

Second Time's A Charm

by themistresssnape

Even though the Battle of Hogwarts is won, Hermione feels that everything has been lost. Can she make things right? Or is she meddling with a fixed point in time that cannot be changed? Rating for later chapters.

Prologue

Chapter 1 of 5

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Prologue

"Are you sure this is going to work?" Ron Weasley asked, his doubt evident in his voice.

"It has to," Hermione whispered back. The two of them stood in the outside corridor of Hogwarts Castle, streaked in blood and soot in the aftermath of the final battle. It was over. Voldemort was gone and the Wizarding world was safe.

But so many were gone. Tonks and Lupin. Colin Creevey and so many students who should never have seen the battle. Hermione felt the tears slip down her cheeks as she thought of everyone who would never see the sun rise over a safe world. Absentmindedly, she rubbed the *mudblood* scar on her forearm. So much had gone wrong.

"Maybe we should tell Harry," Ron continued, breaking into her thoughts. Hermione shook her head violently, making her sweat-streaked curls bounce.

"No! I don't think he'll let us. I don't think he'll want us to."

Ron looked around, his worried pallor making his freckles stand out even further. "Then maybe we shouldn't. Maybe it's best if we just leave things like they are..."

Hermione looked up at him, her deep brown eyes glistening with tears. She pressed her palms to her face just as her shoulders shook with sobs. Ron didn't know what to do. He had thought, all those months in the forests and around the countryside together, that there was something between him and Hermione. He thought they might have had a chance at a life together, but he didn't understand the way she was acting just then. It was so... odd.

He took a breath and tried to get himself under control. So much had happened in the past few hours that he didn't know whether he was coming or going. The world had turned topsy-turvy since they'd come through the portrait hole in the Hog's Head. Now, it seemed, things were going to become even more complicated.

"How are you planning on doing this?"

Glancing up, Hermione felt a rush of gratitude go through her limbs at the confirmation in his voice. "Really, Ron? You'll help me?"

Ron rubbed the side of his long nose, smearing soot and dirt. He tried his best to look anywhere but at her. "Well, I'm not about to let you do it alone, am I?"

Without warning, Hermione flung herself at him, throwing her arms around his neck and hugging him as tightly as she could. "Oh, Ron..."

Ron awkwardly patted her back. He waited for her to let go, but when she didn't, he gave her a strangled squeeze. After a few moments, Ron pulled away and rubbed the back of his neck. "Shouldn't we get moving with this mad plan of yours?"

Hermione straightened and wiped furiously at her eyes with the back of her hand. She took several deep breaths, feeling her body fill up with determination as if the oxygen flooding her blood carried her courage with it. She looked off into the distance, her eyes skipping over the dust and soot wafting in the breeze. People gathered on the lawn, desperate to be out of the suffocating warmth of the Great Hall, not wanting to look at the crumpled form that was Tom Riddle. Hermione could hear Harry's voice beneath Ginny's. But her own thoughts were only on the little shack by the boats.

And the body inside.

With a determined nod of her head, she met Ron's gaze. "We'll have to get down to the boats. And find a hiding place."

Ron took a quick look around, making sure that no one saw them, before he took off down the corridor. Hermione went off after him, digging her arm elbow deep into her enchanted purse. At last her hand clasped on the Time Turner she'd nicked from the Ministry when they'd broken in to find Slytherin's locket. She clutched it to her chest and whispered to no one.

"I'm coming. I'm coming, Severus."

Author's Note: It's been a while since I've written Harry Potter fanfiction. I've been in the Avengers fandom and other places. But I'm coming back to my first love. And I hope I can write stories you like again!

Time Is Tricky

Chapter 2 of 5

Even though the Battle of Hogwarts is won, Hermione feels that everything has been lost. Can she make things right?
Or is she meddling with a fixed point in time that cannot be changed? Rating for later chapters.

Chapter 1: Time Is Tricky

Hermione and Ron made their way down the sloping lawn toward the stone stairs that lead toward the boats. It wasn't more than a few hundred yards, but Hermione felt as if it took forever. A feeling of dread and overwhelming pain settled under her ribs the closer they got toward their destination. Ron went ahead of her, his wand out at the ready just in case they came upon a Death Eater that hadn't been rounded up yet. Hermione clutched her hand around the Time Turner, feeling the little hourglass press into her palm.

Not long now. I promise we'll fix it she thought desperately. A flash of onyx eyes and a worried frown burst into her mind. She gulped down her fear and tried to summon up her Gryffindor courage. The pounding in her ears made her want to vomit.

She stumbled down the stone stairs toward the boathouse, biting back the nausea that tried to claw its way up her throat. Ron's violently red hair flashed in and out of view in front of her as he hurtled around a curve in the stairs before coming back to assure her it was safe. She tried to feel relief that he was with her, but Hermione found it hard to focus on anything at the moment. Her mind turned over and over about the things that she needed to do in order to set the whole thing right.

When Ron reappeared the final time, she looked at him with dismay in her eyes. She could tell by his expression that she looked terrible. The way he reached out to her, the twitch in his jaw tipping her off that he wanted to take her into his arms, told her enough. Deep inside, Hermione felt lost and afraid. She wanted to be able to curl up in the familiarity of Ron and their friendship. She wished, just for a moment, that she could forget. That she could bury the hurt that was burning through her veins and go on.

But she couldn't. It wasn't fair to Ron. And it wasn't fair to Severus.

Ron cleared his throat and looked away for a long moment. Then he tucked his wand up his sleeve and reached out for her hand. He clasped her fingers tight in his own, giving her a reassuring squeeze. Hermione looked up and felt just a little of the trepidation ebb out of her.

