

Distance Between Us

by Southern_Witch_69

Viktor leaves Hogwarts with one witch on his mind. How does he feel? What are his intentions for the future?

The Way He Feels

Chapter 1 of 8

Viktor leaves Hogwarts with one witch on his mind. How does he feel? What are his intentions for the future?

Disclaimer: I'm swiping some of J.K.R.'s characters for a bit of fun.

SW's Notes: I'm going to write a small story for a friend, Lorraine_Bluestar, who truly adores Viktor Krum. I hope you all don't mind my little foray into the world of HG/VK.

I'd like to thank CocoaChristy for giving this a quick read over.

Here are a couple of icons that I made in hopes of making Lorraine smile. Teehee. Yes, I'm guilty of a bit of Ron bashing. Apologies to any Ron fans.



Viktor watched all of the waving students, mostly girls, as their boat began to move away from where it had been docked near Hogwarts. There was only one girl for him, only one wave that mattered. That girl was Hermione Granger. He was old enough to know what he wanted, and he'd found it in her. She wasn't like the other girls and women that tried to get him to notice them. In fact, she'd rebuffed him and ignored him until he'd finally gathered the courage to speak with her openly. It was one of his favorite moments of the year. They'd found that they shared a love of learning and reading. Well, honestly, he enjoyed reading, but the best part of reading or studying with her was the companionable silence, the handholding, and the complete respect for each other for who they were on the inside.

She was still young...only fifteen, nearly sixteen...but she would grow older and be done with school in three years. Then, he would make his move and enter her life again. *Why wait until then? She's already said that she'd meet you on holiday in France!* a voice whispered.

He smiled as he turned to make his way back down below in order to help the others to prepare for the ship to submerge. He would exchange letters with her and be the perfect gentlemen on their planned holiday. He would bide his time, live his life as he had before, and when she was ready for him, they would settle down together.

Harry Potter had been the only thing that had worried him throughout the year. And that worry had nothing to do with the Triwizard Tournament, but it had everything to do with Hermione's heart. He'd feared that the rumors were true and that Hermione had a relationship with the boy. After he spoke with Potter, he realized what a fool he'd been for allowing such a thing to occupy his mind.

"Viktor, ve vill be ready in a minute," Nikolai said, interrupting his thoughts of Hermione.

Simply nodding, his friend moved off. For now, he had to deal with things on the ship, but there would be time enough later to think of his future... of his Hermione.

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Dear Hermione,

I have only been gone from Hogwarts for a few hours, and already I miss you. I know that you said that you don't think badly of me for what happened in the maze, especially since that imposter bewitched me, but I cannot help feeling as if it's made you think less of me for not being stronger, for not fighting his hex.

Hermione, I do not know that I could stand that, thinking that you do not care for me or think of me in high regards. I am still the Viktor that spent time with you this year. I know that you said that you love me as a friend and care for me a little more than you have cared for any other boy. It is an honor to have your feelings. I cannot help wishing that I did not have to return home so that I could remain close to you and be important in your life. I suppose that I will just be happy with seeing you this summer. I look forward to meeting your parents.

You are worth the wait. The memory of your kisses and touches will keep me happy for all of my days until we meet again. I hope that my own will not be easily forgotten.

I did not mean to write so soon, but I just wanted you to know that you are on my mind and will not be easily dismissed as just another girl like you'd worried about. You are not just a girl. You are **the** girl.

Yours,

Viktor

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Rolling up the parchment, Viktor put it in his trunk with the rest of his things. He would send it to her when he returned home. Deciding to take a nap, he settled down on his small bed and closed his eyes, remembering their last private moment together.

"I must go back to see where Harry's gone off to," she said softly, leaning into his embrace and tightening her hold on him.

"Herm-own-ninny, I swear I didn't mean to hurt Cedric or Fleur," he said again for the tenth time, voice tinged with sadness, disappointment, and despair.

She placed her fingers on his lips. "I know. It's not your fault, Viktor." In a bold move, she closed her eyes, tilted her head up, and pressed her lips to his.

Eagerly, he returned her kiss, intent on showing her how very much he felt for her. Somehow one of his hands ended up inside her robes and shirt, touching her sensitive flesh tenderly. She froze for a moment and then smiled shyly before continuing their kiss, lips moving in time with his. When she broke away, moaned, and threw her head back, arching her neck towards him, his mouth swiftly moved to trail open-mouthed kisses along her skin, tasting her, ravishing her.

Viktor could feel his body tingling as he thought of her skin, her kiss, her lips, her expression... her everything.

When he felt her hand meekly slide across his chest and felt her body push against his experimentally, he pulled back and gazed at her partially closed eyes. He wanted to do so many things to her and with her, but it was not the time. She'd never forgive him for taking advantage of the situation. It would ruin everything he'd been building with her if he asked for or took anything more.

"This vill not do, my Herm-own-ninny. Ve vill wait," he said.

Her dazed eyes widened, and she looked at him as if just realizing what they'd been doing. When she blushed and looked at him with shame, trying to move from his grasp, he held her to him, hand still on the flesh of her small, soft breast.

"This is what I want, but you will not be happy tomorrow when you think of this." He kissed her forehead and gave her a final stroke before removing his hand completely. "You are beautiful, and I will always remember how soft you feel."

"I don't know what got into me... I just... Oh, you must think I'm like all the others, Viktor, but I swear that I've never done anything like that before," she blurted, cheeks reddening all the while as she pulled her robes closed.

"You are nothing like them," he said intensely, pulling her chin up so that she had to look into his eyes. "This was special, this time together. I will cherish it."

She smiled and melted his insides, causing him to feel boneless.

"I must go, Viktor."

"I will see you after dinner for one last walk near the lake, I think," he whispered, squeezing her hand one last time as she pulled back.

"All right," she agreed, slipping away.

When they'd tried to get together that night for their walk, there had been too many others around to give them any privacy, and they'd ended up staying near the entrance to the castle. Part of him wished that he'd moved things forward that day with her, but he knew that it would win him more points in the long run.

Sleep found him, bringing him bittersweet dreams of the love he'd had to leave behind.

Southern's Notes: I think Viktor would be a gentleman like this with Hermione and am certain that he never pressured her for anything more while at the castle.

The next chapter will be similar to this one. I will have Hermione's POV, a letter she writes to him, and have her remembering something about their time together.

Christy's Notes: I don't usually read this pairing, but this looks like it will be a sweet romance story. I am looking forward to watching them get together. Let's hope Ron stays out of their way.

The Way She Feels

Hermione thinks about Viktor and makes plans for her holiday in France--plans that include him.

Disclaimer: As stated previously, I'm borrowing some of J.K.R.'s characters in hopes of writing a small entertaining story. No Galleons are being made. Pity.

I'd like to thank CocoaChristy for giving this a quick read through. Cheers, dear.

Hermione kissed her father and mother goodnight before going up to her bedroom to lie down and read the letter that she'd gotten from Viktor. It had been a pleasant surprise to receive something from him so soon.

It was truly a pity that he was so much older and from another country. She would like to have him around while she finished out her days in school. It had certainly made her year more pleasant with him around. After Cedric was murdered and the news of You-Know-Who's return spread, she'd felt more secure with him there, even though he'd fallen prey to Crouch Jr.

The boys, Ron and Harry, never liked hanging around in the library much and doing homework. Well, Harry did when Ron was angry with him, but the moment they'd made up, Harry was back to keeping company with Ron. She'd gotten used to having him about and missed him... until Viktor approached her.

She remembered scowling every time he came by, as there would often be a trail of giggling girls following him. It was quite hard to read with them wandering about and making noise. She smiled smugly as she thought of the librarian and how many times she'd made them leave.

It was on one of those occasions that she'd finally had a conversation with Viktor. When Madam Pince had tossed the loud girls out, he'd slipped into her niche and took the seat at the table across from her. She'd never forget it.

"Hello," she said quietly, all annoyance leaving her face, replaced with a little curiosity. What would a Quidditch star as famous as he want with her? She had been noticing the covert little glances he'd been giving her, but it still didn't explain why he was at her table.

His surly gaze softened, and he inclined his head in greeting. "I haff a book to read."

She looked at the book in his hands and saw that it was upside down, the title evading her. "Well, that's fine," she said, cheeks flushing slightly. He seemed nervous! He wasn't truly reading his book. That could only mean... that he wanted her company. Suddenly, she felt faint and heated, the negative things she'd thought and said about him and his followers faded away immediately. It was a very heady feeling to know that out of all the girls around, he'd sought her out. She looked back down at her own reading, scratching against her parchment with her quill when she saw something of interest.

When she was finished, she began putting her things away, finally glancing over at him, noticing that he'd finally righted his book and appeared to truly be reading, as his eyes were moving along the lines of the page.

"Goodnight," she said.

"I will be here again," he said, pushing back his chair to stand formally as she rose.

She wondered if that meant for her to join him. She simply smiled and fled to the safety of her common room, feeling as if she owned the world.

Hermione smiled fondly at the memory. She knew now how nervous he'd been just by simply sitting there across from her. She sighed sadly. Why couldn't Ron be more like Viktor? Viktor was so very calm, even under pressure, taking things in stride, while Ron blew up in anger without asking questions first and saying hurtful things and jumping to conclusions. Before Viktor had left, Ron had come to his senses and finally allowed his admiration for Viktor to show. That had gained him a few points in her eyes, but it would still be a long time before he could truly measure up to the man that Viktor was.

