

The Light Mark

by debjunk

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Lily was dead, and there had been nothing he could do to stop it. Now he conversed with Dumbledore, making the old wizard promise not to reveal his vow to protect her son.

"I will do as you ask... for Lily."

Dumbledore nodded as Severus turned to leave. The young man's head hung low, so he never saw Dumbledore raise his wand and shoot the stunner at his back. Severus dropped to the ground as Dumbledore approached him warily.

"I'm sorry, Severus. I know you gave your word, but it may be a long, long time before the Dark Lord can rise again. I need some assurances of your loyalty. This should do the trick nicely."

Dumbledore raised his wand again and shot a spell at the back of Severus' head. A small spot glowed brightly before slowly fading back to its natural color.

"There, this should ensure your loyalty for as long as needed." Dumbledore waved his wand over him again and muttered another spell. "Now, you won't remember anything except heading back to your home and falling into a fitful sleep." Dumbledore stepped back and looked over his work. "Really, Severus... it's for the best."

Twenty-five years later...

Severus cracked his eyes open and squinted from the glare. He wanted to shield them, but he was too weak to move his arms. His head hurt so badly that he thought it had been split in two. He groaned loudly and shut his eyes again.

"Oh, good, you're awake. I thought I'd almost lost my favorite potions supplier!"

Severus' eyes cracked open again, and he saw Hermione Granger looking at him with concern.

"What happened?" he managed to grumble out. His voice sounded drained.

Hermione shook her head as she helped Severus sit up enough to give him a pain potion. "Your assistant, Boothby, made another mistake brewing this morning. You caught him trying to add three times the amount of wormwood to the Draught of Living Death. You almost got to him in time, but he dropped it in, and the cauldron exploded sending you into the wall. Unfortunately, your head hit a shelf, and you were injured quite badly."

Severus sighed. "I am going to fire that cretin as soon as I can stand."

Hermione moved Severus' head back to his pillow and put her hand on his shoulder. "Not so fast. You need to stay in bed for a little bit. I was able to mend the gash in your head, but I want to make sure there's no lasting effects before I let you go cursing anybody."

At that moment a mediwitch came in. "Healer Granger, you're needed in the next room. Your other patient needs some assistance."

Hermione looked back to Severus. "I'll be back as soon as I can. Stay lying down and rest or you'll have to answer to me, do you understand?" She pointed her finger into his face for emphasis.

Severus rolled his eyes at her. "Yes, mummy."

"Good," she said as she turned to leave. "I'll be as quick as I can," she repeated as she exited the room.

Severus tried to move his arms. He was getting his strength back. He flexed his wrists and bent his arms back and forth. They seemed to be getting their life back as well. He carefully moved them under his head as he looked at the ceiling and thought of his relationship with Hermione Granger. She was a bossy witch, but she was the primary customer of his apothecary. As head healer, she had come to him a couple of years previously asking if he would supply St. Mungo's with the many potions needed to run a large hospital. He'd been surprised that she'd want anything from him, but could not look a gift horse in the mouth. The hospital's orders alone paid for his living expenses completely. Of course, Hermione, being Hermione, could not just let the relationship be a business one. She'd inveigled her way into becoming his friend.

Severus chuckled. Never in his forty five years would he have thought he would be good friends with Hermione Granger. Somehow, though, he hadn't minded too much. She seemed to know when to leave him be, and also seemed to know when he needed some company. He thought of her as a friend, which was something that he never had the luxury of having in the years of the war. His life had calmed down considerably, and he'd been surprised to find her in it. He found a friend was something he truly enjoyed having... now that he had one. They'd spent many evenings in each other's company, and Severus hadn't regretted any of them.

Hermione returned to the room. Severus gave her a tight smile. "Do you know if there's anything left of the lab? Or of Boothby, come to think of it?"

Hermione returned his smile. "There were only minor injuries to both. They'll be good as new in a couple of days." She turned and walked to the end of the bed and picked up Severus' chart. Flipping the pages absently, she asked him, "So, I was curious, when did you get that Light Mark?"

Severus gave her a puzzled look. "Light Mark? Whatever do you mean?"

Hermione looked up at him. "The Light Mark. It's on the back of your head right around here." She placed her fingers about two inches above the base of her neck to show Severus where she had found his mark.

"I don't know what you're referring to. What's a Light Mark?"

