

True Love's Kiss

by sandlapper

Severus is cursed during the Final Battle, only his Heart's True Love can save him

ONE

Chapter 1 of 7

Severus is cursed during the Final Battle, only his Heart's True Love can save him

The atmosphere around Hogwarts Castle fairly crackled with tangible magic. It pervaded the forest, the lake and the castle proper with the odour of ozone and screams of the wounded and dying. The sheer amount of magical energy being expended by the combating wizards was both staggering and insane. Hexes, jinxes, curses, and Unforgivables painted the air thickly with colour and made it difficult to both see and breathe. Hermione Granger moved quickly through the magical haze, trying to ignore the wash of static electricity like tingles that danced across her skin, and joined Ron Weasley in flanking Harry Potter. The trio acknowledged one another with simple nods, and in Ron's case, a wink and a grin, then moved together to face Voldemort for one last time. There was no doubt that this day would be the end. Nothing less would be tolerated on either side. The three friends battled their way to the edge of the Forbidden Forest where they met face to face with Voldemort and his Inner Circle. Order members and allies moved in from the castle grounds, and Death Eaters poured from the forest. There were taunts and screams and tentative hexing between the two factions, but most just stood waiting, watching, edging towards the finish. Harry and Voldemort ignored the gathering storm brewing around them and focused solely on each other.

"Potter... at last we finish this..." The Dark Lord gestured broadly as he hissed his tirade. "I look forward to ending you, as I did your mother and father and Albus Dumbledore. My loyal servants will finish your friends, and I shall cleanse this world and make it the way it was always intended to be!"

When Harry didn't react as expected, Voldemort pushed even harder. "Or perhaps the Mudblood at your side would make a good slave. Draco has mentioned wanting to teach her her true place in the Wizarding World." The Dark Lord's statement was met with laughter from his followers. "Or perhaps she would enjoy further tuition from her Potions master. I believe I promised him a pet Mudblood once upon a time." This was directed at both the tall man standing to his immediate right and to the Boy Who Lived.

Harry flinched in response, but remained silent again, Hermione finally having impressed upon him the need to rein in his emotions. He had balked at first, angry and arguing that he didn't want to be cold and hard like Professor Snape. He had railed and stomped like a child until Hermione disarmed and bound him before he could even draw his wand. So even though Voldemort's taunts were grating, Harry reckoned that Hermione had been right to push him, and he was able to keep from jumping on his adversary and pummeling him. The Dark wizard was himself becoming increasingly irritated at the lack of response he was getting, and his actions and words were becoming wilder by the moment. This was an advantage that they had never had before.

As the Death Eaters closed on their Lord's position, Hermione and Ron tightened their own positions flanking Harry. The Order moved closer also, trying to create a line so the Death Eaters would have to spread out from their centre to fight. Hermione took this shifting of both sides as an opportunity to get her bearings and look over the battlefield. Even after the earlier fighting, the two sides seemed very evenly matched. Everything was sliding into place to finish the conflict once and for all.

As they stood there, each side waiting for the other to strike, Hermione felt a rise of panic flood through her. The feeling built quickly, almost overwhelming her but, as quickly as the feeling appeared, it was gone, leaving in its wake something, some thought or idea teasing at the back of her mind. Some niggling thought, some forgotten detail remained just out of her reach. Hermione felt the panic rise again, but couldn't reconcile it to any of the thoughts running through her mind. Taking a deep breath, she mentally shook herself and shifted into more of a dueling stance, her right hand lightly, but firmly grasping her vine wood wand. Again that niggling thought, like an itch she couldn't scratch, teased her conscience. Without realising it, Hermione reached a hand to her hair. The itch got worse.

"My hair clip," she thought suddenly, "there is something I should remember about my hair clip."

Hermione lightly fingered the golden phoenix that bound her hair tightly into a French plait. It had been a final gift from the Headmaster, right before he died. It had come to her by owl while she was home for Easter hols. There was a brief note with it that told Hermione the piece had life-saving properties and to always keep it safe. That had been months ago, and the phoenix had been in Hermione's beaded purse since. The clip had seemed much too fine to wear casually with its swirling iridescent blue eyes and gold chased wings. That morning, however, something had told Hermione to wear the clip. When she changed her mind at the last minute it wouldn't come loose no matter what she did. Realisation flooded Hermione.

"Oh, Headmaster, what are you asking of me?"

Hermione shifted her focus back to the Dark Lord when he called for his followers to move on the Order. Before either group could react, Voldemort was casting a curse at Harry. The curse never struck, shocking those that realised it, and sending the tyrant into a towering rage.

"Snape!" The Dark Lord fairly howled in his anger. "What treachery is this? How dare you interfere!"

Severus Snape stood between Harry and Voldemort and threw off the mask hiding his face. Then he laughed, genuinely laughed.

"Did you TRULY believe I would forgive or forget the murder of Lily Evans? I loved her more than my own life; she was my best friend and you killed her. I have spent the last twenty years REMEMBERING that night over and over again, remembering and plotting my revenge. And now, my Lord, it is finally over!"

Snape stepped back and looked at Harry. "Finish this, Potter..." Then he was on the ground writhing from the Cruciatus Curse cast by Bellatrix Lestrange. The Dark Lord stopped her, though, before she could wrest a scream from the Potions master.

"Leave him, Bella, he is mine." Voldemort turned to Snape as he pushed himself to his knees. "So you have remembered a nothing Mudblood for twenty years, and this is your reason for defying your Master? Rest assured, Severus, remembering is ALL you will have for eternity! First I will take care of you, then I will finish Potter and what's left of Dumbledore's Order."

The Dark Lord raised his wand and shot a vibrant blue curse at Severus. It struck him, and he screamed. Then all hell broke loose.

Hermione could never put her finger on exactly when she remember the purpose of the phoenix binding her braid, but the next few moments set her down the path to a future she would have never imagined in her wildest dreams.

Severus Snape knew that this was his end. The searing pain of Bella's Cruciatus was nothing compared to the electrical surge that filled his senses with Voldemort's curse. It felt like it was ripping his entire body apart and turning it inside out. In reality the wand blast lasted only seconds, but felt like it lasted a lifetime. Severus no longer cared and allowed the pain to take him away. It was enough that he had avenged his Lily at last. He had set the stage for the Dark Lord's downfall. Now, he was ready to rest.

He wasn't sure if he had passed out or not, but as he became aware of his surroundings, he realised that he was not alone. At first, he thought he must have died, but the odour of magical ozone, acrid in his sensitive nose, proved that he had survived. He struggled to open his eyes, and the sight that met them stunned him beyond measure. In the middle of a battle for the control of the Wizarding World, he was lying in Hermione Granger's lap. Of course, the little Know It All, bleeding heart swot, would be the one to keep him from his reward. He groaned, whether in pain or irritation he wasn't sure. The two stared at each other until a stray hex caught Hermione in the upper back, and she slumped forward.

