

# Shapeshifter Saga

*by Fairfield*

Snape is invaded by a bipolar Spirit.

## In the Southwest

*Chapter 1 of 3*

Snape is invaded by a bipolar Spirit.

### Invocation

Sing to me, oh muse, of the passion of Severus.

*Oops, wrong culture. Try again.*

Odin, move my tongue,  
That red ship of art,  
To weave a strange tale  
The whole and the part.  
Odin, give it wings  
To soar high and low:  
Demons and courage  
And lovers and woe.

### Text

#### Part 1

There was a man named Severus whose surname was Snape. He came from a dysfunctional family, but his talent and hard work earned him a professorship. He had had an unhappy love affair when he was young, and it had turned him into a morose man which had made him an ideal double agent during a recent civil war since nothing could get past his major preoccupation of brooding, but the war was over and he continued to live a melancholy existence. People said of Severus that he might be basically decent, but it was not possible to discern the real person beneath the sarcastic exterior.

Severus was standing in front of his mirror one November morning, and instead of the usual disparaging comments, he said, "A change might do me good, and I know to whom to talk: a successful and resilient man."

There was a man named Lucius whose surname was Malfoy. He had been on the losing side in a recent civil war, but he and his family had come through with no lasting harm. He had since gained fame because he had led several successful raids. People said of Lucius that his riches prevented them from knowing the real person.

Lucius received the message from Severus which invited him to take tea with his old acquaintance. He arrived at the appointed time, and the two men greeted each other respectfully. Lucius remarked on the fine quality of the tea before saying that he was heartened by the invitation since they had been on opposite sides and he had feared the war had caused irreparable damage.

Severus nodded. "The war is over, and while I did what seemed necessary at the time, I take no pleasure in recalling it."

"It is much the same with me," said Lucius.

They sat in comfortable silence a while before Severus told Lucius about his desire for a change, for something that would let him leave his old life behind. Lucius replied that might be a good thing and to let him think about it a minute. Lucius stared into space for a few moments before setting his cup down decisively and saying that something had occurred to him although he didn't know if it was appropriate.

"An ex-student of yours, that you may or may not recall, also decided to make a break. She is in the Americas, more specifically in the Southwest United States, where the natives have healing ceremonies. Her official position is as a teacher on a reservation, and the natives welcome this visitor because she does not believe in the superiority of the occupier's culture."

Severus smiled for the first time in a long time. "I imagine not," he said.

## Part 2

There was a woman named Padma whose surname was Patil. She was from an old and prosperous family who were on the winning side in the recent war. Padma had been an exemplary student who had always conducted herself with dignity and grace, but she went wandering after the war. People said of Padma that she needed time to recover from the rigors of her academic life and the horrors of the conflict.

Padma was waiting as the afternoon bus pulled into Farmington, New Mexico. She gave the arriving Severus a reserved, but friendly greeting. She and a driver loaded his luggage into a utility vehicle which took him to his lodgings by the school. She pointed out the occasional landmark on the way and observed his eyes would have to adjust to shades of brown before he could see the scenery. She added that his digestive system would also have to adapt, but first he could shower and rest before joining the staff for their evening meal.

She was showing him her lodgings several days later. He observed the interior decorators in this region had a minimalist approach that left the inside of a house almost as barren as the countryside. He said, however, that he much admired a rug she was weaving. It was a lovely shade of gray, but it had two colorful and stylized animals that appeared to be regarding each other. He ran his fingers over it and declared it as comforting as a blanket.

"It is a blanket," she said. "I'm trying to capture Coyote and Crow although the elders say I'm attempting too much."

"Too much?" he asked.

"They're antagonists as you'll learn," she said, "and I wanted to make a medicine blanket. That seemed a forlorn hope until you arrived."

"I know nothing of coyotes or crows and even less about medicine blankets and how I might be of assistance."

"But you will soon learn," she said. "It is your nature."

"Then perhaps I should be wary of my nature. I felt power coming from that blanket even though it is only a thing of woven wool."

## Part 3

The story moves ahead four weeks when it was two weeks into the spring term. Severus and Padma had taken to climbing a small hill at the end of the day to relax after the students had left and to watch the sunset. She remarked that he was gaining a reputation of being tolerant with the children. He replied that he had seen their parents farming and ranching and weaving. How could he be less than sympathetic toward someone destined for such a hard life? In his old school, he had a bunch of students who only needed to wave their wands to get almost anything they wanted, and he had watched them waste their lives and talents.

She mentioned the game he had invented had become the talk of the school. He shook his head. His young charges had been full of energy and too restless to study. He had taken them to a steep hill near the school and told them they were a band of Navajo warriors and their mission was to get to top where they could ambush an Apache raiding party. He sighed. He was afraid he was teaching them racist attitudes toward another tribe. He was afraid they would hurt themselves on the rocks. The worst part was that, the first time, the entire class was at the top of the hill before he had cleared the first boulder. But he was improving.

She took his hand. "You're going native," she accused him.

## Part 4

Severus began to go for long walks on the weekends, and then he began camping on the weekends. Padma asked what he did. He replied that he watched the coyotes watching him and he watched the crows watching him and the coyotes. Padma said she was proud of him.

Padma informed him one day after classes that she had finished the blanket. He looked at it and felt it and declared it brilliant. She asked if he was comfortable with it and he replied that it attracted him despite its power. She said she was glad to hear that and she was certain that he was the one to join with her to turn it into a medicine blanket.