Reading his letter made her smile and sigh sadly. She would miss him much more than she'd realized. Ron and Harry rarely wrote back to her during their summers, but she knew that if nothing else, she'd gained a long-distance pen pal in Viktor. She was flattered that he thought so highly of her and felt as though he loved her. "Love?" she said aloud. "He's never actually said it out loud."

He didn't have to. She could feel it and see it in his eyes. He loved her in a way that no other had before. She admitted that she would have liked for Ron to feel that way towards her, but he was too caught up in other things to notice her the way Viktor had. She thought back to her second meeting with Viktor in the library.

She went to the table that she'd been at a few days before and realized that he was sitting there. She'd wondered if he would be, and she would have come back sooner, but there were other things that she'd had to do. Well, part of her had been a little afraid to come back in case he wasn't there. Then, all of those thoughts she'd had that had given her self-esteem a major boost would have been destroyed.

Not caring that a couple of younger girls were sitting a couple of tables away and watching, likely hoping her advance would be rebuffed, she marched past them and their sniggering and took her normal seat across from him. He quickly rose to greet her, but she simply smiled and murmured a quick hello to him.

"I haff wondered if you would not come back again," he said after a few moments of silence.

"Oh, I've been busy with... ah... a few things," she said lamely, looking up at him and finding him smiling.

It truly transformed his face. Where he'd seemed surly and unapproachable at a distance, she could see that her first impressions of him had been incorrect. He seemed quite friendly and warm.

"What are you reading?" she ventured.

They began talking about his studies, and she explained about hers. She realized that their interests weren't all that much different. When it was near curfew time, she regretfully told him that she would have to be going.

"I will be here again," he said, rising to stand politely as she got up and gathered her things.

"I'll be back tomorrow," she said, hoping nothing would come up to change that. As before, she fled before he could say anything else, unable to stop the smug smile she flashed at the jealous girls when she passed.

Over the course of a couple of weeks, they'd met, studied or read in silence, and talked a great deal on some of their meetings. Some evenings there was no reason for words. The companionable silence was enough. She was especially happy that he'd never asked her anything about Harry and how he was coming along in the tournament. That would have put an end to their long friendly chats, as she could never betray Harry that way.

"I would like to ask a question," he said suddenly one night before she could leave.

"Yes?"

"The ball that is coming, I would like for you to accompany me there. Would this be acceptable?" he asked, hope mixed in with his formal demeanor.

She hadn't even thought of the ball. Her heart started pounding as she nodded, and a small, "Yes, I would like that very much," slipped from her lips.

"I will be honored," he said, taking her hand and kissing it to seal their agreement. "I will not be here again for a few days. I have to help on the ship with a few things." He seemed regretful. "But I will be waiting for you on Friday to make plans."

"All right," she said, blushing profusely and pulling her hand from his. "I'll be here. Oh, Viktor?"

"Yes, Hermion-own?"

"Thank you." With that, she quickly raced off to the closest girls' toilet so that she could lock herself in a stall and dance a jig of happiness. She couldn't believe it! Viktor Krum had asked her to the Yule Ball. This made up for all the rubbish and rumors she'd been enduring at the hands of the Slytherins, that Skeeter cow, and nasty Professor Snape! Well, she supposed that if it hadn't been for him and what Draco did, her teeth might not have been fixed. For a moment, she paused. Viktor had been approaching her before Malfoy had hexed her, so that meant that he hadn't minded that her teeth were a little larger in the front.

Feeling much better about herself and extremely more confident, she made her way to the common room. There was only one person that she would confide in, and that would be Ginny. Ron and Harry would likely make fun of her if they knew she'd been asked...and by Viktor Krum at that.

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Viktor,

I hope you don't mind that I'm responding so quickly, but I just wanted to say that I appreciate your kind words. I've talked to my parents, and they definitely want to go down to France for the holiday. I've not told anyone else. I wanted to make certain that they were still interested before saying anything.

We will have a great time together. I've been thinking about your letter, and I wish that there wouldn't be this large distance between us. I feel that if you would live closer, things could be different for us.

That doesn't mean that we can't continue our plans for France or continue writing to each other. I, for one, will be happy to hear from you every chance I get. Thank you for everything you've done for me, Viktor. This year has been one of the best of my life so far. I meant what I said about caring for you more deeply than any other.

No matter what happened in the maze when Crouch put that hex on you, I still respect you, and I know that you would never do something like that on your own. You're a good man, my sweet Viktor. I would and do trust you with all of my heart. Please don't think that will ever change.

Always,

Hermione

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**Southern's Notes:** Although Hermione isn't a vain person, I think that she would feel special for having his attention while so many others would want it. I don't necessarily think she would flaunt it or use it to make her something into something she isn't. But I remember Harry saying that she carried herself more confidently while with Viktor at the Yule Ball. Hmm... Of course he was uncertain if it was because all of her books were missing. Teehee! Anyway, hope you enjoyed.

I'm going to have them meeting up in France in the next chapter. I shall have to do a bit of research first, as I've never been there. I'll still try to update tomorrow evening though. Cheers.

**Christy's Notes:** To me, I don't think it seemed Hermione flaunted anything. She should feel special...Viktor certainly thinks she is! I love the way he doesn't notice any other girls when Hermione is around him. I can't wait to see what happens in France!

## Some Time Together

### Chapter 3 of 8

Viktor's family joins Hermione's for a small holiday in France before she has to return to London.

**Disclaimer:** I've swiped a few characters that belong to J.K.R. I promise to send them home soon.

*I'd like to thank CocoaChristy for giving this a read through.*

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"Hello," Hermione said to the tall, dark-haired woman and the hook-nosed man that greatly resembled Viktor.

"Hello, Miss Granger," they both said through thick accents, smiling politely.

Hermione had met them briefly when they'd gone to Hogwarts to watch Viktor in the third task of the Triwizard Tournament, but she was still nervous, as this would be the first time they would talk at length and meet her parents, Muggles.

"These are my parents, John and Jane Granger." She motioned between them. "Mum, Dad, these are the Krums. I'm sorry, but I don't... I don't know how to pronounce your names correctly." Her cheeks tinged pink, but Viktor's mother smiled kindly, taking Hermione's mother's hand and leading her to their table.

"Herm-own-ninny and I will talk and give you time to learn each other," Viktor said.

For a moment, Hermione thought that her father would object, but he nodded his consent and shook Mr. Krum's hand. Smiling, Hermione quickly followed Viktor out of the café.

"I hope they get on well," she said, squeezing his hand. "I've missed you, you know. It's quite boring, reading alone."

"You haff been missed," he said, pulling her hand up to place a small kiss on it. "Vill you allow me to take you somewhere special?" he asked hopefully. "It vill not take long."

She nodded. "We've come on holiday here before a couple of years ago, so I'm pretty familiar with the sights, but I won't object to wherever you want to take me." She felt a bit nervous as his eyes glinted mischievously for a moment.

They crossed the stone street and entered a small alleyway between two old buildings. About midway, Viktor turned left down another alleyway, leading her to what looked like a courtyard with plants, a fountain with scented water flowing in the center, and a few wrought-iron tables with candles hovering above them.

"It's beautiful. Where is this?" she asked.

"A place that I do not believe you haff been before," he said, pulling out a chair. "My parents showed me this place and said someon special should be brought here."

Honored and flattered, Hermione sat down and allowed his help with her chair, heart beating wildly. "Thank you."

"It is not a problem," he said, taking a seat right next to her. He took her hand in both of his and held it, bringing it up to his cheek to nuzzle against it. "I haff thought of you every night since I haff left you."

"I... I have, too," she admitted, wishing that things could be different, wishing that Viktor would live closer, and wishing that she wouldn't be so confused.

"I wish that you would not haff to leave so soon." He kissed her palm and released her hand. "Can you not stay the two weeks that we planned?"

"Oh, Viktor, I wish that I could, too, but I cannot. Professor Dumbledore wants me to go and stay with the Weasleys until Harry can join us." She frowned as she saw Viktor try to mask his disappointment. "It's not my choice. He just thinks that I'll be safer with them in a protected home."

Viktor nodded. "I want you to be safe; if that is what it takes, then it will be done."

"Let's just enjoy these few nights while we can?" she asked hopefully.

"Yes, of course," he replied. "You would like Bulgaria."

"Well, maybe I'll see it another time," she offered.

He nodded and snapped his fingers. A light meal appeared before them. "My parents, they will keep company with yours."

Throughout dinner, they talked and caught up on everything that had happened since they'd last parted. She told him how the headmaster thought it best for her to stay under his protection and to help Harry through the confusion and grief he was likely feeling in the wake of Cedric's death. When he picked up her hand again and cradled his face against it, she sighed sadly.

"Viktor, I am confused about my feelings. I care about you deeply, but I think it's wrong of me to lead you on this way." She frowned and pulled her hand from his grasp. "I don't want you to keep... keep loving me when I can't do the same."

He looked away from her and remained silent. His expression was filled with disappointment, but he smiled eventually.

"I think that I can decide when to give up on you, Herm-own-ninny. Do not think that I will be led around by someone if I do not wish to be." He took a sip from his glass. "We will enjoy this time we have together, and then life will move on."