"There's a place just around from the boathouse that we can hide in. I don't think any of the Death Eaters would have found it earlier."

Hermione nodded firmly, clutching the Time Turner against her chest. She felt her heart beating beneath her fingers, her blood pumping through her body in time with the pounding of her heart. "Go ahead. Show me."

Ron pulled her along behind him, along the stone quay where the first years' boats were moored. Hagrid's great boat was stored in the boathouse, the only real place they could hide to make sure that the Death Eaters wouldn't find them when they appeared hours before the end of the battle. From the boathouse, they could get across the courtyard to the Shrieking Shack without being spotted. Then they could be there to save Severus before Nagini's venom took its toll.

Ron tapped his wand on the lock of the boathouse and muttered a spell to spring the door loose. Hermione danced on her toes behind him, holding tightly to the Time Turner as if it were her only lifeline. It was as if she could hear the seconds ticking away from her, knowing that if Harry or any of the others caught them they would never make it back. No matter how much Severus had helped them, she knew that Harry would never let her risk herself to save him.

With a click, the lock sprung open. Hermione pushed past Ron and looked around hurriedly. Once she convinced herself that no one else was there, she waved Ron over. "Hurry! Stand close."

Ron stepped in to Hermione as close as he dared. Harrumphing, she snatched his wrist and tugged him close enough that she could wrap the chain of the Time Turner around his neck too. She whispered to herself, trying to figure out how far back they needed to go in order to save Severus. Her fingers trembled.

"Two hours. That should be enough."

"Are you sure, 'Mione?" Ron's voice trembled just a little with worry. He'd never traveled through time before.

"Has to be." Hermione put her fingertips to the tiny hourglass and took a deep breath. Just as she was about to twist the Time Turner, they heard a voice outside the door of the boathouse. It sounded very much like Harry.

"Quick, 'Mione!"

With trembling fingers, Hermione gave the Time Turner a twist. A burning, tugging sensation wrapped around them. Ron felt the chain digging into his neck, the force of time swirling around them dragging him close to Hermione. It was like traveling by Floo and Portkey and Apparating all at the same time.

The world around them blurred as time slipped backward. Just as they should have been slowing down, settling into the flow of time two hours prior, something happened. The Time Turner shuddered around their necks, the world around them giving a violent shake and jerk. Hermione watched as the Time Turner began spinning faster and faster. She tried to wrap her hand around it, tried to curse it into stopping and throwing them out into the correct timeline.

Their ears filled with the sound of shattering glass as the Time Turner began to crack. In one instant, the little hourglass splintered into a thousand little shards. The sand splattered out around them, the whip of time rushing past sucking it away and into the space between the seconds. Hermione shouted into the void, the great swish of time carrying the sound past Ron's ears.

And suddenly, without warning, they slammed into the floor of the boathouse. The Time Turner's stream dropped them out with a crushing finality. Hermione landed hard on her arm and felt the bones snap and shatter all the way up to her elbow. She let out a violent scream that echoed around the boathouse.

"No!"

Ron dragged himself to his feet and wiped away the blood from his neck and face. "Hermione! What happened? Are you okay?"

Tears swept down her face. Tears of pain and frustration and a feeling of loss that she never could have predicted she would feel. There was no fear of where in time they had fallen out. As long as they were at Hogwarts, they were safe. But she knew now that there was no hope in saving Severus. Whenever they had fallen out, they would never get to him now.

Suddenly, the door of the boathouse opened. Ron looked up, wand at the ready, to see a pair of boys step into the room. One of them wore glasses and had untidy black hair. The other had a smug grin, his shirt tail hanging over his belt and his robes flapping open. They looked from Ron to Hermione and back again.

"What the bloody hell happened here?" asked Sirius Black.

Notes From The Mistress: I hope you're intrigued! Please review, it means a lot to me!

Time is Complicated

Chapter 3 of 5

Even though the Battle of Hogwarts is won, Hermione feels that everything has been lost. Can she make things right? Or is she meddling with a fixed point in time that cannot be changed? Rating for later chapters.

Chapter 2: Time Is Complicated

It took James Potter half a moment to realize that the girl on the floor of the boathouse was injured. He darted toward Hermione with a speed that reminded Ron instantly of the way Harry moved on the Quidditch pitch. It seemed Harry had inherited more than just his father's untidy black hair.

James knelt next to Hermione and looked down into her tearstained face. Hermione was curled around her broken arm and whimpering in pain. Ron watched James warily, not quite trusting the unknown boy around his friend. With a gentle voice, James coaxed Hermione into a sitting position so that he could take a look at her arm. She cradled the damaged limb against her chest, her wrist secure against her sternum.

"Let's have a look," James said soothingly. "Come on then, we'll get you up to Madam Pomfrey. She'll give you some Skele-Gro and set you to rights."

Ron crossed over to help James get Hermione to her feet. Sirius lounged in the doorway, watching the scene with an air of disinterest. He rolled his eyes and ran a hand through his already tousled hair.

"You really think that's a good idea, Prongs?" Black said slowly. "Probably should take them to Dumbledore first."

James shot his friend a rather nasty look. "Can't you see she's hurt, Padfoot? It isn't like they're Muggles. They got here by some kind of magic."

"Magic smagic. They still shouldn't be here. I know we're not afraid of getting into trouble normally, but..." Black looked from Ron to Hermione and then fixed his gaze on James. "In this case, I'm willing to avoid a little trouble."

