

Faithful Death

by Clara Minutes

It is five years after the final battle and life is great until there is a murder at Hogwarts.
Please heed the warnings.

Prologue/Chapter 1: Unexpected Visit

Chapter 1 of 17

It is five years after the final battle and life is great until there is a murder at Hogwarts. Please heed the warnings.

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters or this world. Please don't sue.

Author's Note: *This story is based on events from the life of Leo Frank.*

Prologue

"Hurry up, would you?" Hermione snapped at Severus. "I'm not going to breakfast without brushing my teeth, and, as normal, you're hogging the bathroom!"

"Just a moment, wife," Severus replied.

This exchange was a common occurrence after four years of living together. Severus insisted that Hermione had lived with him too long; she was picking up his attitude. Hermione, on the other hand, always blamed it on not yet having had her morning coffee.

After a moment, Severus came out of the bathroom, full professor outfit in place. He was wearing long black robes completely buttoned. The collar of a white, linen shirt could just be seen at the top of the long line of buttons. Hermione could just make out a hint of his black trousers as he walked. His black dragon-hide boots completed his look. Whenever he was dressed like this, his façade slipped into place. Hermione never understood the continued need for his bastard persona. Granted, he was not a particularly nice man, but Severus was loyal and protective.

His loyalty to Dumbledore, and the side of good, had come into question at the end of her sixth year at Hogwarts. Killing one of the most beloved figures in the wizarding world really is not a good way to show people your good intentions. Hermione had been devastated by the information that Severus had murdered Albus Dumbledore in cold blood. The reason was simple: he was a professor. Professors were people who deserved respect. Finding out that one of the most demanding teachers of her school career could kill his mentor would be devastating to anyone. She was the only one in her group of friends to have actively stuck up for Severus in her first years at Hogwarts.

After those events, Severus Snape had been labeled as a traitor to the light. He had gone over to Voldemort's camp on a permanent basis.

Evidence had been found toward the end of Hermione's seventh year that had once again changed her opinion of her former professor.

Snape had, indeed, still been working for the side of good. The murder of Albus Dumbledore, beloved Headmaster, had been a gruesome tool devised to move Severus up in the ranks of the Death Eaters. This information had come out at the same time Harry Potter, with the help of Severus Snape, had vanquished Lord Voldemort once and for all.

The general public still had reservations where Severus was concerned. Most believed that he was looking out for his best interests, which meant playing both sides until the perfect time. Even with the evidence left by Dumbledore, people were suspicious.

Hermione shook herself out of her rumination. People could think whatever they liked about Severus Snape; Hermione knew she would love him no matter what.

Chapter 1: Unexpected Visit

It was evening, and Hermione was sitting at her desk marking essays when there was a knock at her office door.

"Come in," she said, wondering whom it could be.

Lucius Malfoy walked into her office. He entered with poise and a look of aristocratic indifference on his face. He looked regal in black robes. When he came closer, Hermione noticed small silver stitching around the bottom hem.

"Madam Snape, I have some pressing business with your husband. Do you know where I might find him?" Lucius asked with his normal arrogant drawl.

"Severus is out on his rounds, Lucius," came Hermione's short reply.

"You have been ever so helpful," said Lucius, bowing himself out the door.

Once the door was shut firmly, she heaved a great sigh. She absolutely hated that man. Because he was in Azkaban for the remainder of Voldemort's reign, Lucius managed to get out of prison on the account that he had renounced his previous wicked and vile ways. In her opinion, that was utter codswallop. Lucius Malfoy was, and would forever be, a truly evil person.

After his release from Azkaban, he had managed to buy his way back onto the Board of Governors. Lucius tried to make a good impression by appearing actively involved in the goings on at Hogwarts. He would drop by every few weeks and pester Severus for no apparent reason.

Oh, how Hermione loathed Lucius Malfoy and all the misplaced ideals he represented!

A few hours later, Hermione was sitting and reading in the living room when Severus returned.

"You would think with the number of points I deduct, children would learn to be in their common rooms by curfew," he snarled by way of a greeting.

"How many and which of my little darlings did you find tonight?" Hermione inquired. She kept a small tally in her mind in order to check for repeat offenders. Depending on the student, she would also try to give the points back tomorrow.

"Seven students, well five really, because I caught Anna Bloom and George Epps twice." Severus went on in an exasperated tone, "I also found two Slytherins. My own House; have they no sense? They know better than to get caught!" he finished in a frustrated tone.

"I am sorry, Severus. Perhaps they will have learned their lesson. On a different note, did Lucius find you? He came to my office earlier looking for you. He mentioned a pressing matter he wished to discuss."

"No, I haven't seen him in a month. He probably didn't want to waste his precious energy on all the stairs. They do tend to move around any time he comes near. Though, I wonder what the pressing matter was this time."

Hermione chuckled in response.

One of the things she loved about her husband was his sense of humor; well, when it was not directed at her or her friends, that is.

"It couldn't have been terribly important or he would have made the effort to find you."

"Yes, but keep in mind that Lucius never has anything important to say."

"True enough. But it is late, Severus, we should get some sleep so we can do it all again tomorrow." She stood, taking his hand and led him to the bedroom.

Author's Notes Part Two: Thank you to Zen Lady and Potion Mistress for beta reading. All mistakes are mine.

Reviews and comments are appreciated.

Chapter 2: Murder

Chapter 2 of 17

Minerva arrives with bad news.

Disclaimer: I only play with J.K. Rowling's characters.

Chapter 2: Murder

Hermione and Severus were startled awake by loud banging on the door to their chambers. Groggily, Hermione threw on her dressing gown and answered the door. A very unnerved Minerva McGonagall stood on the threshold.

"Minerva, come in!" exclaimed Hermione just as Severus emerged from the bedroom.

"To what do we owe this unbearable disturbance?" Severus asked with as much disdain as he could muster through his sleep roughened voice.

Minerva sat down heavily in the armchair by the fire. Taking a deep breath, she said, "As Headmistress, it is my duty to inform you that a student was found brutally murdered a few hours ago."

Stunned silence pervaded the room.

Hermione recovered first and asked, "Who, Minerva?"

Looking first at Severus then at Hermione, Minerva replied, "Anna Bloom." The Headmistress got up to pace. "She was found in the unused classroom next to the Potions laboratory," she explained.

Hermione gasped and covered her mouth with her hand. Anna was a fourth year Gryffindor. She was a good student but quite shy; Anna had one good friend that Hermione had noticed. The girl always hung around with another fourth year by the name of George Epps.

"That poor girl," said Hermione through her tears.

Severus looked up at this. He had been standing against the doorway looking irritated. Now he came into the room and watched Minerva's face. She was following his movements with her eyes.

Hermione, meanwhile, had seen the look of unease pass over Severus's face. It was subtle, merely a slight tightening of the corners of his mouth and a flash in his eyes. She only noticed because she had watched this man for four years.

"Severus, what time did you end your rounds last night?" asked Minerva as calmly as possible, sitting back down in the armchair she had just vacated.

"Just after eleven o'clock is when I got back to these very chambers." Looking at Hermione, he said, "My wife can confirm my presence."

Hermione nodded and looked away from his intense gaze.

"Headmistress, Severus returned just after eleven last night, and to my knowledge has not left these chambers since."

Hermione noticed Severus move slightly in response to her statement. It seemed almost like a nervous twitch that he hadn't caught in time to control.

Minerva sighed. "All right, I'll keep you up to date on any information we gather. Is there anything else you'd like to share while I'm here?"

"Actually, yes. Lucius Malfoy came by my office around eight o'clock. He was looking for Severus. Though Severus says that Lucius never spoke to him," Hermione added in a rush.

Minerva turned her questioning gaze to Severus, who said, "Hermione mentioned Lucius when I got back to our rooms, but I had not seen him on my rounds. I just guessed he didn't want to waste his energy on all of the stairs."

Minerva smiled at that. Hermione knew that Minerva felt the same way toward Lucius as she did.

The Headmistress got up from the armchair and moved toward the exit. "Thank you for your time, Severus, Hermione. And sorry about the 'unbearable disturbance.'"

Severus bowed his head in recognition of his words and moved to open the door. Minerva walked through and with a crisp nod set off down the corridor.

"Severus, did you see anything out of the ordinary on your rounds last night? I know you mentioned Anna and her friend being out after curfew," Hermione asked her husband after Minerva left.

"Nothing any different than usual. Though most students tend not to get caught twice in one night," Severus answered.

"Who else was on rounds last night?"

"Argus; he and I always have rounds together."

"Maybe he saw something," Hermione stated hopefully.

"He didn't mention anything when we met just before our shift ended. His mangy feline had sniffed out some people loading the second floor bathrooms with Dungbombs, but that was the most important thing he relayed to me."

Hermione got up suddenly and made her way to the outside door.

"Wife, you will not go barrelling out to wherever dressed in naught but your dressing gown!" Severus snarled as he moved to block her path to the door.

Hermione shot a glare at Severus, then seemed to notice that she was indeed wearing nothing but her dressing gown. Smiling sheepishly, she turned and hurried to the bedroom to change.

Severus followed her, asking, "What was so important that you forgot about your state of dress, or undress, as the case may be?"

"I was going to make sure Minerva knew to talk to Argus." Severus raised an eyebrow at her. "Not that I'm undermining how Minerva runs this school; on the contrary, I just thought with everything she may not have remembered the schedule of Argus's rounds," Hermione tried to explain.

"Hermione, this is not one of your many adventures as a student. You have no need to go rushing out to save the world as you did with Potter." Here Severus stopped short.