Hermione nodded in agreement, eyes misting slightly. He was such a good man, and she did care for him, but it wasn't as deeply as he felt for her...or at least she was uncertain. It might be that way one day if their situations changed, but the distance between them was just a bit much for anything more, especially with everything going on in their world at the moment. She needed to concentrate on school and on Harry and helping him.

As a group, they left Dijon and traveled by Portkey to Paris where they did some touristy treks about the city. Each passing hour that she spent in Viktor's company had her wishing that he would be returning to Hogwarts with her the next term. He had graduated from Durmstrang, though, and he would be playing Quidditch again professionally, not having to worry about any other career for the time being. After their talk during their first dinner, they'd reverted back to the way they were before, an unspoken agreement between them to let them at least have Paris if nothing else ever again.

"We've only got a few hours left before my family has to Portkey back to London," Hermione said regretfully, squeezing the fingers of the hand that were laced with hers. "So, I have until midnight." She grinned. "Dumbledore's idea. What shall we do next?"

"I have something that I would like to do," he said, flashing a sideways grin at her. "Would you trust me?" he asked slyly.

"Yes, of course I would," she replied honestly.

He patted his pocket and said, "We will go to see the Eiffel Tower."

"Oh, all right," she said, slightly disappointed. They'd gone earlier with their parents and had to wait in line for a long time. By the time they'd been to the top, they were feeling a bit too irritable to be appreciative of the dazzling view.

"This will be different," he said confidently. A moment later, he Apparated them to a safe spot nearby. She smiled at the tall erection, lights shining proudly, illuminating the sky. The line wasn't as bad as it had been previously, and they were able to move up to the second floor and onto the lift within ten minutes. Once they were at the top, she gazed out at the city through different eyes. Everything was dark and sparkled with lights.

Viktor moved behind her and put his arms around her and whispered, "I do love you."

She simply nodded and had to bite her lip not to say it to him as well. To do so would be to change everything. Instead, she turned her head a little and captured his lips with hers in a small kiss. She was uncertain if it was the cool breeze whipping around them or just the magical feeling of the city, but that moment was one of the happiest of her life. Everything felt so perfect. The Dark Lord and Wizarding wars faded from her mind. There was only life, love, and freedom.

After he ended their kiss, he led her away from the others in their group, and he discreetly pulled his wand and used it to disillusion both of them. Then, he pulled something out of his pocket, disillusioned it, and restored it to its normal size...his broomstick. He got on and pulled her behind him.

"Hold onto me," he said.

"All right," she said, voice trembling with unease.

"Trust in me, Herm-own-ninny."

Those words calmed her. "Always."

With her hands fastened about his body tightly and her thighs clenching the stick, she held her breath as he kicked off the ground, hovered for a moment, and then moved away from the tower slowly.

"Keep your eyes open," he directed.

She didn't have time to reply as he took off in a long dive down towards the ground. The height of the tower slowly diminished, and the much wider base rapidly came into view. With a small shrill scream, her stomach flipped upside down and shot tingles through her body just as Viktor directed the broom to lift and bring them racing parallel with the ground. It was a rush bigger than anything she'd felt before, and she loved it. She showered his back with kisses, mostly grateful kisses, as he'd not splattered them on the ground or crashed them into anything.

Laughing loudly, he directed the broom to pass through the water sprays of a nearby set of fountains, wetting their hair and clothes. "I hope you haff luffed it," he called over his shoulder.

"I do love it," she said aloud, holding him tightly. *And you*, she thought to herself. *I really do, but I just can't tell you.* And she wouldn't. He didn't deserve to have to wait for her when he could find someone nearer to his age or his home. Someone who could devote herself to him fully as he deserved.

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**Southern's Notes:** I've never been to Paris or Dijon. I just looked up some things online. If something seems off, apologies. I hope you've enjoyed the chapter regardless.

The next chapter will be mostly letter exchanges. Hope that's all right.

**Christy's Notes:** I feel for the both of them! Love that can't be...not yet anyway!

# Time Apart

Chapter 4 of 8

Viktor and Hermione exchange letters and make plans. Have things changed? Will they get better or worse?

**Disclaimer:** I've swiped a few characters that belong to J.K.R. I promise to send them home soon.

*I'd like to thank CocoaChristy for giving this a read through.*

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Viktor,

Things are going well, and yes, I agree with you. I wish that we'd had more time to spend with each other in Paris. I've not told anyone here about our holidayvacation, and I hid the society page in the paper that mentioned seeing us walking through the streets. Luckily, the reporter didn't know my name. The picture was unmistakable though. I just don't think that the news would be well received at the moment, what with all of us supposedly being cautious with the war on. They'd think I'd been traipsing about carelessly. Anyway, I clipped the article and the picture and saved them with all of the other clippings that I have of you. I confess that I did put it under my pillow for the night, but I didn't want Ginny or Ron to see it.

Harry has finally made it here, and he's in a right foul mood. He's yelling a great deal and acts like Ron and I are to blame for most of his problems. Well, maybe I'm exaggerating a little. I know he's going through a lot, but I just wish he'd realize that we are on his side and will be with him until the end, doing what we must to help him.

I read that your team won yesterday in a great victory over your staunchest rivals. Caught the Snitch in the first eight minutes according to the reporter, eh?. That's great, Viktor. I do worry about you, though, and they said that you tried some new stunt, diving and circling and diving again. Do be careful on that broomstick. I know. You don't have to say it. You know what you're doing, and I should leave flying to the professionals.

I can still worry, can't I? It just shows that I care. Anyway, I read something fascinating in a new book that one of Ron's brothers left lying about. It's on a new broom that they are working on and want to have ready for the next Quidditch World Cup. I've duplicated it and attached it for your reading pleasure.

You may have already read it. If so, sorry! If not, enjoy. I'll have to go. Mrs. Weasley needs our help getting a few infested areas of the house cleaned up.

Love from,

Hermione

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Hermione,

The information you sent to me was very interesting. I admit that I did hear something about it, but I did not know the details, so sending it was the right thing to do.

Do not worry about me, my love. I have been flying since I could balance myself on a broom and feel as if I am part of the air when I fly. I will be all right. And, really, you should not always believe what you read. I am sure it wasn't that fantastic. I was just following the Snitch.

I have heard something terrible. I have heard that Harry Potter is telling lies about what he saw that night at the Triwizard Tournament. It was said that he is now lying about being attacked by dementors. What is going on, Hermione?

I do not believe that Harry would say or do this if it isn't true. I do not know him too well, but I like him and believe he has seen what he says. I cannot understand why people support him one day and turn away from him the next. If I could help you, I would.

I am sorry that I cannot say more, but my time is limited. Practice has been tripled for the next two weeks.

Love,

Viktor

Viktor,

I am so happy that you believe in what Harry says. He's not lying. It's our Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge. He doesn't want to back Harry because he doesn't want the public to panic, and if the truth be known, I think he's trying to use this as a reason to make Dumbledore look bad. It seems that some people will believe anything that's written.

Like what that Skeeter woman did to us last year with her articles. She made you doubt my relationship with Harry with her foul lies. Well, now, other people like her are doing the same with Harry.

Something good happened, however, as he's been acquitted of any crimes and will be keeping his wand and going to school after all. There was a Squib that was nearby, and she saw what happened with Harry, his Patronus, and his cousin when the dementors went there. I am so glad that there was a witness. She at least felt them and knew what they were, foul creatures! I wanted to write sooner to tell you, but things have been going on here, not giving me much time.

You'll be happy to know, I hope, that I have been chosen as a Prefect this year. I am quite honored, but I had secretly hoped that I would be picked. What surprised me is that Ron has been picked as the other Prefect for our year. I would have thought that Harry would have gotten that honor. Oh, well, maybe it's just as well, what with all this other rubbish going on.

I must go and make sure that all of my things are together. We will be leaving for school soon. Viktor, I just wanted to let you know that this year won't be the same without you. Good luck in your coming game.

Love from,

Hermione

Hermione,

I have not had time to reply to your last letter until now. I hope that my owl can find you before midnight so that I will not have missed your birthday. If this is too late, please forgive me. We have had many practices, and when we are done, I am usually only able to shower, eat, and sleep.

This was the first afternoon that I've had off in a long time where I could choose to do anything that I wished, so I went into town and bought this. When I saw the color of the Quill's feather, I had to think of you, for it matches the dress that you wore on our first date last year.

I love you, Hermione, and I wear small button that you bought me in Paris on my clothes for each game. It has been bringing me luck.

Happy birthday, number sixteen.

Love Always,

Viktor

Viktor,

I love it! I'm sorry that I can't write more. It's quite late, and your owl demands a return now. It reached me in time.

Love,

Hermione

Hermione,

My parents have decided to invite you and your family to our home for Christmas. We would like to show you our small town and show you how great Bulgaria can be.

I hope you like snow. There is a lot of it here, but we have much to occupy us. Maybe you can show me how to ski like Muggles do, and I will show you how a wizard plays in the snow. I am quite good at making ice art. I remember you saying that you do this skiing sport with your parents often. I hope I can show you a better time than they can.

Love always,

Viktor

Viktor,

My parents agree that a skiing holiday would be nice. I look forward to seeing you again. I guess I'll just tell everyone that I'm going skiing with my folks. It wouldn't be a lie, now would it?