Rolling his eyes, James gave Ron a pointed glance, silently asking if he could support Hermione for a moment. Ron nodded and slipped an arm around his friend's waist as James crossed the boathouse in a few strides. He came nose to nose with Sirius and started whispering furiously. James prodded Sirius in the chest as Hermione leaned heavily against Ron, whimpering each time her broken arm was jostled.

After a few more moments of hissed conversation, Sirius gave a great hump and dashed out of the boathouse. He took off at a run up the stone steps while James crossed back over to Ron and Hermione.

"Where's he gone?" Ron asked grumpily. Normally, Ron had been very fond of Sirius. Of course, that had been an older version of him that had been mellowed a bit by time and the lost years of Azkaban. This Sirius... there was something that just rubbed Ron the wrong way about this version.

"To fetch Professor Dumbledore. He's going to meet us in the hospital wing."

It took them what seemed like forever to climb the stone steps to the grassy lawn. The sun was low in the sky, making Ron think it was near dusk. Luckily, there weren't many people running about the castle. There was just enough humidity in the air for him to guess the time of year. Early September in the highlands...and the start of term at Hogwarts.

James was nearly as talented as Harry at getting around Hogwarts castle without being seen. He was gentle as he guided Hermione up the stairs toward the hospital wing. Ron walked at her other side when he could, scouting ahead to make sure no one was around when he couldn't. James kept up a constant stream of gentle chatter with the purpose of keeping Hermione occupied, helping her ignore the pain from climbing one flight of stairs after another.

At last they reached the door to the hospital wing. Headmaster Dumbledore stood at the door with Sirius on one side, Madam Pomfrey on the other. James very carefully

led Hermione over to the matron and handed over his charge. Hermione's whimpers had lessened on the way up the stairs, but her face was white with pain.

They could hear Madam Pomfrey as she examined the arm on the way into the hospital wing. "Oh, dear, broken. Yes... badly it seems. Here, dear, we'll set it and give you a bit of Skele-Gro to heal a bit faster..."

Professor Dumbledore looked over the tops of his half-moon spectacles and took in the soot and dirt smudged person of Ron Weasley. His crisp blue eyes skipped from Ron to James and Sirius before he nodded as if he'd figured it all out already.

"Mr. Potter, thank you for bringing the girl to Poppy. I'm sure she'll be grateful when her arm is finished healing," said the Headmaster. "Mr. Black, I thank you as well. I will surely get to the bottom of this. Now off the both of you pop. I do believe you have classes in the morning."

With a backward glance toward the hospital wing, James and Sirius made their way back down the corridor and out of sight of Ron and the Headmaster. The doors to the hospital wing swung closed, muffling the sound of Madam Pomfrey caring for Hermione. Professor Dumbledore took Ron by the shoulder and drew him away from the hushed voices. Ron dragged his feet, not wanting to be parted from Hermione, not when they didn't know how things were going to go.

"It's alright," Professor Dumbledore said carefully. "She'll be just fine. And I assure you that, as soon as we have finished talking, that you may come right back to your friend. But first I need you to explain to me *who* you are and *how* you came to be in my boathouse."

Ron gave a little gulp and looked up into the face of the man he'd buried back in his own time. It was an odd sensation to see Dumbledore walking and talking, almost as if he hadn't a care in the world. Ron's gut twisted and fell behind his knees.

His silence spoke volumes. Dumbledore put his arm around Ron's shoulders and gave him a squeeze. "Ah, my boy. It's one of those kinds of tales isn't it? Then that calls for some lemon drops and some tea. Come along."

With an unfamiliar sense of trepidation, Ron followed the Headmaster down the hallway toward the great griffin door warden. "Take your time and start at the beginning..."

"Wonder how they got there," James muttered as he let Sirius lead him back through the castle toward Gryffindor Tower. He rubbed a spot in the center of his forehead, feeling a headache begin to pound behind his eyes.

"Dumbledore'll straighten it out," Sirius responded. He tossed his wand up in the air and watched it turn end over end before catching it in his palm. "Nothing he can't figure out, you know."

"If that's true, then he knows all about us, Padfoot." James shoved his friend playfully in the shoulder. "I think sometimes things can slip past him. Like those two."

"Or this..." Sirius' voice had taken on a mischievous lilt. It drew James' attention so that the other boy looked up. He followed his friend's gaze to the boy making his way down the corridor toward them, his face stuck in the pages of a musty book.

Sirius grinned in that way that made him look almost as if he was mad. There was a feral gleam in his eyes that made even his partner in crime wonder if there wasn't a sadist buried somewhere in the black sheep of the Black family. James reached out to catch Sirius by the arm, but missed him by an inch.

"Sirius!"

But the other boy was long past hearing the caution in his friend's voice. Sirius stalked down the hallway, a spring in his step as he tossed his wand over his head and caught it again. With purposeful force, he bumped into the book reading boy so hard that the edges of the book slammed into the boy's face.

"Where do you think *you're* going, Snivellus?"

The other boy clutched the book to his chest and snatched his hand toward his pocket, searching for his wand. "Fuck off, Black!"

Dark laughter bubbled out of Sirius. "Oh, come now, Snivellus. That's not a very nice thing to say. Maybe I should teach you how to mind your manners."

The boy they called "Snivellus" dropped his book to the floor and launched himself across the corridor toward Sirius. His teeth were gnashed in fury as he struck out with his fist toward Sirius' face. The swing went wide so that the boy hit the stone wall behind Sirius.

Hitting the ground and shaking with fury, "Snivellus" struggled back to his feet even while he cradled his hand to his chest. He was certain at least two of his fingers were broken. He groped with his free hand for his wand, finally closing his fingers around the ebony wood.