Hermione looked at Severus with a determinedly calm expression. Harry Potter was a bit of an unmentionable name in their household. During the final confrontation between Harry and Voldemort, Severus made it a point to continue his protection of Harry. Despite that protection, Harry refused to forgive Severus for killing Albus Dumbledore. Harry was one of the most vocal about 'Snape's true loyalties.' Needless to say, that was a sore subject for the both of them. Taking a deep breath, Hermione sat down on the bed.

"You're right. I just feel helpless, and it's in my nature to act first." Hermione heard Severus mumble something that sounded like 'Gryffindor fools,' but she chose to ignore him.

"I feel so helpless. With Voldemort gone, things were supposed to get better. Now this happens. I have a terrible feeling about this," Hermione admitted.

Severus sat down beside her and took her hand in his. This was a testament to how unnerved he was. Hermione knew that her husband was a very closed person; for him to take her hand, he had to be more upset than he would like the world to believe.

"We will have to let the bumbling idiots at the Ministry do their job and hope they have someone competent running the case," Severus said.

Hermione leaned into him and took comfort in his closeness, silently vowing to do anything she could to help the Headmistress.

Author's Notes: Many thanks to Zen Lady and Potion Mistress for beta reading. All further mistakes are mine alone.

This story is based upon events of Leo Frank's life. If you haven't heard of him, I would suggest looking it up.

This story is finished and will be updated regularly.

All feedback is welcome and appreciated.

Chapter 3: Questions

Chapter 3 of 17

The first round of questioning.

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Chapter 3: Questions

Just after lunch, Hermione heard pounding on the door to their chambers. She was in her study marking essays while Severus was in his private lab brewing potions for the hospital wing.

Hermione got up and walked to the door. A quick charm told her it was Minerva on the other side. Hermione opened the door and noticed Argus Filch standing behind the Headmistress looking ill at ease.

"Minerva, Argus, what can I do for you?"

"I need to see Severus," Minerva stated in a tone that brooked no argument.

"He's in the lab; I'll go get him," Hermione said. "Please, come in."

She moved through their chambers to the door to Severus's lab. Knowing how he hated to be disturbed while working, Hermione knocked tentatively on the thick oak door. After a few moments, Severus threw open the door in an obvious temper.

"Can't this wait?" Severus snarled. "I'm in the middle of a complex potion that needs my full attention."

"I'm afraid not. Minerva is waiting in our sitting room, and this is not a social call," Hermione explained.

After glaring past Hermione and in the general direction of their study, Severus turned back to his worktable. With highly agitated movements, Severus managed to clear his workspace. He spun back around and stormed by Hermione to the sitting room.

She followed him out in time to hear the Headmistress say, "Severus Snape, I will have to ask you to come with me. A Law Enforcement Officer is waiting in my office to ask you a few questions."

Heaving a great sigh, Severus made his way to the door. Noticing no one was following, he turned back to the room with a raised eyebrow.

"Well, what are you waiting for? I have better ways to spend my Saturdays," came his scathing comment from the door.

Minerva got up and looked at Hermione. "These are only preliminary questions; he should be back in no time."

"Thank you, Headmistress."

Hermione shut the door after them and sat down in her spot on the couch. She Summoned a glass and a bottle of wine. Now all she had to do was wait.

It was late evening when Severus returned from the Headmistress's office. Hermione was still sitting on the couch. Setting her book down, she regarded her husband. He looked pale and drawn. Hermione moved her legs off the couch and motioned for Severus to come and sit with her.

While Severus was getting comfortable, Hermione Summoned a glass and a bottle of firewhisky. She poured him a large measure and placed the glass in his hand.

Severus proceeded to look at the glass as if it had done him a great personal wrong.

"I have no doubt that you'll want to know what happened. Am I correct?" Severus said in a low voice.

Hermione's immediate thought was that things must not have gone well if he was acting so morose.

"I figure that I can keep my tongue until you are ready to tell me what happened," Hermione answered in what she hoped was a calming voice.

In the same low voice as before, Severus stated, "As you are observant, you have probably guessed that things do not look good. First of all, that idiot Dawlish was the one asking questions. He is Head of Law Enforcement, so 'it's his right.' Nonsense, is what I think. He still believes that I acted purely for my own benefit during the war, so I am a condemned man already. Why I was gone for such a length of time was because he insisted on asking Argus and I the same questions three times through. Luckily for me, I was first so I was allowed to leave. Argus was still there being badgered when I left. Dawlish probably hopes Argus will change his story now that I am no longer in the room."

Hermione knew that with Dawlish working the case things would not be easy for them. She was trying to think of people who could possibly help them in this situation. Remus Lupin would have been perfect with his knowledge of the laws, but Wormtail, better known as Peter Pettigrew, had seen to it that Remus would not do anything ever again. During the final confrontation, Wormtail had attacked Remus with a silver knife. The full moon was near so Remus's wolf nature was close to the surface. The silver slowly drained the life from him. Wormtail did not make it through the battle unscathed. As soon as Tonks had seen the life leave Remus's body, she turned on Wormtail and cast an unknown curse. She hadn't been the same since.

Blinking away the memories, Hermione tried to think of someone else. Then it hit her. Ernie Macmillan was a wizarding lawyer. He had worked on some other high profile cases. Ernie was also one of the few that believed in Severus's innocence. She would contact him as soon as Severus finished relaying the day's events.

"Argus doesn't know any more about the murder than I do," Severus said while allowing his head to drop into his hands.

"Dawlish tried to - refresh - our memories by telling us in detail what happened to the girl. As Minerva said, she was brutally murdered. I won't go into it in full, but Anna died from slow blood loss. She was severely beaten and raped; whoever did this is a monster."

Severus glanced up at this last part, a deadened look in his eyes. He got up from the couch and started pacing the length of the room.

"Dawlish had the nerve to stare me in the face and say that this was the work of a Death Eater gone free." Hermione noticed an odd look on Severus's face. He hated that accusation more than anything.

"Minerva abruptly told him that she would throw him from this school if he showed such bias and indiscretion again."

Hermione had to smile at that. Minerva was nothing if not fiercely loyal to people she cared about.

A question that had been bothering her slipped out before she could stop herself. "But, Severus, what about your alibi? You were here with me from the moment your rounds were done until that next morning."

"Actually, no, I wasn't," came the soft reply from Severus.

"What?" Hermione breathed.

"After you fell asleep I was still restless. I decided to walk the grounds. I needed the fresh air. I got back to our rooms at four that morning."

Hermione just stared at her husband in shock.

"Since Miss Bloom is said to have died between two o'clock and five o'clock, I am the perfect person for the murder."

"What about motive, did you have that too?" Hermione asked in a despairing tone.

"Only the fact that she is a 'Mudblood Gryffindor'."

"That's rich, being that you've been married to a 'Mudblood Gryffindor' for four years, and last time I checked, I am very much alive."

The Ministry was absurd for thinking Severus to be guilty. They knew from prior instances what his jobs were for Voldemort. He was Voldemort's Potions Master; because of this, he was never forced to get blood on his hands. Hermione shook her head.

"The Ministry should know better than to suspect you. They have plenty of prior evidence as to why you can't have done this."

Severus nodded in acknowledgement of her statement and said, "It has been a long day for both of us. I am going to retire. Are you going to join me?"

"I'll be there shortly. I have to finish a letter."

Severus bowed and left the room. As soon as Hermione heard the bathroom door close, she found parchment and a quill. She wrote:

Ernie,

I know it has been a while since we've corresponded, but I have a favor to ask. Would you be available to meet me at the Leaky Cauldron for a late lunch tomorrow - say two o'clock? I know it is Sunday, and you are a busy person. If there is a conflict, send this owl back immediately. If not, I look forward to seeing you tomorrow.

Say hello to Hannah and the kids for me.

Sincerely,

Hermione Snape

After sealing the note, she called for Morpheus, their owl. Attaching the letter she said, "Take this to Ernie Macmillan with all the haste you can. Wait for a reply if there is one." With that, Morpheus took off into the night.

Author's Notes: Thank you to *Potion Mistress* and *Zen Lady* for the beta! They are both invaluable.

This story is completely written and will be posted in a timely manner.

All feedback and reviews are welcomed and appreciated.

Chapter 4: Headline

Chapter 4 of 17

A newspaper article, a meeting and good news all make appearances.

Disclaimer: Don't sue. I promise I don't own Harry Potter; I would be a lot richer if I did.

The *Daily Prophet* was on the table by the time Hermione woke the next morning. After her morning routine, she decided it was time to catch up on the Ministry's biased

version of the news.

She sat down and gasped at the headline.

Murder at Hogwarts: Are Your Children Safe?

By Rita Skeeter

"The way Hogwarts is run has been a matter of concern for some time," says worried parent and member of the Board of Governors, Lucius Malfoy. As we know, former Headmaster Albus Dumbledore took little consideration toward safety when he appointed staff members. Everyone will remember that Remus Lupin, a known werewolf, Rubeus Hagrid, a half-giant, and the infamous Death Eater Severus Snape, were all products of the Headmaster's brand of idiocy. By the look of things, current Headmistress Minerva McGonagall is holding true to Dumbledore's flighty ways.

Hermione threw the *Prophet* away; she was too disgusted to continue. How dare that menace to society say such vile things about Hogwarts? Hermione decided then and there, that no matter what, she would do everything within her power to prove her husband's innocence.

Having received no reply from Ernie, Hermione Apparated to the Leaky Cauldron at half past one o'clock. She had told Severus she was going shopping and would be back by six. He was so focused on what he was brewing that she would be surprised if he'd heard her.

"Good day, ma'am," said Tom, the barman, in greeting. "What can I get ya?"

"A Butterbeer would be great, for now."