Always,

Hermione

Hermione,

As I said in my last letter, I will use Portkeys to come to England and escort your family back here. It's unfortunate that your country does not allow for anyone to enter using flying carpets. We have one here that we use at times, and it would have been perfect. I think your parents would have enjoyed it. Unless they feel about flying as you do.

{~_~}

Laugh.

You know you want to.

I am so looking forward to being with you again.

Love always,

Viktor

Viktor,

I am so very sorry, but we will not be able to go on holiday to visit your family. Something big has happened here with Harry and Ron's family. Ron's father, Mr. Weasley, was attacked by a snake and has been hospitalized. Dumbledore thinks that it would be good for me to go and spend time with them. They need all the support that they can get.

Everyone else is taking the Hogwarts Express, but I'll be using the Knight Bus to get to them. I cannot convey how sorry I am. I know you'll be disappointed, but you'll have to understand that I can't let them down. And, besides, my Head of House came to talk to me and explained that I might put my parents and your family in danger by going off on holiday like that.

I mean to say that if Arthur Weasley has been hurt, who knows what or whom it will happen to next? I couldn't bear any harm coming to you because of me. Please forgive me.

Sincerely,

Hermione

Hermione,

I am greatly disappointed that you will not come to see me after the plans we've made. Have you so little faith in my ability to care for you and your family? My family would do anything to see that you are kept safe. They know how much I love you.

This hurts me. I cannot lie to you and say it does not. Some things do bother me. You keep our letters a secret. You fear that others will know about our trip to France. You did not want to say that you were coming to visit me for Christmas.

Are you ashamed of me?

Viktor

Viktor,

No, please don't think that way. I swear that I'm not. I just thought that it would be easier on you and me if nobody knew about it. Ron, well, he's always been a bit touchy about me going on that date with you...not that he likes me at all, mind. No, it's more like a protective thing I suppose. The Weasley twins and Harry would likely tease me mercilessly. Ron's mum would have to chide them nonstop to keep things peaceful here. People at school would all be talking about me and asking questions.

I've never been really good with that sort of thing. I am sorry if I've hurt you. You are very important to me, and I will make it up to you when I can. Send your parents my regrets and best wishes for the season. One day things will be different. I can feel it.

Always,

Hermione

Viktor read the last letter slowly for a second time. Things already did feel as if they were different. He would have gone to her immediately had she asked it of him, but she had not, wanting to help her two friends and their family instead. It was very disappointing to him. His love and memory had not faded, but with time, it seemed that hers had.

Southern's Notes: I didn't want to bore you with all the OotP details all over again. Sorry about that, but I think this is a good place to stop for now. Poor Viktor. Hermione couldn't invite him to headquarters because it's a secret place. I'm sure he'll understand that one day... soon. I'll have another installment up tomorrow evening. It will also have some letter exchanging, but also a bit of something else. Muahahaha!

Christy's Notes: That just goes to show how things can get misconstrued in writing. I think that because he couldn't see her face and hear the tone of her voice, he believed she is losing her feelings for him. Poor Viktor, indeed!

Learning the Truth

Chapter 5 of 8

Viktor finds out that Hermione has been hurt and goes to her. However, he finds out something that he truly didn't want to know. In return, Hermione learns the truth about something as well.

Disclaimer: I've borrowed a couple of characters from J.K.Rowling's books, but I'm not making any money from it and will return them shortly.

Thanks go to CocoaChristy for reading over this for me.

Viktor looked down at Hermione's sleeping face. She was beautiful...even as she slept in a medicated sleep. One of those Death Eaters had hexed her when she and her friends had gone to their Ministry of Magic. He'd overheard the matron saying that if the wizard had been able to speak the spell aloud, Hermione might not have been so lucky.

He'd nearly lost her. For almost half a year, he'd been trying to accept the fact that he was losing her. As slowly as possible, he'd lessened the amount of letters that he sent her and didn't pour his heart out any longer as he had before, though he always replied to those she sent. He smiled, thinking of her letters. He supposed that she was trying to fill him in on everything in her life to make up for missing a holiday with him at Christmas. Her letters were all quite long, leaving nothing out.

When he'd read in a paper that she'd been hurt, he'd left his home immediately to find her. Past bitterness melted away, and once again, his feelings for her returned to the surface...not that they were ever truly gone anyway. He'd tried his hand at seeing other women, but nobody had lips like Hermione's or had eyes that lit up so expressively while reading. What he'd found in one hour with another couldn't even compare with a minute of being with Hermione.

She could have died. She could have died and not known that he still loved her. He leaned over and whispered, "I still luff you, Herm-own-ninny." There was no response, so he brushed her lips with his quickly before stepping away. He looked around her bed on the stands and noticed the various sweets, flowers, and cards. Choosing the first card, he opened it and began reading:

Hermione,

I just wanted you to know that we are all thinking about you and are happy that you will recover. Thankfully! If you wouldn't be around to boss us, what would we do? Harry is really distraught. It seems like nobody can reach him the way you can. Ron thought of you first before himself after he was healed. You were still out of it at that point. I think he's pretending to still not feel well just to stay there with you and keep you company.

Get well soon. If you don't, who's going to marry Ron and become my sister? I know I shouldn't say that, but I can see it so plainly...the way you feel about each other. Maybe this will be the thing to open your eyes finally.

Love,

Ginny

Viktor's frown deepened as he placed the card exactly where he'd found it. He'd been a fool to go to her. He'd been a fool to believe that he still had a chance. He'd been a fool to believe that she would really care about his feelings.

Quietly, he tossed the letter he'd written for her into the bin next to her bed. With one last look at her, he said, "Goodbye, my Herm-own-ninny." Not looking back, he left her bedside, slipping back into the silent darkness he'd arrived in.

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"Why would Madam Pomfrey be sending me a letter?" Hermione asked incredulously.

Ginny shrugged. "I don't know. Mum said it was with the other letters the Ministry searched and sent over."

"All right," Hermione said, taking the letter. She opened it and read the short note.

*Miss Granger,*

*I found this when I was moving the furniture in hospital wing. It had slipped behind the dustbin, so I'm uncertain if you'd meant to throw it away or if it simply fell.*

*Yours truly,*

*P. Pomfrey*

The moment Hermione recognized the tiny scrawl, she folded the note. "I'm going to go up and lie down for a little while," she said suddenly.

"What did she say?" Ginny asked curiously. "She didn't forget to tell you anything, did she?"

"No, it seemed that someone left a get well note for me, and she found it recently."

"Right," Ginny said absently. "I wonder why Dean hasn't sent an owl yet. Surely he's not worried about Ron still. He was a little scared to talk to me when we got off the train."

"I don't know," Hermione said, trying to avoid Ginny's gaze. "I'll just go up."

"All right."

As soon as the door closed behind her, Hermione opened the letter and read it quickly.

*Hermione,*

*I have just heard about what happened to you and your friends. All of this time, I have been wondering if maybe you were exaggerating about the dangers and risks, making excuses to not come to see me and my family, but I realize now that you spoke the truth. I have been a fool, for I have been trying to lose the feelings I have for you, thinking it was for the best to forget you.*

*There are so many things that I want to say to you, and I somehow fear that you will not be around long enough for me to say them. I will stop playing Quidditch for a while if you need me. I can help to protect you, Hermione. I love you. I miss you. I have been treating you badly, not writing unless you write to me first, because I was bitter and selfish...only thinking of how I didn't get what I wanted for Christmas: you.*

*I will come to see you. You will just have to read this with me standing next to you. I cannot stay away any longer. I cannot wonder if you are all right. I will have to see it for myself. It's been a long year without you, and when I think that I might have lost you before I could tell you how I still feel, it is nearly unbearable.*

*Love always,*

*Viktor*

Tears slid down Hermione's cheeks. He had visited her in the hospital wing and hadn't even talked to her. Why had he changed his mind about staying? Why did he just leave the letter? "Hang on," she mused aloud. "He didn't leave it. He threw it away."

A gasp fell from her lips. "Oh, no," she moaned, remembering that night. She'd thought that she'd dreamed about him...hearing his voice, smelling his light cologne, and feeling his soft lips. After that, still dreaming...or so she'd thought at the time...she'd opened her eyes and saw him reading one of her cards. The last thing she remembered was feeling so safe and drifting away from the vision before her.

He truly had been there. What could he have read that would have made him leave without speaking to her? Without giving her the letter he wrote? And not only that, but she hadn't heard from him since either. In truth, she hadn't thought to write to him and tell him about it. Not yet. She was going to include it in his monthly letter after Harry joined them. Frowning, she tried to think of what her cards and notes had said.

Just when she'd nearly given up, she remembered Ginny's silly card and how it had mentioned that she and Ron were unknowingly fancying each other. "Oh, Viktor," Hermione whispered, "I'm so sorry. She was only joking." She frowned. "I think."

If she wanted to be honest with herself, part of what Ginny had said was true. She did have some feelings for Ron, but he didn't seem interested. Not that she could tell anyway. *It's so bloody confusing!* If Viktor lived near her, she would try to be with him. She was nearly of age and could make her own decisions... adult decisions. But she couldn't ask him to give up playing Quidditch. That wouldn't be right. His future was so bright. And... and she had too much going on. Harry and Ron, they needed her.

She placed the letter with the picture she had of him hidden away in her trunk. He would never know that she'd read it. She would just carry on and write as she had been. If he didn't know, he couldn't be embarrassed about it, and he couldn't try to talk her out of her decision.