"*Levicor...*"

The spell wasn't even out of the boy's mouth before a fist connected with his jaw. Sirius stood back, rubbing his knuckles as the other boy stumbled back, stunned. James saw the blood begin to dribble down the other boy's robes and grabbed Sirius by the arm.

"Go! Bloody hell, Sirius, you're going to get us expelled!"

James gave his friend a push toward the staircase leading up to Gryffindor Tower before turning toward the other boy. "Snape..."

"Fuck off, too, Potter."

With a shrug, James turned and went after Sirius, feeling more than a little guilty that he hadn't done more to stop the scene from playing out. Snape pulled himself to his feet and rubbed the back of his hand over his split lip. His eyes watered and ached. He was quite sure that the book had given him two black eyes.

He didn't want to deal with the mess of going back to the Slytherin common room and hearing Lucius give him a hard time about letting the blood traitor Black get the best of him. Of course, the coward had resorted to Muggle tactics to do it. In a straight wand fight, Snape was certain he could best Sirius every time. Snape snatched his books and bag from the floor and made his way to the hospital wing, wondering how he was going to explain this to Madam Pomfrey.

Hermione stared at the ceiling as she tried to avoid the pins and needles feeling in her arm. Madam Pomfrey had straightened her out in a tic, that's for sure. The wounded arm was set and bandaged, held against her chest with a sling. The matron had given her a dose of Skele-Gro and a pain relieving potion so that she could sleep through the night. But it was a little difficult for her to think about sleeping just then.

When they'd first been dumped out of the Time Turner's stream, Hermione had been so blinded by pain and by frustration that she hadn't realized exactly when they were. Now that she had a few moments to think about it, she realized that it had been James Potter and Sirius Black who had found them. The longer Hermione thought about it, the more she realized that the Time Turner exploding on them might have been the best thing that could have happened.

Now, it wasn't just about saving Severus from Nagini's venom. Now it could be about so very much more.

Just then, the door at the end of the room opened. Someone entered and stalked across the room to the matron's office. There was a rush of murmured voices and then an exclamation from Madam Pomfrey.

"You'll tell me this instant, Severus Snape!"

Hermione's heart bumped against her ribs so hard that it ached. She felt as if she could fly when she heard that name. She shimmied until she was sitting up in bed enough that she could see when he came back into the room. Severus turned the corner, followed by Madam Pomfrey watching him like a hawk, and slammed his bag down on the end of the bed across the aisle from her.

It was only then that Hermione realized that Severus was bleeding. His lip was busted and swollen, blood crusting on his chin and down his robes. There was a livid red mark on his jaw, growing even darker by the moment. Deep bruises began underneath his eyes.

Dear Merlin, Hermione swore silently, someone's beat him up!

Across the aisle, Severus let Madam Pomfrey examine jaw and wrist with little more than a disgruntled look. He mumbled responses to her questions, but offered no extra information as to what happened to him. Hermione found herself straining her ears, trying to hear his voice. Even from the distance, she could tell that it wasn't quite as deep as in her own time, but it still had the same musical note to her ears.

Unfortunately, Severus chose that moment to turn his attention to the other patient in the room. His onyx eyes met hers, and she felt a familiar tingle down her spine. Somehow, it didn't feel so... forbidden to feel it now. He was her age. But he wasn't quite her Severus.

His gaze was just as intense as she remembered. Perhaps more so as she felt a blush rushing into her cheeks and forced herself to look away from him. She could still feel his eyes on her, even as Madam Pomfrey cast a spell over his cracked knuckles and dabbed a potion on his jaw.

Severus, for his part, couldn't understand why he had the overwhelming urge to just look at the girl lying in the bed across the room. It was a sharp tugging in his chest, in the spot beneath his ribs where his breath settled. He barely heard when the matron told him he could go.

It was inexplicably difficult to force himself to his feet, to walk to the hospital wing doors and to slip out into the corridor. He made it four steps down the corridor before he turned on his heel and hovered outside the door, trying to figure out who the girl happened to be.

"Oh dear," said Dumbledore, sitting back in his chair in the Head's office. He picked a fragment of a lemon drop from his beard and flicked it toward the bin. "That's quite a tale, Mr. Weasley."

Ron looked across the desk at the Headmaster. It was still almost too much for him to look at that wizened face and not remember what happened the night he died. Ron cleared his throat hard, fighting back a stream of tears. "Yes, sir."

Dumbledore tapped his fingertips together, his head tipped to the side in thought. "It seems to me that there's something to your tale that you have left out, but I suppose you have your reasons for not telling me the whole lot of it. For now, I should think, we have enough to be getting on with. You and Miss Granger will have to remain at the castle until we can find a way to get you back to your own time."

The Headmaster looked off into the distance for a long moment before he sat forward and tapped the side of his nose. "The Time Turner shattered, you say?"

Ron nodded, remembering the sensation of being lashed about in a stream of seconds and minutes and hours and decades. He felt as if he was going to vomit at the thought of it.

"Interesting..."

Notes from The Mistress: This one is long, and I think the rest of the chapters will be about this length. It seems to fit what's going on at the moment. Thanks to a lovely reviewer for giving me so much to think about with this story!

Time is Depressing

Chapter 4 of 5

Even though the Battle of Hogwarts is won, Hermione feels that everything has been lost. Can she make things right?
Or is she meddling with a fixed point in time that cannot be changed? Rating for later chapters.

Chapter 3: Time Is Depressing

Ron hurried back to the hospital wing after his strange meeting with Dumbledore. He wasn't quite sure what to make of what the Headmaster thought of the shattering Time Turner, but it seemed that even the Headmaster wasn't sure what he thought. A faint feeling of unease settled in Ron's gut as he made his way back down the corridor to where Hermione was waiting.