Tom handed Hermione the bottle, and she made her way to an empty table in the back facing the door. She was watching some of the other customers when a shadow fell over the table. Hermione started and looked up into the smiling face of Ernie Macmillan.

Hermione hadn't actually seen Ernie since his wedding two years ago. He looked as pompous as always, but he had a good heart.

"I was very surprised to get an owl from you," said Ernie, sitting down. "To what do I owe this meeting — business or pleasure?"

"Business, I'm afraid."

"Well then, Mrs. Snape, do go on."

"Oh, Ernie, you know to call me Hermione. Even if this is business, you are still a friend," Hermione said with a small smile.

"All right, Hermione, what's up?"

"Have you read the *Prophet* lately?"

"Yes, what dreadful writing from that Skeeter cow, as normal."

"Well, there has been a murder, and the Ministry is after Severus again. You were one of the first people I thought of who could help us. The Ministry has been after Severus ever since Albus Dumbledore's murder. Even with Gawain Robards as Minister, there is only so much he can do." This last bit was said in a defeated tone.

"Now, hear me, Hermione, the majority of the Ministry are a bunch of fools who have been bought by the highest bidder," Ernie said in disgust.

Trying to get back on track, Hermione said, "Why I wanted to meet is to ask for your help. If it comes down to it, will you defend Severus? You are one of the few who believe he was on the side of the Order throughout the war. Plus, having been a student of his, you already know his temper."

"Of course, I'll help in any way I can. How far are they in the investigation?"

"Minerva McGonagall asked Severus very basic questions, and Dawlish, the Head of Law Enforcement, interrogated him for hours yesterday. They've also been questioning Argus Filch," Hermione explained.

"All right, what I want you to do is go home and keep me informed of any new information. I can't technically do anything unless Professor Snape is arrested. Just use the Floo. We have ours hooked up, and I know you can make calls from Hogwarts."

"Thank you so very much, Ernie. Now on a lighter note, how is Hannah?"

"Oh, she's great. We just moved into a bigger house. We needed extra space now that Matthew is born." Ernie was positively beaming as he said this.

"How is little April? She's almost two, isn't she?"

"She's eighteen months old, and doing great. Are there any children in the plans for you?"

"Not as of yet. I'm not too sure if I want to have kids, and Severus seems reluctant as well. I have all the kids at Hogwarts if you count my teaching. We are rather content as we are now," said Hermione warmly.

"Well, it's been nice seeing you, and I'm sorry to cut this short, but I need to get back. The newborn is a handful."

They both stood up and shook hands.

"Thanks, Ernie. I'll definitely be in touch."

They walked out to the entrance to Diagon Alley where Ernie waved and Disapparated, and Hermione tapped the bricks to enter Diagon Alley.

A few hours later, pockets heavy with magically reduced bags, Hermione Apparated to the front gates of Hogwarts. After a quick glance over her shoulder, she tapped the gates with her wand and started to make her way across the grounds to the castle. As Hermione knew all too well, old habits died hard. The threat of Voldemort had been gone for five years, but the old precautions were still firmly ingrained in her soul.

The hike from the gates to the front doors normally took around five minutes. She had just reached the entrance when Minerva met up with her.

"Hermione, a word if you will?"

"Absolutely, Minerva," Hermione said, shooting a look at the Headmistress.

Hermione noticed she seemed tense but exhausted. Hermione followed the Headmistress up to her office. Once they were inside, Minerva offered tea.

"Please have a seat," McGonagall said handing a steaming cup to Hermione. "I thought you would like to know that the Ministry has taken Lucius Malfoy in for questioning."

I received the owl while you were out.”

“That is wonderful news!” exclaimed Hermione. “Why they didn’t question him first is beyond me.”

“You know as well as I do that Lucius Malfoy has more gold than he knows what to do with and no qualms about using it to his advantage.”

Hermione rolled her eyes at this statement. “It still amazes me that a Death Eater, a nasty one at that, with money is pardoned, and a noble man, shackled by circumstances, has to pay the price.”

Here Hermione stood. “Thank you for the tea and news, but I must get these items put away.” She gestured to her pockets.

“No problem, dear, I will let you know any other information I may receive.”

Hermione left Minerva’s office with a smile. Things were looking up.

Author’s Notes: *I have two wonderful betas! They are Potion Mistress and Zen Lady. Thanks for your help.*

Reviews are appreciated.

Chapter 5: Arrest

Chapter 5 of 17

An arrest is made.

Disclaimer: I don’t own Harry Potter or anything to do with it.

Chapter 5: Arrest

Hermione woke the next morning feeling better than she had since the news of Anna’s death. Knowing Lucius Malfoy was a suspect did wonders for her disposition.

She sat up and noticed that all was quiet in their rooms. She wondered where Severus was: it wasn’t like him to be out this early. Hermione got up and decided to check his personal laboratory. After knocking, she opened the door to find the room empty.

A little worried, she quickly got dressed and headed to the Great Hall. Perhaps, Severus had woken early and chosen to get breakfast out of the way, she thought.

As she was ascending the stairs from the dungeons, she saw Minerva. The Headmistress looked as though sleep had been elusive.

“Hermione, I need you to come to my office. Now,” Minerva said in a rush.

“What’s happened? Is Severus alright?”

“Just follow me, please.”

Panic was trying to edge its way into her thoughts, but she shoved the feeling away as they hurried through the halls and to the gargoyle that lead to the Head’s suite. Sensing Minerva, the gargoyle moved aside.

Hermione followed Minerva’s fast pace; they didn’t wait for the stairs to carry them to the top.

The Headmistress glanced at Hermione before opening the door to her office. Hermione rushed through, and with relief, saw Severus sitting in a chair by the desk. The relief ebbed away when she noticed Severus’s bound hands. Dawlish was leaning against the fireplace looking smug.

“Ah, Mrs. Snape, I’m glad you could join us,” Dawlish said.

“Please satisfy my curiosity, and tell me: why is my husband bound?” Hermione asked with contempt.

“Because he and Mr. Argus Filch are under arrest for the murder of Anna Bloom.”

Hermione looked Dawlish straight in the eyes when she replied, “You, sir, are making a mistake. What happened to innocent until proven guilty? Also, did you not have Lucius Malfoy in for questioning just yesterday?”

“Mister Malfoy is none of your concern, and we have it on good authority that your husband has not been entirely truthful.”

At this, Severus snorted from the chair. “Not been truthful? And how has Lucius convinced you of his innocence? Gold, perhaps? Possibly Imperius? Is he saying I cast it?”

“Severus! There is no need to provoke a fight,” Minerva said sternly.

“Let’s go, Snape. I am sure Azkaban has waited a long time to house you.”

Hermione marvelled at how poised and in control Severus looked. If their places had been reversed, she would have been a wreck.

“Filch, you too. Azkaban has plenty of space for people like you,” Dawlish said in a mocking tone.

Hermione realized that Mr. Filch had been standing by the door the whole time with his hands bound. He looked like he was going to be sick. Argus was shaking and he looked pale. He was the opposite of Severus’s composure.

As Severus was walking by, Hermione reached out and touched his arm. He stopped and looked down at her face. She stood up on her toes and kissed his cheek. Before pulling away, Hermione whispered, “I have spoken to Ernie; he will help. Don’t lose faith, for I won’t fail you.”

With that, Hermione turned away and headed out the door.

Hermione used her anger to propel her through the halls toward her rooms. When she arrived, she went straight to her desk and wrote a quick note to Ernie Macmillan.

Ernie,

They've arrested Severus and Argus. Lucius Malfoy was questioned and released yesterday. Tell me what I need to do to help.

Hermione

She called for Morpheus and sent the letter. With that done, Hermione took a moment to collect her thoughts. She knew she had to stay in control, or she would be no help at all. She thought about how things had been going so well. Leave it to the Ministry to screw it all up.

Hermione knew that if Lucius hadn't actually committed the murder that he had a hand in it. How to prove what she knew in her heart was a different matter.

Hermione was startled from her thoughts by Ernie's head in the fire.

"Hermione, can I come through?"

"Yes, Ernie, please."

A moment later, the fire flared green, and he stepped into the study.

Hermione opened her mouth to speak and unbidden tears began to fall. Ernie quickly moved to hold her so she wouldn't collapse in her grief.

"Shh, it'll be alright. We'll help him. We will show them, I promise," Ernie murmured into Hermione's ear.

Breath hitching, Hermione said, "Those Ministry bastards took my husband. Severus was condemned from the start because of a terrible choice he made twenty-three years ago."

"We'll help him. With the two of us working together, you'll have Severus back in no time."

"I will not fail him. This is my promise. I will work tirelessly until he is home and the real murderer is locked away forever." Hermione wiped the tears from her face and moved away from Ernie.

"First things first, I need to talk to Headmistress McGonagall. She was present for all of the questioning. The thing you can do right now that will be the most beneficial is wash up and get some rest. I will be back after I've spoken with Minerva."

Hermione nodded in acquiescence and watched Ernie leave. She got up and looked around the room. Finding nothing that needed to be done at that moment, she walked to the bathroom to take Ernie's advice.

Author's Notes: Thank you to Potion Mistress and Zen Lady for the beta.

This story is based on events from Leo Frank's life. If you don't know anything about Leo Frank, I would suggest looking it up.

All reviews and feedback are welcomed and appreciated.

Chapter 6: Memories

Chapter 6 of 17

Hermione feels useful.

Disclaimer: I own nothing that you recognize.

Chapter 6: Memories

After washing up and a quick nap, Hermione was ready to work. To her knowledge, Ernie was still talking to the Headmistress. She stood for a moment trying to decide what to do. She concluded that talking to Minerva was indeed a good course of action. Hoping they hadn't gotten too far, Hermione made her way to Minerva's office.