"Bloody hell, Miss Granger, get down or get up and fight. Why are you bothering me? Let me go, you silly witch!" Severus tried to get himself up, swatting at Hermione's hands as he did. "What the devil are you doing? Why in Merlin's name did you revive me?"

With a grimace, Hermione tightened her hold on Severus and pulled his hand up to grasp the phoenix in her hair. She wrapped their fingers around the hairpiece and whispered, "Lemon drops." A tug behind their navels signaled the Portkey activation, and the two disappeared from the battlefield in a vivid flash of gold.

Ron stood behind Harry, protecting his back from Death Eaters. He had split his time between both his friends until Hermione pushed him to focus on keeping Harry safe. He had momentarily lost track of Hermione, but caught sight of her again when she jumped towards the fallen Snape. The flash of the couple Portkeying from the field distracted everyone close to them, but it was Ron's scream that garnered the attention of Harry and the Dark Lord.

"Hermione... NO!" Ron made a move towards the spot she had moments ago occupied with Snape, then suddenly turned on the Dark Lord.

"Where is she?" he screamed. "Where is Hermione; what have you done to her?" Without waiting for an answer, Ron began firing spells at Voldemort, who was caught off guard enough to have to go on the defensive. This prodded Harry into action, and he took advantage of the Dark Lord's distraction. With a scream of pure rage and a cry of hate, Voldemort's reign of terror was over.

With the fall of Voldemort, the remnants of his once mighty Death Eaters were quickly overwhelmed, rounded up, and sent to Azkaban to await trial. A handful did escape, but they became the priority of the Aurors. The Order retreated to Grimmauld Place to lick their wounds and celebrate their victory, and to wonder what had happened to Hermione Granger.

TWO

Chapter 2 of 7

Severus is cursed during the Final Battle, only his Heart's True Love can save him.

Thanks, peskipiksi, for your beta-work! Not owning, just playing!

With a rough groan, Professor Snape opened his eyes. He jerked his arm and hand up to shield his eyes from the sun that was beaming down. He stared blinkingly up at the sky for a moment, watching clouds scuttle by and trying to clear his head. After a few moments he sneered, remembering the events of the last day from the battle to the unknown curse the Dark Lord had thrown at him, all the way to how he ended up lying on his back in the grass.

Severus hated travel by Portkey. Not only was it a harsh mode of transport, flinging a body through space the way that it did, but it was also quite undignified, especially

when one wasn't expecting it. And if there was one thing that Severus Snape hated more than Portkeying, it was being undignified. He rose up from the prone position he found himself in, wincing as his protesting muscles screamed in disagreement to the movement, and took stock of his immediate surroundings, finding himself in quite a lovely garden. The peace and quiet of the place made Severus ill at ease after the chaos of the battlefield he had just been a part of, and he quickly scanned the area for anyone or anything that could be an enemy. Finding nothing, he turned his attention to the slight moan that broke through his musings.

"Of course, I can't forget my saviour," he thought and rolled his eyes.

He looked over his shoulder to the slight figure that was huddled next to a particularly fine specimen of foxglove. Any closer and she would have been a part of the plantings. Sighing deeply, Severus gained his feet and made his way gingerly to his "kidnapper". The little brat never could leave well enough alone. Always having to be "right", Granger tended towards being over-bearing, and that aggravated Snape almost as much as Portkeying and being undignified. Sighing heavily again, and ruthlessly shoving down the thought of just leaving her where she was and heading back to Hogwarts to take his chances, Severus waved his wand and muttered, "Ennervate."

Nothing could have prepared him for what happened next. But, then, nothing in his life should ever come as a surprise.

Hermione despised magical travel and Portkeying ranked close to the top of the list, not too far behind brooms. But needs must, and for some reason that she couldn't begin to understand and dared not examine too closely, Hermione felt the desperate need to get Professor Snape away from Voldemort and to safety, and a Portkey was what she had to work with. The phoenix hairclip deposited the two on the grass of her parents' back garden, and the last thing that Hermione saw after they landed was a flare of blue light, and then everything went black.

Hermione was jerked abruptly to consciousness and she groaned as sunlight pressed in on her eyes making them water copiously. She squinted up at the black figure that towered over her and frantically scrabbled for her wand. The events of the past few days crashed over her in a wave of adrenaline drenched panic, and she surged to her feet, wand securely in hand.

"Who are you, what do you want?" she begged, her tone of voice belying the readiness of her defensive stance. "Did you Portkey with me? I don't remember anything."

Severus rolled his eyes and snapped, "Miss Granger, I should be asking you what YOU want. I was the one who was accosted on the battlefield and bodily dragged, against my will, to what I presume is your parents' home, and you have the audacity to berate me?"

Wiping her eyes fiercely, Hermione looked at the man staring down at her. His black eyes were flashing with some unnamable emotion and he was bleeding from several cuts on his face and hands. He looked as exhausted as she felt. Hermione stared, trying to place the dark man, he was so familiar to her, but other than a teasing in the back of her mind, she didn't know who this person was. The teasing turned into a slight ache, but try as she might, Hermione couldn't name the man standing before her.

"Miss Granger!"

The sudden exclamation of her name startled her into movement. Still focusing her wand on Severus, Hermione scrambled back from the man, almost falling in the process.

"How do you know me? I don't know who you are!" Hermione exclaimed with trepidation.

Snape huffed with irritation, and crossed his arms over his chest. "Miss Granger, have you lost your senses? Did you strike your head when we Portkeyed into your parents' garden? I assure you that I am still your Professor no matter what you and your little friends desire, and I don't appreciate being mocked. Especially when I didn't ask to be dragged off from Hogwarts."

Hermione stared in confusion. "Professor? I swear I don't know you. What did you teach? Were you there before I attended?" She reached a hand to her head and swayed slightly. "I really don't remember you... Maybe I did hit my head."

"May I check you for a head injury, Miss Granger? I would like to get this resolved and get some answers as to why you would take me from battle at Hogwarts. I am sure we are being looked for; unfortunately, we don't know which side is doing the looking." Severus waved his wand as he lectured and cast a spell at the witch.

"You were at the battle?" Hermione's eyes got big, and she brandished her wand at Snape. "Stop, what was that spell? Are you a Death Eater? Did you bring me here to keep me from helping Harry?"

Before he could read the diagnosis spell, Hermione cast in self-defence and was immediately disarmed by the Professor.

"MISS GRANGER! I am attempting to discover the reason for your memory loss. I would appreciate it if you refrain from attacking my person again. I assure you, one battle today was quite enough!"

A growing sense of déjà vu was overtaking Hermione as the wizard continued his wand work and his berating of her person. "You must be one of Volde..."

"DO NOT SAY THAT NAME! And most certainly do not finish that thought."