"What do you mean, join you?" he asked.

"What does a woman usually do with a man on top of a blanket?"

"Is that proper?" he asked.

"I can see you still have some hesitation," she said. "You have not completely shed your past and come to see sex as a sacrament, but we will not perform the ceremony until the proper time, and I am confident you will be ready then."

"The ceremony?" he asked.

"You will make me soak the coyote emblem with my juices."

"I can do this?" he asked.

"I get wet looking at you, but we must wait until the signs are right."

"Do you think I'm that capable?" he asked.

"You have been sojourning with Coyote Spirit whether you know it or not, and Coyote is a randy beast."

There was strangeness between them for a while, but Severus went camping and let the wild winds blow through him. He finally talked to Padma as she had been waiting for him to do.

"You're as talented in divination as your sister, you're as highly sexed as your sister, but you kept it hidden to conform to our Victorian society."

Padma nodded.

"The war came with its trauma. All emotions are ultimately connected. Something snapped, and here you are in this far corner of the universe."

"Here I am in the far Four Corners where they tolerate me because I keep their children calm in class and let them enjoy learning," said Padma, "but they avoid me because they believe I am a witch."

"I was wondering why you waited for me. There are plenty of men around, and you are very attractive," he said.

"The locals would bed a witch only if they intended to hurt her or if they were drunk out of their minds," she said.

He nodded.

"You don't understand," she said. "Do you think I would bed just anyone to get a medicine blanket? It doesn't work that way, and I wouldn't do it if it did."

Part 5

Padma informed Severus that the appropriate hour was almost upon them, but she had planned an extended ceremony, and she hoped he would be willing to go the whole course. The blanket was homage to both Coyote and Crow, and each would want their own ritual. He would have to let each of the spirits move him in its turn. Otherwise, the two would be jealous and there would be trouble.

"I will have to spend multiple times on the blanket with a beautiful and talented woman," he said.

"I know I'm asking a lot," she said.

The first time would be about a lady fearful of her own emotions. She had run to a remote corner of the globe to escape where her desire was leading her, but her admirer had followed her, and she could no longer resist her attraction to him. As he was possessing her, however, he could see that her face was contorting with equal amounts of passion and fear of losing control, but he took her nevertheless and drove her into a place of mindless ecstasy.

"I traveled halfway around the globe to be with a dame that fled from me?" he asked. "I must be a hopeless romantic."

"That's the part I want you to play. It'll make my heart go pitter pat."

"Wouldn't it be better to let the lady decide on her own, and if she stayed away, wouldn't it be better to find someone else?" he asked.

"I see the quiet of the desert is having a healing effect on you," she said, "but I'm certain you're talented enough to rise to the occasion."

It was two nights later that Padma knocked on the door of his lodge.

"It will be a clear night," said Padma.

They walked to the top of the mesa. They sat before a small fire with each holding an eagle feather in the left hand and a crystal in the right.

"We wait for the wind," said Padma.

The wind came and ruffled the feathers. The starlight shone in the crystals. The fire warmed them and went out, and they returned to her lodge.

"It is a good night. Coyote Spirit will come," said Padma as she spread the blanket on her bed.

Part 6

The story moves ahead two weeks. Padma and Severus were sitting outside and enjoying the early spring evening. Padma revealed the skit for Crow Spirit.

"I'm a neglected woman, and you are going to take advantage of me. To make things spicier, you are a Dark Wizard and my would-be boyfriend is a law officer dedicated to your apprehension."

"As part of my darkness, I could mention that your boyfriend is probably looking for you, thinking I've kidnapped you, as you're wiggling under me like a big, slippery fish."

"You have a flair for drama," said Padma.

"It would be even more piquant if I were the one person who could make you squeal," he added.

"That's the Crow Spirit I was hoping you would evoke," said Padma. "We need only wait for a sign."

They heard cawing in the distance. A flock of crows appeared. The flock blotted out the light of the moon. Padma stood, took Severus by the hand, and led him into her lodge.

Part 7

Padma and Severus were talking several days later, and Severus asked if the rituals were finished. Padma replied she had a gnawing feeling that one more was required and she hoped Severus was up to it. He asked what was required, and she answered that he must release his inner beast.

"I am in the middle of life changes, and relinquishing control of anything could be catastrophic," he said.

"I know we are walking the edge, but that is an essential element of the last ritual," she replied. "To begin, we will pretend I'm a woman with strange ways."

"Okay, let's pretend," said Severus.

"And we can pretend that beneath my cool exterior, I am a fiery pit of passion."

"With a little effort, we could pretend that too," said Severus.

"Good," said Padma. "Take me like an animal."

"Excuse me?" asked Severus.

"Service me."

"And the details of that are?" he asked.

"You mount me, all the way in to the hilt. I have an orgasm. I'm serviced. You leave."

"What if I have feelings for my wild partner?" he asked.

"No, no, that would ruin everything," said Padma. "Remember, like a beast: mount, to the hilt, orgasm."

He held her by the shoulders and said, "I can see the smoldering in your eyes and I know I can possess you anyway I want and I will take you and you will be a wild animal."

Part 8

Padma approached Severus a week later and remarked that he had been acting remote. Did she mean enough to him for him to talk about it?