Hermione arrived, gave the password, and proceeded up the moving staircase.

"Come in, Hermione," came Minerva's voice through the closed door.

Hermione thought, jokingly, that omniscience must come with the duty of Headmaster or mistress. Upon entering the office, Hermione noticed a Pensieve sitting on the desk.

"We have just finished watching the preliminary questions that I asked the morning after the murder," Minerva explained.

"Since you were present for those, you haven't missed anything," Ernie added.

"Ernie, I don't want to be in the way, but you know me well enough to understand that I will not sit back and let others do the work. I want to contribute all I can to Severus's case."

"I'll need an assistant in this case, so I don't see any reason why you couldn't fill that position."

Hermione was thankful for Ernie's willingness to accept her help. She would have something to do instead of sit around and worry day and night.

"Now that that's settled, do we want to watch the next session?" Minerva asked pointedly from her desk.

They all gathered around the Pensieve. Hermione reached to touch the substance with her right hand and was transported into the memory from the Head's office. She had learned earlier that certain places in the castle were programmed to record whatever happened in them. Ernie and Minerva soon followed.

They had arrived in Minerva's office. Looking around, Hermione saw Dawlish leaning against the Headmistress's desk. He was occupying his time by sifting through the parchments on the desktop.

Minerva bristled beside Hermione. Hermione surmised that the Headmistress had not seen this memory before.

Just then, noise could be heard coming from the moving staircase. Dawlish quickly moved away from the desk and looked toward the door with an air of indifference.

Minerva entered first, followed closely by Severus, who looked like he would rather be anywhere else. Argus Filch brought up the rear, shuffling through the door. After a wave of Minerva's hand, the door shut behind them.

The Headmistress strode past Dawlish and took a seat at her desk.

"Everyone, please take a seat," she said.

Dawlish instantly sat; Argus chose one of the chairs across the room, while Severus made no move at all.

Minerva shot him a stern glare. Severus simply returned a look of utter boredom.

Hermione knew that Severus was shutting himself down.

"Dawlish, now that we are all here, will you please begin?"

"Of course, Headmistress," Dawlish replied with a nod.

Turning toward Severus, he said, "Snape, did you or did you not have ill feelings toward Anna Bloom?"

"My feelings weren't as ill toward her as they are toward you."

The Minerva standing beside Hermione stifled a chuckle.

"Tell me, what exactly did you do the night of Anna's murder?"

Severus stiffly recounted that he had been on his rounds and in his chambers until half past one in the morning.

"Where were you after that?" Dawlish demanded.

"I went for a walk. I traveled all the corridors in the castle then went on the grounds. I got back to my chambers at four that morning," Severus finished.

"Then what did you do?"

Exasperated, Severus said, "I slept until Minerva woke us up with her incessant banging."

Both Minervas shot Severus another glare. It was now Hermione's turn to stifle a giggle.

"Did you encounter anyone on your walk?"

"The Bloody Baron was in the dungeon hall when I arrived back in my rooms. Other than him, I met no one alive or dead."

Unbelieving, Dawlish asked, "And you didn't meet Anna Bloom at all on your wanderings?"

"As I said, no. I saw her last at about ten o'clock. She was with one of her friends."

"Oh, yes, we've already spoken to George Epps. He had some interesting things to say, I assure you."

Hermione could see the effort Severus was putting into keeping his body language and face passive.

The Minerva behind the desk looked shocked. "Dawlish, as I told you before, Severus is a senior member of this staff, and I trust him implicitly."

Dawlish scoffed. "Snape, perhaps a reminder is in order. You are certain you didn't leave a fourteen-year-old girl severely beaten and raped in one of your dungeon rooms?"

"No," hissed Severus.

"A little more help might jog your memory. Anna Bloom was found with a concussion, numerous bruises all over her body, boot marks on her sides. Those kicks resulted in four broken ribs and one punctured lung. She had two black eyes, multiple lacerations on her mouth from where her teeth had cut her lips. She had been cut with a sharp knife on both arms. The blood was used to draw patterns on her torso. She looked to have been raped twice: once before she died, and once after. Semen traces were also found around her mouth."

"That is enough!" Minerva exclaimed. She looked as if she could cry and be sick all at once.

Hermione found herself taking deep breaths to try to calm her roiling stomach. Ernie put a comforting hand on her shoulder. During Dawlish's appalling description, all the blood had drained from Severus's face. Argus Filch had a hand over his mouth and was desperately trying not to be sick.

"Well, Snape, was your memory sufficiently jogged?" Dawlish asked after a minute.

"I have no memories to jog, Dawlish. I didn't do any of those things to that girl. I did not see her after ten o'clock last night!"

"This crime has all the evidence of a Death Eater attack. There only seems to be one of those around here," Dawlish said nastily.

Minerva stood from behind her desk. "I warn you now, Dawlish, you make one more blatant and uncalled for accusation, and you will never be allowed on these grounds again."

Severus meanwhile was looking at Dawlish with renewed spirit. "Dawlish, there was another Death Eater here that day. Lucius Malfoy came to call earlier that evening. He never did state what his business was or find me to discuss it."

"Mr. Malfoy is a generous member of this community," the Enforcer said in a huff.

"He also happens to be a Death Eater gone free."

"We'll look into it."

Dawlish turned to Argus and began questioning him.

Minerva pulled both of them, Hermione and Ernie, out of the Pensieve.

Once back in the present, Hermione sat down heavily in one of the chairs by the fire. Ernie stood completely still, lost in thought.

Finally, Hermione said, "Things are worse than I thought."

"Don't give up hope yet, my dear," Minerva said kindly.

"Oh, I'm not giving up yet. Severus is innocent. Until I prove that; I won't give up."

"Hermione, we need to talk to George Epps. What Dawlish said concerning him has me a little on edge," Ernie said quietly.

Minerva looked decidedly uncomfortable. "I'm afraid there may be a problem getting a hold of Mr. Epps. His father took him out of school late yesterday evening."

Author's Notes: *All comments are welcome and appreciated. A great round of applause for my beta, Zen Lady!*

Chapter 7: Frustrations

Chapter 7 of 17

Preparations are made.

Disclaimer: I don't own anything you recognize.

Chapter 7: Frustrations

Hermione and Ernie were sitting in the Snape chambers. Both looked at the end of their wits. Her hair was frizzier than normal, owing to the fact that she kept running her hands through it.

Ernie was sitting with his chin resting on the palm of his hand. He was unsuccessful at stifling a yawn.

"It's been twenty-four hours, Ernie. I'm sure if they were going to get in touch, they would have already done so."

"Hermione, we have no idea where the Epps live. The owl may have just gotten there."

Hermione turned to look at Ernie. She really needed this to move forward. After witnessing the memory yesterday, Ernie had sent off an official owl requesting a meeting with George Epps. As time wore on, Hermione became more and more frustrated.

"Why don't you try and get some sleep?" Ernie suggested after a moment.

"Severus is sitting Merlin knows where, and you expect me to be able to sleep? I couldn't. I miss him." This last was said in a whisper.

"I'm sure we can set up something for tomorrow. It's the middle of the night. First thing in the morning, I'll contact Law Enforcement. I need to speak with Professor Snape, anyway."

"And until morning? What shall we do until then?" Hermione implored.

"I must go home. Hannah will be worried. I'd also like to see my children."

"Oh, Ernie, I'm sorry. I am being terribly selfish. Please go home to Hannah and tell her it's my fault you are late," Hermione said, abashed.

Ernie simply smiled.

"Goodnight, Hermione. I'll be back early tomorrow, and we'll go see Professor Snape. Do try to get some sleep. You'll be of no use if you're exhausted."

"Goodnight, Ernie, and thank you. I may take something and sleep for a few hours."

Hermione woke with a start. After a moment, she realized that she was asleep in her chambers. The bed felt large and foreign without Severus's presence.

Taking a few deep breaths, Hermione decided that sleep had left her, so she might as well get up. She pulled on her dressing gown and made her way to the study. Hermione knew she should have a list of questions written out to ask Severus.

A muttered "*Lumos*" illuminated the room. Picking up her quill, she sat behind the desk and started to think.

Hermione couldn't get over the fact that she, well they, were in this position at all. Severus had been cleared. It had been a reluctant decision on the part of the Wizengamot, but he had been cleared nonetheless. Voldemort was gone, and people were finally moving on with their lives.

Now they had encountered this atrocity. Hermione had heard enough of Dawlish's description to know that Anna Bloom was probably no longer recognizable as the young woman she had been. Hermione could feel in her very soul that the one responsible was an absolute monster. Most of the people fitting that description had been taken care of right after Voldemort's fall. Lucius Malfoy was the only one she could think of who was free and had the vileness to commit such a crime. Conveniently enough, he had just happened to be here the day Anna's life was so brutally taken.

Hermione shook herself to get the images and thoughts out of her head. Her questions were not going to write themselves. Maybe if she wrote down topics, instead of

specific questions, she would get somewhere.

George Epps, she wrote. He especially bothered her. When Dawlish mentioned Mr. Epps, he resembled a kid who'd been told Christmas was happening twice a year.

Other motives. Hermione didn't believe Severus held anything against the girl, but it was better to know for certain.

Lucius Malfoy's job and habits as a Death Eater. If Severus had seen Lucius commit acts of a similar nature, it might help in clearing his name.

As Hermione finished making her list, Ernie Macmillan stepped out of the fireplace. She looked up and stifled a yawn.

"Please, Hermione, tell me you got some sleep," he asked, sounding worried.

"Don't worry. I haven't been up very long. I was wide awake and decided to make good use of my time." She indicated the parchment. "I've made a list of topics to discuss with Severus."

