

Trying to Forget

by JackieJLH

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Trying to Forget Her

Chapter 1 of 4

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I'd never thought that happiness was possible. I'd never been *happy*. I didn't even really believe such an emotion existed. It just didn't seem plausible. With all the pain, the suffering, the treachery and lies... with all of the masks we wear to shield ourselves from the world and to shield the world from us... how could anyone truly be happy when they don't even know who *they truly are*?

She seems perfect. Though I know that she is far from achieving flawlessness in actuality (she's not overly beautiful - she's barely pretty; she talks too much, shows off even more, and allows her emotions to overrule her mind), to me she is perfection personified, if only for one reason: she knows who she is.

She doesn't allow anyone or anything to change her. When she makes a decision, it is with her whole heart and of her own volition. She is true and loyal, fair and honest, but not above breaking the rules if she believes it to be for the common good. She doesn't fear me; she doesn't fear anyone, really. Hell, she looked into the eyes of Voldemort and didn't even flinch. Grown wizards fell to their knees at the very sound of his name, and she tried to stare him down.

And for the brief moment that she caught his eye, when he took his focus off the battle, he was defenceless, lost in her gaze as so many men have been. Her fiery eyes, full of passion and knowledge and confidence... whether she was looking at you with love, respect, or hate, her eyes were all-encompassing, hypnotic and eternal. It was then that Potter cast the Killing Curse, freeing me from my years of servitude.

The wizarding world gives thanks to Potter, praises him and regales their children with tales of his bravery, his triumph over the most evil wizard of our time. I lay my thanks at *her* feet, thanking the gods for her existence every day.

Sometimes I wonder if she is happy. To me, it seems that she is the only one who has a right to be—she, who is real and honest. The one girl who has been true to others and, most importantly, to herself.... Her conscience is untroubled, her hands unsoiled. Yes... sometimes I wonder if she is happy. If she is not, I hope that, at the very least, she is content.

Her class left school three days after the Voldemort fell. Potter and Weasley were finally out of my life, and I didn't feel restrained or burdened for the first time in over twenty years. I was not happy—as I said, I was hardly one who deserved such a luxury—but I was free, and I'd decided that being free was good enough.

If she had remained at Hogwarts just one more year, I think that I could have watched her, learned from her how to be happy, how to be real. But she was gone in a whirlwind of final exams, NEWTs, ceremonies and celebrations in the aftermath of the war, hugs, well-wishes, and long, teary goodbyes.

She made her rounds to all of the staff, thanking them for their work over her school years and for their guidance. Except for me. She despised me, as she had since she was a child, and I accepted that. Welcomed it, even. Why should her feelings change? Just because I was fascinated with her, just because she was my inspiration for getting up and teaching each day, with only the hope that I would learn her secret to perfection? No. She had been my focus, my object of study, my obsession even, for as many years as I'd known her, and she'd never realised it. She never would.

And then she was gone. I watched her climb into the Thestral-drawn carriage, waving at the staff and smiling broadly at her friends, eager to begin her new life... her adult life, a life that didn't include me.

Her eyes passed over the window nearest the door and caught mine and, as always, I was locked in her stare.

She lingered there for a moment as I sought for understanding in her eyes, wishing that my emotions were as evident on my face as hers always seemed to be, wishing for the first time that I was a Gryffindor, unashamed, bold and without tact, so that I could run to her and tell her everything and take her in my arms. So that I could beg her to stay with me, to let me stare into her eyes for the rest of my life....

But my face was cold and unchanging, and after a moment she offered me a brief nod and ducked her head, sliding into the carriage and closing the door behind her, closing the door on my hopes, my salvation. I turned from the window, a saddened frown making its way across my face as I walked the darkened hallways back to my private rooms. Pulling a Pensieve from the tall cupboard that stood opposite my bed, I extracted the memory of those last few moments—her look as she met my eyes—and placed it in the basin. It was one of many, all of them memories of her, and they embodied my whole world.

Placing the Pensieve back on its shelf, I settled myself in front of the fire. Thinking of her and only her, I cleared my mind and tried, unsuccessfully, to forget.