"You pushed the boundaries," he said. "Taking you while pretending I didn't care for you was painful. It becomes more painful the more I think about it."

"It was only pretense, Severus."

"It was pretense you wanted. That's the part that's painful," he replied.

"Do you want me to leave you alone?" asked Padma.

"Yes," he said.

Padma approached Severus a week after that encounter and asked if he had forgiven her.

"I have my emotions under more control now," he said, "and I realize you need no forgiveness. I was unsettled. I wanted to be all things for you, but I didn't comprehend that all things included taking you with no feelings."

Padma turned on him. "What kind of cold monster are you? You say you've forgiven me, but you don't tell me. You just sit and brood. I mean less to you than your outrageous pride."

"I acted poorly," he said.

"You let me suffer, thinking you never wanted to see me again."

"It's something I have not known before," he said. "I don't know how to face it."

"My thoughts are a jumble," said Padma. "Can you invite me in for coffee?"

They sat silently at his kitchen table until the coffee was ready. She took a few sips and said, "I'm at fault, too. I was thinking about the blanket, and I knew you were compatible."

"Are you saying this got out of hand?" he asked.

"The last time, when you were a beast, I waited for you to return. When you didn't, I first told myself that you were playing the part perfectly. Then I told myself that that you weren't playing, that you had no feelings for me. That hurt."

"But I do," he said, taking her hand.

Severus woke the next morning and smelled the coming rain. The gathering clouds were making it dark outside. He noticed a cat in the middle of his bedroom rug.

"Where did you come from, and how did you get in?" he asked the cat. "Are you another Spirit? I can't hold another."

"Are you a regular cat come to live here?" he asked the feline. "That would be a domestic overload. Can't you tell I'm not ready for this?"

For an answer the cat leaped on the bed and stretched out next to him. Padma, wearing one of his white shirts, stirred and snuggled closer. Severus stroked Padma's hair as she sighed contentedly. He petted the cat as it purred. The raindrops fell on a parched land.

Part 9

The story moves ahead one month. Severus had boarded the bus and had opened the window for a few last words with Padma. The tribal elders had decided he was a warlock, and they had decided that the tribe could not sustain both of them. They were attracting Spirits the tribe wished to avoid.

"You do wrong to leave me," said Padma.

"I have no choice in the matter; neither do you. You should not send any curse after me because of this."

"That's rational; my heart isn't. It will do something we regret while it lies broke and bleeding in the dark. But I do love you, and the curse will be subtle and not fatal."

## Return to England

*Chapter 2 of 3*

The bipolar adventures continue.

Part 10

There was a house elf named Dobby who had won his freedom during the last civil war. He had gone on raids with Lucius Malfoy, and he had acquitted himself well. People

said of Dobby that he was unusual for a house elf.

Severus returned to England, but upon his arrival, he discovered he could not locate his home. He cast a revealing spell and saw it shimmering before him. He managed to knock on the door, and he was let in by Dobby.

"Dobby begs a thousand pardons," said the elf. "Lucius and Draco have fled because of a recent bout of persecution and everyone thought you would be gone a whole year and every one decided to hide everything in your home."

Severus inspected the house to discover that the kitchen, the lavatory, and half the front parlor were free. He assured the elf that the space was adequate unless Dobby snored louder than Padma. Dobby said that he was puzzled by the last remark but, in compensation, they could live on the choicest items from the Malfoy larder, and he, Dobby, was a first-rate chef. Severus replied that he would have a sherry with his bath, and after he rested, they would go out for a pint and fish-and-chips. He hadn't had a decent brew in ages.

There was a woman named Parvati whose surname was Patil. She was the sister of Padma Patil. During her school years, Parvati had appeared less serious than her sister, but she had taken a job in government and had become engaged to a law officer. People said of the two sisters that they were similar when young, different when in school, and reversing roles after they left school.

Severus heard a knock on his door one Saturday morning and opened it to see Parvati Patil. He gave her a pleasant enough greeting but stated his home was in no fit shape for company.

"Mrs. Malfoy sent me," she said as she swept in.

She seated herself in a chair. "I already know what's here since I was the one who suggested it as a hiding place while my fiancé and his colleagues search the Malfoy estate for contraband."

Dobby snapped his fingers and a tea service appeared. Severus asked if she had any qualms about hiding illicit goods from her fiancé the law officer.

"What? This stuff is dangerous. I don't want my boyfriend anywhere near it."

Severus said those were admirable sentiments but what about others getting hurt.

"You weren't supposed to be back until next year. And you're a powerful warlock. You are still powerful, aren't you? You didn't let the Colonials weaken your moral fibre, did you?"

She looked him in the eye, gasped, and backed toward the door, not taking her eyes off him. "What did you do to yourself?"

"I've become a host to two warring Spirits, and I'm under the curse of a witch who believes herself scorned."

"My, my, aren't you talented. No wonder you left the Colonies after only six months," she said. "My sister says she regrets the curse, but she is too forgiving, and I'm of the opinion that you probably deserve much worse."

"Your sister is a lady that I much admire even though fate tore us apart," said Severus, "but tell me, what is the purpose of your visit?"

Parvati sat and sipped a tea to brace herself before confiding that Lucius had promised to take a group of them raiding but an unexpected witch hunt by the government had ruined their plans and she was here to see if Severus would do the manly and honorable thing and organize a raid and save the Malfoys from an act of bad faith.