Hermione looked concerned for a minute. "Well, a Light Mark is usually placed on someone when they want to control some aspect of themselves. Some use it when they want to lose weight. Others when they want to focus on a certain issue in their life. I actually looked into them a little bit while you were still unconscious. They're quite rare, so it's not unusual that you've never heard of it. But since you have one, I thought you'd know how it had gotten there."

Severus sat up slowly and felt the back of his head. "Where is it? I don't feel anything."

"No, you wouldn't. It's just a mark, there's no raised skin or anything." Hermione got closer to him and rubbed a small spot on the back of his head. "It's right here. It's not very big; maybe half an inch. Your hair covers it completely, so no one else has likely seen it before."

Severus turned to look at her. "How would it have gotten there?"

Hermione parted his hair and looked at the mark again. "Well, it had to be placed there. It's definitely not a birth mark." She rubbed it and a few other places on his scalp. "Does that feel different than when I rub other parts of your head?"

"I feel no difference."

Looking at the mark again, she began to describe it. "Like I said, it's small. It's yellow, and looks as if it's shaped like a lemon drop."

Severus' head whipped around, and he stared at her. "You don't think..."

Hermione narrowed her eyes. "I can't say I'd put it past him. There's one way to find out. Once you're feeling ok, we'll go ask the source."

Severus stood quickly. He fell back a little, prompting Hermione to brace him up. He put out his hand to stop her. "I'm fine. I just got up too fast."

"Are you sure? The old man isn't going anywhere."

"No, I want this solved now." He straightened himself and pulled on his clothing to straighten it as well. It was then he noticed he was wearing a hospital gown. He glared down at it and then back to Hermione.

"Granger, where are my clothes?"

Hermione pointed to a chest of drawers. "Top drawer." She turned and looked at him. "I suppose you'll want some privacy?" With that she turned and left the room, closing the door behind her.

Severus dressed as quickly as he could. He found he was still weak, and it wasn't as easy as he'd thought, but within a few minutes he was clad in his all-black attire once again. Moving somewhat slowly to the door, he made his way out and nodded to Hermione that he was ready. She took his arm in hers, and they walked out of the hospital to an apparition point.

"It would probably be best if we went Side-Along, just in case," Hermione said and gave Severus a small smile.

He nodded curtly, and before he knew it, they were spinning away from St Mungo's and appearing before the Hogwarts gates. They took it slower than he'd like getting into the castle, simply because his head ached, and he wasn't steady on his feet. Hermione held him strongly, supporting him just enough so he would feel like he was in control, but giving her the ability to aid him. After a while, they'd made their way inside and up to the Headmistress's office. A quick word with the gargoyles, and it was swinging to let them enter.

"Minerva asked me to keep an eye on the place while she was on holiday, so this is an opportune time to visit," Hermione explained to Severus as they headed up the stairway. They wound their way up and entered the office, moving to the large portrait that was placed behind the Headmistress' chair.

"Dumbledore," Severus ground out.

The portrait slept on as if it hadn't heard a thing.

Severus spoke a little louder. "Dumbledore?"

The painting snored on.

"Albus, wake up this instant, or I'll turn your picture to face the wall!" Severus barked.

Dumbledore startled awake. "My boy! You should have announced yourself earlier! It's so good to see you."

Severus rolled his eyes. "Yes, yes. I'm not here for platitudes. I have to ask you something."

"Whatever is it, my boy?"

"Did you place a Light Mark on the back of my head?"

Dumbledore's eyebrows furrowed as his hand came up so his finger could tap his lips. "Now that I think about it, yes... yes I did."

Severus approached the portrait. "Why?" he demanded.

"Now, Severus, I fear you'll be upset with me when I tell you the story."

"I'm already upset, Dumbledore. Why did you put that mark on me? And when?"

"You have to understand, Severus, it was a very long time ago. I wasn't sure whether I could trust you or not. I..."

"When?"

"Right after the Potters were murdered. That night you promised to protect Harry."

"My word wasn't good enough for you, Dumbledore?" Severus ground out.

"I didn't know you like I do now, Severus. I thought you might return to the Dark Lord's side."

Severus moved to within inches of the portrait. "If you don't tell me immediately what it does, I will burn your picture until it is nothing but ashes."

Dumbledore shrunk back. "Surely not, Severus."

"*Tell me!*" he demanded, although his voice hadn't risen a decibel.

"It's to keep you devoted to Lily."

Hermione gasped. "Professor Dumbledore, how could you?"

