

The Old Ways

by Mela

Severus Snape is different. Hermione decides to learn his ways, the Old Ways. (AU, HBP disregard)

Introduction

Chapter 1 of 3

Severus Snape is different. Hermione decides to learn his ways, the Old Ways. (AU, HBP disregard)

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A/N: When this story had first been uploaded, the first couple of chapters had been un-betaed, while all the rest had been betaed by Larilee, to whom I am still grateful. I am very lucky now, because another wonderful person has undertaken the difficult task of correcting, beta-ing, polishing and in general improving the story. This person is Ellie, and I am extremely thankful. For those (if any) who have read the story before, there will be a few additions, and maybe a few extra lemons, for those who had complained.

The Old Ways

Chapter 1:

On the last day of their sixth year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Harry, Ron and Hermione were asked to visit Albus Dumbledore in his office. Once seated, and after he had offered them a couple of lemon drops, he informed them that they were to become members of the Order of the Phoenix within the next few days and that they would spend their summer at number twelve, Grimmauld Place.

Ron and Harry were beside themselves with excitement, but Hermione, always the practical one, started to ask a dozen questions all at once: "Professor, doesn't Harry have to be at the Dursleys in order to be safe? What should I tell my parents? Won't it...?"

Before Hermione could finish her series of questions, Dumbledore interrupted her kindly and informed her that everything had been taken care of.

The first few days in the house at number twelve, Grimmauld Place went by rather quickly. Harry and Ron were sharing a room while Hermione had a room to herself down the corridor. She would be sharing the room later in the summer with Ginny, as soon as she and the rest of the Weasleys returned from Romania where they were visiting Charlie. The boys spent their time practicing Quidditch in the atrium of the house while Hermione had found her paradise in the library attached to the study on the ground floor. In the evenings they would have dinner with the other members of the Order, who were also stationed there. Tonks and Lupin were their favourite companions.

There had been two meetings of the Order in the first week. During the first one, all three of them were initiated in the Order.

The second meeting was not scheduled, but when Snape returned from a Dark Revel with information, the Order gathered in the study to hear the latest news. Snape was as distanced as always, but he also seemed exhausted. Hermione watched at him as he sat uneasily in an over-stuffed armchair, waiting for the meeting to begin, and thought he might appreciate something to replenish his strength.

"Professor, you look tired. I've brought you a something," she said as she offered him a steaming mug of tea and plate of biscuits.

"My welfare is none of your concern, Miss Granger. You can take these back to the kitchen and stay there yourself." Snape was no less sarcastic than usual, but there was unusual anger and venom in his voice. Concerned, Hermione left the room still carrying the tea and biscuits.

A week later the Weasleys returned from Romania, and they also came to stay at number twelve, Grimmauld Place. There were now more than twenty people staying in the house, and the Floo was often used by visitors. The Burrow was safe, but the new wards around it made it unapproachable to anyone who was not specifically invited by Mr. Weasley. Hence, Grimmauld Place remained the Order Headquarters as it allowed the members to come and go as they pleased.

Snape would appear once every couple of days, bringing news and information, but would leave again after only a few hours. One of the evenings he was there, Harry and Ron, on their way back from practising Quidditch in the Atrium, collided with Snape as they ran into the kitchen, sending all three of them crashing to the floor. Hermione, who happened to be in the kitchen making tea, saw the fury in the eyes of her professor as he slowly rose to his feet.

"You idiots, if you are incapable of walking and acting as befits your age, stay in your room. This is not a playground." He looked at them, disgust written all over his face.

Hermione thought she should intervene before her friends said something that would make the situation even worse.

"Professor, they did not mean to bump into you. It was an accident," Hermione offered and stood between the professor and her friends.

"Miss Granger, just because your friends are so incompetent as to be unable to answer for themselves, does not mean you should use this opportunity to show off the manners you think you have." He sneered at her.

Hermione was astounded by his words. She was prepared for the sarcasm, but his insult against her upbringing was too much, and she left the room almost at a run in an attempt to hide her tears. A few minutes later Harry and Ron found her sobbing in the library.

"Don't let the greasy git get to you." Ron tried to calm her.

"Yeah, he's just being his old, nasty self," Harry added with venom.

"But, I have always treated him with respect, and now he says that I have no manners. How could he when he treats everyone so horribly?" Hermione complained.