Severus stood and solemnly raised his right hand. "How. White Indian make heap good on promise. Not let Malfoy brave speak with forked tongue."

"Well played," said Dobby.

Parvati replied that that seemed to be the response she was looking for. She pointed out that the last raid had acquired precious metals along with artifacts of such potent magic that no one wanted to touch them. She demonstrated her point by showing him the ancient battle wands in their leather wrapping. He unrolled the bundle and passed his hand over the wands.

"I like these," he said, picking one before offering Dobby his choice.

Two waved wands reverberated through the room.

"I didn't know you two were that powerful," said Parvati, backing away from them.

"I've always admired you," said Severus.

"You're every creature's dream," said Dobby.

"You're flushed," said Severus.

"You're panting," said Dobby.

"Are milady's breasts feeling perky?" asked Severus.

"Are milady's knickers getting damp?" asked Dobby.

Dobby's nostrils flared. "I smell virgin."

"That's personal and private," exclaimed Parvati.

"Your fiancé truly has fibres of stainless steel to resist a woman of such charms," said Severus.

Parvati was against the wall and breathing deep. "You won't hurt me, will you? You'll be gentle."

Severus and Dobby looked at each other. "We've got to brace up."

"You are the most desirable woman we know, but under our savage veneer, we are Brit gentlemen," said Severus.

"Our upper lips are even stiffer than the rest of us," added Dobby. "We would never touch a betrothed lady."

Parvati regarded the two. "I rather think you are beasts with a thin layer of civilization that will soon wear off."

She took a deep breath. "Be that as it may, your raw power plus your last remnants of rational restraint may be able to make the next raid a success. Goodness knows, that's what's needed. Cissy didn't want Lucius to go. The last raid aroused the inhabitants of that godforsaken wilderness, but there's treasure out there, and I deserve to go on the raid this time."

"Taking that into account, it would be proper for us to avail ourselves of any useful artifact we find in this stash," said Severus.

"Dobby is not certain Dobby should carry a wand," said the elf.

"It's not a registered wand," said Severus. "It's a stick someone found."

"Are you really going to let an elf have a wand?" asked Parvati.

"What are you going to do, tell your law-officer fiancé that an elf has raided the contraband you hid from him?" asked Severus.

"I see you haven't completely changed," said Parvati, "except you're now a Dark Wizard."

"I'm not a Dark Wizard. I'm a possessed wizard."

#### Part 11

There was a woman named Hermione whose surname was Granger. She was exceptionally talented and, hence, had a difficult time finding a suitable position. She was now a professor at a school for witchcraft and wizardry. People said of Hermione that she might be an intellectual but she had a wild streak in her that craved adventure.

Severus and Dobby received an invitation from Hermione Granger to meet her at a local pub. He and Dobby arrived at the appointed time and gave her a good greeting before seating themselves at her table.

"I suppose you wanted to meet in public after talking to Parvati," he said.

"She said you were scary. She said you were an animal, but I find that hard to believe."

"You may as well find out for yourself," he said, looking her in the eye.

She leaped to her feet. "What did those Colonials do to you?"

"I did it to myself," he said, "and no, they did not tamper with my fibre. I suppose you want to look in the library to find a cure."

She sat and took his hand. "I'm certain something can be done."

She continued to hold his hand. "You look fit."

Severus sang a song:

I wandered in the wild part  
And let the land take my soul  
I bid my sorrows to part  
And willed to join with the whole.  
The land lifted my spirit  
The animals danced for me  
The free wind howled of merit  
The sky showed what I could be.

The patrons raised their glasses and clapped. Hermione smiled and licked her lips.

"But you look pleasantly exhausted," he told her.

"Dobby has seen this many times," said the elf. "The first years of teaching drain the new professors."

"You must rest," said Severus.

"Will you help?" asked Hermione.

#### Part 12

There was a witch named Luna whose surname was Lovegood. She was known for her strange beliefs, but her friends had found her steadfast and courageous. People said of Luna that she would accomplish much if she found a proper use for her talents.

Severus and Dobby knocked on the door of the Lovegood residence and received a cordial greeting.

"You are regarding us as curiosities," said Severus. "How does it feel to be on the giving instead of the receiving end?"

"Parvati warned me not to be alone with you two while Hermione claimed you to be splendid fellows."

"That's not incompatible when viewed from a higher plane," said Dobby.

"I have often aspired to soar to such heights," said Luna, "but speaking of soaring, I assume you are here to talk about reconnaissance brooms. Lucius invented them for his last raid."

"We should build a fleet of them with improved sensors," said Severus. "We need to get in and out fast. The report is the previous raids have provoked the inhabitants of the region."

"It's sad, really," said Luna. "We want to collect treasures from our past that have no value to them, but there's no way to do it peacefully. Thousands of years have gone by, and all we have is hostile co-existence."

"It is a great failing on our part," said Severus.

"The thousands of years of climate change act in our favor," said Dobby. "The old settlements with their treasures are different from the current favorable places to settle."

"We will make every effort to avoid conflict," said Severus.

"If we are careful, we will take no life," said Dobby.

"Can't you ask those powerful entities inside you to come to our aid?" asked Luna

"They are willful beings that bring both great benefit and great calamity," said Severus, "and often together."