"Now let me explain. With your devotion to Lily intact, you would want to look after Harry. I knew you despised the boy. It was the only way, Severus. Otherwise, you may have returned to your previous master."

Severus began to shake. His fists clenched. He was literally seeing red. Before he could say anything, though, Hermione had moved to within inches of the portrait as well.

"How could you?" she repeated. "What gives you the right to drive a man's existence like that? He may have found someone else, but wouldn't have even known! You are the worst kind of despot. No one should choose another's desire. All this time, you've kept him from moving on and finding a life of his own!"

"You never cared for me one whit, did you, Albus? It was always what I could do for you," Severus said in a wounded tone. The realization cut him to the quick.

"Now, Severus, you don't understand."

"No, Dumbledore, now I finally do understand. It was all an act, your concern and pretense of caring. Deep down, I've always been that hated young man you almost killed when I heard the prophecy."

"That's not true."

"Why didn't you remove it, then?"

"I beg your pardon?" Dumbledore asked incredulously.

"If you cared so much and realized that I would not turn, why didn't you remove the mark?"

"Severus, it was for the greater good."

Severus raised his wand. Blue light shot from it and surrounded the portrait. Dumbledore spoke, but nothing could be heard. He began to shrink. Running to the front of the portrait, he slammed his fists into the front of it, yelling unknown things as he got smaller and smaller. Soon, he winked out of the frame and there was nothing but a chair and the walls behind it.

Hermione gasped. "Severus, what did you do to him?"

He shot another hex at the portrait before turning to Hermione. "I sent him where he belongs, into oblivion."

Hermione looked at Severus. "Don't you think someone will wonder where he went?"

"The spell will wear off in a week, and he'll be back in his chair snoring away. No one would miss him anyway, the old poof."

Severus turned and stalked out of the room and moved quickly down the stairs, his earlier frailty gone with his fury. He walked and walked, expressing his rage with his frenetic pace. He heard Hermione hurrying along behind him, but did not stop to wait for her until he was out of the castle and a long way down the pathway. Finally, he stopped, taking deep breaths to try to calm down. Hermione caught up to him after a minute and placed her hand on his shoulder.

"Severus." She waited a few seconds. "Severus, are you all right?"

He shook her hand off him and turned to her. "Of course I'm not all right! How would you feel if you just came to the knowledge that your entire life was a lie? Would you be all right?"

Hermione withdrew a step and shook her head. "Of course not; I'm sorry. That was a foolish thing to say. I just want to help."

Severus looked away. "I apologize. I think the best thing for you to do right now is to leave. I cannot promise you that I will be civil, and you haven't done anything to deserve that."

Her hand was on his shoulder again. She shook him slightly so he'd make eye contact with her. "I'll stay if you want me to. I know you're furious. I don't know if you should deal with this alone."

He studied her for a moment, and then looked back to the ground. "No, I can handle this myself. Go."

"All right, but you know where I live. I'll look into how to remove the mark if you want to do that."

He nodded but didn't look up. Once he heard her Disapparate, he finally looked up into the sky. A guttural sound came from him as he screamed in frustration. Extracting his wand he shot hex after hex at the surrounding trees.

"Foolish... (hex) old... (hex) man... (hex) trying... (hex)to drive... (hex) everything. How dare he!" With his last sentence he struck the ground with a hex so hard he blew a crater the size of a truck into the dirt. Trying to calm himself, he reversed the spell, covering the hole and charming grass back over the dirt. With a last look back at Hogwarts, he stalked to the gates and Apparated away to mull over his situation.

The next day he'd sent an owl to Hermione to meet him for lunch at a café near St. Mungo's so they could discuss the situation. As she seated herself, he frowned at her.

"I apologize again," he said curtly.

"It's fine," Hermione replied.

"No, it's not, but I could not control myself, which is why I asked you to leave. I want you to know it was all about Dumbledore and nothing that you said or did."

Hermione sighed. "That's good. I was afraid you were upset with me for breaking into your conversation with him."

Severus raised an eyebrow. "No, I appreciated that. In the past my fights with Dumbledore were never backed up by anyone."

"Severus, he was awful. I don't know how he could do such a thing to anyone. It's just another example of his manipulative nature. I wish we had recognized that better when we were younger and not thought the world of him."

"The man was good in many ways. You should not fault yourself for being duped by him."

Hermione looked at him with concern. "Anyway, I don't want to talk about him. How are you doing?"

"I'm still furious. However, I did a lot of thinking last night. I want to remove the mark."