When he turned the corner, Ron saw a figure hovering around the hospital wing doors. The figure paced a few steps back and forth, almost as if it couldn't figure out whether to stay or go. Ron reached into his pocket for his wand and held it at the ready. It didn't matter if they were in the same castle as a seventeen year old James Potter. Ron knew for a fact that there were Death Eaters in the castle... or at least Death Eaters in waiting.

He was only a few steps behind the figure when it whirled around, robes billowing in a fashion that made Ron start with recognition. Staring back at him was the same pair of bottomless eyes that had terrified him during his first years at Hogwarts. The face wasn't as lined from scowling or hissing at dunderheads, but he recognized the large nose.

"Snape!" Ron shouted. It was the first thing he could think of even if it wasn't the brightest thing to say.

An angry scowl twisted Snape's face, making him look as if he'd eaten something sour. "Who are you? How do you know my name?"

Ron's mouth opened and closed so quickly it made him look like a landed fish. His eyes nearly bulged out of his head. Unsteady fingers held his wand, not sure if he should use it or not. Even though the Snape standing in front of him was just seventeen, he was pretty sure he had a few good hexes up his sleeves already.

The trembling in his hands drew Snape's attention to Ron's wand. A lightning strike of fear rushed over his face before he puffed out his chest and closed in on Ron.

"You're one of Potter's friends, aren't you?"

"Well, yeah, H..."

Snape's eyes narrowed, flicking back and forth from Ron's face to his wand and back again. "Of course you are. He and that idiot Black sent you, didn't they?"

"What?" Ron stammered, too flabbergasted to figure out what was going on. "No, of course they didn't!"

Ron felt himself being pushed back against the stone wall as Snape stalked toward him. Those menacing black eyes were very familiar, almost as if they had reached back across the years to make sure Ron knew he was in quite a lot of trouble. With a snarl, Snape stepped into Ron's space and practically pressed the end of his wand to the other boy's throat.

"Do not. Lie. To me."

Gaping, afraid to say the wrong thing, Ron just stared back at Snape, his eyes bugging out of his skull. He was certain that his future professor was going to hex him within an inch of his life. Whatever had landed them at Hogwarts in this time, it was going to get him killed. There would be no getting things straightened out and back home to their own time. Not if Snape was going to put him six feet under.

The door behind them opened with a faint creaking. Madam Pomfrey had cleaned her up, but Hermione still looked haggard and worn. Her bound arm rested tight against her ribs as she peeked out from around the doorframe. There were dark circles under her eyes already, but there was something about the glow in her eyes that made Ron uncomfortable. She'd looked at him that way... once.

"What's going on, Ron?" Hermione's voice was soft, her brow furrowed when she looked between the two of them. She tried to keep her eyes on him, but she couldn't help the way she was drawn to the seventeen-year-old Severus just feet away from her. "What have you done?"

Clearing his throat guiltily, Ron shifted from one foot to the other. He kept his eyes on Snape's wand... just in case. "Nothing! I was just coming back from talking to Professor Dumbledore and saw him lurk...outside the hospital wing."

Hermione stepped fully out into the corridor. She had changed into a clean pair of pajamas from the hospital supply, her hair tied up in a loose ponytail. It was almost comical to see Snape's expression change so quickly. His eyes lost some of their menace, and Ron would have sworn he blushed.

"Hello," she said quietly. There was an easy smile on her face as she let her gaze roam over Severus' features. She fought back the urge to reach out and touch him.

For a long moment, he stared at her. That feeling, that tightness and pulling beneath his ribs, stretching along his diaphragm, it was back. The strength and suddenness of it made frustration and anger roll inside him. He didn't know this... this girl. And it unnerved him that she made him feel something that he only ever believed he could feel for Lily.

"Where did you come from?" he spat, trying to rein in his anger. He fought the urge to crowd her back into the hospital wing just to get her out of his way... out of his mind.

Hermione and Ron looked at one another. Ron tried not to look as if he wanted to say that this whole thing was a bad idea. It would have been just fine with him if they just went down to Hogsmeade, took a room at the Three Broomsticks, and waited this whole mess out until Dumbledore could figure out what to do. But he knew Hermione well enough to know that once she set her mind on something, there was little that he could do to change her mind. And so he just sighed, looking back at her in a way that let her know that she was in charge.

"It's complicated," Hermione said helplessly. If she could have, she would have been wringing her hands in worry. "We... where we're from... I don't think..."

A sneer raced across Snape's face so quickly that Hermione felt she had been slapped. "That much is obvious." He turned his nose up at her, trying to be angry with this troublesome girl who had made him feel so out of sorts. "The both of you look as dumb as Potter and his other friends."

As Ron watched, Hermione's brown eyes filled with tears. Her face went pale white as she did her best to turn back to the hospital wing. Ron felt a wave of pity rush through him as he watched his friend's shoulders shake with her quiet sobs. Snape backed away, looking as if he was confused at her reaction.

Ron took a quick step between Hermione and Snape, letting her take a few steps into the cooling darkness of the hospital wing before he spoke. His voice was laced with venom on her behalf. "You're a ruddy git. And you'll always be a ruddy git."

Then he slammed the hospital wing doors in Snape's face.

For a moment, Snape stood there, his chest heaving and his heart racing as if he'd just run a long marathon. He couldn't quite explain why he felt the way he did, but there was something about that girl... Well, there was nothing that could be done about it. She was one of Potter's friends, just as Lily was. Wherever she and the ginger had come from, the glory that was James Potter reached there too.