"I suppose that's not incompatible when viewed from a higher plane," said Luna.

## Hermione's Tale

*Chapter 3 of 3*

Bipolar is contagious.

### Part 13

The story now moves forward one month. Severus and Dobby had been honing their defensive skills on a horde of invading mice after Cissy, with the help of Andy, had removed the wards protecting the garden and the peacock seed. Cissy had not given the attending law officers permission to participate. It was during one such practice session that Severus received word that Hermione Granger wanted to see him. He arrived at her flat where he received a cordial welcome.

"It's midsummer's eve," he said. "You've chosen to meet me when the forces of good are exalted."

"Did it never enter your mind that I've made you a garland and planned to gambol away the long evening among the daisies?"

"Of course it did," he said. "I am wearing my gamboling outfit, but I know I must be patient since you will want to dispose of business first."

"Parvati has made twenty miniature brooms, and I have the relay transmitters," said Hermione, "and Luna has brewed a bottle of Pixle repellent. She says they take delight in thwarting adventurers, but a drop on each broom will keep them away."

Severus replied that he knew he could count on the team to be thorough. Andy and Cissy, telling the law officers they were making bibelots for a charity auction, had made good progress on sensors, although the scholar in Hermione might be disappointed to learn they were concentrating on locating precious metals. Hermione said the previous expedition had only found enough bullion to give each of the four witches a nest egg to invest for retirement and it hadn't improved their current lives.

He asked to see the relays and was rewarded by a display of enthusiasm. They took several of them to a nearby field with Hermione apologizing that the field was only large enough to test them over a short range and they needed to test them on a mobile platform.

"You finished your first year as an instructor and immediately began designing and building relays," said Severus. "You need a break. I'll put on the garland you made for me and we will hie ourselves to yon meadow with its babbling brook."

"You seek to call my bluff about the garland, but it will avail you nothing since all know the better ones are the fresher ones and the best are made on the spot by fair maidens. Hence, whisk me away to that patch of dandelion weeds and stain your outfit on the grass while I weave stems and feminine stratagems."

"You speak to my heart," said Severus.

"Do you have room for a heart amid your inhabitants?" asked Hermione.

"We have a soul turned romantic in its reconciliation of opposites," he said as he spread a quilt and pulled a melon and a bottle of Chablis out of his rucksack.

"Don't the Southwest Indians have healing rituals?" asked Hermione. "Couldn't they have driven out the spirits?"

"I invited Coyote Spirit and Crow Spirit on my own accord. The healing rituals are for those who realized they have transgressed and recognize the enormity of their error, but I have not yet reached that exalted state."

"You make it sound as if nothing can be done," said Hermione as she placed the garland on his head and stretched out beside him, "but I've always felt better knowing that someone was interested in my well-being."

"I feel relaxed," she said hours later as the sun set. "This was a good idea."

"Then you'll agree to rest tomorrow," he said, "and the day after come visit us at the Malfoys. We've mastered the wands found on a previous raid."

"What about the law officers? Won't they be suspicious?" she asked.

"They believe you to be a Child of Light and, hence, there to aid them by worming out of the Black sisters where they hid the contraband. It's mysteriously disappeared, and they're beginning to think there's a leak somewhere in the organization."

### Part 14

Hermione appeared at the Malfoys as agreed, and those present gave her a good greeting. They had tea under a shade tree while Andy and Cissy asked her how she liked teaching. Dobby brought out the wands, and they asked Hermione to choose one.

Hermione examined several before saying, "I think this one will match my necklaces and earrings."

Andy and Cissy cheered and declared her to be a Black sister in spirit. It was a mark of good breeding to accessorize properly. Hermione said it seemed to be calling to her but she was hesitant to wield it. Severus replied that caution was good since the wands were potent, and that one might have gone rogue since they last tried it. He picked it up and suggested walking over to a small orchard where he could test it again. He pointed the wand at a flower on a fruit tree and obliterated it. Next, he pointed it at a small fruit and obliterated it. He handed the wand to Hermione who took careful aim at a small flower and obliterated the tree. Bark, leaves, and splinters rained down upon them.

She handed the wand back to Severus who pointed and obliterated two more flowers before returning it to Hermione. She took careful aim at a small fruit and obliterated another tree.

"I never realized how important it was to properly accessorize," he said.

They returned to the waiting group and described the trial. All assembled declared it a success. They had heard Hermione was fond of pineapples with whipped cream, and they would celebrate before she had to return to school.

"I'm sorry about the trees," she said.

"It only takes eight years for them to mature," said Cissy, "and we have more."

"Won't the officers be suspicious about the wands?" asked Hermione.

"They counted them when we arrived, and they will count them when we leave," said Severus. "Their job description is to seize suspicious Malfoy articles."

As Hermione was saying goodbye at the front gate, Severus said, "We may have deadly weapons, but we're not bloodthirsty. Let Dobby tell you about his idea."

"Dobby thinks we should use weapons of mass discouragement," said the elf.

"That, combined with Parvati's idea of using the brooms in an offensive manner, gave me the idea of delivering nonlethal potions by aerial means, either broom or levitation," said Severus. "I'll talk to Luna about developing more repellants."