"That will be helpful. I have some notes as well. We won't be able to see Professor Snape until ten o'clock. To kill that time, we should compare notes, and you should eat breakfast," Ernie said.

"Yes, Father," Hermione said with a small smile.

Author's Notes: A huge thank you to Zen Lady for beta reading.

Feedback and reviews are highly appreciated.

Different Questions

Chapter 8 of 17

A trip to Azkaban.

Disclaimer: I only wish that I owned Harry Potter.

Hermione and Ernie arrived on Azkaban Island by boat. They both shivered as the wind off the sea tore through their clothing. A patrolling officer spotted them and hurried over.

"What business do you have at Azkaban Fortress?" he yelled over the wind.

"We're here to see Professor Severus Snape. Can we please move out of this weather while we're at it?" Ernie said.

The guard seemed torn for a moment before beckoning them to follow. Upon reaching an entry area, the guard rounded on them again.

"Severus Snape is a dangerous criminal. He is not allowed any visitors." He looked pointedly at Hermione.

"It's good we aren't here as visitors then," came Hermione's sharp reply.

"We are his defending counsel, and I need to be able to freely speak to my client," Ernie explained.

"You will wait here while I check your information. Your names would be?"

"Hermione Snape and Ernie Macmillan."

"Do not move." With that, the guard hurried off.

Hermione turned to Ernie and said, "If this is the treatment now, I would hate to have seen this place under the dementors."

The Ministry banished the dementors after the fall of Voldemort. Too many innocent people lost their minds and their souls to those creatures.

After fifteen minutes, the guard came back.

"You will follow me. Snape is considered highly dangerous, so he cannot leave the cell. You will also give me your wands."

Hermione felt terribly uneasy relinquishing her wand to the guard. Ernie handed his over without preamble. The guard looked at her expectantly, so she finally handed hers over, and the guard led them into the fortress.

Azkaban was a labyrinth of hallways and cells. The guard was leading them to what seemed to be the centre of the fortress. Hermione noticed that the deeper within the prison they went, the more neglected the inmates looked. She was worried about the state her husband would be in when they saw him.

A few minutes later, they arrived at a set of heavy, metal doors. The guard said an incantation, and the door slid away, revealing two cells. Severus was in one, and the other looked like it had never been used. Dust was everywhere, along with cobwebs. The cobwebs covered every corner of the cell and the bars.

Hermione took one look at Severus and nearly collapsed. It was obvious he had been beaten. His nose was broken, and the blood had mingled with that from his cut lip.

His gaze was unfocused, as if he wasn't used to the light. Hermione rushed forward and reached through the bars.

"Severus, what have they done to you?"

"Hermione?" Severus rasped. He had either been screaming or been silent for too long.

"Professor Snape, Hermione and I have to ask you some questions. We're doing everything we can to get you out of here."

Suddenly, Hermione asked, "Where's Argus? You're holding him for the same crime as Severus. Why isn't he in the bowels of Azkaban as well?"

"He's a Squib; therefore, he's not considered a risk. He's being held in our minimum security ward," replied the guard.

"Pardon me? Are you telling me that people without magic can't perform acts of violence? How, then, do you explain the numerous murders or violent crimes in the Muggle world," Hermione said to the guard.

"Mr. Filch is a Squib; therefore, in comparison to the magical inmates, he poses no threat."

"I don't think you understand. Both my husband and Argus Filch are being wrongly imprisoned for the brutal murder of a young girl. Since it is the same crime, both men should be of equal threat."

"Not how we see it," replied the guard.

"Then your view is "

"Hermione, please drop it," Severus interrupted her. "You said you were here to talk to me. Stop bickering with that imbecile and do what needs to be done."

"I request that you leave us so we can question him without interruption," said Ernie to the guard.

The guard glanced between all of them and looked as if the last thing he wanted was to leave them alone with this prisoner.

"Sir, I assure you, we can take care of ourselves. If you could just wait outside the doors, we will conclude our business."

Reluctantly, the guard turned toward the door. Before he could leave completely, he turned and said, "I hope you know what you're doing, defending scum like him." With that parting shot, he left.

Finally, Hermione and Ernie turned their full attention to Severus. He had moved so he was closer to the cell door. Hermione reached through the bars and took his hand. His hands felt like ice to her.

"Professor Snape, we need some information from you to allow us to give you the most help."

Severus nodded.

"Firstly, what was Lucius Malfoy's job or position within the Death Eaters?"

Severus sat for a moment and stared at the wall. Hermione squeezed his hand to show her support. Her action seemed to bring him out of his memories.

"Lucius was one of the highest ranked Death Eaters. The Dark Lord would place him in charge of the Muggle raids. Lucius found enjoyment through torturing the Muggles. He particularly liked to make them bleed and scream."

Hermione closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She had a vivid image of her parents being tortured. They, thankfully, were alive, but she still feared for them.

"Were there any particular things that only Lucius would do to his victims?" Ernie asked.

"Any excess blood should have been used in some way. He liked to draw designs or things of that nature. Lucius hated wasting blood."

"How considerate of him," said Hermione, feeling slightly queasy. "Is there anything else concerning Lucius we should know?"

"I can think of nothing."

"Alright, well, moving on then, what do you know about George Epps?" Ernie inquired.

"Nothing out of the ordinary. He's a Gryffindor in the same year as Miss Bloom. They were normally together from what I could tell."

"Does he have any specific reason to hate you?"

"Besides the fact that it's me? None that immediately come to mind. I can think of all the *normal* reasons: biased Slytherin, bastard extraordinaire..."

"Severus, this is no time to joke!" admonished Hermione.

"How else am I going to keep what little sanity I have left?"

"By knowing you'll be out of here soon. They can't keep you much longer without real evidence."

"Why, Mister Macmillan, were you asking about George Epps?"

"I'm not sure, exactly. His name had been floating around. George's father removed him from the school. Also, Dawlish looked like a giddy schoolboy when he mentioned the younger Mr. Epps. Just to be safe, I thought it wise to ask you about him."

"Indeed."

Hermione noticed that Severus seemed lost in thought. Perhaps he was remembering something useful.

"Have you thought of something?"

"I don't know. The only reason George Epps stands out to me is that I remember catching he and Miss Bloom out after curfew at least twice a week. This was excessive, even for you and your friends, wife." He turned his gaze toward Hermione.

"What were they doing out so often?"

"Well, snogging from what I could tell."

"Why go out to snog? They were both Gryffindors. The Common Room was available as well as Anna simply going into George's dormitory."

"And how would you know that last is possible?"

"I was allowed up there for Christmases. I wouldn't think the enchantments had changed. Ron found out the hard way that boys weren't allowed into the girls' rooms."

"That is something we'll need to ask Mr. Epps when we speak with him," interjected Ernie.

"Though, they were only fourth years. It may have been too soon for that sort of thing," Hermione continued.

"Please stop. Hearing about my students' love lives is making me ill."

"Very well, moving right along. Were there any reasons that you didn't like the girl? Besides the 'Mudblood Gryffindor' thing, that is?" Hermione asked.

"No, do you have so little faith in me that you must ask that question?"

"I ask because I have so much faith in you. If I had any doubts at all, I wouldn't have asked for fear of the answer," Hermione replied.

"Not to beat a dead horse," Ernie said, "but Miss Bloom hadn't just come to you because she wanted an unsatisfactory mark changed? Or, perhaps, she had caught you and Hermione in a compromising position and was threatening blackmail?"

"No, and absolutely not. We were happily married and, therefore, not much is compromising."

"All right, I simply had to ask. We will need to talk to George Epps before we can do anything definitive. We should be in touch with him within the week," Ernie explained.

"Ernie, could you give us a minute? I will be out shortly."

"Certainly, Hermione." Ernie made his way to the door. "I will be directly outside if you should need me."

After Ernie left, Hermione turned her attention to Severus. For a moment, all she could do was look at him. He really didn't look well.

"What have they been doing to you?"

"Treating me no worse than I deserve."

"How can you say that? You have committed no crime!"

"Not recently, though the charges against me are all very true, just a few years too late."

"Stop it, Severus. You have been pardoned or cleared of all of those crimes. You are a different person now. You are my husband, a caring man. Would someone with as much feeling as you be capable of committing such a crime in the present? I doubt it. Even under other circumstances, you decided that way of life was not for you. Severus, you can't give up hope, now least of all. Think of all the time that we'll have wasted if you just give up. I, and you, have put in too much effort for this all to have been a waste." Hermione finished and stared directly at the wall. Severus is not one who appreciates a show of strong emotions.

"Hermione, my wife, please forgive me. I have been locked in this cell too long. This is almost worse than when the dementors were here, for now all I have are happy memories. Each happy memory involves you, and not being near you is taking its toll."

"Thank you, Severus. That means more to me than anything. Now, I have to go and track down George Epps. Somehow, he holds the missing key to all of this. Keep faith in me because I will never fail you."

Severus raised her hand and kissed it as Hermione stood to leave. With one last look, she turned and headed out the door.

Author's Notes: Thanks go to Sophi and Zen Lady for beta reading. You are so much help!

Feedback and reviews are always welcomed and appreciated.

Slander

Chapter 9 of 17

The meeting with the Epps family.

Disclaimer: I love Harry Potter. Unfortunately, that doesn't give me any rights to it.

Hermione woke late the next morning. She was hungry, but didn't want to hide away in her rooms. She decided that she would take breakfast in the Great Hall. People needed to see that she wasn't hiding her face in shame because of her husband's imprisonment. She got dressed and let her feet carry her to the Great Hall while she was lost in thoughts of George Epps and what information he would provide. Ernie was still waiting on a reply from the Epps family. They, by law, had to respond within a week from the date of receipt.