Am I to never have anything that isn't tainted by Potter? With that final thought, Snape turned on his heel and made his way down to the dungeons and the Slytherin common room.

Hermione tucked herself beneath the blankets on her bed in the hospital wing. She wished she could stop the tears from slipping down her cheeks in hot trails. As she pressed her head against the pillows, she closed her eyes and tried to remember the last time she'd seen Severus...her Severus. It seemed so long ago... a lifetime ago.

A flash of memory fought its way to the surface of her mind. It seemed the disaster with the Time Turner had left her memories of the future a little addled, almost as if they were already changing. It was like looking through a puddle of clear water. The edges of her memory were fuzzy and rippling, trembling like the gossamer strands of a spider's web in the wind. Hermione fought hard to hold on to the memory, to see just a few seconds of it.

There was darkness, the smell of pine and wet leaves. A ripple of wind and the snap of snow and ice. Something silver flickered through the trees ahead of her, followed by a silent black shadow. Her heart lifted, pounding against her ribs. She caught the scent of what Amortentia smelled like to her... freshly mown grass, new parchment, spearmint toothpaste, and the potions classroom. The scent wafted off a deep black cloak.

The memory wavered and disappeared. Hermione let out a wail and tried to reach for the retreating thoughts. Ron, sitting on the bed across from her, felt his heart twist with sadness for Hermione. She had buried herself in the bed, hiding her face in the pillows and sobbing with silent cries. Something had happened in those months while Harry and Hermione had gone through the Forest of Dean without him. Something that had changed Hermione in a way that he could never understand or explain. And Severus Snape was right in the thick of it in some way that Ron could never quite pin down.

"We don't have to stay," Ron whispered quietly. "I'm sure Dumbledore will help. We can find some rooms in Hogsmeade. Figure out how to get back home."

That was obviously the wrong thing to say for Hermione's sobs only got stronger. She pulled the blanket up over her head with her good hand and rolled away from him. Ron gave a little huff and lay back on his own bed. He barely heard when Madam Pomfrey came through and told him off for having his shoes on the sheets.

Ron stared at the ceiling and listened until Hermione's sobs stopped and she drifted off to sleep.

Snape burst through the door of the Slytherin common room and would have continued storming if he hadn't been stopped by a marble white hand on his elbow. He looked up to see the cool eyes of Lucius Malfoy staring down at him, one brow cocked in question.

"Oh dear," Malfoy said smoothly. "It seems you got into a bit of trouble again."

The vast bubble of fear and frustration that had ballooned in Snape's chest burst with a painful violence against his ribs. He lurched forward, feeling for a moment as if he would strike his friend... his only friend these days. In a moment, Snape's body went from burning with anger to feeling as if his life's blood had drained onto the stone floors.

In an easy move, Malfoy slipped his arm around Snape's shoulders and drew him over to a pair of high backed chairs by the fireplace. Malfoy picked the book and bag from Snape's hands with practiced grace, barely having to apply pressure to the other boy's clenched fingers. With a practiced eye, he caught sight of the flecks of blood on Snape's robes and the way his obsidian eyes appeared dull.

"Potter?"

"Black."

"Ah." It was all that needed to be said. Malfoy knew how much Snape loathed the two of them. For his own part, Malfoy could have cared less...even if Sirius Black was a traitor to wizardkind. One of the oldest pure-blood families in their world, and there he was running about with those Mudbloods and half-breeds. Malfoy let out a breath through his nose and sat back.

For what felt like hours, Malfoy and Snape sat in silence, alternately looking at the fire burning in the grate and at each other. It was nearly more than he could manage for Malfoy to stay silent in those long moments. Yet he had been friends with Snape long enough to know that when he didn't want to speak, there was no pushing him to words.

At long last, the space between them filled with Snape's warm timbered voice. But it wasn't exactly what Malfoy expected to hear.

"Something strange is happening, Lucius."

Malfoy quirked a silver eyebrow and crossed his legs, propping his ankle on his knee. He waved his long fingers in a gesture for Snape to continue.

"There's a girl in the hospital wing."

A muscle in Malfoy's jaw tightened almost imperceptibly. He had listened enough of Snape pining after that Mudblood Lily Evans. Malfoy was nothing if not a good friend, but he was quite sick of listening to Snape's broken hearted tales over witches who weren't good enough for him.

"Who is she?" Malfoy kept his frustration on a tight leash. The last time he and Snape had gotten into a row about some girl Snape hadn't spoken to him for weeks.

Snape rubbed his fingers over the bridge of his beak-like nose. He pressed at the spot between his eyes. "No idea. She's our age at least. Magical without a doubt. She *feels* like a powerful witch. But I've never seen her inside Hogwarts before. She isn't a student."

A bit of the pressure in Malfoy's chest released. If this mysterious girl wasn't a student that meant it would be much easier for Snape to forget about her once she was gone. "Perhaps she's visiting? Related to one of the professors."

"Maybe, but she had a boy with her. Never seen him here either."

Malfoy closed his eyes to fight the urge to roll them. "A problem that will go away by the morning, I'm sure."

Snape stood up with a sound that was remarkably like a grunt. He gathered his book and bag into his arms before he made his way to the doorway that lead to the dormitories. Snape barely looked back at his one remaining friend, his mind all those floors above with the brown eyed girl in the hospital wing.

Malfoy watched Snape disappear into the darkness of the dormitory hall. His alabaster fingers flexed and contorted as he fought the urge to throw something into the fire. It seemed nothing had changed over the summer. He had nearly single-handedly removed Snape from under the thumb of his pustule of a Muggle father and his slightly simpering good-for-nothing witch of a mother.