#### Part 15

The story now goes forward two weeks. Severus, Hermione, Parvati, Luna, and Dobby were at a tract of wilderness owned by the Malfoys and testing the detection and relay devices. There were a number of abandoned dwellings clustered together. Severus mentioned that in the past when wizards were more numerous, people lived here and herded livestock. Hermione thought the structures could be put to use. It would be a place to teleport and store anything they found. Cissy and Andy visited the site several days later.

"We have talked this over," said Cissy, "and Andy and I will stay here while you are raiding. We can watch over the spoils as they arrive."

The others thanked them for their generous offer.

"It is little enough. We, too, would go raiding, but we cannot under the current circumstances," said Andy, "but if you would take some advice, I recommend practicing on your brooms for speedy flight."

Hermione, Parvati, and Luna said they had not thought of that.

"It is ever our way to push our luck," said Cissy, "and when you quit your quest, you may do so with the fiends of hell after you."

#### Part 16

The story now shifts to the second day of the quest. Hermione had climbed to the top of a small knoll to match the topographic map with the features of the terrain. The wind began to blow her hair around and into her eyes so that her vision was blurred and she could make out little except that no where else seemed to have a breeze. The wind became cold and it whistled past her ear and it formed a melody.

*The secret of the wands you bear.*

Hermione looked around but saw nothing. The wind hummed.

*The real power of the wands. The key to the scrolls.*

Hermione saw a dim shape. The wind sang.

*The workings of the wizard staff. Lost in time. Wisdom from the ages. Knowledge beyond mortal comprehension.*

Hermione saw a path leading to a strange figure. The wind piped.

*More knowledge than now possessed. Revealed to you. Revealed to you alone.*

Hermione began walking toward the beckoning image. The wind chanted.

*Knowledge. Lost secrets. Arcane philosophy. Insight into all. Power.*

The other two witches were gripping her arms and pulling her back. She was struggling to free herself. Severus was between her and the advancing form and waving his wand. Sparks were flying. Hermione was protesting that she had to open the book. Dobby stood forth and pointed his wand. There was a clap of thunder. Hermione and the other two witches were knocked to the ground. Severus was on his knees and screaming spells that hurt her ears. Lightning sprang from the tip of his wand to a multi-armed entity with gaping maw. Dobby hurled a soul-curdling curse. There was an implosion. There was quiet. Hermione looked around at the serene landscape. Birds chirped in the distance.

The party spent the rest of the second day examining the nearby sites located by the reconnaissance brooms. They woke the third day to the sound of distant drums.

#### Part 17

Dobby found Severus arranging pottery shards.

"They appear to be from the same period," he said. "The decorative designs are similar to each other, but different from the last site."

"The scholar in Severus is troubled," said Dobby, "even though we are marking each box we send back with its site location."

Severus replied that was something and it was probably the best they could do although the information was likely to be lost as they searched the items for objects of monetary value. There seemed no hope of a peaceful coexistence with the denizens of the region which was essential for a careful excavation; the government was not going to fund an organized expedition; and the girls needed seed money if they were to lift themselves out of their current existence.

"The girls are scholars, too," said Dobby. "They appreciate the scrolls and artifacts for their own sake."

#### Part 18

Dobby was standing guard when he gave the alarm. The others appeared and went into a defensive position. They considered the menacing shapes surrounding them and advancing toward them and decided they should use a weapon of mass discouragement. Severus attached a canister to a broom.

"Crow Spirit, be with me," he implored as he sent the missile on its way.

The broom dodged the stones the advancing horde threw at it and wove through their ranks as the canister slowly opened instead of exploding as it was designed to do. A greenish mist enveloped the natives. They were violently ill. They had diarrhea.



"Eww," went Parvati.

"Yuck," went Hermione

"It worked splendidly," said Luna.

"Thank you, Crow Spirit," said Severus. "I will smoke a pipe on your behalf."

They quickly packed what they could from their current site, teleported it, and moved to a new sector. They woke the next morning to discover the drums had a deeper beat and concluded new forces were being summoned.

#### Part 19

The story now goes forward three days and moves to the abandoned farm where the two custodians had made themselves comfortable. They came alert when the wards informed them that a party of five was approaching at high speed. Andy and Cissy and took their assigned positions on high ground overlooking a ravine. The fliers went single file into the ravine, around a hill, and between two boulders where they vanished as had been arranged. Andy and Cissy followed when they were satisfied there was no pursuit.

"Is any one injured?" asked Cissy.

"No," they answered.

"Is it over? Are we safe?" asked Hermione.

Cissy replied there had been no pursuit, that it was finished, and all was secure whereupon Hermione ran behind a shed, dropped to her hands and knees, and was sick. She rejoined them and apologized, but Severus stated that she had held up splendidly when it counted and they were all a bit shaky.

"What we all need is a good, strong tea," announced Andy.

"That wasn't funny, sister dear," said Cissy.

They opened the sherry and toasted their success. The three girls refilled their glasses and proceeded to the hot tub. Severus sat by the fire and merely sipped his drink.

"Is something wrong?" asked Cissy.

"I do not trust myself to relax," he said. "I will wait until I am safely home and out of sight of polite company."

Andy and Cissy protested that he should not do that alone in a gloomy part of London but that he should commune with nature on the Malfoy estate. He was welcome since he had taken over the raid and preserved the Malfoy reputation. Severus rose the following morning, ate a light breakfast, and took a bottle of Chablis to a nearby waterfall where he spent the morning. Hermione appeared at the Malfoys around noon and asked for him. She found him under a shade tree, dreaming the spray.