If her life was meant to be spent in England with her family and friends, then it would be, but if her future was truly with her Bulgarian Viktor, then it would come about in time. Nothing should be forced.

"Goodbye for now, Viktor," she whispered.

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**Southern's Notes:** Yikes. I normally don't stretch out anything angsty, but I needed to do this here. They will meet again in the next chapter.

**Christy's Notes:** Poor Viktor! He is heartbroken! I hope he finds out how she feels soon.

## Being Honest

*Chapter 6 of 8*

A confused Hermione decides to be honest with Viktor about her feelings for Ron and for him. What does Viktor do?

**Disclaimer:** I've borrowed some of J.K.R.'s characters, but I'll return them shortly.

*Thanks go to CocoaChristy for giving this a read through.*

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Hermione put aside Professor Snape's essay on Inferni and pulled the article she'd clipped back to her and frowned. She'd recognize Viktor's surly expression anyplace. He seemed annoyed with the reporter, but the female clutching his arm certainly beamed brightly for the picture. Her name was Avgustina, and she had accompanied him to his team's annual party.

Why had he never mentioned anything to her about this girl... woman... in his letters? She'd not ever kept anything from him. Frowning, she knew that that was untrue. She'd never explained about her confusing feelings for Ron. And lately, more than ever, her confusion was even worse. She hated that Ron and Lavender were an item, and she also hated the way he'd been treating her. She'd found out that he'd been angry at Ginny for snogging Dean and that Hermione had snogged Viktor.

In her mind, he had no right to be angry over something that was none of his business, but then, partly, she was pleased because it certainly meant that he cared. However, she didn't understand why he'd turned to Lavender. She'd thought it was to make her jealous at first, which had worked, but then, she thought that maybe he simply liked what Lavender did for him. More than ever, Hermione wished that she'd carried on a bit more with Viktor. She'd be able to compete with Lavender then, knowing what boys liked.

"Ugh! Listen to yourself!" she said in disgust. "If I have to be like her to get a boyfriend, it's not worth it."

And her thoughts were so unfair for Viktor. He'd pined for her for so long, and she hadn't wanted to hurt him, but she'd done so. Now that it seemed he was moving on with his life, she was uncertain if she liked it, for the same jealousy she felt with Ron and Lavender hit her full force with Viktor and this Avgustina person.

There was only one thing to do.

*Dear Viktor,*

*I hope this letter finds you well. I know that I've just written to you last week, and you haven't had time to write back to me just yet, but I couldn't stop myself from writing this to you. There are so many things that I want to say to you, and I am uncertain where to begin.*

*Starting off with an apology would be silly because then you wouldn't know what I am apologizing for. Therefore, I suppose I'll start by saying that I am so very confused and feel the need to be honest with you about my feelings on everything in my life.*

*When I went home this past summer, I didn't stay very long, but I realized that everything had changed. One day I was an odd little girl, and the next day, I was off to a school for magical people. My parents have always been supportive or loving, but they will never understand me fully. Things weren't as they seemed when I was home. For the holidays, I usually don't spend much time with them, and I realized that I don't truly know my parents any longer. I don't know what Mum's favorite dress is. I don't know what Dad likes to watch on the telly each night. I couldn't tell you the names of their patients that they see most often.*

*In return, they couldn't name my favorite charms, subjects, people I've fancied, or any of my close friends...aside from the Weasleys and Harry. When did this change? It seemed like not so long ago we were all happy and still knew how important each other's lives were. It feels like it's slipped away. I hate that feeling.*

*Now, it also feels like you are slipping away. We barely owl each other anymore. What is it now...once every other month? I hate that, Viktor. I don't want you out of my life, though you are because you live so far away, but you know what I mean. I never want our letters to stop. Promise that we'll always be friends, that I'll always remain as special to you as you are to me. For I am promising you that you will always be here with me, even though there is this distance between us.*

*I should also tell you that on some days it feels as if I fancy Ron. I think about him often, I wonder what it would be like to kiss him, and I even get a bit jealous that he's paying more attention to another girl than he is to me. I don't like feeling like that, but I can't seem to help it. However, on other days, I want to slap myself and feel like I've gone temporarily mental. How could I fancy him? Most of the time, he's quite rude to me, and yet there I go thinking of him in "that" way.*

*Please don't hate me for saying that. I think it's time to be honest with you. Ginny has been thinking that he and I fancy each other for a long while. There may be some truth to that, but I swear I've only truly realized it recently. I wish that I'd told you before. I feel dishonest by not doing so.*

*Viktor, I am confused because I care about you, too. I never wanted to tell you, but when we were together in France, I realized that I loved you. I didn't want you to pine away for me or ruin your life by knowing...making you want to come here with me for my protection or whatever. Although my feelings have dimmed, they are still there. This is the most confusing thing to me. I think of Ron. I think of you.*

*I don't expect you to be pleased about this, but I just thought you ought to know. Whatever happens in life, Viktor, please be happy. If you meet or have met someone that you care about, please don't hesitate to build a life with her, for I can make no promises to you and won't do so. Your happiness matters to me.*