Author's Note: This story was written pre-HBP, and is therefore AU in that sense. If it seems immaturely written or not at all like my other stories, well, I can only offer the excuse that this was the first fanfic I ever wrote, though the second one to actually be posted, and that I was very new to the idea of fanfic clichés or at the time. :) The story will be complete in four chapters.

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Trying to Forget Him

Chapter 2 of 4

I wasn't ready; how can one ever be ready to say goodbye to their world?

I watch him. I know it's creepy, and I feel ashamed every time I catch myself doing it, but somehow my gaze always finds its way back to him. He's never noticed...I don't think that he even knows I exist for any reason other than to annoy him, and he pays me little mind. That's just fine with me. If he knew how fascinated I am with him, he'd probably never come within sight of me again, and that would be unbearable. As it is, I will have to leave him far too soon.... But I have prepared myself for that, and I can handle it; I *think* I can handle it.

I don't know why he interests me so much. I know it's not his 'good looks'. He's rather ugly, I suppose. A long, hooked nose, stringy, greasy hair.... His skin is so pale he's nearly translucent, and I once actually caught myself wondering if he would glow in the dark if he didn't cover himself with so many layers of black robes and cloaks. I felt horribly guilty after that particular thought...and guiltier that I'd thought it out loud...but Harry and Ron seemed to find it amusing, and I tried not to dwell on my treachery for long. After all, I'm sure he's said worse about the know-it-all, Mudblood Gryffindor in his day.

His looks repulse me, so I know that's not the reason I'm attracted to him. Yes, attracted to him. I know, I know, it sounds disgusting. I hate myself for feeling that way. If anyone found out, they'd either have me committed or beat me around the head until I came to my senses. I'd submit to it willingly; I'd give almost anything to be free of this obsession. But I suppose it's true that you can't pick whom you fall in love with, and my heart will always belong to him, even if he will never accept it.

I think, perhaps, it was curiosity that first attracted me to him. He seems so cold and distant, so disinterested in life... but on a few occasions I have been blessed with a glimpse at the person behind that hard façade. The brief flash of hurt or guilt or sadness in his eyes; the uncertainty or fear evident on his face; but for only the blink of an eye.... I'd never have seen it if I hadn't been watching, but as I said, I watch him every opportunity I get.

There are so many things that I want to ask him, to learn from him and about him. Why he became a Death Eater is the easy question, one every person who's ever known him wonders. The second question is always, 'What made you switch sides and turn spy for the Order?' While I would like to know the answers to those questions, they hardly seem important. After all, that was only twenty years ago....

I once looked back in the old Hogwarts records and found a photograph of the Slytherin house in his first year of school. He wore that cold, hard mask of non-expression even then, at eleven years old. What could happen to make one so young so distrustful, so closed off to the world? That is my first question. Who is he, and what made him that way? Really, this answer may very well explain any other question I might have.

He is amazing. He stood face to face with the Dark Lord on more occasions than I care to think about, and yet he still lives. He was tempted with power and wealth, influence and glory. If Voldemort had won the war...and surely he would have, if his trusted servant had actually been spying *for* him and not against him...then all of his loyal followers would be kings among men, so to speak.

Yet he looked that temptation in the face daily and chose to walk away from it. How hard must it have been, turning his back on his friends to help the Light, the very people who made fun of him, hated him and feared him?

He protected my friends and me, always risking his life for our safety. He hates us, wishes to kill us himself at times, I'm sure... and yet, on more than a few occasions, he's put everything on the line to keep us alive and well, with nothing to gain on his part. For that, he has my undying gratitude and respect.

Sometimes I want nothing more than to be like him. My biggest flaw has always been that I tend to wear my heart on my sleeve, to let my emotions rule everything I do and say. My feelings cloud my judgment and put everyone at risk. He simply pulls down his mask of control and wisdom, and he is in full control of his actions and thoughts. He always keeps a level head under pressure and in the face of grave danger....