Hermione nodded. "It's a complicated and painful process. There's no guarantee that the mark will be fully removed. However, the research I did shows that the effects can be nullified permanently with the right spells."

Severus nodded.

"So, you're still in love with Lily, I take it?"

Severus noticed she looked a bit pained when she asked him that. He nodded again. "Yes."

"Do you want to give that up?" Hermione asked, averting her eyes and glancing at the table.

Severus studied the tea that had been brought to them while they chatted.

"I don't know." His voice was barely a whisper.

Hermione looked back up at him and her hand came up and took his. "Do you feel like it would be losing her all over again?"

Severus only nodded. They sat that way quietly for a while. He stared into his tea. She looked at him warmly, still holding his hand. Finally, he raised his head up and looked at her as well.

"I know it would be like losing her again, but what I have now *isn't* real. It's a fantasy... worthless."

Hermione opened her mouth to say something, but Severus held up his other hand to stop her.

"Hear me out. I've loved Lily for as long as I can remember, but for as long as I can remember *this* has been driving my feelings." He motioned to the back of his head. "I don't know what's real and what's not."

Hermione nodded and squeezed Severus' hand signaling for him to continue.

"If I don't remove it, I'll never know what my real feelings are. I'll never be able to move on because this bloody thing won't let me." He glanced down at her hand placed over his. Frowning his brow, he continued, "I'm not even sure whether what I did for the war was my own decision or that of Dumbledore's."

"Wait, Severus," Hermione said. "You can't go there. You can't second guess everything you've done for your entire life since Lily died."

Severus didn't look up.

"Severus, look at me." She waited until he'd made eye contact with her. "What you did... that wasn't part of the spell in the Light Mark. Yes, you love Lily, but surely you couldn't think that everything you did was because of that?"

"It influenced everything I did, Hermione," he ground out.

Hermione shook her head. "I don't agree with that. I don't think it influenced you to the extent you're implying. All those years... surely everything you did wasn't just for her?"

Severus looked into Hermione's eyes. "Much of it was," he replied finally.

Hermione sat back and regarded him for a minute. "What would you have done differently if Lily wasn't in the picture?" she asked finally.

He shrugged. "I really don't know."

"Do you think you would have left the Death Eaters?"

His eyebrows drew together as he mulled that over. "I would hope that I would have eventually. Even without Voldemort's going after Lily, I was starting to become concerned with some of his domineering ways. I think I would have eventually tried to distance myself. However, it would probably have meant my death."

"What about being a spy? That would have kept you alive, but on our side."

He shrugged. "That truly was only for Lily. I did feel like I was helping to defeat the Dark Lord, but I hated what I had to do for Dumbledore. I was constantly in peril, and he never cared. However, looking back, I can't really see myself doing anything differently."

"Neither can I," Hermione said quietly. "Honestly, Severus, I don't think you'd do much differently had the Light Mark not been placed on you."

"Well, we'll never know, will we?" he stated bitterly.

Her hand went out to his again as she leaned in toward him. "If we remove it, you may be able to tell. I'm willing to do whatever you want with it, Severus. I'm here to support you in whatever you choose."

Severus nodded. "We need to do it. If we don't, I won't be able to reconcile anything of my past or my future. I need to have this obsession taken from me, even if it will be like losing her all over again."

Hermione squeezed his hand. "Hopefully, it won't be so emotionally upsetting this time around."

Severus nodded.

Hermione rose. "I need to get back to work. When do you want to meet to remove the Mark?"

"I am free Saturday morning, if you are able?"

She nodded. "That would be perfect. I'll make sure everything is ready. Do you want to do it at the hospital or somewhere else?"

"Can we do it in my flat? I don't want to be on spectacle if this goes badly."

"Of course. I'll see you around ten, then?"

Severus nodded and watched her leave. She seemed a bit sad as she turned and waved to him before walking out the door of the café. He wondered what she was thinking to make her look so melancholy. Heaving a great sigh, he thought about the weekend to come. Saturday would bring a new life to him. He just wasn't sure he wanted whatever that life had in store for him.

The days dragged on. Severus impatiently ticked down the hours until his life would be changed. He stared at the picture of Lily he'd taken from Black's house. It was late Friday night. In fact, it was so late that most would consider it morning. He'd tried to sleep, but he was too nervous. In just a few hours, his entire perspective would be altered. He had no idea what to expect.

"Lily, how I wish you were here with me. That you loved me, and me alone."