*Love always,*

*Hermione*

~~~~~

Viktor read the letter unhurriedly and felt the breath slowly leave his body. She had loved him... still loved him. She also fancied Ron. He noted that she never said that she loved Ron, but he supposed that she did on some level. There was still a chance for him. Perhaps the time of waiting patiently was over. He was too far away to be serious competition, but if he visited her, she would see that Weasley was not for her.

Weasley would never care for her the way he could. Viktor prided himself on the ability to protect her the way she needed to be protected. Everyone was worried about Harry Potter and keeping him safe, and while they did worry about his two closest friends, they weren't as watched over. He could do that for her.

Would it be wrong for him to go to her? Would it be wrong for him to make her choose? He shook his head even as he thought it. She was seventeen...of age in her country. She could make any decision regarding her life legally. It wouldn't be long before the summer months were upon them, and his season in Quidditch would finally be over. He would go to her then and take a leave from the team.

"Viktor? Are you ready to eat?" came a soft voice from behind.

"Yes, Avgustina, I will be right in," he said, smiling at his cousin. "I haff a letter to write."

"Is that from your friend in Scotland?" she asked, nodding to the letter.

"Yes."

Avgustina smiled knowingly and left him alone to respond to Hermione's letter.

Hermione,

I hope that this letter finds you well. I think that I should be honest with you. I thought that you felt more for the Weasley boy than for me. It is why I have been trying to keep you at a distance from my heart, but you have never left it and will always be a part of me. There is no one for me but you.

Your letter, it made me happy. You words will never be forgotten. I would also like to have you happy in life and hope that you can find peace again. After you are finished with schooling, you can build the relationship with your parents again. They will be there waiting for you... as will I if that is what you want.

In fact, I was thinking of taking some time away from the team this summer. I am tired and have been playing Quidditch for a long time. I need time for myself. Perhaps I will see you this summer then. It would be good to do this and would make me happy. I will not pressure you about anything so long as I can see you.

My family is giving a dinner for my cousin this night. She is to be married to one of my friends. I cannot write a longer letter, but I want you to know that your honesty is appreciated.

Always yours,

Viktor

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Hermione stepped off of the Hogwarts Express carrying Crookshanks and following her friends. She put her cat's carrier down and hugged Harry tightly. Since Dumbledore's murder a few days before, things had been tense. So many things had happened. Ron and Lavender had ended things. Harry had broken things off with Ginny. Snape was a murderer...this caused her to grieve internally. She'd never thought he could do such a thing. Draco was a right foul git and a coward.

While she'd felt comforted when Ron had held her and snogged her a little, there was something missing. Her long-desired fantasy of kissing him had proved to be less spectacular than she'd hoped for. She supposed it was all the tragedy around them that had taken away it, but it wasn't like it had been with Viktor. The wonder, the excitement... that was missing.

"Look," Ron said, pointing. "Your mum and dad are over there." His face darkened. "Who's that?"

"Oh!" Hermione gasped, unable to keep the shocked smile from her face. "Viktor!" she called out, running towards her friend and hugging him tightly. "What are you doing here?"

"I haff taken time away," he said plainly. "I thought you might need a friend in this time of disaster."

"I do," she said, squeezing his hand. Suddenly, her flushed cheeks paled. Ron. She turned around to see him gazing at them through narrowed eyes. "Come see," she called, beckoning him over. "Viktor's come to visit. He heard about Professor Dumbledore."

"Yeah, I expect everyone has," Ron said, nodding tersely in greeting.

"Hello," Harry said, reaching over to shake Viktor's hand. "Er... how long are you here for?" he asked when nobody spoke.

"I do not know for certain," Viktor replied smoothly. "I will see how things are."

"Well, things are fine," Ron said bluntly.

"Ron!" Ginny called. "Come on. We've got to escort Harry. The Ministry has given us cars again."

Harry frowned but moved towards Ginny, who promptly turned to ignore him.

"We've invited Viktor over for dinner," Jane Granger said with a smile. "It's been so long since we've seen him. I thought it would be nice to catch up."

Ron took Hermione's hand and pulled her a few feet away. "What is going on, Hermione? How are they so cozy with Viktor?"

"They met him before," she said as honestly as she could. It wasn't the time or the place to tell everyone about their families meeting in France two years earlier. "Honestly, I didn't know he was coming, but it's nice to see him all the same."

"I suppose," he relented. "I'll owl you." When she nodded, he shocked her by kissing her fully on the lips in front of her parents and Viktor. When he pulled away, he looked directly at Viktor as if staking his claim. "I've got to go, but it looks like a Ministry car is going to follow you home, too." He hugged her again. "Bye."

Hermione's mouth gaped open as she watched him run off to join the other Weasleys. When Hermione gazed at Viktor, she saw the amusement in his eyes *What have I gotten myself into?* she asked herself, allowing him to guide her out of the platform behind her parents.

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**Southern's Notes:** It's about time she admitted her feelings, eh? I sort of feel sorry for Ron. Hmmm. I'll have to fix that.

**Christy's Notes:** I enjoyed Hermione's jealousy and how it brought out her feelings for Viktor.

## Working Things Out

*Chapter 7 of 8*

After a talk with her mum, Hermione realizes exactly what she wants and why.

**Disclaimer:** I've borrowed some of J.K.R.'s characters and am having a bit of fun with them. I'll return them shortly.

*I'd like to thank CocoaChristy for looking this over for me.*

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Hermione smiled as Viktor washed dishes the Muggle way, getting most of his shirt and trousers wet in the process. "I don't think that they will notice if we used a bit of magic," she said conspiratorially, looking to see if her parents were near. She tossed down the towel she'd been drying the dishes with and flicked her wand a few times.

"Would they be upset?" he asked.

"No, they wouldn't mind, but I've not really used much magic here...especially not in front of them, just coming of age in the Wizarding world last September and all." She grinned impishly as he looked around before flicking his wand.

"I never did like housework," he said. He held a hand out to her. "Would you like to go out to that swing that I saw in the back?"

"Yes," she said, stomach tingling as she placed her hand in his. When they got to the door, her father stopped them.

"Hermione, Viktor, a program is coming on the telly if you want to watch it with us?" he offered. "It may be a little boring for you, but we dentists think highly of it."

"Er... we're going to go out back before Viktor has to leave," she said, nodding towards the backdoor.

"Right," her father said. "Where will you be staying?" His wife walked up beside him. The three Grangers looked at him expectantly; none had asked this question during dinner.

"I haff not decided. I just wanted to be near Herm-own-ninny," he said, looking down at her with an odd expression. "I want to spend time with her... and you," he added quickly, nodding at her parents. "It has been so long since I haff been seeing you."

Hermione blushed and realized that she wanted him to stay nearby. She'd missed him so much, and she'd been surprised to see that he hadn't changed all that much in his face...his looks, his expressions...but his body was more of man's than the large boy she remembered. He still had the same walk that made her think of a duck, but it was endearing. She wondered what he thought of her, but her ponderings were interrupted by her mother's next sentence.

"Well, you can stay here with us! We wouldn't have you put up in some place when it's us you want to visit," Jane said happily. "We've a guest room upstairs next to Hermione's."

"You may need to allow us to clear it up. We've a few boxes stored in there, but we could put them in the corner," John offered.

"I would appreciate this," Viktor said. He turned to Hermione. "I will stay here if you would not mind."

"No, of course not," she said, biting her lip so that she wouldn't say more in front of her parents.

"Will your boyfriend, Veasley, be upset?" he asked suddenly.

"O-oh," she stammered. *Bloody hell. I haven't been thinking of Ron.* "Well, he's..."

"Are you and Ronald seeing each other?" her mother inquired.

"No, I mean... I don't know," she replied dumbly. "I mean, I guess we are a bit more than friends, but he never said... We've never made any real decision on anything definite." She swallowed thickly. "I'm sure he wouldn't mind anyway. Viktor's been a friend for years."

Her parents smiled at each other knowingly. "We'll be watching the telly. You can help him settle in if you'd like."

"Yes, use some of your magic to move the boxes for us," her father said.

"John," her mother said with a grin, swatting him on the arm.

"What? It would save us the time."

Hermione laughed and pulled Viktor out into the heated evening air. "There are no lights on back here. Did you want me to put one on, or will the moonlight do?"

"The moonlight will be fine," he said.

She sat on the swing and moved back once he'd sat next to her. What happened next surprised her. His hand was on her cheek, and his mouth was over hers, lips brushing hers in a soft kiss. He pulled back.

"I want to kiss you."

"I... I think you just did," she murmured.

"I want to really kiss you," he said.

"Then do," she agreed, lifting a hand to touch his face, tracing his jaw in the dim moonlight. "Oh, Viktor, I can't believe you are here... now... I thought..."

"I know what you thought." He gave her no time to respond, bringing his lips back down to hers. This time his mouth was more demanding, the kiss firmer and seeking.

She parted her lips in invitation. He accepted eagerly, tongues meeting and tangling excitedly. Her hand dropped to his shoulder and tugged him closer as her other one slid around to cup the back of his head. One of his hands dropped to her waist while the other still held her face gently. When he finally ended their kiss and pressed his forehead against hers, she was breathless and thought of nothing else...aside from the need to clutch him to her.

"I missed you so much," she finally mumbled. "I didn't ever think you'd be here with me after all this time."

"I have been thinking that I have stayed away too long," he said. "I will protect you, Hermione. Always."

"Don't throw your career away for me," she said suddenly. "Please don't feel that you have to put your life on hold for mine. Mr. Weasley told my father that Aurors and Order members are working together to watch over our house."

"I love you," he said simply. "This is where I should be, where I want to be."

She pulled back to look into his eyes. He still loved her even after she'd written to him about her feelings for Ron, even after he'd seen Ron's slight possessiveness and kiss, even though she was uncertain as to what she wanted. What did she want? She wanted to tell him that she still loved him, too, but would that be fair? She knew she did love him, but it wasn't as strongly as he loved her. And there was Ron.

Ron was finally treating her better. He fancied her and wanted her to be his girl... sort of. He hadn't made any declarations, but it was obvious that he assumed her to be his. She'd allowed him to hold and snog her some, though it had lacked the feeling that the simplest touch from Viktor gave her.

But she did love him. Sort of. It was more than fancying him, what she felt.

"I do love you, Viktor," she said cautiously, "but there are other things that you must know."

"You love Weasley," he stated, not releasing his hold on her when she tried to pull back completely.

"I do have feelings for him," she admitted. "It could be love."

"You will decide what you want, and I will not force you," he said, brushing his lips against her cheek and then releasing her. "It will be hard not to touch you this way."

"You don't have to *not* touch me."

"We will see what happens."

She nodded and allowed him to pull her against his chest. They stayed that way for a long while, listening to the nocturnal sounds around them and the quiet creaking of the swing.