Yet as much as I admire the face he shows the world, I hate how much it controls him. I'm fascinated by the idea of what lies hidden beneath the mask. Sometimes I think he is angry and full of hate, and just barely manages to keep it in check. Other times I wonder if he is sad and hurting, but too proud to let anyone see the real man behind the sarcasm and icy glares. Most often, though, I think of him as a lost little child, terrified and intimidated by the crazy world around him, but putting on a brave face so that no one knows he wants nothing more than to run away and hide. I picture him more easily in that way than in any other.

As my last year at Hogwarts came to an end, I managed to distract myself from the fact that this was it...I was leaving and would never see him again. It wasn't hard to keep my mind off of my impending departure; Voldemort's fall took place just three days before the end of term, and there was more to do and more to deal with in the aftermath than there was before it occurred.

It didn't matter that our list of casualties was short; we had still lost friends, and everyone was sombre and subdued, though few could keep from smiling at the very realisation that for the first time in twenty years, we were free from the terror of a madman.

The night after the battle, I finally allowed my mind to wander back to *him* unhindered, and I realised that I'd missed my forbidden thoughts. What was he thinking at that moment? Was he happy now that he was finally free? It seemed to me that he, above anyone else, deserved to be. After all, he gave his whole life to the 'Cause', and now, finally, he had something to show for it.

He is renowned as a hero, and though many will barely acknowledge his part in the war, to me he is the true victor. Harry may have been the one to cast the Killing Curse, but Voldemort was distracted at the time, and it was hardly a show of great power or cunning on Harry's part.

Voldemort watched as his trusted servant tore off his Death Eater mask and drew his wand, felling the cloaked men and women left and right, casting the Killing Curse on those that he had supposedly sworn his undying allegiance to. As he passed behind me, I managed to catch a glance of the Dark Lord's red, venomous eyes. He didn't look angry. He looked surprised, outraged....

He looked as if his own son had slapped him in the face. I guess, looking at it from his point of view, that was what had happened. I nearly smiled at the thought of someone...anyone...daring to slap the most evil wizard of our time across the face. It seemed ridiculous, and yet the man whom everyone called a coward had done just that. He had shown strength and courage beyond that of anyone else fighting for the Light, and it was because of him that we won.

The narrow, glowing eyes flicked to me, catching me staring at him unabashedly, and I knew in that instant that I would die. But before either of us could raise our wands, a green light encircled the Dark Lord and he fell, ending the war and freeing us all.

As the following days rushed by and my childhood drew to a close, my friends and I made our way around to all of the staff, saying our goodbyes. Hagrid cried; Professor McGonagall had a rare but welcome hug for each of us. Nearly all of them told us that we were three students they wouldn't soon forget, and I didn't doubt their sincerity. This war had taken its toll on everyone, and I don't think anyone will ever forget anything that happened to them or any of the people they knew during that time. We all shared a connection through our suffering and fear.

As we reached *his* door, my heart was pounding wildly in my chest. Harry asked to go in first, on his own. He wanted to apologise for his behaviour over the years and thank the man who had helped us so much. We waited outside, giving him the privacy he needed. He emerged a few moments later, looking at me expectantly. I shook my head briefly. I wasn't ready; how can one ever be *ready* to say goodbye to their world? I couldn't do it....

I started down the hall, hearing Ron open the classroom door and shout, 'See you around, Professor!' before they followed me to the Great Hall for our last dinner under the enchanted ceiling of stars and purple clouds.

I decided that I had to talk to him, had to say *something*. I didn't know what, or how, but I knew that I couldn't leave without saying goodbye. I borrowed Harry's map and Invisibility Cloak, thanking the gods that he knew me well enough to read the expression on my face, to know not to ask what I was using them for.

Wandering the dungeon corridors, the map led me to a door I'd never paid attention to before. He was just on the other side... this had to be his private chambers. I stood there for hours. I must have lifted my hand to knock a thousand times, but each time I would stop myself, terrified. What would I say to him? Thank him like I had the other professors? No, he deserved better; not to mention, I could easily have done that during the day, in his classroom.

So... what? Could I tell him that he amazes me? That I want to sit and talk to him forever, to learn all of his secrets? Could I tell him that I want to be the one who gets him to open up? That I want to see who he is inside, and find some way, any way, to make him happy? Could I tell him that I love him?