As Hermione got closer to the Entrance Hall, she noticed more of the students. Some were stopping and looking at her; others were whispering to their friends. Granted, behavior like this wasn't unheard of to her. She was married to the least-liked professor currently at Hogwarts. However, there seemed to be more open gestures of hostility today. Telling herself not to dwell on it, she entered the Great Hall.

Upon her entrance, a lot of the sound died away. Now rather nervous, she moved a little quicker than normal to her seat at the high table. The mail had already been delivered. Taking her seat next to Filius Flitwick, she asked to see the paper.

A large, sneering picture of her husband took up most of the front page. The article that followed made Hermione's blood boil.

Insider's Look Into the Life of a Murderer

By Rita Skeeter

My dear readers, this article will not shock most of you. We will be taking a close look at a well-known figure within our community. He has been in the spotlight before for numerous things, including treachery and murder.

Severus Snape has stood trial on two separate occasions for heinous crimes. The murder of former Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Albus

Dumbledore, is the most infamous trial Severus Snape has had to endure. Due to technicalities and liberal use of his connections, he managed to escape punishment. The former Professor Snape should be rotting in Azkaban Prison.

At long last, this man of questionable affiliations will get his comeuppance. This reporter has it on good authority that he will soon be enjoying the view from inside a prison cell in Azkaban for the murder of a Hogwarts student. (Story continued on pages 2, 4, and 5.)

'How dare she!' Hermione thought furiously. She stood and started to leave when another lone owl entered the Great Hall. It was heading straight to her seat at the staff table. Looking around, she noticed that most everyone was either looking at her or at the seemingly confused owl. Moving quickly, she went back to her seat and took the parchment from the owl. After handing it a scrap of toast, it flew away.

Hermione didn't recognize the writing but decided it would be better to get out of the Great Hall. Being in the Snape chambers alone depressed her, so she decided to head outside. A walk by the lake had always worked at calming her.

She sat on a rock on the far side of the lake. She wanted to be as far away from students as she could get. Whatever this letter was, she had a feeling that it was only for her eyes. Turning it over in her hands, she looked for any sign of identification. None could be found by the naked eye. A few whispered words showed that there were no curses placed on the parchment.

Taking a deep breath, she broke the plain wax seal.

Hermione,

I have always told you he would do something else like this. Why, when you're so smart, do you willingly overlook that you've married a murderer? I'm not the only one to think he's guilty. Actually, I wonder how much your husband gave McGonagall to get her on his side.

Hermione, listen to me; this is your chance to get out of that doomed marriage. I can help you. Please, take my advice and leave him.

Your friend,

Harry

Hermione was exceedingly glad at her choice to sit. The letter from Harry had rattled her. She had known there was bad blood between Harry and Severus, but she hadn't realized it was this bad. It had been smart of Harry to use a dict-o-quill for the address. She probably would have opened the letter right away if she had seen Harry's handwriting.

Heaving a sigh, Hermione stood and started to move back toward the castle.

After having lunch in her chambers, Hermione decided to pen a reply to Harry's letter. As she sat down, Ernie's head appeared in the fireplace.

"Hello, Hermione. Can I come through?"

"Certainly." She stood as the fire roared green and Ernie stepped into the room. A quick charm from his wand later, he stood in pristine robes.

"I have finally received a reply from the Epps. They are willing to meet with us in about half an hour."

"Where are we meeting them?" Hermione looked up quickly, excitement spurring her movements.

"I don't know. They provided a Portkey that will activate in twenty-five minutes," Ernie replied, checking his watch. "Until then, let's discuss possible topics. Is there anything in particular you want to ask them?"

"What he and Anna were doing out repeatedly that night. Also, what does he gain from Severus being imprisoned, or worse."

"Yes, those are definite questions to ask. I want to know what he thinks of Professor Snape, and what he has against him."

"Those are given questions in my head, so I didn't voice them. Though I have a question for you: Do you see Minerva McGonagall as someone who could be bought?"

Hermione fiddled with the hem of her robes as she asked.

"Goodness no! The Headmistress is much too strict for something like that. Why do you ask?"

"It was mentioned to me that people may come to that conclusion because of her stance on Severus's innocence."

"Whoever said that to you is either daft or doesn't know the Headmistress at all," Ernie assured her, placing a comforting hand on her shoulder.

Ernie checked his watch and took a plain piece of parchment out of his pocket.

"We have about a minute before this activates, so we should get ready."

Hermione grabbed on to the side of parchment facing her. She looked up at Ernie and the world was tugged away.

After what seemed like the longest moment of her life, Hermione and Ernie landed hard in a small clearing inside a forest.

Ernie looked around and pointed to a path that led out of the trees. Hermione followed him into the bright sunlight. Ahead of them stood a small cabin, and an older man was sitting on the front steps, wand aimed at them.

They both stopped abruptly when they reached the edge of the trees.

"I am Ernie Macmillan and this is my assistant, Hermione Snape." He gestured to himself and Hermione in turn.

"I am Matthew Epps, George's father. I was under the impression I would only be talking to the lawyer."

"As my assistant in this trial, Mrs. Snape has every reason to be here."

After a while of staring, Mr. Epps nodded. He rose and beckoned them to follow him into the house.

George Epps was sitting at the table when they entered. He looked a little scared once he noticed Hermione. George kept looking from her to his father.

"Have a seat," Mr. Epps said once he had secured the door.

Hermione chose the seat across the table from George. This seemed to make the child even more nervous. She wondered about this reaction.

"Mr. Epps, we are here to ask your son some questions in regards to the murder of his friend Anna Bloom," Ernie said with authority.

"Yes, yes, I knew you would come. That man, Dawlish, was going on about how we needed to tell everyone what my son saw."

"Well, that leads in nicely. George, will you tell us about what you saw the night Anna was murdered?" Ernie asked.

George looked around the room for a moment, not meeting eyes with any of them before he said, "Anna and I were out after curfew. We ran into Professor Snape. He was cruel as usual. He even took one hundred points from Gryffindor! We were out looking for Anna's pet. Her cat liked to get out of the tower. We saw Mrs. Norris but she didn't see us. I'm sure she heard us trying to hide. After a few minutes, we decided to come out of our hiding place. As we were walking along, looking for Anna's cat, that jerk found us again. He took two hundred points this time. He also looked furious; he was yelling about the idiocy of Gryffindors and how stupid we were. He informed us that he would expel us and let some of his friends take care of us. I was scared because we had heard about his *duties* and *friends* from the war."

"What do you mean his duties and friends?" Hermione asked.

"He was a spy for You-Know-Who! He had to be friendly with the Death Eaters. He also killed the most beloved man in our world. He's cold-hearted and vicious."

Hermione noticed George Epps was trembling. Looking closer, she thought she noticed something off about his posture and actions. Though, he wasn't looking at her, so she couldn't be sure.

"Do you remember what else happened after your encounters with Professor Snape?"

"We were scared! He told us he would escort us back to the tower. We got up there, but Anna was still worried about her cat. Snape said not to worry about the stupid animal and get some sleep. I realize now we should have done what he said, but Anna was really worried. We searched the common room again in the hope that Sabian was sleeping in a hidden spot. Of course, the cat was nowhere to be found. We snuck back out of the common room and went a different way than before. At some point, Anna and I got separated. I was calling for her when I saw Mrs. Norris. I found a tapestry that was hiding a shortcut to the dungeons. Snape had been in a different part of the castle before, so I didn't worry about running into him. I was surprised to see a man in one of the classrooms. It had to have been Snape. The robes and stature were the same. I knew something was wrong but didn't want to get caught. I made my way back to the tower and figured I would tell Anna about Snape in the morning."

Hermione was watching George intently. He had tears running down his face.

"George, I know this is hard, but you mentioned you thought it was Professor Snape because of the robes and stature. Did you happen to see the person's face? That would be very important," Hermione asked quietly.

George nodded. "It was the *professor*." He spat the last word.

"Do you need a moment to compose yourself?" Ernie asked in a kind voice.

"No, I just want that bastard put to death for what he did! I know it was him; there was blood on his hands. No, I didn't see his face, but I've seen him in class for years. I know how he moves... It had to be him..." George's voice trailed off so the end of his speech came out as a whisper.

Hermione was taking deep breaths, trying to calm her roiling emotions. She looked around attempting to find something to focus on rather than the terrible image her mind had created.

Ernie stood and helped Hermione up.

"Thank you, George, Mr. Epps. You have answered all of our questions. We will be in touch. Please, if you think of anything else, anything at all, don't hesitate to contact me." Ernie shook hands with George and his father. Hermione nodded to both and let Ernie lead her away.

Author's Notes: A huge thank you to *Sophi* and *Zen Lady* for beta reading.

All reviews and feedback are appreciated.

For those who are wondering, I've completely written this story and it will be updated in a timely manner.

A Farce

Chapter 10 of 17

A letter is sent and received.

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter or anything to do with it.

Harry,

I appreciate your concern for my wellbeing, but I must ask you not to ever say such things to me again. You of all people should know the good deeds that Severus has accomplished.

And another thing, howdare you slander Minerva's name in all of this? Think, Harry! Can you honestly believe she would be bought? She was the strictest teacher, beside Severus, that we had at Hogwarts. I simply cannot believe your audacity.

Do not write to me for a while, Harry. I won't read your letters even if you try.

Incredibly hurt,

Hermione Snape

She knew it was vindictive to sign her full name, but Harry had to understand that she was, and would always be, standing by Severus.

"Morpheus," Hermione called a little louder than she had intended. Her movements were jerky as she folded and sealed the parchment.