"Actually, he is right." Startled, the three of them looked around to see who had spoken. They were startled to see that the words had come from the portrait of Phineas Nigellus, former Headmaster of Hogwarts.

"Hermione's got excellent manners. She's polite to everyone."

"You're only saying that because he's a Slytherin." Both boys supported her.

Hermione didn't say anything for a while, but soon her curiosity won over.

"What do you mean he's right?"

"That his statement that you have no manners is correct," the portrait replied coolly.

"That's enough! Hermione, we're not staying here listening to this painting insult you. Come, let's get outside," Ron said, walking towards the door.

"No, it's okay; I have some reading to do anyway. You both go, and I'll come and find you in a little while."

"If you're sure... Just don't listen to this Slytherin painting." With that, the boys left the room.

As soon as they left, Hermione turned to the portrait of the Headmaster and asked what exactly was wrong with her manners.

Phineas Nigellus squirmed for a while in his portrait, and after a few moments of thought, he answered:

"I will use a Muggle example from my time as Intercultural Advisor for Magical-Muggle relations. What would you think as a European of someone coming to your house for a black-tie dinner, removing his shoes before entering, and coming in barefoot? Similarly, what would an Asian think if you went to his house for the same dinner and did not take your shoes off before entering the house? As both questions were rhetorical, please do not attempt to answer and allow me to continue: Your behaviour, and the behaviour of your friends, is insulting and disrespectful in the light of the Old Ways."

Before Hermione could think of any reply, Phineas Nigellus disappeared from his portrait, most probably returning to his favourite portrait in the Headmaster's Office in Hogwarts.

Hermione had never heard anything of the Old Ways, or come across any reference to them in any of the books she had read. She looked thoughtful for a moment and decided to do what she did best: Research.

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Thank you, Ellie

Research

Chapter 2 of 3

Hermione tries to learn more about the Old Ways

Chapter 2:

Over the next few days, Hermione spent all of her time searching the library for any reference to the Old Ways and Wizarding Etiquette in general. The only thing she found after days of searching was a copy of *Savoir Vivre*, with basically the same content as any Muggle book on etiquette. Every time Snape was in the house, she studied him from a distance. He snapped at everyone who tried to speak to him, and the only person he seemed to be able to stand was Mrs. Weasley. Hermione noticed that Molly

acted differently towards Snape than she did with everyone else; she held herself differently, moved her hands in a slightly different way. To Hermione, it looked like some sort of ritual. Molly would always keep a respectful distance from Snape, and after a few moments, she would greet him with a nod of her head. She would keep her palms open towards him, and when she served him tea, she would always do it holding the teapot slightly to her right. Sometimes Molly would not walk directly towards him but would move in a beeline, always passing through the centre of the room.

Hermione soon found the opportunity to ask Mrs. Weasley about it. Molly was surprised, as she didn't think anyone had noticed the way she acted towards Snape.

"Indeed, dear. I am using some little rituals that derive from the old manners. However, I do not know anything more about the Old Ways, just what you saw me doing. The old manners have been completely abandoned for more than a century, and even before then, only a handful of people used them over the last three hundred years. My grandmother had a friend, and when she came to visit, this is how my grandmother acted towards her. Long ago, something in Severus reminded me of this friend of hers, and I thought to give it a try. And it worked," Molly explained.

"Maybe I should try it too. Despite his demeanour, I respect him and want him to feel appreciated".

"I don't know, my dear. The Old Ways were so complicated; something could easily go wrong, and he would end up being furious," Molly cautioned.

Hermione's stubbornness won through Mrs. Weasley's reservations, and she eventually agreed to teach Hermione the few movements that she knew. Two days later, Snape arrived in his usual ill temper. Hermione approached him with a cup of tea and started following the patterns that Molly had taught her. The next second she found herself sprawled on the floor in the opposite side of the room.

"How dare you?! You will never insult me like this again! Now get out of my sight before I curse you into next week." She looked up to see Snape towering over her, wand in hand. He had moved so quickly that Hermione couldn't work out how she ended up on the floor. She scrambled to her feet and fled the room, tears streaming down her face.

