4 °C."

"Do you have to argue about everything?"

"When you don't make sense, then yes."

"And you can't just take this on faith?"

I bit my lower lip. It was just a simple thing he was asking. And... honestly, he did deserve every bit of faith and trust I could give on what I did remember alone. I'm sure anything I'd forgotten would just cement that faith.

"All right," I said softly. He exhaled the breath I doubt he even registered he was holding. I pulled a warm wrap out of the front closet.

"Ready?"

I nodded.

"Just follow my lead and everything will be fine." He held out his arm to me. "You'll need to step close and hold on tight, one never knows with Portkeys."

"Where are you taking me?" I asked, stepping close to him.

"You'll see," Snape replied, wrapping an arm around my shoulder and taking my hand in his. He then pulled a small, kitschy keychain out of his pocket and clasped it in both of our hands.

I felt a jerk just under my navel and then everything started swirling. The sensation seemed to go on forever far longer than I ever remember a Portkey taking, and just as I started to feel nauseous, we were deposited in a small courtyard. I shuddered as the cold air hit me, my breath coming out in small white puffs.

"Welcome to Canberra," Snape whispered in my ear.

"Canberra?" I asked stupidly. "Why on Earth are we in Canberra?"

"We come every year... and..." He shrugged.

"Why?" I asked, shivering. The weather was freezing and I wasn't feeling very charitable towards his vagueness. I could hear voices in the distance and knew we'd be surrounded by some people any moment.

"Here, let's get you inside. We do need to check in."

"Why, Snape?"

"We attend the annual Worn Dentition," he said in a low voice.

I glared at him. "And why do we attend the Worn Dentition?" He mumbled something that I didn't quite catch.

"Severus Snape," I said sharply. "Explain to me why we are here, and now."

"To see and visit Wendell and Monica Wilkins in the only way that is available to you."

I sucked in a gulping sob.

Snape caught my right hand with his warm left one and tugged me in the direction of the hotel. I blindly followed him my parents... still being called Wendell and Monica Wilkins. "*All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again!*" I must have royally scrambled their brains.

~~ ~

Tuesday August 20, 2002

I actually told Severus about my parents today. He's the first person, outside of Harry, that I've told. I could never discuss it with Ron; I don't think he could've understood, whereas Harry - Harry got it.

I hadn't intended for it to come out - we were discussing how fear makes people do actions they may have never considered before, regrettable, sometimes unforgivable actions. Of course, Severus, being Severus, said there was no way that I could possibly understand what he meant, and that it was no use trying to explain it to someone "*who couldn't possibly understand the emotional ramifications of such an act.*"

Severus is so bloody contentious and condescending sometimes when we have these talks that I... well, I got furious and let my mouth get away from me.

He simply listened. He didn't interrupt once; I don't think I could've finished the telling if he had. I laid out every sordid, ugly little detail of what I did to them. How I systematically erased myself from their lives, and then erased them from England. I was in tears by the time I finished.

And strangely enough, he simply took my hand and held it until I calmed down.

~~ ~

The room that Snape acquired for us was a suite, which just went to further show me how much he had taken into consideration. I was tense the entire time we checked in; I kept looking over my shoulder, wondering when would be the first moment I'd see them. I wasn't sure how I would react probably end up in tears, which would not only mortify me, but the strangers that were my parents as well.

Snape didn't say anything to me as we rode the elevator to the 20th floor the silence was only broken by his quiet conversation with the bellman as we walked down the hall. The room was breathtakingly lovely, but I wasn't in a mood to appreciate it or the niceties that Snape was extending to me. Like someone caught under the *Imperius Curse*, I wandered mindlessly towards the inviting bed in the other room. I caught Snape's outlandish pronouncement that the "airline" had lost our luggage as I shut the door to bedroom portion of the suite.

I nearly collapsed onto the bed; flopping on top of it in an ungainly heap. My throat burned with the effort of keeping myself in control, but it was a losing battle. I curled into the fetal position, bringing my hands up to my face. I bit my knuckles, trying to stifle the sobs, but nothing worked. I was a complete and utter wreck.