No. No, I couldn't tell him any of those things. He would have laughed at me, told me I was stupid, and sent me back to my rooms. He hated me. He had since my first year, when I was an overzealous, obnoxious little eleven-year-old, and I held no illusion that he would change his mind.

Having to leave him was hard enough, but at least I still had my hopes and daydreams. I could still pretend, in the far recesses of my mind, that I was with him forever and that he loved me as much as I did him. If he rejected me, if I had to see the disgust and disdain on his face and know that those looks were directed at me, I would die. I would have nothing left to live for, to keep me going....

Daylight was creeping over the horizon as I ascended the dungeon steps and tiptoed back up to Gryffindor tower. I skipped breakfast and finished packing my things, tears running unnoticed down my face. This was it. This was goodbye.

He wasn't there to see us off, and for that I was glad. I didn't know what to say to him. If he had been there, I don't think I could have resisted running into his arms and holding on for dear life. Harry and Ron climbed into the carriage, waving goodbye to the professors as they did, and I got ready to step in behind them. Giving my teachers one final wave, I caught a glimpse of a face in the window nearest the door. It was *him*.

My heart stopped. Was he watching me? No, he would be watching his Slytherins, seeing them off in his own way. And if he was watching this particular carriage, it would only be to assure himself that the Gryffindors who had made his life hell for seven years were finally leaving.

Catching his eye, I searched fervently for something, anything... any sign that there was something there beside hate and loathing. But his face didn't change...the cold façade was firmly in place, and I knew that I would never be the one to take the mask from his face and shatter it, though I wanted nothing more.

Not trusting myself to do anything else, I nodded slowly at him. He just glared back at me, and I ducked my head into the carriage, closing the door before he could see the tears that were now once again streaming down my face.

Harry and Ron were concerned, of course, but I brushed them off, telling them that I was just upset at the idea of leaving school. They nodded and rolled their eyes when they thought I wasn't looking, probably thinking that this was just their typical little bookworm, heartbroken at the idea of leaving behind Hogwarts' impressive library.

For a moment I hated them for being so stupid, so unobservant. I hated them for being my best friends and not really knowing me at all. And I hated myself for not showing them the *real* me, for preoccupying myself so much with someone who had no interest in me whatsoever that I had managed to alienate my true self from those closest to me.

Vowing that I was going to change, that I was never going to allow my heart and mind to dwell on my sick obsession for another minute, I wiped my tears away with the back of my hand. Closing my eyes and taking a deep breath, I thought ahead to whatever lay in my future, pushing thoughts of him to the back of my mind.

Well, I tried, at least. But his face was always there every time I closed my eyes, and it became apparent to me before we'd even reached the train that I would have a new mission in my life: I would spend the rest of my life trying to forget.

Learning to Live Without Him

Why, over the years, have I allowed myself to think that things may have ended up differently?

I feel his eyes, dark and fathomless, boring into my very soul, caressing every inch of my being with his loving gaze. I feel his hand tracing the curve of my chin, and I lean willingly into his touch. I love this man....

I've forgotten him. I assure myself of this fact every morning as I wake up and find myself mistaken, realising that I'm staring into eyes that aren't his, but my husband's. Blinking and smiling gently, I kiss him and rise from the bed, drifting into my childrens' rooms and waking each of the three in turn. I fight them into the kitchen, where Ron is already waiting, flipping through the *Daily Prophet*.

His blue eyes are slightly swollen with sleep, and he rubs them with the back of his hand as he greets his daughters. At seven, four, and three, they are his pride and joy, and he kisses each little face before settling back to listen to their chatter. He is a good father, and I know that I should be grateful that to be blessed with such a loving man. I *am* grateful. I love him, and I am happy. I assure myself of this fact every morning as well.

Finishing the breakfast preparations, I leave my family to eat while I get ready for a long day in my office, which is too small and too dim to be the source of any enjoyment. Nothing interesting could play out on so depressing a set.

I hear Molly's confident knock echo down the hall and the girls excitedly greeting their grandmother. Quidditch season will be starting soon, and Ron has extra practices with his team-mates in preparation. Keeper for the Chudley Cannons, his days are long and hard at this time of year.