A moment later, she watched as Morpheus took off to deliver her letter. She wondered when she would hear from Ernie again. After the meeting with the Epps, they had Apparated to Hogsmeade. Ernie had escorted her back to her rooms and told her to get some rest. He said he needed to go over the information that George Epps had given them. At the memory of his tale, Hermione shuddered. George completely believed that it was Severus that he saw in the dungeons, though part of his story didn't add up.

Hermione sat for a moment and went over the end of George's statement. He had said he saw a figure in the dungeons that looked like Severus. Before that, he had mentioned that Severus was patrolling a different section of the castle. Fine, a while had passed so maybe Severus had made his way back to the dungeons. What about George's change of story? At first he found it odd that Severus was in the dungeons and kneeling on the floor, and he had planned to relay that information to Anna the next day. Abruptly after that, he had said it had been, without a doubt, Severus with blood on his hands. This was a rather large change in account.

Hermione quickly got up and went over to the fireplace. She tossed Floo powder into the flames and called for Ernie.

Ernie emerged from the flames a moment later. Dusting himself off, he said, "Hermione, good morning. You needed me for something?"

"Yes, did you happen to notice how George changed his story while he was talking to us?" Hermione asked in a rush.

"I noticed his abrupt change in demeanor, but I hadn't got as far as reviewing the memory for changes in his story. Rest assured that anything I can find that doesn't ring true will be looked into. Unfortunately, I have to get back to the house; Hannah needs to run errands, so I am Mister Mom." Ernie flashed Hermione a smile and made his way back to the fire. "I suggest that if you remember anything else you write it down, and I'll be by later to discuss it with you."

Hermione nodded and smiled wearily as he threw a pinch of Floo powder and stepped through the flames. She really hadn't slept much the last few days and it was catching up with her. Hermione decided to make herself comfortable on the couch and sleep if she was able.

Hermione woke up to an incessant tapping sound. Dragging herself out of bed, she made her way from the sofa to the door to the hall. A house-elf stood in front of the door repeatedly tapping his knuckles to the wood.

"Yes? Why didn't you simply come inside?" Hermione said, clearly puzzled.

"Madam Snape, I is giving you a letter. I is not entering because you is sleeping. House-elves can't enter sleeping chambers of Madam." The elf stood, shifting from foot to foot.

"Thank you. What letter are you supposed to be delivering?"

An official looking envelope popped into existence and hovered in front of Hermione.

"Who is this from?"

"The official. I is being given the letter to hand directly to Madam Snape."

"Okay, thank you."

The elf bowed and vanished.

Hermione took the letter and examined the seal, her forehead creasing in confusion. The Ministry symbol had been embossed into the wax. Opening the letter, Hermione quickly scanned the missive.

A trial date. They had finally set a date for Severus's trial. A week from today. Fear and unease gripped her heart. All of a sudden, she did not feel able to help her husband; images flashed through her mind faster than she could comprehend. The feeling of losing control was almost overwhelming. Hermione desperately wanted to discuss this with someone. Ernie was out of the question, Harry wouldn't be much help, and she doubted she would be able to put up with him anyway. Thinking through the turmoil in her mind, she tried to come up with people she trusted. Her mind was moving in circles, continually coming up blank. 'Calm down!' she thought. She was annoyed with herself for losing it like this. She started thinking of the people at Hogwarts that she trusted... Minerva! Minerva would listen and probably understand.

With that, Hermione made her way to the Headmistress's office. The stone gargoyle moved out of the way as she approached.

After riding the moving staircase, Hermione tentatively knocked on the large wooden doors.

"Enter," came Minerva's muffled reply.

Hermione opened the door and moved to stand before the large desk in the center of the room.

"Hermione, to what do I owe this visit? Please, have a seat." Minerva gestured to a chair across from her.

"They have set a date for Severus's trial. It is a week from today. I—" Hermione swallowed loudly. "I don't feel adequately prepared. A week? We just talked to George Epps yesterday. How are we going to make a good case with such short notice? Minerva, I fear the outcome of this trial more than I ever feared Voldemort. I feel so lost."

She leaned down, covering her face with her hands.

"Oh, my dear. I'm sure you and Ernie will come up with the perfect defense for Severus. Granted, he is innocent, which makes your lives that much easier. The Ministry will have a hard time making their evidence stick, especially since the evidence could point to anyone really. Hermione, don't worry. You'll have Severus back in no time. Think of that! Just a few more weeks and you can put this whole mess behind you."

"But who, Minerva? How can I prove that Lucius Malfoy is responsible for this? All I have to go on is my intuition."

"That's not your job, Hermione. Your job is to free Severus. The Ministry is in charge of finding the actual guilty party."

Minerva had said all of this with such confidence and conviction that there was nothing Hermione could do but believe the Headmistress's words.

"Minerva, you have always had such faith in my abilities. I thank you for that. I guess it's just hard for me to not feel capable. I'm glad to have your support."

Without thinking, Hermione stood up and hugged Minerva, thankful for the older witch's confidence.

"I have faith in you because you have always proven yourself worthy. Do not despair; all will work out in the end. The right man will be brought to justice."

Hermione smiled. "Thank you, Minerva. You always know how to make me feel better."

Author's Notes: A huge round of applause to my wonderful betas, Sophi and Zen Lady!

Feedback is always welcomed and appreciated.

Visits

Chapter 11 of 17

The day before the trial.

Disclaimer: Oh, how I wish I owned Harry Potter.

Throughout the next week, Hermione and Ernie met daily to put together a good defense. They found that there were numerous holes in many of the statements given to the Magical Law Enforcement. George's change in story was just one of many similar cases. Hermione actually started to suspect that someone had been tampering with the "witness's" memories. Knowing what she did of Lucius Malfoy, she was not surprised.

Hermione woke the day before the trial feeling much more confident than she had the week before. Ernie was a great lawyer, and he was putting all of his efforts into making sure everyone knew of Severus Snape's innocence.

She hadn't been to the Great Hall for breakfast in a while. As a show of good faith, she decided to breakfast there that morning. Hermione found herself under much scrutiny upon entering the hall. Making her way to the Head Table, she tried to ignore the whispers and stares. The trial date had been made public knowledge at some point during the week. She attributed all the attention to people trying to figure out her role in all of this mess.

Loading her plate with toast and fruit, she immersed herself in conversation with Professor Vector.

"I do wish you the best of luck at the trial tomorrow. I'm sure you and Ernie are well prepared. Tell Severus we're all thinking about him."

"Thank you so much. If I get to see him, I will definitely relay the message."

The morning post was arriving as Hermione finished her conversation. The *Daily Prophet* arrived along with two letters. She examined the letters first. One was from Lucius Malfoy and the other from Harry Potter. Hermione wondered about both of these correspondents. She hadn't spoken with Harry since his last dreadful letter. 'Maybe he's going to apologize,' she thought. She ran her hand absently over the letter from Lucius. Any correspondence from him was not normally a good sign. After a moment, Hermione decided to forego the letters and read the *Daily Prophet*. This turned out to be a mistake.

Death Eater, Murderer, Scheming Husband?

By Rita Skeeter

With the trial of former Hogwarts Professor Severus Snape fast approaching, the public should know exactly what kind of man they are putting behind bars.

Since I have already covered Severus Snape's past and present misdeeds, let us focus on his relationship with former Hogwarts student, Hermione Snape nee Granger.

As a close friend of Harry Potter, Hermione Granger was under much scrutiny in the past. Her relationship with Hogwarts's most hated professor has not gone unnoticed.

An anonymous, helpful citizen had this to say of Miss Granger's relationship: "I know from personal experience that Hermione has to be under some spell or potion. Severus Snape is Slytherin enough to slip her a love potion, and no one would be the wiser. I, as a close and caring friend, have tried repeatedly to help her get out from under his controlling ways."

Severus Snape's powers of manipulation have not lessened since his imprisonment. His **devoted** wife has been doing everything within her power to help this murderer escape justice.

Hermione read the article through twice more before folding the paper and setting it aside, her movements calculated to look calm. She swore to herself that she would make that woman eat her words. Hermione noticed the staff was throwing her concerned glances. With as much poise as she could muster, Hermione stood, gathered her letters, and marched out of the Great Hall.

Upon reaching her chambers, she threw herself into a chair by the fire and cried out all of her frustrations. The fire roared to life and Ernie stepped through. Hermione only noticed him when he placed a comforting hand on her shoulder.

"Oh, Ernie, I miss Severus so much. What if things don't go as planned tomorrow? They'll throw Severus straight back into Azkaban."

"We have made stunning progress on our defense. The witnesses have been telling lies or their minds have been addled. There is no way they could possibly find Severus guilty."

"Is there any way we could see him? I've been meaning to ask you all week. I've been sending letters, but I doubt he's received them. I don't want him to feel alone before his trial."

"Actually, that's partially why I'm here. I have already gotten permission for us to see Severus. We should leave now to give you more time with him."

"I have to read these letters before we go. Lucius Malfoy and Harry Potter don't normally write without reason."

She pulled the letters out of her robes, and opened the one from Harry.

Hermione,

I won't take back what I said, but I want you to know that you still have my support.

Hermione, you're one of my best friends. I won't let Snape come between us. But, I have to tell you, even the Minister is skeptical this time.

I ask you to just look at both sides. You have a biased opinion, and it may just cause you more pain.

Your caring friend,

Harry

Hermione folded Harry's letter and sighed. She wished that he were on her side for this. Well, on Severus's side; Harry had said he was on hers. Shaking her head, she opened the missive from Lucius Malfoy.

Mrs. Snape,

I am writing to send my condolences on your husband's imprisonment. His fate will be decided tomorrow, and, of course, I will be there to lend whatever help I can. I would hate to see an old friend incarcerated for such a heinous crime.