He gave her a friendly greeting but warned her that he was becoming unraveled. She said he looked composed enough, but he replied that he intended to spend the day at it and slide imperceptibly into a state unfit for refined society.

"I can warn you if any refined society appears," she said as she spread her own cloak beside him.

He waved his wand for another Chablis and another goblet. Hermione said she was surprised he wasn't drinking from the bottle to which he replied that unraveling was best if the proper forms were observed. She accepted his offer of wine and asked how this last expedition differed from his time in the American Southwest. He replied that she was the first to ask. He supposed it was because the American experience had damaged him. He finally said he had gone to America to temper his bitterness and to that end he had sought Potent Spirits. He had found them. She was moving closer and closer as he talked until no space separated them. He let her rest her head on his shoulder, and she soon fell asleep. He told the waterfall and the breeze that Hermione Granger had been working too hard. He told the birds in the sky and the animals on the earth that others beside him might need solace. He woke her several hours later when it began to rain.

"It's strange," she said. "I never knew spending time with someone would make me content."

#### Part 20

Hermione was at school the next day preparing for the beginning of the school year. At noon she sent a message to the Malfoys but they informed her Severus had returned to London. She knocked on his door that evening. He was surprised to see her, but he gave her a cordial welcome.

"I have been thinking," she said, "that I interfered with your unraveling."

He was amused. "A strange thing to apologize for, but there is no need. Your company was relaxing, and it was better than unraveling."

"I'm not used to hearing that, Severus. I think I make people nervous."

"You're talented and ambitious, and others aren't certain they measure up. That makes it difficult for them to see your kind-hearted nature."

"Severus, I don't know if I have a boyfriend or not."

Hermione put her hand in front of her mouth. "Forgive me. I shouldn't have blurted that out."

"Are you speaking to me as a friend, a neutral confidant?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said.

"If it helps, I consider you attractive."

She shook her head. "I know I'm not a beauty queen."

"Doesn't that make it better?" he asked. "It's your special beauty that attracts me."

He took her hand and sat her next to him.

"Did you never think that being with you was something special?" he asked.

She put his arm around her shoulders and snuggled into him. He sat motionless as Hermione relaxed into being with someone. Her hand was on his chest; she was nibbling on him.

Outside, crows were gathering.

Hermione was telling him he was brave and steadfast. She was kissing him softly. He was telling her she had healing power.

In the air, the crows were calling

Her body was warm against his. Nothing was more natural. She was squeezing her thighs together.

Overhead, the crows were circling.

Her kisses were demanding. Her fingers were gripping his shirt. There was a low moan and the girl was quiet.

Hermione leaped to her feet, out of breath and flushed. "I didn't ask you to do that."

He stood. "I am of dubious morality."

She took two deep breaths, took both his hands in hers, kissed him, and fled out the door.

He strode outside and looked up. "I know your ways, Crow. You would form a vortex and draw up the unwary."

He stepped into the shadow of a tree and said, "I owe Crow Spirit," and opened his trousers.

"You may have my first offering to Hermione Granger." His cock spurting into the air. "But ask no more for I know other spirits and not all of them are friends of Crow."

There was pandemonium overhead. The flock departed.

Part 21

The next day, Cissy asked Severus about Hermione. "She is much with you."

He replied that he was of two minds about the matter. She was a talented companion and splendid company, but their past had seen animosity, and everyone believed she had a boyfriend.

"Do you wish to bed her?"

He replied that he desired her more than any other even though he knew there were women who were more beautiful. But who knew what passion he would stir up if he broke through her exterior? Who knew what would burst forth?

"I think you have the right of it," said Cissy. "Her reserve hides fierce emotions. Does that attract you or repel you?"

"I will have to find out," he said. "Things happen beyond my control when I'm with her."

Part 22

Hermione fussed about her office the next two days. She visited Andy at work and took her aside.

"How do you resist a wizard?" asked Hermione.

"I'm not the person to ask," said Andy. "If I found a compatible wizard, I would put myself in his way. You could talk to Parvati. She thinks Severus is possessed by evil spirits."

"Both he and that elf are possessed, and that's what saved us when we went raiding, but they're dangerous," said Hermione.

Andy gave Hermione a close look. "Who are you trying to resist, Severus or yourself? Do you want to save him, or do you want the wild animal within?"

Hermione was silent.

"I fear, love, that you have been fighting yourself and your resistance is at an end. But you are right, being possessed can be terrifying."

Part 23

Hermione appeared at the Severus residence and received a cordial greeting. She accepted a tea and commented that his home was now more crowded than before.

"We and the others went raiding with you, but I'm afraid we are not now doing our part to sort through the spoils," said Hermione.

"I think all of you are doing what you can," said Severus. "Parvati and Cissy are working on transferring the bullion to the mundane market. The Malfoys have invested in the mundane world for centuries, and the Patils have business contacts everywhere. I trust them to do this well and honestly since both families want to preserve their good name."

"There's the scrolls and artifacts," said Hermione.

"The fate of the scrolls is almost amusing," said Severus. "Andy works in the Historical Artifacts Division, and Luna has joined her. It seems the scrolls are a record of ordinary life thousands of years ago, and they are using them to deduce the plant and animal life at that time. All her searching for exotic beings has given Luna a feel for ecology."