And yet, this appeared to be starting off as every other year since they had become friends. Another year listening to Snape moaning about some useless girl who could never match him for wit or talent. Another year watching Snape make a fool of himself trying to screw up the courage to get their attention. Another year seeing him disappear further into himself.

Another year where he tried to keep his hands and his feelings to himself. "Good gods, this is going to be depressing."

Notes From The Mistress: Sorry for the delay in this chapter. It's been a long week. And for those of you following along... the plot thickens!

Time is Frustrating

Chapter 5 of 5

Even though the Battle of Hogwarts is won, Hermione feels that everything has been lost. Can she make things right?
Or is she meddling with a fixed point in time that cannot be changed? Rating for later chapters.

It was a strange sensation for Hermione to be sitting in the hospital wing on the second of September in 1977. She could hear the sound of the students going to and fro to their classes in the corridors. The first official day of term, a day that had once been the best thing to her mind, now held nothing but boredom for her. It wasn't as if she was in her right time. And besides, she was eighteen...nineteen in a few weeks thanks to the Time Turner she used in her second year.

The thought of a Time Turner made her stomach turn over. She wanted to vomit.

"It's my birthday soon," she said to no one in particular. Of course, the only one within hearing distance was Ron. He just nodded, not quite sure where she was going with it.

A few minutes of silence permeated the room before Hermione spoke another word.

"I'm turning nineteen two years before I'm even born."

Just thinking about it made Ron's head start to hurt. Hermione sat up in the bed and pulled her knee up to her chin, looking dejectedly down at the foot of the bed. There were dark circles under eyes that were puffy and red from crying all night. Ron had fallen asleep long before Hermione had the night before. It was almost too much for him to listen to her crying over that lousy git.

It made him want to hit something.

"What was the point of all this, anyway?" he said aloud. The words were no more out his mouth than he wished he could call them back. Ron knew it wasn't the best thing to say to her...now or ever, even if they got back to their own time and set things right. But, of course, sometimes Ron Weasley was good for nothing more than opening his mouth and sticking his foot straight in it.

For a moment, Ron thought he'd made Hermione so angry that she wouldn't speak to him. Then there was the sound of creaking springs and the mattress beside him dipped as she sat down, leaning her head against his shoulder. She sighed, and it was obvious that she was trying very hard not to cry again.

"I thought..." She stopped and took a steadying breath. "I thought that going back would change things. If I could get to him fast enough, if I wasn't in that damned basilisk chamber when it happened..."

Ron put his arm around Hermione's shoulders and gave her a quick, firm squeeze. "Something happened while I was away being a bastard, didn't it?"

Her only response was a nod. Hermione's lips were trembling too hard to be able to make more than a squeak of soul-deep pain.

"Right, then," Ron said encouragingly. "I suppose we'll have to try to take the git out of him, won't we?"

Lucius Malfoy spent the entire day fighting the urge to go to the hospital wing and find out who exactly the mystery girl who had wormed her way into Severus' attention actually was. The problem, of course, was that it was almost impossible to slip away from Severus in the first place. And Merlin only knew what kind of hell he would catch if he was caught snooping around the mystery girl.

Perhaps the only time he would have had to go take a look was squandered by the fact that he left his textbook and most expensive quill in Professor Slughorn's dungeon. Severus went on ahead while Malfoy doubled back to retrieve his things, cursing the whole time that he was going to miss the break.

It was a few minutes later, when Malfoy appeared at the top of the dungeon stairs, that all nine rings of Hell broke loose. Severus was sprawled on the floor of the entrance hall, a bottle of ink splashed over his books and bag, a welt the size of the Golden Snitch starting on his forehead. It looked as if Severus had been caught by surprise, his wand knocked to the other side of the hall by a well-placed disarming charm.

Malfoy felt something like white hot fire rush through his veins as he looked across to the stairs leading to the upper floors. There, struggling valiantly against the grip of Potter and Lupin, was Black shouting curses and insults at Severus' limp form. For a moment, Malfoy was afraid that Black had knocked Severus out completely.

"Filthy, unforgivable, waste of a wand..." spat Malfoy as he took three great running strides across the great hall. He thrust his hand into his bag and wrapped his fingers around his wand, every inch of him practically thrumming with the desire to curse Black into a pile of cinders.

Black turned his attention from Severus to take in the way that Malfoy stood, practically ready to duel. A sneer turned the corner of Black's lips.

"Oh, dear, Lucy... are you going to hurt me?" Black pulled at the hold his friends had on him, getting close enough to hiss in Malfoy's face. "Are you going to defend him? Is that what they do down in the Slytherin dungeons?"

A flash of complete and consuming rage shot through Malfoy like a bolt of lightning. His fingers ached from their grip on his wand. There were a dozen curses floating around the back of his mind, ready to turn Black into a bouncing bucket of slugs.

"*Blood traitor.*" Malfoy's voice dripped with venom and ice. The edges of his words were sharp enough to flay Black alive had he come close enough.

The word that slipped into the air between Black and Malfoy was as filthy as it was truthful. Malfoy flicked his wand into position just as a voice boomed from the top of the stairs.

"What is going on here?" came Professor Dumbledore's voice, the sound magnified magically and echoing around the entry hall. He stood like a sentinel, looking every bit the formidable wizard he had been when he defeated Grindlewald all those years ago.

Malfoy quickly jammed his wand back into his bag and took two steps away from Black, trying to put himself closer to Severus. He glanced at his friend from the corner of his eyes, hoping that the pallor of Severus' face was due to the fact that he was covered in ink and not because he was bleeding from somewhere. Severus groaned, his head lolling on his neck.