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"Did he reply to your letter?" her mother asked.

Hermione nodded and gave the letter to her mother.

Hermione,

I guess it's all right if he comes with you to the wedding. I'd hoped you'd stay on for a while after. When's the bloke going to go home? Tell him we've things to do. You know... certain things that we need to help Harry with. He'll take the hint.

Tell your mum and dad hello. Harry is right here. He says hello. Well, I do miss you and hope to see you soon, even if he's with you. It's right odd not to have you about.

Ron

"What do I do, Mum?" Hermione asked.

"What does your heart tell you?"

Hermione sighed and plopped down onto a nearby chair. "I'd given up on having anything with Viktor. I'd always cared about him, even felt that I loved him, but as time passed, it seemed that we would never be. So... I started thinking of Ron and was utterly jealous when he had a girlfriend."

"And?" her mother prodded.

"And now that I finally have the chance to be his, I find myself wondering if it's what I really want. I'd hate to pass up a chance to be with Viktor for something that might not work out." She put her hands over her face. "When we kissed, Ron and I, it seemed that something was missing. It was all I'd wanted for a few months and yet..."

"Not at all as you'd imagined," her mother finished wisely, sitting next to her. "How does it feel when you kiss your Viktor?"

"Mum!" Hermione said, looking at her mother through her fingers, feeling her face heat up. At her mother's pointed look, she grinned and answered, "It's like I'm alive. I can feel every part of my body at once, and it makes me want to laugh and just hold him tighter."

"Do you know that I still feel that way at times when your father and I are together?"

"Really?"

Jane nodded. "Yes, definitely." After looking away for a moment, she added, "I nearly married someone else."

"What?"

"Yes, your father's cousin," she confided. "My father and his father were friends, and they were pressuring us to wed. It's how I met your father. I was confused over it. I had my family's wishes and my own." She blushed prettily. "When he pulled me aside and kissed me one day, I knew that I could never marry anyone but him. I'd never felt so alive before that moment. Life had never felt so good."

"Thanks, Mum," Hermione said, feeling as if things were clearer to her suddenly.

Being with Ron seemed to be what everyone expected: Harry and the Weasleys anyway. Too much had happened between them, what with the things he'd done and said to her. She'd rather have him as a friend rather than nothing at all. Perhaps a relationship would ruin things for the three of them. She didn't want to not have him or Harry in her life. And she wanted Viktor in her life. Where did he fit if she dated Ron?

He was stepping away from his career and had never stopped hoping that she would feel something more for him. He wanted her to be safe and would see to it that she was. Ron would do the same, but... Well, would he? She supposed he would protect her with his life, but she was uncertain he would walk away from fame and fortune just for her. In fact, it was nearly all he dreamed of at times...being wealthy and possibly well known.

It would have to be Viktor. She could rekindle things with him easily. Each night for the past week, he'd kissed her before going to his own room, leaving her wanting just one more touch, just one more kiss.

"I'm going to go out to the garden and rescue Viktor from dad. I think we need to have a talk," she said firmly, slipping the letter into her pocket.

"You do that," her mother said, smiling softly. "Tell your father I'd like to talk to him."

"All right."

She quickly made her way to where her father was explaining to Viktor about his favorite plants. She watched them for a minute before they noticed her.

After sending her father to see her mother, she took Viktor's hand and kissed its palm.

"Vait. I vas in the dirt vith it," he said, wiping his hand on his pants.

"I don't care about that," she whispered.

He caught on that something had changed. "Herm-own-ninny?"

"Ron wrote to me. He knows that I intend to bring you to the wedding," she began.

"And?"

She noted that he seemed anxious, his jaw tightening slightly as if he expected her to dismiss him.

"And I realized that he and I are better off as friends only." She smiled hopefully. "I'd like to tell him after the wedding that we shouldn't get involved, being that Dumbledore's death sort of threw us together and being that we have to finish helping Harry and not allow personal things to get between us and maybe mess things up."

"Does this mean that you vill luff only me?" he asked, a light shining in his eyes.

She nodded. "I want to try. Will you give me some time to adjust? To explain to him that he and I should only be friends?" She frowned, brow creasing. "Please don't think that I'm ashamed. I just hate to hurt him or to make him think he lost me to you. It would make things worse."

"Do not tell him that you haff decided to vant me," Viktor said.

"Well, I don't want to lie either. It's confusing."

"It vill cause more pain and maybe harm your friendship," he said. "Just let him believe that you vant to be only friends for the reason you said. He vill understand better that way, I think."

"But I don't want to have to hide my relationship with you, and I don't want to be dishonest with my friends." She bit her lip in thought. "I suppose I don't have to tell him about anything with us right away." She hugged Viktor close, afraid the moment would pass, and she'd find that they'd not taken the step towards a real relationship.

"Ve vill be all right. I svear it."

"I am going to think about what I will say to him. We still have a couple of days. I'll write back to him and let him know." She pulled back. "Viktor, there is something that I have to tell you. I've not even fully explained it to my parents."

"Vhat is it?" he asked curiously, guiding her to the swing.

"It's something that I promised Harry I wouldn't tell anyone, and he needs my help to do this in order to defeat Voldemort."

"You vill not put yourself in danger," he stated.

"I will do what needs to be done to help Harry. I have given my word." She smiled. "To not do this would be wrong, wouldn't be me. It's what I have to do at all costs."

"Then I vill follow you and help you."

"Let me talk to Harry about this, and I'll see if he minds letting you in on it. I think that another mind and set of hands could help us." She leaned close and kissed his cheek. "Let's go in and get ready for dinner."

"All right," he agreed, voice emotional.

"What's wrong?"

"Thinking of you being in danger... I do not like it," he admitted. "Vhat if I fail you?"

"Don't think that way," she said softly. "I have a feeling that we will do this."

"Together."

"Yes."

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Hermione was surprised to see that Lavender Brown had been invited to the wedding, which was taking place on the sunny grounds of the Burrow. She nodded at the girl who coolly glanced her way momentarily before moving to stand near Ron.

"Hermione," Harry called, raising a hand in greeting. "Krum."

"Hi," she said, guiding Viktor over to her friends.

It seemed that Ginny and Harry were on speaking terms again. Ron looked indecisive for a moment, gazing from Viktor to Hermione, but he nodded in greeting and remained where he was.

"We'd hoped you'd come earlier," Ginny said, smiling happily. She looked around. "Be careful. The twins have been talking about getting with Viktor to talk on something." She extended a hand to Viktor, which he took and placed a small kiss on, causing her to blush. "Er... I wouldn't trust them too much," she warned.

"I say!" a voice said from behind. "Is that Viktor Krum?"

"Yes, it is," said another.

"Oh, no," Hermione said, looking worriedly at Viktor. "I'm sorry. I didn't think about your fame or guests bothering you."

"Yeah, Vicky's so bloody famous and all that," Ron muttered. Everyone turned to face Ron, who reddened immediately. "But he'll never be as famous as my best mate, Harry Potter, though."

In that instant, Hermione realized that she'd made the best decision of her life when she'd decided to choose Viktor. It felt even better that she'd done so before seeing Ron revert back to his immature behavior. Was that why Lavender was there? Had he made a decision of his own?

"Come on, you lot," Molly called. "It's time!"

Hermione and the others...except for Ron and Ginny, as they were part of the wedding...followed her into the crowd, choosing seats near the back. Viktor sat between Lavender and Hermione, who had Harry on her left.

"What's going on?" he whispered.

"I'm not sure," she replied. "Do you mean with Viktor or Ron?"

"Both?"

She couldn't lie to Harry. She slyly looked to Viktor to see him listening to Lavender's chatter. As quietly as she could, she told Harry, "I think that he's the one for me. I think that Ron and I are better off as friends." She bit her lip while he gazed at her, thinking of what she'd said.

He nodded slowly. "I think he's been thinking along the same lines."

A breath of relief left her. "Really?"

"Yeah, he said that maybe you and he should just be mates for now... until what we need to do is over." He widened his eyes for emphasis.

"Right. I agree." She nodded towards Lavender. "And her?"

"Mrs. Weasley sent her the invite a while back. Someone had let slip that they were... er... you know."

"Oh, all right." She nodded thoughtfully. "How did he take it? Her showing up I mean?"

"He was worried that you would be upset, but then he reasoned that you didn't seem to mind if he was upset about Viktor visiting your family." Harry shrugged. "That's when he admitted that maybe he was too young to be in a serious relationship anyway, though you are all he's wanted for a while...even when he was with her."

This made Hermione feel a little guilty. "I've given this thought, and I feel that a relationship would ultimately ruin things for us, all of us. I want us to always be friends no matter who we end up with."

Harry nodded. "Ginny and I... Well, I decided that she'd be safe enough while we're off looking for... you know."

Hermione nodded. "I needed to ask you about that." She gestured to Viktor. "Do you think he could join us? Could I clue him in?"

He frowned. "I don't know. Let's talk later. Here comes Fleur."

A quick nod of agreement and Hermione looked behind her to watch Fleur slowly walk towards Bill. She was a vision of beauty and had hypnotized all present...except for Viktor it seemed. He was looking at Hermione and had pulled her hand into his.

"One day, you will be talking to me like this." It was more than a simple statement. He was letting her know exactly what he felt for her and that he was ready to settle down. He was four years older than she was, so it was a possibility.

Tears misted her eyes, and she smiled madly, envisioning being Viktor's bride-to-be, walking to meet him. She would be eighteen in just a couple of months, and she was already thinking of her own wedding. Didn't all girls dream of those things at some point in their lives? Her old Housemates, Lavender included, had mentioned weddings and things before. She pushed those thoughts aside. They had all the time in the world.

Ron, Ginny, and the others in the wedding party had already taken their places, but Hermione and Harry had missed it, as they'd been talking. She hoped that nobody had noticed. She didn't feel like answering any questions. It was bad enough that Harry seemed reluctant to let Viktor know about their new mission...not that she could blame him. It would be a disappointment, but she'd think of something to make it work. But later...

She simply needed to get through the wedding, talk to Ron, and finish her conversation with Harry. As far as Viktor... Well, there would be time later when they returned home to maybe advance things a little farther between them. Wasn't it about time they explored a little more? Shouldn't she show him what she was feeling? Shouldn't she allow him to do the same?

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**Southern's Notes:** Sorry it took so long to update. That bites, I know, but I've been a busy little lass. Really.

**Christy's Notes:** Our Hermione is ready to take the next step. I am glad she chose Viktor. Ron is too immature for her.

# Coming Together

Chapter 8 of 8

Viktor has a chat with someone at the wedding. What will happen once he and Hermione return home?

**Disclaimer:** I've snatched a few of J.K.R.'s characters for a bit of fun. I shall return them shortly.

*I'd like to thank CocoaChristy for giving this a read through for me.*