The Potions master stopped his analysis and looked at Hermione in growing exasperation. "Granger, you know good and well I have been on the side of the Light spying for the Order, and if your prodigious brain had not wrapped around that tidbit from the clues undoubtedly dropped by the late Headmaster, surely you heard my declaration to the Dark Lord as I turned on him mere hours ago." Snape huffed again. "You don't have a brain injury of any type, so I would appreciate an end to this little game you are playing. Or should I assume that I am being detained here until your friends or the Order comes to take me away?"

Hermione looked in confusion at Severus. Her trembling hand still held out in front of her, but she was beginning to get lightheaded again. "I will send a Patronus to Professor McGonagall, she will sort this out. I won't cast any spells at you, I promise."

Severus rolled his eyes, but handed the witch her wand back while surreptitiously holding his on her just in case. "You go ahead and let them know where you are, but I will be leaving now. No sense in causing undue trouble."

"Wait, sir, you need to stay here. There has to be a reason that we Portkeyed here and we need to find out what it is. Perhaps you have some information... Unless you truly are a Death Eater..." Hermione's voice became shrill as panic rose in her.

As she started to flick her wand caught between messaging her friends and casting a spell at the man staring at her in consternation, Hermione's eyes rolled up in her head and she slowly began to fall. Snape caught her before she hit the ground and actually did strike her head, and she turned softly into his chest. He had to lean closer to hear her last mutterings before she was completely unconscious again.

"I do know who you are, you smell like home..."

Severus just shook his head at the ridiculous statement and lifted Hermione gently into his arms. He made his way into her parents' home, which was blessedly empty. Wandering through the kitchen and into the family room, he found the closest sofa to lay her on. He cast another diagnosis spell just to be sure there was no damage to her brain, and after ensuring she wasn't in danger from predators of the two-legged sort, Severus Snape Disapparated with a "pop", leaving everything behind.

THREE

Chapter 3 of 7

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"I've made up my mind and my decision is final!"

Hermione huffed in irritation at the hard-headedness of her best friend. No matter how long she, Ron, Harry and the Weasleys had all known each other, no one ever seemed to know or understand Hermione, and she was quickly losing patience with that fact.

"But Hermione, what about your job?" Harry questioned a bit hesitantly. "You can't just quit and leave the Ministry, it doesn't work that way. You have to give notice and find and train a replacement. Besides, you are a Department Head, what would they do without you?"

"Job? What job, Harry? I work as a glorified clerk in a made-up department, in the bowels of the bloody Ministry of Magic," she fumed. "I don't do anything. There is no field work because I am not allowed to seek out any magical creatures, I have to wait for them to come to me, and most of the time I end up filing things or doing research for other departments because they are too busy to do it themselves. Don't bother, just ask Miss Granger, she has loads of free time. I knew I should have returned to Hogwarts when Professor McGonagall asked me."

Hermione was in high dudgeon now, her fingertips sparking silvery sparks, and she vented everything at Harry, sparing him nothing.

"I told her no when the school opened last Autumn, and I told her no again at Christmas hols." She glared at Harry who didn't dare speak yet. "I could have been preparing to teach. You all knew I wanted to study and teach Charms. It's all I ever wanted to do. I had even discussed an apprenticeship with Professor Flitwick, but I let you talk me out of my dreams... and for what?"

Hermione covered her face with her hands trying to stem the tears of frustration that threatened to overwhelm her. She wasn't as successful as she would have wished, tears spilling down her cheeks as she tried to regain her composure.

"Where is all this coming from, Hermione?" Harry was confused by Hermione's little speech. "I thought you were happy with your decision to join the Ministry with Ron and me. Remember, we are going to change the Wizarding World!"

Hermione laughed mirthlessly. "My decision? Really, Harry? Interesting that you should say that. And I certainly am not doing anything to change the Wizarding World considering my department doesn't get much advertising or work. I always wondered why I only get a handful of cases of Magical Creature rights a month."

The Boy Who Lived backed away from the look in Hermione's eyes. "Now, 'Mione..."

"First of all, my name is NOT 'Mione. Secondly, don't even try to patronise me. You lied to me. You used our friendship against me, and I am very angry with you right now. I am furious with every one of you that plotted behind my back. Perhaps, after some space and time, I will move past this. I am not sure what I am more furious about."

"Herm..." A hand in his face kept Harry from finishing what he started to say.

"I said no, Harry, you will let me finish. I have already had this discussion with the Weasleys, and now I am going to have it with you. I can't believe that you and Ron lied to me, that even Ginny knew what you were planning and that you somehow managed to get the Minister to lie to me also. You both knew I wanted to finish school and sit my NEWTs, so did the rest of the Weasleys. You both lied so that I wouldn't."

Harry paled as he realised what Hermione was talking about. "How did..."

"How did I find out? Well, imagine my surprise when Percy Weasley approached me to ask when I was going to set a date. It seems that my job only lasts until my wedding, and then my section dissolves, and he regains the office space for storage. Of course, Percy needs that space as soon as possible. And imagine my further surprise when confronting Kingsley, I find that they really didn't have to have me here for you and Ron to be hired as Aurors. You told me that so I would follow you. And dear, sweet Hermione would never let a friend suffer if she could help it."

Hermione stood quietly for a moment then took a deep breath before she delivered the final blow.

"And imagine my horror when I found out that my supposed best friend wasted a life debt to make sure HIS best friend got what he wanted."

"Hermione, please."

"Please what, Harry? You lied to me and wasted something precious so that Ron could try to talk me into dating him?"

"I never meant to hurt you; Ron really likes you, and I just wanted us to all be together, a family, me married to Ginny and you married to Ron."

"We were already family; you didn't have to plot behind my back. Why can't you and the Weasleys see that what I felt for Ron in school was a crush? I realise now we never suited in any way that counted. I want more from life than to be just a wife and mother."

Harry drew back like he had been struck. "Nothing is more important than family, how can you not want..."

Hermione shook her head. "Harry, I am not trying to hurt your feelings, but I have a family, I have parents who love me and encourage me to go after my dreams. I've never needed fulfillment in that way, not like you and even Ron. I want to learn and travel, and I want to teach. If and when I settle down, it will be because someone special completes the life I have built, not because it is expected of me."

Harry winced at the finality in Hermione's tone.

"Will you ever speak to us again?" he whispered. "Have I lost your friendship forever?" The tears were thick in Harry's voice.

"Yes, I will speak to you again. No, you will never lose my friendship, Harry. One day I won't be angry anymore, and you and Ron won't be hurt either, and we will start over."

Hermione turned and Disapparated, leaving Harry standing alone wondering how he and Ron could have hurt their friend so.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry stood proudly again. Hermione stood at the gate waiting for Hagrid to come let her in. She was home once more and fairly trembled with the excitement of getting back to her studies and to working towards her teaching certification. She had finally quit berating herself for wasting more than a

year on something other than her education. It had been several months since she had seen Harry or the Weasleys, but her feelings were still raw after finding out the only reason she even had a job was because Ron had decided that he wanted to marry her, and if she went back to school, she might get away. Now was her chance to shine. She was thrilled to be back in the world of academia at last. Professor Flitwick was as excited as she, having written a long letter detailing his plans for the year as Hermione was to become his apprentice over and above her regular classes.