Once again Hermione ended up in the library. She went straight to the portrait of Phineas Nigellus and shouted accusingly:

"You should have told me that the Old Ways were only accepted among pure-bloods. See what happened now? I only tried to please him, and he got insulted because I am Muggle-born, or, as you and he would say, a Mudblood." Hermione spat the final word at the portrait, her voice filled with revulsion.

"Stop talking nonsense, girl, and tell me what happened. Where did you learn any of the Old Ways?"

"Mrs. Weasley knows a ritual that she uses when speaking to him. I copied her movements exactly, addressed him in the same way, but he would not accept it from me because I am not pure-blooded."

"Did he tell you as much?" the portrait enquired.

"He just shouted at me to get out of his sight. But it is the only explanation since I did everything exactly as Mrs. Weasley showed me."

"Sometimes you should look beyond the obvious in order to discover the true motives of a person's reaction. And in order to spare me your endless questioning, let me tell you that you made a serious mistake in copying Mrs. Weasley. The old manners have many different rituals. The one you followed was most likely a rite to be performed between equals, while the correct one would have been a ritual addressed to someone older or superior to you. Before attempting something like this again, you should be aware that using the wrong ritual can be taken as a serious insult or even an attack against a person. You should consider yourself lucky he didn't kill you," the portrait lectured her sternly.

"How was I supposed to know that?!" Hermione was now beyond tears. She was angry. "I have tried to research; I can't find a single book about the Old Ways."

The portrait looked sceptical for a while. "Why is it so important for you to learn the Old Ways?"

"Professor Snape has sacrificed everything for the Order. Respecting him is the least we can do."

"Yet another Gryffindor speech about noble causes. Don't you ever get tired of it? Never mind about that, just go up in the attic. On the floor covered with some sort of green velvet is the portrait of Lady Altamira Dumbledore. I don't know whether she will help you or not, but she is the only one who can."

Hermione, however, had just learned the hard way that taking the advice of the former Headmaster of Hogwarts at face value was not a very good idea.

"What's the trick this time?" she asked suspiciously.

"Ah... Typical Gryffindor insolence. How will you master the Old Ways when you can't even be polite by the low standards of the present manners?"

Hermione looked angrily at the portrait and mused.

"If I burned this portrait, then you would not be able to visit, and you'd miss all the gossip of what goes on around here. I'm sure we could cope without you hanging around."

"Are you trying to blackmail me? A very poor attempt, I must say. However, for your effort, I shall tell you this: The portrait in the attic is the only portrait of Lady Dumbledore in existence. She has been stuck in that frame of hers for over three hundred years. Do try not to stare at her ugliness too much. If you are good enough, she may decide to help you. Just don't let anyone else see her portrait."

With these words he disappeared from the frame, possibly going back to his portrait in the Headmaster's Office at Hogwarts.

Hermione, still shocked by her recent experience with Snape, decided to think about what Phineas had said before going in search for the portrait. However, later the same night, she found herself unable to sleep and tormented by her curiosity. She stood up, taking care not to make any noise so as not to wake Ginny, and ascended to the attic with only the light at the tip of her wand to guide her. Finding the portrait was not difficult, but she found herself hesitating to remove the velvet cover. What if the portrait started to scream like so many portraits in this house? And why were no other portraits of her apart from this one in the attic? Assuming that Lady Dumbledore was related to the current Headmaster of Hogwarts, why was she covered and not hanging on a wall?

Summoning her Gryffindor courage, she pulled the cover away to reveal the most ugly portrait she had ever seen. The woman in it looked like the wicked witches in Muggle fairy tales. Hermione quickly dropped her eyes, not wanting to offend the woman in the portrait by staring at her, and greeted her formally.

"I apologise for disturbing you at such a late hour, Lady Dumbledore, but I have some questions that only you can answer".

Hermione had expected the woman in the portrait to be disturbed by her presence after being alone for so long. She was surprised, therefore, when a very soft and kind voice asked her what kind of help she needed. Hermione looked at her, and without being to restrain herself, she immediately started to talk:

"I came to you for a selfish reason: I wish to learn the Old Ways so that I can show someone important to me how much I respect them. I've searched the library, and I can't find a single book on the subject. I tried using a ritual Mrs. Weasley taught me, but he was insulted when I used it. I thought it was because I'm Muggle-born, but the portrait of Phineas Nigellus told me that this is not the case. Will you please teach me?" Hermione finished and immediately reddened. She had not planned to tell the portrait so much. She had expressed all at once her confusion, her frustration and her feeling of guilt for disturbing the old lady in the portrait.