He crumpled the picture, then hastily smoothed it back out again. "That's not even me speaking. It's some robot made by an old megalomaniac. Will I even think about you anymore?" he asked the smiling woman as his finger traced the line of her chin.

"I can't imagine how I will feel after tomorrow. Will I even think about you? Will I welcome the change, or wish I'd never removed this blasted Mark?" His hand went reflexively to the back of his head, and he rubbed the spot where the Mark was. Earlier in the week he'd had a look at it himself with the use of a magical dual mirror. It was small. Severus had no doubt Dumbledore had never meant for him to know it existed.

"It's surprising it wasn't discovered while I recovered from Nagini's attack," he mused. Of course, there were so many to be attended to, and the back of his head hadn't really been injured, so he couldn't fault anyone for not noticing it.

His attention was drawn back to the now ragged picture in his hand.

"Whatever happens, I will miss you," he whispered to a long gone Lily Potter.

There was a knock at his door, and Severus rose to answer it. He found Hermione smiling at him on the other side. He scowled at her, but moved aside so she could enter.

"Good morning!" she said cheerily.

"For you, maybe," he ground out.

Hermione's smile left her lips. "I know this is difficult for you, Severus, but it may work out to be a good change. We'll have to see, right?"

Severus rolled his eyes at her. "Forever the optimist, hmm, Hermione? I cannot say whether this will be good or bad, but I hold no high hopes for a good outcome."

Hermione shrugged. "Forever the cynic, eh, Severus?"

Severus harrumphed. "Let's get this over with."

Hermione moved into the living room and sat on the couch. "I think the easiest way would be for you to kneel in front of me. I'll go ahead and work the spells to remove the Mark. The first one I'll perform will remove the enticement. The second one is the one I'm not sure will be effective, however, if it works, the Mark itself will be gone. If it doesn't, you'll just have a lemon drop shaped mark with no effects on you."

Severus nodded and knelt with his back to Hermione. "I am ready," he stated in resignation.

Hermione's hands went to his shoulders. "The first spell will be very painful. It may cause you to black out. I will try to be as gentle as possible, but the act of removing the enticement part of the spell takes a lot of energy and will drain some of your magic as we go. Try not to reach back and touch your head, you may come in contact with the spell, and that would cause more pain, and could reduce the effectiveness of it, okay?"

"Yes, I am ready."

"Okay, here goes." Her hands squeezed his shoulders before she removed them to get ready to cast the spell. With a flick and a swish she moved her wand to within an inch of Severus' head. "*Summovo eo cicatrix*."

A jolt went through Severus' entire body, and he began to shake. He tried to keep his hands at his sides, but the intense pain was calling to them to clasp his head. He fought the urge and balled his hands into fists as his body continued to shake uncontrollably. The spell seemed to last forever. He tried not to cry out, but the pain was pulsing through his body with such intensity he couldn't help himself.

"Ahhhh, Hermione!!" he cried.

She did not respond as she concentrated on finishing the work she'd started. His vision was getting fuzzy. He felt the concentration of the pain settle in his chest around his heart. It squeezed his torso, and he slumped forward just as Hermione ended the spell. Darkness surrounded him, and he felt no more.

They were children once again, Lily and he. She was smiling at him, and he couldn't help but smile at her. She waved at him as she slowly moved away from him, although she hadn't moved at all.

"Bye Severus! I'll miss you."

"Good bye, Lily. I'll miss you too, but not like I used to."

Lily smiled then before disappearing completely. "That's how it's supposed to be, my friend."

Severus slowly became aware of his surroundings. Everything was fuzzy. He was lying on his couch, he could tell, but everything around him was gray. He looked around, searching for Hermione, but she didn't seem to be in the room, what little he could see of it. He assumed it was an after-effect of the spell and that his vision would clear soon. His thoughts went to Lily. She seemed to be a distant memory now. Thankfully he did remember her, but her constant presence in his mind was now gone. It came to him that it had been rather foolish of him to hold on to his attraction for her for so long, but that was the effect of the Light Mark, wasn't it? His mind was befuddled, and he was having a hard time concentrating on anything. Closing his eyes, he passed back into unconsciousness.