"And there's the recipes," said Hermione.

"They believe they've discovered the earliest known Ale Spell," said Severus. "They can't wait to try it out." He shuddered.

"There's the artifacts," said Hermione. "They would have more value if we knew what they did. We could photograph the more familiar looking ones, and I could search the school and Malfoy libraries for references."

"You would be the best candidate for that, but you might have to wait until you're familiar enough with your teaching duties that they have become routine."

"You don't want me to help," stated Hermione.

"I see I have not been a good host or a gracious companion," said Severus. "I meant by means of a warm welcome and attentive conversation to make you feel your company was desirable and I wished more of it."

"Just my company?" asked Hermione.

"Yes. Did you think you had to perform some sort of task to be accepted?"

"That's the way it's always been," she said.

"I want you to be here, and I want you to want to be here," said Severus. "I hadn't said anything because I thought people fell into that naturally, but perhaps I was wrong."

He took a breath. "But I can show you an interesting find. I didn't discover it until I opened a wood box. It's three stones. They're polished, and they are the deepest black I've ever seen."

He opened an old box to show her three polished, black stones. She had never seen anything so dark.

Hermione slammed the lid shut. "Those things are dangerous."

She looked at him. "You've been playing with them, haven't you."

"I've been examining everything," he said.

"Well, you shouldn't examine these," she said, taking the box from him.

"What are they for anyway?" she asked as she set the stones on the floor. "If there were four of them, we could orient them with the four cardinal points, but they're a puzzle."

She arranged them as an equilateral triangle and skipped around them and declared they must be good for something and their full benefit probably required dancing within their confines. Severus was pulling Hermione away from the power figure. She was struggling to return to the triangle. She was clawing at him as he put the stones back in the box. He held her as she yelled about new frontiers and fought to get free. When she was exhausted enough to quit struggling, he sat her on the couch.

She took a deep breath and said, "I told you those stones were too dangerous to examine by yourself."

He took her hand and said she was right. She made him promise not to do anything if she wasn't there to guard him. He promised. She said she wouldn't believe any promise unless he sealed it with a kiss. He gave her a chaste kiss on her forehead.

"More than that!"

He coaxed her into his lap. His fingertips were stroking her temples, and he was telling her she was beautiful. She was shaking her head and saying she knew she didn't have a full figure. He was telling her he preferred her athletic form. She asked if he was certain.

"I have refined tastes," he said.

She was biting her lower lip.

"Would you like to show off your figure?" he asked.

She blushed and nodded and began unbuttoning her blouse. He kissed her. He kissed her deeper. Her tongue was between his lips. Her top was off. She guided him to her breasts. Her fingers were in his hair.

"Would you like me to kiss all of you?" he asked.

She arranged herself on the couch. A tongue dispensing fire trailed the rising skirt. Flaring nostrils took in her scent. Eyes gleamed yellow at the sight of opening legs. She was pushing her knickers down. "You'll keep the animal under control, won't you?" she asked

"I'll try," he said.

Severus is entering Hermione. She is spreading wider. He is sliding in and out. Her face softens. She is pretty. He is all the way in. Hermione Granger is mounted. He looks into deep brown eyes. Her arms reach up for him. He is riding her. He is gentle. Her body moves as she makes small noises. All of Hermione, the whole woman, is overwhelming. She pulls him down to kiss him. He is lost in her affection. Severus cannot stop. He will not last.

"Coyote Spirit," he implores.

Old Man Coyote licks his chops. He will take Hermione Granger's first time.

Her body is moving with him. He is stripping her more than naked. She is afraid.

"It's too good. It's too good," she says

But her legs are wrapping around him. She is wet and slick and wonderful. He does not stop. She is smiling. He can feel her intimate ripples. Gentle as the merciful rain. He holds her. Severus is right. This is the most desirable of all women. He can feel her heart beating. He comes inside her.

Later, Hermione was staring at the floor. "Are you going to leave me now that you've had your way with me?"

"Why should I leave you?"

"Oh, you want more nooky. Was I fun? You were a sarcastic man, and now you're a predatory wizard."

"That's true," he said. "You would have a better life if you left."

"So, you do want me to leave."

"No, I want you to stay."

"What do you really want?" she asked.

"A life enhanced by you."

"I don't know if I can live that way. That's scary. I'll be crushed if it goes wrong," she said.

"Do you want to take a chance?" he asked.

"Okay, but you have to be nice to me. You have to sleep with me and cuddle me."

Severus woke the next morning and checked the bedroom rug.

"Of course," he told the creature, "I expected a cat."

He fell back asleep but woke a little later to find Hermione looking at him.

"I didn't hear any drums," she said.

"Drums?"

"Every night since I returned, I've had nightmares filled with drums and monsters," she said, "but they're gone."

The feline saw her give him a kiss of gratitude, saw her pause, saw her give him a kiss of affection. Its eyes widened as it saw her response, saw her hesitation, saw her resistance crumble. Its ears pitched forward at her soft sounds. Its whiskers twitched with her ecstasy.

The cat was on the breakfast table as the couple sipped their tea. Hermione was gripping her teacup.

"I can't do it. I can't do this," she said.

"I'm not ready for this," she said as she stood and grabbed her cat.

He waved goodbye as the girl fled into the bright new day.