Lady Dumbledore smiled. It was not a pretty smile; what few teeth she had left were blackened and crooked. She looked even more ugly now, but somehow Hermione knew that she could trust the old woman.

"Don't fret, my dear. People who talk to me are forced to speak from the heart and are unable to tell a lie. This is the reason why my portrait is not hanging on a wall. Well, my dear nephew, Albus, says that it is because I am so ugly, but he is only teasing; the portrait of my identical twin sister, Alba, is hanging on the wall of his office." Hermione could not help but smile at the portrait. She could see where the Headmaster had inherited his kindness.

"My dear, Hermione, I have been in this portrait for over three hundred years. Every now and then, one of my relatives comes to visit and tells me what's happening in the outside world. There were times when people forgot about me, and I went years, or even decades, without a visitor. But that is not important. When I lived, the Old Ways were not so old, and every wizard and magical creature used them. However, much has changed since then. And there was a good reason why they were abolished, and why there are no books to be found. My nephew fought, when he was young, for the abolition of the Old Ways and for the destruction of every book on the subject."

"Headmaster Dumbledore? But destroying books is terrible! Why would he do something so appalling?" Hermione was so shocked she could barely speak.

"Calm down, my dear. There were reasons, important ones: The Old Ways were misused in order to enslave people, and Albus felt that emancipation could only come if the Old Ways were forgotten. And so, he destroyed every text he could find. Maybe one day he will explain everything to you."

"So is it forbidden to learn the Old Ways?" Hermione was trying to absorb everything the old woman told her.

"No it is not, but very few people alive know about them. Albus is one of them, but for obvious reasons, he would never teach them to anyone. And there are certain magical peoples who use them: The centaurs, the mermaids, the vampires, and also creatures such as the unicorns. The Old Ways come naturally to them," the portrait explained.

Hermione stood up and stretched tiredly. "Thank you very much for answering my questions, Lady Dumbledore. I have a lot to think about. Would you mind if I visited you again?"

"Of course you may, my dear. Good night and sleep well."

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Ginny woke the next morning surprised to find Hermione still asleep; she was usually up and making breakfast before Ginny even got out of bed. She roused her friend so that she would not miss breakfast.

"What happened to you? Did too much studying finally get to you?" the redhead teased.

"I just couldn't sleep and it was late before I finally managed to doze off." Hermione had decided not to tell anyone of her conversation with Lady Dumbledore; the words of the old lady had puzzled her. What could be so dangerous in the Old Ways? And more importantly, if they had been abolished for so long, why did Snape still use them? Were they used amongst the Death Eaters? He obviously didn't belong to the creatures still using them, as he was neither a mermaid nor a centaur, and although the boys had often called him an overgrown bat, he couldn't be a vampire; she had seen him outside daylight on many occasions. Still troubled, she followed Ginny to the kitchen. Harry and Ron were already there eating breakfast.

"Hey, 'Mione, you okay? We heard about Snape attacking you yesterday. Remus Flooed the Headmaster and told him everything. Dumbledore actually defended Snape and praised him for remaining calm. Can you believe that?!"

"Ronald Weasley! You will stop this nonsense right now!" Mrs. Weasley intervened, and Ron remained silent, not wanting to risk making his mother lose her temper.

"Hermione, how are you feeling today? Professor Snape's response was most unfortunate, but I did warn you that he might not react well."

"Good morning, Mrs. Weasley. I'm fine, thank you." Hermione greeted the older woman warmly. She did not want Molly to feel guilty for teaching her the ritual.

That was when Hermione made her decision. "Harry, Ginny, Mrs. Weasley, there is something I wanted to discuss with you."

Ron looked offended and got up to leave the room.

"Oh, no, Ron, please stay. I asked them because this is Harry's house, your mother looks after the sleeping arrangements, and Ginny is sharing my room. I wanted to ask for a favour."

All four of them looked at Hermione and waited, unsure of what favour she was going to ask for.

"I'm having trouble sleeping at the moment. I'm under a lot of stress from studying, and the only way I seem to be able to fall asleep at all is if I doze off whilst reading. Ginny, I really like having you as a roommate, but I know you can't sleep with the lights on. Therefore, I would like to ask to move to a different room."