The next time his eyes opened he could see his surroundings. Hermione was still not in the room, but everything else was as he'd left it. He searched his thoughts. The immediate thoughts of Lily were not to be found, leaving his mind open to all sorts of new possibilities. In retrospect, that was definitely not a bad thing. He had no regrets about Lily or anything else in his past. Instinctively, he knew that what he did during the war was more about his own desires rather than some unrequited devotion to a dead woman. He felt at peace for the first time in his life. He was himself, and he was free. Elation filled him as he thought of a future of possibilities ahead of him. He had made the right decision to have the Light Mark removed.

At that instant Hermione came through from the kitchen. She was holding a chocolate bar. "Oh, good, you're awake. I thought some chocolate might help with your recovery," she said and smiled at him.

Her smile sent a jolt of electricity through his body. Looking at her, he felt his chest clench within him. He had a sudden urge to kiss her senseless. His eyes narrowed at her.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded.

"Meaning of what?" Hermione asked. "Do you still feel Lily?"

"I think you know the answer to that, Hermione. What have you done to me?"

"I removed the spell, of course. I wasn't able to get the mark to disappear, but it's not controlling you in any way anymore."

He got to a sitting position, then rose and walked over to her, his hands clenched into fists.

"What did you do?"

Hermione looked at him and shook her head. "I don't know what you mean," she replied nervously. "What's wrong?"

His arms reached out, and he shook her. "You have substituted one obsession for another! I trusted you, and you did this to me! How could you? I thought we were friends."

"We are, Severus! What are you going on about?"

He could barely control himself. Part of him wanted to wrap her in his arms, the other part wanted to make her flee in fear of him.

"You just changed the spell for me to be focused on someone else. This isn't a bloody love potion, Hermione, this is my life!" He shook her again, looking at her wildly.

"Severus, I didn't do that. What are you feeling? Maybe it's a side effect. Maybe..."

"Get out."

"But Severus!"

"I said, get out." He shook her once again. "Don't you ever come around here again, do you understand me? I will supply your medications, but I don't want any part of you, is that clear?" He pulled her close to him and glared into her eyes. "What you have done is unpardonable."

Tears filled Hermione's eyes. "Severus, I don't know what you mean. I didn't do anything. Please, just talk to me."

He shoved her away and turned his back on her. "Leave now, before I do something I will regret."

He felt her hand on his arm, but he wrenched it from her grasp. "I said go!"

She slowly removed her hand and gathered her things, leaving the chocolate bar behind. She left without saying another word. Once he heard the door close, he looked over to make sure she'd really left. She was gone. He heaved a great, troubled sigh before fury filled him. How could she replace his obsession for Lily with an obsession for her? How could she make him beholden to yet another woman. Would he be able to get this spell reversed, or would he be pining away for that snake of a woman for the rest of his life? Stalking to his bedroom, he slammed the door and didn't emerge for the rest of the day.

Over the next few days he searched every book he could find on Light Marks. Nothing described the procedure Hermione had done to him. All of them said that once the spell was performed and the obsession removed, there were no lingering side effects. He scoffed. There had to be an answer to what Hermione did. He'd need to talk to a professional.

That was why he found himself at St Mungo's, knocking at the door of Augustus Pye, Healer. He was quickly called in. Healer Pye seemed surprised to see him when he came through the door, but smiled warmly at him.

"Severus, I thought you had all your medical needs taken care of by my esteemed colleague," he said.

Severus frowned. "I have a delicate matter to discuss with you, if you don't mind," he said shortly.

"Of course, what can I do for you?"

Severus quickly outlined the Light Mark and its removal. Without going into great detail, he explained that he felt Hermione Granger had substituted another figure as the focus point of the spell instead of truly removing it.

"Why would Healer Granger do something like that?" Pye asked.

Severus grumpily looked to the ground. "I don't know, but it's the only explanation possible."

Augustus sat back and steepled his fingers as he thought. "I'll need to do some research and see if this sort of thing is even possible. I assume you don't want me to discuss this with Healer Granger?"

Severus huffed. "Of course not."

Pye nodded. "I won't say a word. Can you give me a week? I know a little about Light Marks, but this seems to be a unique situation and could take time to research."

Severus nodded.

"I'll owl my findings to you. You're more than welcome to come back in if you have any follow up questions."

Severus rose and shook Pye's hand. "Thank you, Healer Pye. I look forward to your owl."

"I'll get it to you as soon as I can, Severus. Thank you."

Severus nodded and left the man to his research.

She was in his dream again. "You know the truth, Severus," she whispered in his ear before kissing his cheek. "Just search your heart. You don't need books to tell you how you feel."