Ron will be leaving soon, as will I, and the children will stay here with Molly. Annie and Diane wander off to one of their bedroom to play, while Grace returns to her room only long enough to retrieve her books.

She will spend her day practicing her penmanship and maths. She learned to read very young, much like I did at her age, and to write, but the things she scrawls on the parchment are hardly legible. Her grandmother teaches her like she taught all seven of her own children, preparing her for her coming days at Hogwarts. It's four years away, but one can never be too knowledgeable, and she, like I, craves knowledge.

Kissing my children goodbye, I take my leave and head for the Ministry of Magic entrance, willing my mind not to drift back *thim*, willing myself not to wonder how things might have been....

Laughable, really. If I had stayed or gone back, I highly doubt things would have changed at all. I was the know-it-all Gryffindor, the bane of his existence. Why, over the years, have I allowed myself to think that things may have ended up differently?

I guess it shouldn't matter, really; after all, though I may not feel it sometimes, *am* happy with the way my life turned out. I have to be. I'm happy... and I've forgotten.

Learning to Live With Memories of Her

She'd taken my only chance at true happiness with her when she left, and nothing had been the same since.

I watched the students coming into my classroom with wariness. This was it.... My hands shook slightly as I held up my class role and scanned it again, wishing that I had cancelled the lesson. I wasn't ready for this. It had been fourteen years, but I still wasn't ready. I doubted I ever would be.

Ilana Weasley made her way into the room, and I gave a small sigh of relief as she settled into the seat nearest the door, and farthest from me. Thank the gods for small favours.

She eyed me nervously, no doubt having heard stories of the evil Potions master from her parents all of her life. I glared at her, and she quickly turned her gaze from me, suddenly taking great interest in the other students.

Class went smoothly—a rarity, but a welcome one—and she was finally out of my sight. I was inexplicably glad to see her go, though not entirely sure why.

She looked nothing like her mother. Red hair and freckles, she was all Weasley. Her eyes were bright blue, and though she seemed to be the normal, happy child, she didn't exude that confidence that her mother had possessed. For that I was infinitely grateful.

Perhaps it was the idea that, if I'd had my way, she would have been my child. No, that's not true. No child of mine would ever look quite as beautiful or innocent as this one. I couldn't help but wonder what *our* child would have looked like, if I had only had the courage to ask her to stay.... But that was in the past, and there was no hope of changing it.

Besides, the girl's mother was happy, and wasn't that what mattered most of all? She had a husband who loved her, and though I wondered how she could have married the idiot that she had spent the better part of seven years barely recognizing as being male, it brought her happiness. She had three children, all little girls. I pitied them—they looked like their father—but thought them wonderful nonetheless. They were *hers*.

I also found them frightening. I could only imagine the horrible things that she had told them about me, and it terrified me. Not that I worried about my reputation with her children, or any children, for that matter. No, it was the idea of all of my transgressions, of all the hate and bitterness she held for me, being portrayed on her face and in her words that frightened me.

I'd tried to forget her. I had spent years searching for a life, a happiness of my own, but it never came, and I blamed her. She'd taken my only chance at true happiness with her when she left, and nothing had been the same since.

I attempted to drink away her memory, I tried burying myself in my work.... At times I was able to convince myself that I had sufficiently forgotten her, but it was always a short-lived assurance. She always weighed heavily on my mind, and I had stopped trying to force her from it years ago....

Wondering how I was going to get through the next eleven years and see all of her children pass through this school, I shook my head and found myself depressed, not for the first time, at the thought. They were living, breathing evidence of her happy life, a life without me, and I hated them. I had toyed with the idea of forbidding each of her daughters to have access to my classroom, freeing myself of the horror of having to stare into the eyes of at least one of them every day for the next decade, but I did not want to do anything that would betray the secret longing I had kept hidden from the world.

Deciding that perhaps it was time to consider retiring, I made my way to my private rooms and collapsed onto the four-poster bed that I'd slept in for twenty eight years. Finding comfort in the familiar, cool sheets, I pulled them around me and closed my eyes, praying that I would dream of her.