Soon enough Hagrid rumbled to the gate and pushed it open. Hermione hurried through excitedly, unsurprised to be scooped up in the half-giant's crushing embrace.

"Oh, Hagrid!" Hermione laughed. "How I have missed you!"

The gentle giant bellowed his own laugh and set Hermione down before he could crack her ribs. "'Tis good ter see ya, 'Mione. This ol' castle ain't been tha same since you and the boys left."

Hermione smiled brightly at Hagrid. "Well, I am back, at least for a year and I will make sure to take tea with you as often as I can."

Hagrid blushed happily and turned to make his way back to his hut. "Perfesser McGonagall'll be waitin' fer ya in the Headmistress' Office. You know tha way. I'm off to feed Buckbeak and Fang."

Hermione waved her goodbye, and headed up the path to the castle proper. The old building looked as though there had never been a battle and no damage had ever been done to its walls. The people that helped repair Hogwarts had outdone themselves. The inside of the castle looked no different than it had when Hermione had studied within its halls before and for that she was glad. It didn't take Hermione long to make her way to the entrance of the Headmistress' Office, and as she stood and waited to be admitted, a ghostly chill caressed her neck and trailed down her spine. She gasped loudly and quickly looked around, but saw nothing. Turning her attention to the opening door and the welcoming arms of her mentor, Hermione soon forgot the sensation she felt, and put the matter aside.

Outside the Headmistress' Office, Severus Snape cancelled the Disillusionment spell he normally wore when wandering around the castle halls. "Interesting," he thought with some small touch of trepidation. "I wonder how the little Know-It-All knew I was here."

FOUR

Chapter 4 of 7

Severus is cursed during the Final Battle, only his Heart's True Love can save him

Snape's return to Hogwarts had not been as gracious or as welcoming as Hermione's had been. Minerva McGonagall was perfectly kind and hired him on the spot, but it tore at Severus that she looked at him as she would a stranger, and continued to do so every time they met. Severus wasn't sure he would be able to handle things for much longer, but he needed Albus Dumbledore's Pensieve and the potions labs and ingredients for personal research so he stayed, painful as it was.

Severus Snape looked over the castle grounds from his perch on the Eastern turret of the Astronomy Tower. It had the best view of the forest and lake, especially as the sun came up. Severus spent a lot of sunrises musing on his life, and why he had come back to the place of greatest failures. Coming back to Hogwarts had been almost as painful as leaving had been. If he had known then what would happen when Hermione Granger had "rescued" him, he would have immediately gone back to the battlefield and done whatever he had to do to get the Dark Lord to kill him. He snorted a laugh and leaned his head back against the rough stone of the turret and thought back on the past year and little more it had been since the Final Battle.

Finding himself in Hermione Granger's parents' garden should have been the biggest shock of that day. Certainly being cursed by the Dark Lord and his Death Eaters was no surprise, and it wasn't like he truly wanted to die, he was just ready for it all to be over. Of course, he should have known that disappearing from the battle was just the start. So Severus took advantage of the little Know-It-All's amnesia to sneak away and disappear for good. Leaving his two Masters behind, at least one of them dead, had been something Severus couldn't pass up, and he ignored the little niggles of guilt that he felt, as he made his escape. The shock of being free at last had faded quickly, and Severus had reveled in his anonymity in the beginning as he travelled the world like he had never been able to before. He took in everything almost manically, terrified it would end as soon as he woke from whatever dream he was having. The reality of his situation ultimately began to wear on the man, and there was nothing left to do but return home and try to fix things.

The Potions master scoffed as he stared off towards the lightening sky where the sun was beginning to reach its rays. "Amnesia, I should have known THAT was too easy an explanation," he muttered aloud.

No, it wasn't as simple as that. Hermione Granger didn't have amnesia. Severus Snape just didn't exist any longer. Well, he did exist, just not to anyone living or dead except himself and his soul mate. His thrice bedamned master and his penchant for drama had left Severus in limbo... literally. The spell that the Dark Lord had used didn't kill or maim, it just rendered the cursed soul forgotten, completely removed from the memories and knowledge of everyone who knew him. He wasn't even a memory in his student's nightmares any longer. No matter how many times he was introduced to someone, as soon as he was out of sight of that person, he was forgotten again like he never existed. After a few months of wandering and searching for a counter curse, punctuated by the pain of being completely alone had led him to the only place he could find an answer.

The curse on Severus had made returning to Hogwarts and teaching a tad difficult, but he worked his way through it. After several months of re-introducing himself every time he entered a room or had a class, Severus took a page from Professor Binns and set up an elaborate ruse to teach in peace and to avoid staff meetings. The Potions classroom was now haunted by an ancient professor who was so protective of his territory, Hogwarts staff steered clear, and the students only went to the dungeons during class time where they found the day's lesson on the board, and the necessary ingredients for brewing in the student cupboard. It had been a long first year back, but as in every task, Severus endured. And it was there at Hogwarts, that he finally found the curse he had been hit with, and it was there that he began to realise there would never be a counter.

All of the dunderheads had returned to Hogwarts a month prior, and with them the dreams. It had been at least a year since these particular dreams had haunted his sleep. The strange nightmares had returned, filled with a gut-wrenching sense of loss, of seeking some tangible thing just out of reach. Severus, becoming agitated in his sleep, jerked fitfully awake. He rolled frantically out of bed, burning his feet on the frigid stone floor as he hurried into the loo. Staggering to the sink, he muttered a quiet "Lumos" to light the room. Severus proceeded to splash his face with cool water trying to quell the nausea that threatened to overwhelm him. Propping himself on one hand, Severus dragged the other through his hair and stared at his haggard visage in the mirror. Bloodshot eyes and dark circles mocked the Potions master as he was tormented by the visions wildly churning through his mind and the absolute knowledge that some part of him was missing and he had no idea of what or where it was. Knowing there was no use in remaining in front of the mirror, Severus returned to bed needing to rest, but dreading what he knew would come when he closed his eyes. With a harsh sigh, he

rolled onto his side, punched his pillow into more of a submissive pose and resolutely shut his eyes. Once again, he was dragged into slumber to dance with the spectres of his dreams.

A thick fog swirled around him as he moved blindly forward reaching for something desperately. He was reaching, reaching, always reaching for something just beyond his fingertips. In despair, he fell to his knees, both hands tugging at his hair as he choked back a sob. That is when he heard her. The whisper tantalised his ears, teasing his senses. The whisper brought a clearing of the fog and glimpses of long hair and robes.

"Severus? Severus, where are you? I need to find you... I need you. Severus? Severus, where are you?"

"Lily?"