"Hermione, I would really like to help you, but with so many people in the house at the moment, there just isn't anywhere else for you to sleep." Mrs. Weasley still felt responsible for what had happened the day before and wanted to help in any way she could.

"I thought about that all last night, and I thought of a room that is unoccupied; I would like to stay in the attic."

"Wouldn't you be afraid to be up there on your own?" Molly asked.

"Our 'Mione isn't afraid of anything," Ron said proudly.

"Well, if you're sure. As long as Harry thinks it's okay, you may move up there. But you'll have to clean it yourself and get rid of all the rubbish that's in there at the moment. I simply won't have time with all these people staying here."

A few minutes later, having received everyone's approval, Hermione headed towards the attic. Her friends saw her smile as she left the kitchen and thought that would help her forget the incident with Snape. The boys kept in mind that they would have to drag her out into the atrium from time to time if they didn't want her to spend the entire summer in the attic reading.

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It took Hermione a couple of hours to clear everything out of the attic and clean the walls and floor. When everything was tidy, she pulled the velvet cover off the portrait. The old lady blinked in surprise at the newly cleaned attic.

"Good morning, my dear Hermione. I see you decided to move in here."

"Yes, Lady Dumbledore."

"Please, call me Altamira. I prefer it"

"Altamira, I need to ask you a huge favour." Hermione thought that she hadn't asked any favours from anyone for longer than she could remember, and suddenly she had asked for two in the same day. "I would like to learn the Old Ways."

Altamira looked like she had expected the question, but asked, "Why?"

"There is a professor at Hogwarts. He is an excellent teacher, but his demeanour leaves a lot to be desired; he is sarcastic, mean, and biased, but he has made a lot of sacrifices for the Headmaster and for us all. He knows the Old Ways, and I wish to learn them so that I can treat him with respect in a way that he would understand."

There was silence for a while. Hermione waited for the answer in nervous silence. Finally the lady in the portrait spoke:

"I will teach you."

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Thank you, Ellie.

(I do not own HP)

An Apology

Chapter 3 of 3

Hermione implements her newfound skills and knowledge.

Chapter 3: An apology

Hermione spent the next few days in her new room, only venturing downstairs for meals. She had even stopped reading and spent the entire day learning from Altamira. There were so many rites and all of them were extremely complicated. She had now an idea of why her behaviour had offended Snape. She had only seen him once in the last few days at an Order meeting. He was on the other side of the room and did not even acknowledge her presence. She did not try to talk to him, knowing that it would only make things worse. After the meeting, she explained to Altamira that she wished to apologise to him, and had asked the old lady to teach her the proper ritual.

On Sunday, the Headmaster arrived at Grimmauld Place and informed Harry that he would have to visit the Dursley's house in Little Whinging in order to renew the bond of protection. Lupin and Tonks would accompany him the next day. Mr. Weasley asked if they could go back to the Burrow for a day in order to hold their annual family celebration. The Headmaster turned to Hermione and asked her if she wanted to come to Hogwarts for the day so that she would not be alone, but she declined. She had too much practising to do with Altamira.

Hermione stayed in the attic all Monday morning. At lunchtime she went down to the kitchen to make a sandwich. She heard the fire cracking in the study, and she entered, worried that someone had forgotten to extinguish it before leaving. She ground to a halt, halfway between the doorway and the fireplace when she noticed Snape sitting in an armchair by the window reading a book.

She gathered her Gryffindor courage and tried to remember everything she had learned in the past few days. It was a perfect opportunity for her to apologise. Well, if she did something wrong, he would doubtless kill her, and people would only find out when Harry, Lupin and Tonks returned the next day.

She stood in the middle of the room with her eyes dropped to the floor. He did not seem to notice her, and normally she would have coughed to draw his attention. However, Altamira had explained the importance of proper respect towards an elder, which included trusting their powers of observation, so she remained motionless and silent. After about ten minutes, she was almost certain that he wasn't going to notice her, or that he had fallen asleep. She didn't dare raise her eyes as Altamira had explained that it would be inappropriate; it would mean she was criticising his decision to make her wait. After another quarter of an hour, her legs had started to ache from standing still for so long, but her resolution had grown stronger. After another couple of minutes, she started to recite in her head everything that she had learned over the past few days. It was almost an hour later, that she finally heard him say, "Good afternoon, Miss Granger. Is there a reason for your presence here?"