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Viktor wished that the wedding would be over. He hadn't had a moment of privacy with Hermione since the couple had taken their vows. The reception after had proved to be trying the moment he and Hermione broke away to get some drinks. Guests crowded around asking questions and even asking for his autograph. Hermione had slipped off long before to speak to Harry.

He'd always thought that if she would turn to one of her male friends for a relationship that it would be Harry, not Weasley. Many others thought so as well. However, he was not so insecure that he would worry about her now, especially since she'd confessed that she wanted a life with him. He trusted her completely.

Seeing his chance to escape from yet another well wisher, Viktor slipped out onto a path that led behind the Weasleys' home. He sat down on a bench and was instantly joined by a longhaired brunette.

"Hi," she said quietly, "we've met before. I'm Lavender Brown. Do you remember me?"

Viktor couldn't quite place her, but she seemed familiar. Of course, Hermione had told him about the girl in their letters, but he hadn't been able to put a face to the name until that moment.

"Hello," he greeted politely.

"I need to talk to you about Hermione."

"All right." He was cautious and wondered what the girl really wanted. She was no friend to Hermione and had tried intimidating her during the past school year.

"Why are you here with her? Do you want to be here, or did she ask you to come in order to make Ron jealous?"

Viktor scowled at her. "I am Herm-own-ninny's date. You should not be here asking these things."

"Because I'm right! She's wanting to seal her relationship with Ron by making him see what he'd be missing if he ended things with her!" she accused loudly, slight whinge to her voice.

"I luff Herm-own-ninny," he said heatedly, not liking this girl or her words. He stood quickly, nearly unbalancing the bench. "You vill not talk about her this vay to me."

"Oh, Viktor, you poor thing, you've been taken in by her. She's been trying to get Ron away from me all year long, and she finally succeeded when he was upset about things at Hogwarts." She stood and put a hand on his arm to keep him from walking away. "Now that he's having second thoughts, she's dangling you in front of his face to make him want to stay with her, to show her that she must be special if a rich Quidditch star wants her."

Viktor removed her hand. "If I hear you speak about Herm-own-ninny again like this, I will become angry." He stepped back from her, lifting a hand so that she wouldn't follow. "She told me about you in letters, how you hurt her, and she told me about her feelings for Veasley. Do not think you are giving me any news that I do not know."

Angrily, the girl stalked off back towards the crowds.

"Been trying to do that all along," Ron said, stepping out from behind a nearby tree.

"She is not somevun I vould trust," he said, holding out his hand to the boy. It was grasped and shook.

They both sat down.

"So you love Hermione," Weasley said.

"Yes." Viktor had no reason to lie.

"I do, too," he said softly, looking out into the overgrown, weedy garden. "I wish I would have realized that sooner though."

"Vhat do you mean?" Viktor asked curiously.

"If I would have known what I felt was love, I would have never been with Lavender. I would have been a better person...nicer, braver...and showed her." He sighed. "Now that I know it's love, I believe it's too late." He looked at Viktor. "She doesn't look at me the same way she used to. When we kiss... there's no spark."

Not knowing what to say, Viktor remained quiet.

"When I saw you after we got off the train that day, I started thinking about things. Maybe she and I aren't meant to be, not right now anyway. Maybe we should both do a bit of living and concentrate on being friends and helping Harry." His face reddened. "You won't object to her running about with a couple of blokes, will you?"

"No, I vill not," Viktor said. He didn't let on that he knew something of what he was talking about because he knew that Hermione hadn't had the chance to explain to Weasley about her decision. Perhaps there was no need.

"Treat her well, Viktor. Harry and I... we love her and won't stand for some bloke treating her bad. You'll have us to deal with if you hurt her." He held out his hand, which Viktor grasped.

"Thank you, Ronald."

"S all right," he replied. "I'm going to go find her and have a talk with her." He stood. "Thanks for talking to me."

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Hermione was feeling a bit giddy. She and Ron had an excellent talk about their relationship, both deciding that friendship would suit them better. Harry hadn't wanted to include Viktor in things completely with the Horcrux searches, but he said that they could include him as much as possible and eventually clue him in on everything. Harry felt it was safer for them and Viktor to keep things private for now.

As Viktor walked Hermione to her door, her stomach began flipping about nervously. He nodded to her, pulled her hand up to his lips, and pressed a kiss upon it.

"I will think of you tonight," he said softly. "Today was a good day."

She clutched his hand as he moved to pull away from her. "Tonight can be good, too," she said boldly, "and you don't have to just think about me. Be with me."

His eyes widened, and he automatically looked down the hall to the stairway as if expecting her parents to appear. His gaze slowly made its way back to hers, and his free hand lifted to cup her face.

"I will not rush you."

She could hear the slight waver in his voice. He didn't want her to feel obligated to be with him, but he did want her.

"It's been years for us, Viktor. I don't think we've rushed."

His lips pressed against hers, and he began backing her into her darkened room, deepening their kiss as he did so. Minutes later, her door had been closed and locked, Silencing Charms in place, and her hair had been pulled down to tumble about her shoulders and back wildly.

"You are so beautiful," he said after their eyes adjusted to the bright moonlight.

Emboldened, she reached behind her and began unzipping her dress. Once it was unzipped, she pushed it down from one shoulder, then the next, and finally after only a moment of uncertainty, she pushed it down towards her waist, revealing her light blue chemise. She wiggled, and it dropped to her feet where she stepped away from it and kicked off her heels. Clad only in her chemise and stockings, she awaited his approval.

Viktor reached out with shaky hands, placing one on either side of her face, slowly moving down and touching her throat, her collarbones, up and down each arm, the swells of her breasts and finally resting on her waist, pulling her closer.

"I haff luffed you for a long time and haff dreamed of this," he whispered. "This vill not be taking anything. This vill be giving myself to you for all my life."

Touched beyond words, she lifted up on her tiptoes and kissed him, wrapping her arms around his neck. As the kiss intensified, he quickly discarded his clothing, leaving him unabashedly naked in the moonlight.

She looked at his body, purposely avoiding *that* part of him, and took in the sight of a well-fit man. His chest was broad, muscular, and had a fair share of hair upon it. Tentatively, she reached out and softly ran her hands over it, scraping her nails against his skin and smiling at the way it felt and the moan it elicited from him. His arms were strong and stocky. His thighs were also bulky and sturdy. And his hard...

"Oh, my," she breathed, eyes lifting to meet his.

His hands fell to her waist and tugged the silky fabric of her chemise up and over her head. He pulled it to his face and inhaled the scent of the perfume she'd sprayed upon it.

"You always smell so good," he said as the garment dropped to the floor. It was his turn to take in her body, eyes roaming and lingering.

His smile and the love in his eyes reassured her that he was pleased with what he saw. She nearly stepped away as he knelt down and began to pull down her stockings and knickers. She stepped out of them and was completely bare for him.

From his position on the floor, he looked up at her, desire in his dark eyes, and in that instant, she knew she'd made the right decision. She wanted Viktor to be her first lover...possibly her only lover. The love she felt for him was enough to prove how right their lovemaking was.

His lips found and kissed her stomach, tongue tipping out to taste her flesh. His fiery trail moved up between her breasts, across her throat, and to her left earlobe. He whispered, "I luff you."

"I love you," she repeated, body tingling from the sound of his voice in her ear.

He eased her back onto the bed and began the unhurried exploration of her body, tasting her flesh, gently fondling her breasts. In turn, her hands touched and caressed every part of him. When his finger slipped into her, delving into her wetness, she gasped, wanting more. She was ready. It was time.

They moved around to where Viktor was between her thighs and pressing his firm erection into her, one inch at a time, breaking through her hymen, but not painfully so. Once he was completely in, he asked, voice strained, "Are you all right?"

She nodded. "I feel full." She kissed his cheek. "Complete somehow."

He pulled out and pushed in again, a little more forcefully.

"Ah," she called out, digging her nails into his back. "Ouch."

"It vill be better. I swear it."

And before long, it was. The slight stabbing feeling was replaced by something else, a nice friction, though she couldn't exactly relax enough to completely enjoy his body, mind too full of wonder and awe of what she and he were actually doing.

When he eventually admitted that he could not last any longer, she whispered, "Please don't wait for me. My pleasure will come another time." She moved with him through his release and held him close after, kissing his sweaty brow and gliding her hands over his dampened back.

Three little words were floating through her mind continuously: *We did it! We did it! We did it!* Then, three other words took their place: *He loves me! He loves me! He loves me!* She then whispered three words to him, "I loved this."

He lifted his head. "It is not finished." He slid his hand down her body and moved aside, intending to touch her intimately. She stopped his hand.

"I'm a little sore at the moment." Hermione quickly kissed away his disappointment. "We have forever to get this right. All of our lives."

Viktor nodded and slid out of the bed to get his wand. He cast a charm that tingled through her entire body, cleaning away the evidence of their coupling. "Ve are not ready to be parents, I think." She shook her head in agreement. He then chanted a contraceptive charm, which made her pelvic area feel cold for a moment.

He crawled back into bed with her, simply holding her to him, entangling his legs in hers. After they both slept for a while, woke again, and started caressing one another, Hermione was able to relax enough for him to touch her and coax her into a small climax, leaving her body feeling boneless and open in invitation.

Of course he accepted, making them one again.

Just before dawn, after waking and kissing her, Viktor crept back to his room, not wanting her parents to notice that they'd shared a room. Hermione knew that it was a new beginning for them. Their lives were now changed forever. Grinning, she knew it was for the better. She might not yet be eighteen, but she felt strongly about the things she wanted in her life: She wanted to help Harry defeat the Dark Lord in any way she had to. She wanted to stay in her friend's lives. She wanted to sit for her N.E.W.T.s the moment she had the chance. She wanted a career. She wanted Viktor.

She was uncertain what the future held, but for now, they would face it together. Never in her life had she felt more confident about herself or secure in her future. There was no way that Voldemort could win...not with the world being so full of love, miracles, and new beginnings.

Southern's Notes: And that ends the Viktor and Hermione tale that I've tried to weave. As I said before, this was for my friend, Lorraine Bluestar, who truly enjoys this ship and has talked me into taking it for a ride. Thanks to those of you who've been following and also to those who have been kind enough to let me know what you thought.

I've purposely left this a little open. I think that everyone can decide what they'd like to happen. Does their love last? Does she eventually end up with Ron? Does Snape come into her life later? (Oops, my other ship is sliding in, eh?) Does Voldemort win? You decide. I know that I believe in happily ever after themes....

Christy's Notes: I am not a Hermione/Viktor shipper, but I loved this fic. With my happily ever after mind, I have them married, when she is older of course, and two or three little ones running around! Great job, Southern!