The name was groaned from a place deep within his chest, pulled into a painfully pleading question.

"My Lily..."

As soon as the words left his lips the fog overtook him, thicker than ever, and he was fighting it again, desperation once again overwhelming him. He was lost in the gloom, never hearing the mournful sigh that followed him as he blindly searched his dream.

"Oh, Severus..."

Hermione jolted awake, sitting straight up in her bed, a name on her lips. She pressed her trembling hands to her chest and focused on controlling her breathing. After a few minutes, her breathing had slowed and she fell back onto her pillows. Closing her eyes, she tried to relax again to sleep. She needed her rest to keep up with her classes and apprenticeship. Unfortunately, Hermione knew it wouldn't be that simple. The dreams had begun again.

Just after the Final Battle, Hermione had awoken in her parents' living room. She couldn't remember why she was there, only that she had been Portkeyed from Hogwarts and it had something to do with a request by Professor Dumbledore. It hadn't taken very long for the Order to locate her, and she was brought back to Grimmauld Place a heroine. The whole incident had been so strange, but no one ever questioned her or asked what really happened because the Boy Who Lived adamantly declared that Hermione's actions had been the distraction he and Ron had needed to finally defeat Voldemort. Before the day was through, Hermione's disappearance from the battlefield was being portrayed as having been planned, so no one had been surprised it had happened. Even now, more than a year later, Hermione herself couldn't have told what was the actual truth.

But for several months after the defeat of Voldemort, Hermione was plagued with terrible dreams. They were all similar. Nothing, not even Dreamless Sleep would suppress them. The dreams were all thick fog and whispers and the smell of green herbs and Sweet Woodruff. Hermione would find herself lost in the swirling mist looking for someone. She would call his name, begging him to answer, to find her and she could hear a masculine voice, but she could never find him. She never remembered his name when she awoke and this time was no different.

As Hermione drifted back into Morpheus' embrace, she realised there WAS something different this time... She had gotten close enough to see who she was looking for. He was on his knees, but before she could touch him, the fog swirled her away again.

Aside from the nightly dreams cutting into her sleep, the term was going well and classes were wonderful. Hermione was once again in her element...studying, tutoring, and in general just being a swot. She had laid claim to a table in the library where she spent every waking moment not in class. She had scheduled plenty of study time for herself, but had also added in personal time. She didn't want to get burnt out like she had her sixth year, and she had found by accident that she didn't dream if she took a small nap during the day. She was determined to have the highest grades possible so as not to end up in a situation like she had been in with the Ministry, but she had matured enough to know not to run herself into the ground. Hermione was finally ready to admit that equal rights for all magical creatures was not something the Wizarding World was ready for on either side of the coin, so now she was determined to become the best Charms teacher she could be.

Hermione was perusing the stacks in the library, looking for a tertiary source for her latest Potions essay when she found it. Pulling out a particularly heavy tome, Hermione noticed that there was something wedged into the corner of the case the book rested in. Standing on her tiptoes, she fished out a pamphlet. It was obviously old, ancient even, bound in cracked leather and delicate to touch. The title was painted in faded gold paint, but was still somewhat legible. *Dreams Between the Soules* it read. Suddenly, a flash of the fog-filled night she dreamed of struck Hermione, and she clasped the tiny book close. Hurrying back to her table, she slipped the book into her bag, looking around furtively before returning to her work. She would read her find when she regained the privacy of her quarters.

FIVE

Chapter 5 of 7

Severus is cursed during the Final Battle, only his Heart's True Love can save him.

The dreams had awakened her again, and this time she knew there was no returning to sleep. Hermione rose from her tousled bed and got dressed, deciding that a nice long walk and some fresh air would do her a world of good. Perhaps if she tired herself out with exercise, she would sleep soundly for once. The quiet solitude of Hogwarts' empty halls was a relief to the racing brain of the witch as she tried futilely to remember any part of the dreams that tormented her nights. Hermione wandered as she tried to calm her mind, hoping that she would be able to get a little more rest before her first class that day.

The stairs that Hermione were walking down suddenly switched position, and she found herself at the base of the Astronomy Tower. Something tugged at Hermione's conscience, and she began to climb the tall staircase to the peak of the castle. Almost in a daze, she made her way up the stairs and out onto the large hall that graced the top of the tower. Her focus became the Eastern Turret, and Hermione made her way out onto the walkway that overlooked the castle grounds.

Hermione's perusal of the turret and view was suddenly interrupted by a sharp intake of breath and a muttered swearword.

"What in Merlin's name are you doing out here, girl?" The question was sneered with some unidentifiable emotion clinging to them.

"Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't know anyone was up here, and I came to try to clear my head... so I could sleep again..." Hermione rambled to the stranger staring at her, curiosity

as to who this man was burning through her along with the desire to get closer.

"This place is off limits this time of morning. Get back to your rooms before I take points," Severus hissed at the witch. Some odd feeling was drawing him towards the girl, and he was desperately trying to ignore it. He could smell the scent of her shampoo and wanted nothing more than to bury his face in the mass of curly hair. That revelation struck him like a blow to the solar plexus, and he lashed out.

"Get out of here!" he growled, eyes narrowing. "Seventy-Five points from Gryffindor."

Hermione drew her slight frame to its full height. "Points? Just who do you think you are? Why are you even here, hiding in the tower?"

She pulled her wand and flourished it at Severus, realising finally that she was alone with an unknown man. "I know you aren't a professor; I've not seen you in the Great Hall. Perhaps the Headmistress should know about you."

Hermione made to cast a Patronus when her wrist was grabbed. Snape jerked her arm, interrupting the wand movements the witch was beginning. "I'll thank you to mind your business, Miss Granger..."

Hermione gasped in shock, then turned and ran from the formidable wizard that occupied the Astronomy Tower. He had known who she was. A stranger, hiding in the castle knew who she was. All she could think was that she had to get back to the safety of her room. Hermione hurried back as quickly as she could and threw herself into bed. Unfortunately, she traded one puzzle for another and it took even longer than usual to fall back to sleep. When Hermione's alarm woke her several hours later, the only memory she had of her walk the night before was the niggling thought that she had forgotten something on the Astronomy tower.

Severus stared at the empty space Hermione Granger had just occupied. He had an odd feeling dragging at his chest, but determined it was because she had been the one to save his life. "Wonderful. I owe the Know-It-All a life debt, that can be the only explanation for this feeling."

Eventually the sun began to appear, and Severus pushed the thoughts of the witch who had invaded his personal space as far into the back of his mind as he could, and rose to begin his day as the Ghost Who Taught Potions.

Hermione was in her element at last. She swept aside the dreams that haunted her and the odd happenings as she walked the castle halls. Several times she had almost fallen down the moving stairs, and once she was almost crushed by a suit of armor that had been charmed to life by another student. Now she stood in the centre of her sitting room casting all of the Charms she had to be proficient in for the NEWT. She had been at this for weeks, determined to take the exam early so she could get into her apprenticeship more fully. Professor Flitwick had done everything he could up to this point, but one was required to have a NEWT in Charms in order to be able to move into the more complicated charms and charm theory. As long as she was a Charms student, she couldn't help grade her fellows' work, and Flitwick needed as much help there as he could get!