She was surprised. His voice was neutral, but there was no sarcasm in it. Hiding her surprise, she moved on to the next step of the ritual. She approached him slowly, and when she was about two meters away, she knelt on the floor and remained silent. Slowly she raised her head, and when their eyes met she relaxed her defences so that he could see through her eyes in her mind without the use of Legilimency.

He looked at her, and for the first time, there was no cruelty to his eyes; he only looked solemn. His voice was low and serious when he simply said, "I forgive you."

Hermione would have normally reacted very differently from the way she was about to, but Altamira had warned her that this would be a delicate moment. She dropped her eyes to the floor, stood up, and left the room. Altamira had explained that she could not thank him or speak in any way, as to do so without permission would show that she lacked respect, and she could not stay in the room any longer because she would be intruding on his privacy.

Hermione ran to the attic to inform the portrait of her apology, having forgotten how hungry she was and the sandwich that she had left an hour and a half before in the kitchen. She felt overjoyed. She quickly related everything that had occurred to the old lady, and then she ran down to the kitchen to prepare dinner for everyone. When Harry and the Weasleys returned, they found a very happy Hermione taking a huge chocolate cake out of the oven. The table was full of food in large decorated plates and dishes.

Ginny was the only one to be suspicious of Hermione's sudden change of behaviour, but did not get a chance to speak to her, as Harry and Ron monopolized her attention during the evening. Snape was not there for dinner. Hermione thought that he must have returned to Hogwarts some time after she left him in the study, but decided against informing the others of his earlier presence in the house.

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Severus Snape left the house immediately after his encounter with Hermione Granger. He returned directly to Hogwarts, and a few minutes later, he visited the Headmaster in his office.

"Severus, what are you doing here? I thought you would be in London today guarding the house until Lupin and Tonks returned. Has something happened?" Albus Dumbledore asked worriedly.

"Miss Granger," he replied. "Albus, she apologised."

"Oh, that is excellent." The old man was surprised.

"No, it is not. She apologised properly. You know how much it hurts me to see these students ignorant of good manners and without true respect. However, I am aware of the reasons that led to the final abolishment of the Old Ways a hundred years ago and the dangers they held. This is why I am informing you," Severus Snape explained.

The Headmaster paled, and his eyes darkened. "What do you mean she apologised properly? How did she learn? All Molly Weasley knows is a tea ritual. It could not have

been from her. And I have made certain that there are no books on the subject."

Severus Snape did not expect the Headmaster to be so upset. He was one of the few people who knew his involvement in the final abolishment and the reasons behind it, but surely a girl knowing how to behave properly could not be such a serious problem.

"Severus, could you spend a few days in 12 Grimmauld Place and find out how much she knows?" Albus Dumbledore asked worried.

Severus Snape had obligations much more important than watching over a seventeen-year-old know-it-all, but he could not deny the Headmaster anything he asked for.

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At breakfast the next day, Mrs. Weasley told them that Professor Snape would spend the rest of the week in the house and that they were to avoid disturbing him in any way. She looked worriedly towards Hermione, unaware of the apology that had taken place the day before. Hermione didn't seem to mind. She was progressing with her learning and vastly enjoying Altamira's lectures. She was so used to her by now that she never noticed her ugliness. During lunch Snape joined them, and he looked towards Hermione.

Hermione noticed it, and immediately after lunch, she excused herself and ran upstairs to talk to Altamira about it.

The old lady in the portrait said that it meant he wanted to speak to her, so Hermione ran downstairs again.

She entered the study, and he was once again seated in the armchair by the window. Repeating the actions she had been taught, she walked to the middle of the room and waited motionless with her eyes cast down. After five minutes, he acknowledged her and she moved closer to him, this time walking up to his armchair and kneeling on the floor by his feet. Once again, she dropped her defences and looked him in the eyes. Hermione had expected to be disturbed having to show her thoughts to him, but she was not. She trusted him not to violate her mind.

His face was very calm; she had never seen him looking so peaceful. He produced his wand and aimed it to the floor next to her. A green and silver pillow appeared and he motioned her to use it. Without breaking eye contact she moved and sat on the pillow.