With every breath I took, I shuddered under the pain; I don't know how long I lay like that.

At one point, the bed dipped under the weight of Snape. I thought I heard him mutter, "Bugger me," but I was too wrapped up in the misery that was my life to hear him clearly. I felt him stretch out on the bed next to me and then his arms settled over me, pulling me close. I turned and curled into him; I hadn't expected this unconditional comfort from him.

His arms tightened around me and he placed his head on top of mine. "I'm sorry, Hermione," he said softly against my forehead. "I..." he sighed. I pressed my face into his chest, burrowing close as I could to him. "I didn't mean to cause this."

I shuddered and pressed closer. He made me feel safe... strange that I could feel this with him. Or, maybe not. Maybe I'd been so wrapped up in what I had lost, I hadn't given what I still had a chance.

"Should we go?" he asked.

I shook my head. "No," I croaked out. "Please... no."

"All right, then," he said soothingly, softly stroking my back. "All right."

He held me until I had exhausted myself, stroking my back and lending me his strength until I fell asleep.

~~ ~~~

Thursday September 19, 2002

I should've stayed in bed today.

Nothing good has come of celebrating this day, since what I did.

Harry, lovely Harry, stopped by the flat with some coffee, strawberry crepes and a present. It was sweet of him to remember my favorite birthday breakfast, but it only reminded me that I couldn't celebrate with my parents.

When I was little, before being sent off to Hogwarts, my birthday was a special day devoted (absurdly, I realize now) to just me and my wants. My parents would close down the office and I'd not have to go to school. We'd start with a signature breakfast - Mum made these gorgeous chocolate and cream sweet crepes along with scrambled eggs topped with cheese and a rasher of bacon.

From there, we'd go off on an adventure, or if my birthday were a Friday or a Monday, a mini holiday. I remember one time we took the train from Waterloo Station and went to Richmond upon the Thames. We walked along the Thames Path, and wandered around the city aimlessly (or so I thought). Later I heard my Dad say he wished we had a better glimpse of Mick Jagger's house, but it was still fun.

We'd also have a full afternoon tea; my parents wouldn't normally bother but on my birthday we'd do so with finger sandwiches, warm home-made scones with clotted cream and strawberry preserves, and an assortment of cakes and fancies at whatever nice restaurant was close to where we were spending the day.

Then we'd come home, sit around the living room watching whatever was newly out on VHS and I'd open my gifts. I'd get to stay up far too late, and have to spend a good thirty minutes brushing my teeth before bed to protect my teeth from all of the illicit items we had eaten throughout the day, but it was so worth it.

Now... now I just go to work. Go to work and come home.

That's not to say my friends don't try to do something special for this day, they do. But, I can't. Not after what I've done. And my birthday just highlights what I've done.

I miss them.

Speaking of work, I gave Harry a kiss on the cheek and then headed off to the lab, since it is Thursday, and Severus tends to get tetchy if I'm too late, especially with the project he's currently working on.

The day went rather well, all in all, and then Severus had to go and ruin it by giving me a gift as well. It was utterly perfect too! Of course I reacted the way I normally do when someone gives me a gift, I hugged him and then kissed him.

He turned stiff and pried himself from my arms as quickly as he could. Then he locked himself up in his study and I didn't see him for the rest of the day. I can only imagine what his reception will be on Saturday.

~~ ~~~

Saturday September 21, 2002

No Severus today. Just a note of instructions on what he wanted me to work on, and then the yawning silence. I must've offended him more than I thought with my emotional outburst.

~~ ~~~

"Thank you," I said softly, once the feeling of nausea over the return trip had abated. We had landed in the foyer of Grimmauld Place.

Severus brushed his palm against my cheek. "You are quite welcome, Hermione. I just..." He shrugged a shoulder.

"It was perfect."

"Hardly. You cried for nearly the entire trip."

I placed my hand on his chest. "It wasn't because of anything you did." I stepped up on my tips of my toes and bussed his cheek with my lips. "It was wonderful, and I really appreciate it."