At this point, Hermione had used everything within her reach to charm in various ways, and now she was looking for something else to practice on. As she searched around the sitting room, Hermione realised there wasn't much left to choose from, so she walked into her bedroom. A glint of gold caught her eye, and she happily pounced on the Phoenix hairclip she had almost forgotten about.

Taking the jeweled piece back into the other room, she immediately began casting charms on it. She made it sing and fly and even dance in mid-air. After several more minutes of working on her charms, Hermione began cancelling them one by one. She saved the Phoenix for last, enjoying watching it flit around the room. Smiling, she cast Finite Incantatem on the piece and watched in shock as it did far more than she was expecting. The phoenix began to grow exponentially, the wings coming around in a curve with the feathers joining underneath, forming a bowl. Hermione stared in shock as she realised that her hair clip, her gift from the former Headmaster, was the Pensieve that had dominated his office when he was alive. It only took her a moment more to recognise that the shimmering eyes she had always admired were swirls of stored memories.

Hermione stepped towards the now fully formed Pensieve. It was quite a large and elaborate piece.

"Headmaster, what else are you asking of me? I went to my parents' like you wanted me to, but there was nothing there and no one ever came. What do you want now? The war is over," she intoned aloud. "What memories could you possibly have for me rather than Harry?"

Thoughts churned through Hermione's mind as she reeled from this discovery. She shook her head in bemusement and then jerked in fear. What if the memories were needed before the battle, what if there was something they were supposed to do and now it was ruined because she hadn't figured out the puzzle?

Sighing, Hermione decided to take a chance anyway and see what Professor Dumbledore had left her. She bandied about the idea of getting the Headmistress, but something told her that if Dumbledore wanted someone else to see it, he wouldn't have secretly gifted the phoenix to her. Hermione reached out and popped the jeweled eye out of the right side of the Pensieve. She carefully poured the shimmery liquid into the bowl and took a deep breath. Before she could change her mind, Hermione plunged her face into the memories and found herself falling... falling... falling. There were two men arguing in the Headmaster's office; and Hermione, getting her bearings, made her way closer to hear what was going on.

Albus Dumbledore sat behind the grand desk in the Headmaster's office, blue eyes subdued for once. He was watching the dark figure hunched over in the window seat opposite him. After a moment, the Headmaster made his way over to the man and spoke softly.

"Severus, there was nothing that could be done. All is occurring as it was meant to, as it needs to. The boy is safe for now, but mark my words, Tom Riddle will be back and you must be ready."

The dark figure looked up at the wizard hovering over him. "I told you I would spy for you; I told you I would do whatever it took to finish this. Never question my resolve again!"

The memory swirled into a fog not unlike the ones that filled Hermione's dream, then cleared and another memory began. This one was in a sitting room Hermione didn't recognise, but since the dark man was in shirt-sleeves, she assumed it was his quarters. Creeping closer, she listened to the newest conversation.

"Severus, when the time comes YOU must make the final move. I am counting on you to not allow my torture at the hands of your fellows. You must also protect young Draco."

Severus glared at the old man. "I am tired; perhaps the Dark Lord will do me a favour and execute me next time I am summoned. What would you do then without your faithful lapdog spilling blood for you, keeping your hands and soul from being stained."

Dumbledore smiled benignly. "Severus, Severus... you will survive and if you do not, then you will have earned your reward. I know I ask much from you, but you are the only one I can count on unreservedly. The ONLY one!"

The next memory startled Hermione from her musings. Albus Dumbledore was speaking directly to her as he stared into a mirror.

"Miss Granger, I am sure that this has come as a bit of a shock to you, but I wanted to make sure that you understood why I am entrusting the safety of Severus Snape to you. I know he was harsh as a professor, but he is truly a good man. If he survives the war with Tom, if you all survive this war, I want to make sure that Severus is properly rewarded, not punished. He has been placed in a very difficult situation, and I rest assured that you will do everything in your power to keep in safe."

Dumbledore stared into the mirror, blue eyes twinkling madly. "There is another reason I chose you, Hermione. Recall when your class performed the Soul Mate charm? We do the charm, but it only works a handful of times in a five-hundred-year period. Filius was thrilled when your aura glowed after the spell was cast. What no one knew was that Severus Snape was with me when it happened. He also glowed. Yes, Hermione, you are soul mates... take great care of each other."

Hermione fell out of the Pensieve and promptly threw up from the disorientation. She retched until she couldn't bring anything else up and then rolled over onto her back on the floor. A sob was wrenched from her as she realised what the memory meant. Severus Snape, her Potions master and Albus Dumbledore's spy was alive, and for some unknown reason, she had forgotten all about him. That realisation triggered another niggling memory. Professor Snape was here at Hogwarts and he was the mystery man she had run into on the Astronomy Tower. And they were soul mates...

SIX

Chapter 6 of 7

Severus is cursed during the Final Battle, only his Heart's True Love can save him.

Once again, not mine!

The memories in the Pensieve were all similar in that they were pieces of evidence collected to prove Severus Snape, Hogwarts Potions master was innocent. Well, not innocent per se, but not guilty of the murder of Albus Dumbledore or of being a Death Eater. Hermione spent an entire weekend with the Pensieve, playing and replaying the day of the Final Battle and the last year in general, trying to determine why she couldn't remember the Professor. And it wasn't just Hermione herself, but NO ONE remembered him. It was like he had never been born. Even his name disappeared from history as she found out when taking an afternoon to look through old Hogwarts yearbooks.

Hermione sat on her sofa and stared at the fire burning merrily in the fireplace. She had been startled awake once again by those ridiculous dreams, and once again she couldn't quiet her mind enough to go back to sleep. Looking at the clock, she realised that it was close to the same time of night it had been when she had seen the man on the Astronomy Tower. Making a quick decision, she grabbed her cloak and shoes and headed out of her door.

It didn't take long for Hermione to make her way to the base of the tower, and she gingerly stepped onto the stairs. The higher she climbed, the more nervous she got, her steps echoing lightly in the stairwell. Hermione gained the main floor of the Astronomy Tower and almost lost her nerve. She rallied, wrapping her Gryffindor courage around her and making her way to the serpent's lair.

Severus Snape had settled into his place on the Astronomy Tower's Eastern turret and leant his head back onto the stone wall. He sighed lightly, another long day of teaching potions not helping his dark mood. After classes, he had spent another several hours in futile research trying to counter that damned curse of the Dark Lord's. It had to be something of his own creation, no matter in what book Severus looked or what potion he brewed or spell he created, it was no use, nothing ever worked.