"Severus was attacked by Sirius Black, Professor," Malfoy said coolly. He kept his head high, almost as if he were too good for the entire conversation. "And then he attempted to attack me."

Professor Dumbledore made his way down the stairs until he was standing next to Black and his friends. The Headmaster's crisp blue eyes swept the hall, taking in the sprawled form of Severus Snape in the floor and the look of unadulterated rage on Malfoy's face. Then he took a long moment to examine Sirius Black, who was still weakly struggling to get out of the grip of his friends.

"Mister Malfoy, Mister Nott," Dumbledore gestured to a tall, pale faced boy with a slightly squashed nose, "please see Mister Snape to the hospital wing. Madam Pomfrey will take care of him."

A sort of seething rage began to pump through Malfoy, slushing through his veins with each beat of his heart. It was as if he could see what would happen the moment he carried Severus out of the entry hall. Dumbledore would have a little talk with Black, lament his behavior but explain it away due to his upbringing, and then send him off to do a detention without further punishment. No points lost, no concern about the fact that Black and physically attacked another student.

Stupid bloody Gryffindors, Malfoy grumbled as he and Nott helped Severus to climb the stairs to the hospital wing. Nott rapped on the wooden door and waited for Madam Pomfrey to answer. When the matron appeared, she tutted and bustled the three of them over to an empty bed.

Severus groaned as they put him down on the bed. A smear of bright red blood appeared on the pillow as Severus turned his head, his brows furrowing in pain. "Shite," Malfoy swore, looking over the length of his friend for further damage. "I will hex Black until his head is permanently stuck up his arse for this."

Madam Pomfrey gave a shocked gasp. "Language, Malfoy!" Then she rushed across the room, muttering a list of potions and bandages that she would need to put Severus to rights.

Malfoy was just about to send Nott away when he saw a girl sitting up on a bed across the aisle. Her bushy brown hair was pulled back in a ponytail, her face pale white as one hand pressed to her mouth. Her other arm was bandaged and bound to her chest in a clear indication that it was severely broken. She looked very plain.

For a moment, she stared. Her eyes were fixed on Severus, some kind of unfathomable expression bleeding over her features. As if under the Imperius Curse, she rose from the bed in a fluid motion, as if she had no control, no will or way to resist. She crossed the room, coming closer and closer to Malfoy with each passing second. His lips turned to a sneer even as he saw her tawny brown eyes glistening with tears.

Nott stood up, rubbing the back of his neck uncomfortably. The girl stepped past Nott to stand next to Severus' bed. Two fat tears rolled down her cheeks as she reached out a trembling hand toward his head.

"Don't touch him!" Malfoy hissed, slapping the girl's hand away. His breathing quickened, his heart thundering painfully in his chest. His fingers itched for his wand.

The girl met his eyes, and he felt an unfamiliar sense of kinship with the pain he saw reflected in her gaze. Malfoy steeled himself. This was the girl Severus had mentioned the night before. This was the girl he wanted to hate simply because she had caught Severus' eye.

"Is he going to be okay?" she whispered softly. Her gaze flicked to the smear of blood, the pale sheen of his skin. "Is he going to be alright?"

Malfoy could not bring himself to speak about what happened to Severus. He didn't want to entertain the idea that he might not be alright. Instead, Malfoy examined the girl up close. He turned his nose up at her. "Who are you?"

The girl wiped the tears from her cheeks with the back of her hand. She took a deep shuddering breath and backed away. "Nobody. I'm nobody."

The hospital wing was a deep, shadowy black when Severus finally came to. He tried to sit up, but a wave of nausea and vertigo made him fall back against the pillows. His head felt heavy, like it had been stuffed with cotton. Severus touched his head and found his hair slightly damp as it poked out from a set of gauze bandages wrapped around his head.

He barely remembered what had landed him in the hospital wing this time, but he knew it must have been a hell of a hex that made Madam Pomfrey bandage him up the way she had. The last thing he recalled was coming up the stairs from potions and calling back to Lucius that he'd save him a seat in Transfiguration. Everything after that was blurry.

Thinking too hard to figure out what happened in those fuzzy places in his memory made his head start to throb. He closed his eyes and tried to relax, but his ears caught the sound of faint whispers. He'd almost forgotten about the girl who had been in the hospital wing yesterday. Severus strained his ears to pick up the sound of her voice.

"... never thought he was like that. We heard the stories, but I never thought it was this bad."

"I always thought he was a bit like Fred and George," came a masculine voice. The red-headed boy who was with her. "Playing harmless pranks. I didn't think he was so... vicious."

"You remember what happened third year. You know what he did with the Whomping Willow, Ron. Sirius almost got him killed once before for a prank," she whispered hurriedly. "I suppose I don't put it past him now to do bodily harm. No matter what Harry says, there's something very wrong with Sirius."

Severus let the words turn over and over in his mind. The girl and her companion knew about Sirius, they knew about the Whomping Willow and how Sirius had almost sent him into the clutches of a werewolf on the full moon. But how did they know any of it?

Who were they? And where had they come from?

"I'll hex him six ways from Sunday when they let me out of here," the girl vowed. "I don't care if Harry never speaks to me again. What he did today was unforgivable."

"Hermione, you can't go hexing people. You know what Dumbledore said the last time..."

A feeling of warmth settled in Severus' stomach. *Hermione*. Her name was Hermione.

Notes from The Mistress: I'm so sorry for the long time between chapters. Work and real life have gotten in the way of writing, but I hope the chapter was worth it! Please review!