"Mum! Dad!" I heard Rose exclaim from somewhere behind me; her footsteps thundered down the steps as I turned around. She threw herself against me, wrapping her arms around my waist. "I missed you!"

"Ah, you're home," Harry said, peeking his head out into the foyer. "Have a good time?" He gave Severus a knowing look.

"It was fine," I said as Rose extracted herself from me and then launched her entire body at Severus. He let out an audible "ump" as her weight hit him.

"And this means you'll all be heading home?"

"Uncle Harry says I'm exhausting," Rose tattled. "He's just mad 'cause Draco kept saying '*not while Rose is here!*'" She tried to mimic the pitch of Draco's lower voice.

"Draco?" That was news to me.

Severus arched an eyebrow. "Indeed."

Harry blushed. "Ah... well, not exactly."

Rose gave Harry a big smile. "I liked when Draco was over, we had chocolate ice cream for dinner."

He tugged on Rose's nose. "Don't be such a tattletale, brat."

"So can we go home now?" Rose asked, shaking Harry's hand away from her face.

Severus looked to me. We hadn't discussed this at all. I bit my lower lip; Severus had been nothing but patient and kind. I hadn't gotten all the way through my journals, but I knew that I felt something when I was around him.

I crouched down to Rose's level. "I think we can all go home."

"Oh, yippee!" Rose cried out, then dashed down the hall and stomped her way up the steps. "Let me go get my stuff," she yelled down.

"Are you sure?" Severus asked.

"Yes." I gave him a small smile and stood up. "I think it's time we started on track with our lives."

"But " I stopped his words with my fingertips.

"It hasn't been easy," I said softly. "And I don't know what I'm doing. But " I kissed him, just letting my lips brush against his. He stood still, letting me control how much I wanted to do. I pulled back and touched his cheek softly. "That right there tells me all I need to know." I kissed him again, and he wrapped his arms around me, holding me close while I directed the path of our kiss.

I could hear Harry cough in the distance.

"Go away, Harry," I muttered, kissing the edge of Severus's lips.

"This is my hallway," he said dryly.

"He does have a point," Severus said softly.

"I suppose," I sighed. "I know the kiss doesn't solve everything... but I'm willing to make this... make us work."

"That's all I can ask."

~~ ~~

Wednesday December 25, 2002

I took Harry's advice again, and boldly made my point last night.

Every single muscle in my body concurs, I made the right decision. Now, as long as I can keep Severus believing that this *is* what I want, and that he isn't a horrible opportunistic bastard... well things will work out just right.

The future is just one step at a time, and I feel quite ready to start marching.

~~ ~~

Author's Notes: I broke your prompt, sorry. I've kind of taken the last prompt, smashed it a bit around to make... well this. I really liked all three prompts, but I'm not confident enough to say I could've done justice to them as they were outlined... plus my brain is just hardwired wrong, and I've got to let the characters lead where they may. So, I do hope you like this, , and if not, you're more than welcome to call "bullshite" on me when this is all done.

If I've botched the conversions for making "Eton Mess" (and the stove temperature) sorry... I based it on the receipt from my great grandmother.

The inspiration for their house comes from here (I so dearly want this house!):

<http://www.jackson-stops.co.uk/propertyimages/ju48434d.jpg>

<http://www.jackson-stops.co.uk/cgi-bin/properties/summary-details.pl?propID=48434>

I do know that there is an actual Worn Dentition (google-fu is my friend) and that it is not in Canberra, but... well I wanted a big cold, wintry city in July, so I bent it a bit.

Thank you so much, GoodWitch! You saved my bacon with your betaing help. Anything that is wrong, misspelled, or lacks any form of coherency is solely due to me.

Original Prompt:

Fic Prompt #3: Hermione is the new Muggle Studies teacher. She is writing a chronicle of Voldemort's two wizarding wars. Severus Snape has fallen desperately in love with her, but Hermione's only interest in her ex-professor is his memories of the war.