The Potions master would have thrown himself off of the tower in frustration, but experience had proven that was not an option. He couldn't even kill himself because of the curse. He was, indeed, damned to wander the Earth, unknown and unloved.

Somewhere during his short-lived independence, Severus had taken up smoking. It wasn't particularly pleasant tasting or smelling, but he had nothing better to do, and it wasn't like he could DIE from it, so smoke he did. He had just lit another cigarette when a voice beside him caused him to start and burn his leg with ash. He had been so wrapped up in his thoughts he hadn't heard anyone on the stairs, and now he was swallowing his tongue and way too much smoke all at once.

"What the devil...," he gasped through a coughing fit, glaring fiercely at the witch standing near his knee.

Hermione looked at him quite unrepentantly. "Those are quite bad for you, Professor Snape."

Severus wound up to begin his rant about nosy people and the sanctity of personal space when he nearly swallowed his tongue again. "What did you say?" he hissed. "Answer me, girl..."

"I said, those are bad for you." Hermione tried very hard not to roll her eyes at the fearsome man.

"No, who did you say I was. What name did you call me?" There was an edge of urgency in his voice, and Hermione immediately responded.

"Professor Snape. That is your name, after all."

Severus slid off his perch and grabbed Hermione's arms, shaking her slightly. "You know who I am?" His voice was raspy from the cigarette smoke and unnamed emotions that roiled through him.

Hermione nodded. "Yes, I know who you are, and I know everything about your work with the Order. I just don't know why no one else knows who you were."

She eased out of his grip as he stood staring at her. "I have made a list of what we need to do. First of course, we need to find out what happened to you. It stands to reason that you were cursed because I don't think that everyone else could have been cursed. Second, we..."

"Miss Granger..." Severus attempted to interrupt Hermione's planning. "MISS GRANGER!"

Hermione stopped her pacing and looked up. "I'm sorry, you called my name?"

"Futurs semotus ex memoria quod fio somnium..."

Severus watched Hermione as she translated the Latin in her head. If he had been a jovial man, he would have burst into laughter as he watched her eyes narrow and her lips purse.

"So the curse removes you from memory, but you can be seen in dreams? But who would dream of you?" Hermione gasped as she realised how that sounded. "I'm so sorry, that didn't come out the way I meant."

Severus snorted. "It is perfectly fine, Miss Granger, I know how people feel about me, or rather how they felt... "

"Sir, we need to figure out how to cancel this curse. The memories I have also clear you as a Death Eater."

"Miss Granger, all this is very lovely, but why are you even bothering with me. You expect me to believe that Albus Dumbledore left evidence exonerating me of my crimes to you and not a senior Order member? The man was barmy, but he wasn't a fool. So I appreciate that you know me, at least until you walk away from me, and I do appreciate your attempt to help, but go back to your studies. There is nothing to be done for me."

Hermione, hands on her hips, stood firmly in front of the Potions master and wouldn't back down. "I am here to help, the Headmaster asked it of me and I won't let him down. You saved us all and now I will try to repay that."

"It still doesn't explain why you are the one he trusted, so I must thank you to leave well enough alone."

Before she could answer, Severus was gone.

For several weeks, Hermione tried in vain to meet up with Severus again. He avoided the Potions classroom as usual, but he was also avoiding the Astronomy Tower. Hermione couldn't even get a note delivered by house-elf or owl. The dreams were getting worse, and she was feeling desperate. One evening after dinner, Hermione had rediscovered the little pamphlet she had taken from the Library. She sat down to read and became more excited as she did. In the middle of the book was the curse Voldemort had placed on Severus. The next page detailed the counter and how simple it was. All he needed was to kiss his Heart's True Love now known as a Soul Mate. Hermione knew that Dumbledore wasn't a Seer and couldn't have known that this curse would be used, but it seemed a miracle that he decided to trust Hermione because he had seen the Soul Mate charm work.

Another week passed and Hermione was getting beyond antsy. She finally attached a note to her latest brew in Potions class and went about the rest of her day.

Hermione practically ran up to the Astronomy tower hoping that Severus would be there. She drew up, panting, relieved to see him in his usual place.

"I found the answer! I found a book by accident in the Library, and it was all about Soul Mates and dreams. In it was the curse Voldemort used on you!"

Severus looked at Hermione. "Soul Mates? What, pray tell, are you talking about?"

Hermione huffed a bit. "The curse is an ancient one. The only cure is a kiss from your Heart's True Love... That is what they used to call soul mates."

Severus grunted. "Well, that is that then. You will leave and forget you know about me." He turned his back to Hermione and leaned on the turret ledge overlooking the grounds.

"I said GO!" he screamed.

Hermione burst in to tears. "No, Professor... Severus, I can't leave you. I AM your soul mate. That is why Dumbledore left me the memories. He knew that we were destined to be together; he just never planned on Voldemort punishing you for turning on him. It is why he trusted me with your life and safety. The Headmaster knew I would do anything I could to protect you. All we have to do is kiss once and it will be over. The curse will be broken."

Severus turned on Hermione, an almost deadly gleam in his eyes. "How dare you. You are no more my soul mate than Hagrid. The only person I will ever love is dead."

"But..."

"Silence, I said we are not soul mates and we aren't. I could no more love you than I could love a Flobberworm. You are nothing to me... nothing but a pain in my arse. You can't leave things alone, can you? You have to fix things. Well, leave me the hell alone, Miss Granger. I cannot stand the sight of you."

Hermione stood there, tears leaking down her face. "Severus... please..."

"I haven't given you leave to use my name. One hundred fifty points from Gryffindor for improperly addressing a professor." Severus looked at the distressed witch and went in for the kill. "Why in Merlin's name would I want something like you when I already love the best? You have nothing I want."

With that, Severus stalked away and left Hermione a sobbing mess on the Astronomy Tower floor. She knew from experience that he could be cruel, but it had not prepared her for the viciousness of this tongue. The charm had been wrong; there was no way she could be soul mates with a man like him. Yet why did his rejection leave her feeling so wretched?

SEVEN

Chapter 7 of 7

Severus is cursed during the Final Battle, only his Heart's True Love can save him.

Hermione had thrown herself into her studies after the night on the Astronomy tower. She had avoided her friends, isolating herself with the pain she was feeling. And she studied. When she wasn't getting ready for NEWTs, she was researching another way to end the curse and to break a Soul Mate bond. In her search, Hermione had discovered that soul mates could never be with anyone else. This proximity bond occurred when the two soul mates touched each other. If one died, the bond could be broken, but as long as both lived there would never be another love. The thought that she would never be in love or be loved began to wear on Hermione and so she researched and planned.

Several times she had tried to talk to Severus, but he would simply throw Lily Evans in her face so she completely gave up on him and it was driving her mad. The dreams were as vivid as ever, but now she knew him, and Severus would lose himself in the fog calling for a person who would never answer. Every time she heard the name, Hermione's heart broke a little.