"I am going to look into your mind. There are certain things I need to know." His announcement did not upset her. She found it reassuring that he informed her of his intentions, as he wasn't obliged to; after all, she had opened her mind willingly to him. Altamira had thoroughly explained to her everything that was entailed in the Old Ways. It was much more than mere table manners. Through the lessons, she understood exactly what had led Albus Dumbledore to such extreme measures as the destruction of books. In any exchange under the rules of the Old Ways, the younger party was vulnerable and could be subjected to anything at the Elder's whim. It meant surrendering the control of your actions and yourself. Altamira had not frightened her, she only planned to act in accordance to the Old Ways towards Professor Snape, whom she respected and trusted. He disliked her, Harry and Ron, and despite that, he had protected them on many occasions. Albus Dumbledore trusted him. He was in constant danger of being revealed as a spy. These were enough reasons for her to trust him.

Severus Snape was careful not to delve into any private memories as he searched Hermione's mind: He only wanted to see where she had learned to address him in the proper way. He soon had his answer, and placing his hand on her head, he began to stroke her hair. Shocked, Hermione almost broke eye contact with her professor, but soon regained her composure.

"Come with me. I have to talk to Lady Dumbledore," he ordered softly.

Hermione was terrified. Altamira had expressly told her that she didn't want to be seen by anyone else. She did not know how she could tell Snape this, as he had not given her permission to talk, but she could not allow anyone to harm the old lady in any way.

Sensing Hermione's confusion, Snape spoke: "Do not worry, child. You may speak." His voice was hardly above a whisper.

"S-Sir, Lady Dumbledore does not want to be seen by anyone else. I promised her that I would keep her presence a secret. I have just failed her." Hermione looked at him pleadingly, hoping that he would not force her to break her promise.

"Go upstairs now and explain to her what has happened here. Ask her if I may visit her. Do this for me, child, and I will respect her decision."

Hermione stood and left the study, heading straight to the attic. As she was climbing the stairs, she re-played everything that had happened in the last few minutes. She noticed that instead of "Miss Granger," he had called her "child" twice. She reached the attic and told Altamira everything.

Some minutes later, she descended the stairs smiling. Once again she entered the study and made to walk to the middle of the room, but before she could get there, she was asked to assume her position. She sat on the pillow, her pillow, and looked at him. He immediately knew the answer to his request, but asked her to tell him nonetheless.

"Sir, Lady Dumbledore has invited you to take tea with her in the attic. As she is unable to serve tea, due to her two-dimensional condition, I will perform that service. She will be expecting you at five o'clock," Hermione relayed the message to Snape.

He once again placed his hand on her head and stroked her hair. He then dismissed her.

....

At precisely five o'clock, Severus Snape knocked on the door of the attic dressed in his formal Slytherin robes. Hermione opened the door. Severus Snape strode into the room, ignoring her completely, and headed straight to the portrait. Hermione had positioned Altamira's portrait on the main wall and placed an armchair facing it. He bowed deeply and introduced himself.

"Welcome, please take a seat. Hermione, please serve the tea." Hermione did as instructed and then moved backwards in order to withdraw.

"No, please stay with us," the lady in the portrait asked.

She immediately went to the side of the armchair and sat on the floor in front of it next to the feet of Snape. He placed his hand on her head as before.

"Lady Dumbledore, I have already informed Professor Dumbledore of Hermione's knowledge of the Old Ways. He sent me here to find out how she learned them. He was very upset and worried."

Hermione thought that Snape would try to be subtle and manipulative, not so direct and outspoken. Then she remembered what she was told the first time she uncovered the portrait. People were forced to speak truly and make their intentions known when facing the portrait.

"You may tell him the truth. I think he will relax once he knows who is teaching her. You must excuse his prejudice against the Old Ways; he lost half of his family due to their misuse." She paused for a few seconds and then continued, "They are natural to you, aren't they? I can feel it."

"Yes, they are." A simple affirmation.

"I have a request that I would like you to carry to my nephew. I wish to be moved to Hogwarts and placed next to my sister. It has been a very long time, and I have missed her. I also have an order for you. You will continue the training of young Hermione in the Old Ways."

He acknowledged her order by a slight inclination of his head. He then excused himself and left the room.

TBC

Thank you, Ellie!

I do not own Harry Potter