He awoke suddenly and sat up. His breathing was labored, and he'd been sweating. This dream had been recurring for days now. He couldn't get the woman out of his mind, even while sleeping. Bloody witch. How could she have done this to him?

The letter from Augustus Pye came a week to the day from his visit. He broke open the seal after quickly giving the delivery owl a treat and sending it back on its way. He studied the letter carefully.

To the respected Severus Snape,

*I have done an extensive search which has taken me from London to Rome, as well as Paris. None of the writings I find say anything about transferring the obsession from one thing to another. In fact in the book **The Light Mark and its Value** it states that the obsession cannot be imitated or transferred once the removal spell is cast. From my research, there is no way that Healer Granger was able to transfer the focus of the Light Mark from Lily Potter to any other thing or person.*

I know you were hoping for a different result, but perhaps you should reevaluate your feelings. Perhaps the Light Mark was covering up things that were only allowed to emerge once the Mark was lifted. Please come by if you have any lingering questions.

Yours respectfully,

Healer Augustus Pye

Severus crumpled the letter and threw it across the floor. Rubbish! There was no way he'd hidden feelings for Hermione Granger for all this time, just to have them come to light with the removal of the Light Mark. It was ludicrous. Insane. Impossible.

He sunk into his favorite reading chair and put his head in his hands.

"It just can't be," he muttered. "Pye must be wrong. I'll consult someone else; someone who isn't a dunderhead."

He sighed. Augustus Pye had built a reputation for his thoroughness. He was one of the most respected healers at St Mungo's, and his prowess was second only to Hermione's. If Pye said it wasn't possible, then it wasn't possible. There was only one other possibility, and Pye had already stated it. The Light Mark had hidden his feelings for so long, that when they did emerge they were incredibly forceful. So forceful that he'd thought she'd spelled them on him. Now the only conclusion was that he was hopelessly in love with Hermione Granger.

He gave a guttural sigh. "I'm a fool. She could never feel like that for me. I was horrible to her after she'd helped me. I doubt she'll be able to forgive me."

But he had to apologize, didn't he? It was the only honorable thing to do. Perhaps he could salvage their friendship. That would have to do for now. It might have to do forever. He stopped himself at that point in his musings. He would not entertain these negative thoughts any longer. He needed to move into action. He hoped she would hear him out. He'd deserve anything she'd throw at him, he knew it, but he had to try... for both of them.

He stood outside her door with a bouquet of white and yellow roses. He stared at the door. Frowning, he turned and began to pace. This was no good at all. He needed to gather his courage and knock.

"Come on, old man, you faced the Dark Lord all the time and never felt this nervous."

Of course, the Dark Lord had never held his heart in his hands, and he'd never needed to apologize quite like this.

He harrumphed. Time was wasting. He needed to make the move and knock on the door. He faced the door with his hand poised to knock. Just as he was about to take the plunge, the door opened, and Hermione almost walked into him. She looked startled, but once she recognized him, the shock on her face turned to annoyance.

"Severus," she said coldly.

The coldness in her eyes pierced his soul. His heart clenched within him. He didn't think he could speak, but he forced himself to.

Clearing his throat, he began, "I know you probably don't want to have anything to do with me, and I can't say that I blame you. I wasn't myself that day I threw you out, and I made some bad assumptions."

Hermione huffed but said nothing.

He extended the bouquet, hoping for the best. "I'm sorry. I was a fool. You are my friend, and would never do anything to hurt me. Please accept my apology."

She looked from the flowers to him and back to the flowers. "I'm late for an appointment, Severus."

"Just take the flowers, please?" he said as he extended them to her.

She looked crushed. "I'm sorry, I can't."

She rushed past him and quickly Apparated at the end of the walkway. Severus' shoulders slumped, and he lowered the flowers in defeat. He'd failed. He couldn't blame her, he'd been awful. In his mind, his dream Hermione kissed him on the cheek like she did every night. If only the real Hermione could do that too. Severus straightened and squared his shoulders. This wasn't over. He'd help her see his folly, and she'd forgive him, no matter what. He quickly waved his wand, creating a small card with the words "I'm sorry, please forgive me." written on them. He tucked them into the flowers and left them at her door. He'd come by again and again and again if he had to. She'd have to forgive him eventually, right?

Yes, he'd come by again and again. She'd not answered the door... ever. He knew she was in there. A quick locator spell had verified that. But she wouldn't open her door. Owls were always returned unread. He'd need another way to get to her, and Augustus Pye was the key.