Severus stayed away from the Astronomy tower after his run-in with Hermione. It still infuriated him that the little upstart Know-It-All tried to take his Lily's place. Lily was the only one he loved, would ever love, and it galled him whenever Hermione would cross his mind. He quit reading her essays and testing her potions; he knew they were perfect, just so he didn't have to think about her. And when he could stand it, he would avoid sleep when he thought she would be sleeping so that he could avoid her in the dreamscape too. The times their paths crossed, he made it clear that she was nothing to him by staying in the fog and calling for Lily.

He didn't notice the dark circles and the gaunt frame of the girl he avoided the few times she had tried to speak to him. He lashed out at her, and finally, she completely gave up on him, much to his relief.

School was almost over and graduation was looming. Hermione was tired to the bone, and she had finally decided how she was going to proceed. The little house-elf disappeared leaving Hermione alone in her parents' summer cottage. She had begged the Headmistress to allow her to go to the cottage, lying when she said her parents were there and she wanted to see them before they left on an extended trip. Headmistress McGonagall agreed readily and allowed her favourite cub to Floo as soon as she was packed.

Hermione sat at the desk in the small library, frantically writing. It had taken her most of the afternoon and evening, but she had finally finished the last of the stack of letters piled in front of her. The last thing she had written was her resignation from her Charms apprenticeship. Hermione knew that Professor Flitwick would be devastated, but she was content in her decision. Now that task was complete and she moved to the next. It would take several hours, but Hermione tuned into her favourite radio station and set herself back to work. At last, everything was done and the room was tidied. Hermione looked around the library one last time and headed off to bed.

The fog swirled thick around her as Hermione wandered the landscape. It was as dark as it had ever been, the night broken only by vivid flashes of lightening. She wandered slowly, aimlessly, no real purpose in mind, but she was filled with a sense of finality and of resolution.

To say she was surprised when she was grabbed from behind was an understatement. Even though she had sent a vial of Dreamwalker potion to Severus, she never dared dream that he would use it and talk to her one last time.

Severus let go of Hermione and turned her to face him. "What foolishness have you wrought now, Miss Granger?"

"I just wanted to let you know that I am done. I'll not bother you any longer."

"You could have owled me and saved me the bother of seeing you." Severus sneered. "But I am glad to know that you have finally seen sense. I assume that this means you will forget your ridiculous notion that we are soul mates?"

Hermione sighed. "You can't change the truth no matter how badly you may wish to, but I can't fight you and Lily any longer."

Severus just glared at the witch when she mentioned his lost love, so she continued uninterrupted.

"I have done research on soul mates, and I wanted to let you know what I found. Soul mates, if they are acknowledged and are then separated, will eventually go mad. Since you have chosen to disbelieve that we are bound, I have decided to leave. I have resigned from my apprenticeship. I won't be back at Hogwarts after tonight, so you needn't worry about us crossing paths."

Severus felt an odd pang on hearing this statement. He had been in love with Lily for so long that when this witch had come to him claiming to be his soul mate, it had infuriated him beyond belief. How else could he justify everything he had done for the last twenty years if it had not been for love? All of this, combined with the fact that Hermione was the only person in the world that knew him, made him both hate her and want to kiss her at the same time.

With no small amount of relieved smugness, Severus responded, "Allow me to wish you well, Miss Granger. Hopefully this will be our last meeting, though I do wish you success with your new apprenticeship. I am sure whoever you have contracted with will be as capable as Filius."

Hermione smiled at the dark man sadly. "I'm afraid there will be no future in Charms for me." She sniffled and then wiped her eyes.

Snape arched a brow and motioned a hand between the two of them. "Surely you won't let this ridiculousness stop you from finishing your apprenticeship, even if it is somewhere other than Hogwarts?"

"I have no other choice, sir. You won't let go of a dead woman, and I refuse to waste what's left of my life pining over you until I am locked in an asylum."

"What rubbish...," Severus began.

"I told you before, soul mates that don't bond go mad, and I refuse to do that to myself and to my friends and family. I will take control of my life now; I will not waste away in hospital somewhere." Hermione began to shout at the Potions master. "The only way to sever a connection between soul mates is to sunder one of the souls."

Severus blanched when he heard this. "You stupid girl, what have you done?"

Hermione threw her hands in the air and began to pace back and forth. "I've simply done what you want. I am leaving you alone. I have released your soul back to you and your ghost... You will have realised by now that if you and she were actually soul mates, you would have both gone mad years ago."

Severus tried to answer, but Hermione wouldn't let him.

"You shouldn't feel any pain, but the Sundering potion takes several hours to work. According to my research, you will know when it is complete."

Hermione looked at Severus as he paced back and forth. "You do realise that a Sundering potion is not fatal?" he asked.

"I also took a Heart Stop potion when I took the Dreamwalker potion. It should stop my heart when the other potion removes my soul. I couldn't bear the thought of having no soul, but still being alive, so I took precautions."

"You stupid little girl! What have you done?" Severus roared in disbelief. "Why would you kill yourself? Am I to have this on my soul too? When does it end? Go! Get away from me!"

Hermione scuttled back from the enraged man. She couldn't believe the fury that radiated off of him as he screamed at her. She turned and ran, tripping several times, until she lost herself in the fog.

Severus came awake screaming. He had known deep in his heart that Hermione was right all along. He had been clinging to the spectre of Lily for so long he didn't know how to do anything else. Dragging himself from bed and into the loo, Severus shook the cobwebs from his head and began to plan. He called a house-elf and sent a message to McGonagall asking for Hermione's whereabouts. When he didn't get an answer that helped, he visited the Headmistress' office and used Legilimency to get the answers he needed.

The Potions master gathered everything he thought he may need and set off for the Grangers' coastal retreat.

"Severus Snape! Where are you?"

Severus rolled his eyes and refused to answer the voice that called his name over and over. Everyone who knew him was aware that he despised being disturbed while he worked. Why his wife was any different, he would never know.

Wife. How easily she could have been dust beneath his feet. She had almost died even after he had done everything he knew how to do. If he had been even a few moments later, her soul would have been destroyed and her body dead. Luckily, the Sundering potion was easily countered. The antidote was one of the most simple to create, and as it was good for indigestion, Severus had plenty on hand. It was the Heart Stop potion that was the danger. It had to be allowed to wear off, and it could take days for that to happen.

Severus looked at the small vial that graced a shelf on the bookcase behind his desk. It was tiny, barely large enough to hold a dram of potion. It only took half a dram to stop the heart.

The door to his lab opened and Hermione stepped into the room. Severus set the vial back down and turned to the witch waiting by the door. It had been years, but the thought of Hermione not being in his life scared him to death.

"Dinner's ready." Her voice broke through his musings. He answered with an embrace and a whispered, "I love you."

THE END

A/N Another story finished. Thanks very much to peskipiksi for her beta work! And thanks to everyone else for reading! I appreciate it!