He'd penned a short owl to him explaining what he needed. The reply came quickly, stating that all was at the ready. He Apparated to St Mungo's and went to the Healer's

office.

"Ah, Severus, you came quickly."

Severus nodded. "Have you already summoned Hermione?"

"No, I'll do that now." He waved his wand and sent a memo flying through the air to her. "Take all the time you need, Severus. I'll cover for Hermione for as long as you need, so the office is all yours."

Severus bowed his head to Pye. "Thank you for your help."

The man nodded and left the room. Severus quickly Disillusioned himself to wait for Hermione. After a while there was a light knock on the door. He didn't answer. Hermione knocked again before stepping into the office. She took a couple of steps in and called out Pye's name. Severus quickly shut and locked the door and revealed himself. Hermione saw him and huffed. She turned and tried to open the door, but it was charmed locked.

"Severus, unlock the door."

"We need to talk."

She looked at the door. "No, *you think* we need to talk."

"Hermione, I was a stupid, old, cantankerous fool. I've ruined our friendship, and I can't tell you how much that pains me. Please, there must be something I can do to earn your trust back?"

Her hand clenched around the doorknob. She didn't turn to look at him. "I doubt that's possible."

He walked over to her and placed his hand on her shoulder, trying to turn her.

"Severus, let me go. I need to get back to work."

"Augustus is covering your patients."

She turned to him then. "What did you tell him, that I'm some harpy, and you need to calm me down?"

He looked into her eyes and saw her anger. "I told him the truth. I acted like a fool, and I need to set it right."

She looked into his eyes as well. "How do you expect to set it right? You destroyed our friendship with only a few words."

Severus regarded her. If he wanted this to work, he'd need to tell the truth... all of it. But that might destroy their friendship as well. He'd thought this over every day, but still didn't know what to do.

"I should never have said what I did. I made foolish assumptions. I lashed out at you for something you were innocent of. The only thing I can say in my defense is my mind was muddled by the spell. However, it took me a while to move beyond my initial thoughts. I should not have doubted you. You have done nothing but try to help me throughout this whole process."

"What's to stop you from doing this again?"

He pulled her close to him, his arms surrounding her. "I'll never doubt you again."

She pushed him away and quickly wiped tears from her eyes. "Severus, you can't... I can't... please, just let me out of this room!"

He reached out and turned her face to his again. "I asked Healer Pye to research the Light Mark to see if it was possible to have done what I accused you of. He said it wasn't. He also said that I needed to review my feelings to see if they'd been there for a while but had been covered up by the Light Mark and its spell."

"Severus, if you're really in love with someone else, that's wonderful. I just can't... I..."

He looked into her tear stained face and came to a decision immediately. "It's you," he said. "I'm in love with you."

She gasped. "How... how can that be?"

"How could it not be?"

"Severus, don't toy with me like that. Just the other day you hated me. How can you say you're in love with me now?"

Severus looked into her eyes. "Because I never hated you. My feelings for you were so strong that I couldn't believe they were real. I know now that they are, but I was afraid."

She searched his eyes. "What were you afraid of?"

"I was afraid you didn't feel the same. I didn't know whether to tell you or not, because if I told you, and you weren't interested, our friendship would be ruined."

"Oh, Severus..."

"But you do feel the same, don't you? I can see it in your eyes. How long have you felt this way? How did you hide it?"

"I've felt like this for a long time. I just didn't think you were interested and had pretty much put it out of my head. I almost hexed Dumbledore myself when I found out that he'd marked you like that. Then when the spell was removed, and you said that those feelings had been transferred to someone else, I was crushed. I was almost glad that you had been so horrible to me. I don't think I could have borne you being in love with someone else. All of this just brought my feelings for you to the forefront, and I've felt very sorry for myself this last while."

He kissed her then, urgently yet lovingly. She consumed him, and he knew that this was what it meant to love someone completely.

"I must have loved you for a long time and been unaware," he whispered as he broke his kiss. "Thank you for finding that mark. I was oblivious to what I was missing with you."

Her arms went around his neck, and she looked into his eyes. "You don't know how long I've wanted to hear you say that. I love you too."

True joy filled him. She was his, and he knew instinctively that would not change. He said one more thing before capturing her lips in his again.

"My beautiful Hermione."

The End

A/N: This was posted in 2016 for the promptfest, but I'm finally getting around to adding it here. Many thanks to my beta, steelersgirl.