Tell Severus I send my thoughts. This will all be over soon.

Lucius Malfoy

Hermione crumpled the letter from Malfoy and threw it across the room. Malfoy was so vile. She had a feeling that his "help" would actually harm Severus in some way. Looking up, she saw Ernie watching her.

"Let's go see Severus. I need to inform him of the letter from Lucius."

Nodding, Ernie held out his arm. Hermione took it and they walked out of her chambers.

The guard had just left to verify Ernie and Hermione's visit. Looking around, she wondered what state her husband would be in when she saw him. Last visit, she had been absolutely appalled at the treatment he had received.

Finally, the guard returned to lead them to Severus's cell. They headed down an innumerable number of corridors before reaching their destination. It was the same cell that Severus had been in on their last visit.

If possible, he looked worse now than he had the last time Hermione had seen him. Ernie was talking the guard into waiting outside while Hermione rushed to the bars of her husband's cell.

"Severus..."

Severus looked up at the sound of his name. Hermione noticed that he had huge dark circles under his eyes and his face had an overall look of despair.

"Hermione," he barely managed to whisper.

Tears welled in her eyes before she spoke, "I am sorry I haven't been by to see you. You haven't been out of my thoughts for a moment."

"You're here. I wondered if you had left me to rot," he rasped.

"Severus, I would never leave you! I wrote you a letter every day, but given the state you're in, I'm not surprised you didn't receive them."

Severus shook his head before asking, "How will my trial go tomorrow?"

"Ernie Macmillan and I have been working tirelessly to find any and all information to help you. We've gathered a good defense; there is no way they can find you guilty."

"There is always a way to find guilt. Though, I won't hold it against you if that happens."

Hermione could do nothing but stare at her husband.

"I have offended you," Severus stated.

"No, you've shocked me. I just figured you would be grateful for all of the work we've done," Hermione shot back with a hurt look.

She was greeted with silence. Hermione moved her gaze to the floor before replying, "I'm sorry. You simply managed to say exactly what I've feared. I would love nothing more than to simply imagine that everything will turn out all right. But, I fear it won't. I fear my work hasn't been adequate."

During her reply, Severus had moved so he was sitting next to the bars of his prison cell. He reached out to take Hermione's hand; it felt cool against hers.

"I don't deserve devotion such as yours, but I will gladly accept anything you are willing to give. I don't say this enough, but you really are a clever witch."

"Thank you, Severus. Tomorrow will be hard but we, Ernie and I, have done everything we can. I cannot guarantee a victory, but I can guarantee that you'll have a fighting chance."

Severus looked into her eyes and nodded.

"I want your opinion on this: Lucius sent me a letter this morning. He sends his thoughts and says this will all be over soon. He is going to be there tomorrow," Hermione said in a rush.

"Do you believe his letter is sincere?"

"No, of course not. I find Lucius absolutely dreadful. I can't help but think that he's up to something."

"It is a good idea to be wary of Lucius, but do not let his presence unnerve you tomorrow," Severus offered as advice.

"I'll have you there to counteract his presence." She smiled at him before continuing, "Severus, promise me you won't lose hope again. I need you to believe in me," Hermione pleaded.

"I do, and I will. I won't let all of your work become a waste of time."

"Thank you. We should be going before that guard gets even angrier."

Before Hermione could stand, Severus raised her hand and kissed it. Hermione stroked his cheek in return.

"My wife, I will see you in the morning. Until then, know I will be thinking of you."

Hermione quickly stood and moved to the door of the hall. With one last glance, she moved down the corridor so her husband wouldn't see her cry.

Author's notes: A huge thank you to Zen Lady and Sophi for beta reading. This story would not be the same without their help.

Feedback is always appreciated.

Tension

Chapter 12 of 17

The trial.

Disclaimer: I do not own anything you recognize. The idea is even based on actual events.

Hermione awoke with the dawn on the morning of Severus's trial. She was meeting Ernie at seven. Nervousness was already starting to affect Hermione. She got out of bed and went through her normal morning routine in the small hopes of calming herself. She had chosen her semi-formal robes the night before; Hermione wanted to make the best impression possible on the Wizengamot.

To pass the time before Ernie's arrival, she sat at her desk and went over her notes. She had them all memorized, but it helped her nerves to feel productive.

The fire flared and Ernie stepped through promptly at seven. He was dressed in plain black robes, but they were obviously tailored and made quite an impression.

Hermione stood and waited for Ernie's approval on her robe selection. The robes were high-necked and conservative; the dark blue material was fitted from her upper body down to her hips then flared into a flowing skirt, which shimmered slightly when she moved.

"Hermione, you look stunning. You'll catch everyone's attention, that's for sure."

Ernie held the Floo powder out to Hermione so she could go first.

"Thank you, Ernie. The Ministry of Magic Atrium," Hermione said as she stepped into the green flames.

Once in the Atrium, Hermione gave a wave of her wand to clean away any soot that had managed to gather on her robes. Ernie appeared next to her and led her to the Visitor's desk.

"Hello, Eric. This is Hermione Snape. She is here as my assistant for Severus Snape's trial."

"Wand please, ma'am." He reached a hand out for her wand.

She gave it over and waited semi-patiently for her wand to be registered. Eventually, Eric handed her wand back to her along with a visitor's badge.

Hermione Snape

Trial of Severus Snape, defendant

She read the badge and pinned it to the left side of her robes. Ernie was already moving to the elevators, so she hurried to catch up.

"We're in Courtroom 10. I think it's a bit foolish that they chose that particular room, but not much can be done."

Hermione knew that only dangerous or important trials were held in that courtroom. She highly suspected the former was the Ministry's reason for choosing Courtroom 10.

Taking the elevator as far as possible, Hermione and Ernie walked the rest of the way down to Courtroom 10. She started to notice the people lining the walls once they walked into the corridor leading to the Department of Mysteries. Some spoke in eager whispers; others openly stared as she walked by.

Hermione had the feeling that most of these people were not here to lend their support to Severus. This was made painfully obvious when a woman stepped forward and spat at Hermione's feet.

She stopped and looked at the woman. Before she could say anything, Ernie had taken her by the arm and led her away.

"There is so much hatred in these people," Hermione whispered to Ernie.

"People have a hard time getting over the prejudices," Ernie said in reply, a sad look gracing his features.

They had finally made it to the entrance of the courtroom. A line of reporters stood on one side of the corridor. From what Hermione could see, every media outlet seemed to be in attendance. Even the Wizarding Wireless had a representative present.

Knowing that every word she spoke would be available to the wizarding community made her insides squirm.

Ernie was a steady force next to her. His hand was still on her arm, keeping her grounded in reality.

She gave him a half smile to let him know she appreciated the gesture. No one was allowed to enter the courtroom until the guilty party had arrived. By Hermione's estimate, they had about twenty minutes until the trial actually began. This meant that Severus should be arriving at any moment. She would be glad to see him outside of a prison cell.

As soon as she'd had that thought, the people around them fell silent. Two guards were leading Severus to the doors. His hands and feet were chained. He also looked to be under the influence of Veritaserum. His eyes were moving lazily from side to side, not really taking in his surroundings. His posture also didn't have its normal rigidity. Hermione hadn't even thought of Truth Serum. She hoped that the guards hadn't abused their power while he was drugged.

When the guards drew even with her and Ernie, she moved to stop them.

"Severus, are you under Veritaserum?" she asked.

"Yes, they made me take it before leaving Azkaban."

"Are you under the influence of anything else?"

"No, though I would love to be under the influence of alcohol."

"Yes or no would have been fine. But thank you for the answers. We will go into the courtroom now," Ernie said to the guards and Hermione.

She reached out and placed her hand on Severus's arm. He looked at her hand then up at her face and raised an eyebrow.

"I love you, Severus. I don't say it enough, but it's true."

At that proclamation, Severus's eyes softened.

"And I you, wife."

Satisfied, Hermione turned, and with Ernie at her side, entered the courtroom.

After most everyone had entered the room, the guards walked Severus to the chair in the center of the court. As soon as he was seated, the chains came up to secure him. The guards removed their chains from Severus's hands but left both sets on his legs.

Hermione and Ernie transfigured chairs and seated themselves behind and to the left of Severus.

All of the reporters were seated along the right side of the courtroom. The Wizengamot was seated directly in front of them. Rufus Scrimgeour was seated in the middle to show his position as Chief Warlock. The left side of the room was full with a variety of people. The Epps were present; Lucius Malfoy was in the front of the same section.

Hermione noticed Minerva McGonagall, accompanied by Rubeus Hagrid and Filius Flitwick, seated at the top of the left side. Minerva caught Hermione's gaze and gave her an encouraging smile. Hermione also caught Harry Potter's fierce gaze. He nodded to her and looked away.

"Attention, this court is being called to order. We are here for the murder trial of Severus Snape. He is accused of murder, sexual assault, and battery. Rufus Alexander Scrimgeour, presiding; Daniel Dawlish, Ministry representative; and Percy Ignatius Weasley, Court Scribe."

"The accused, how do you plead?" Scrimgeour asked.

"Not guilty," Severus responded in a monotone.

"Where were you on the night of the 26th of April?"

"First, I was on my rounds at Hogwarts. I came back to my chambers and spoke to my wife. We went to bed, but I couldn't sleep. I then left our chambers to walk the grounds. I was uneasy for most of the night. I came back to my chambers at five the morning of the 27th of April."

"Did you notice anything untoward while you were on our wanderings?"

"No, the only occurrence that was out of the ordinary was finding George Epps and Anna Bloom out repeatedly after curfew."

"Why was this out of the ordinary?" a witch toward the rear of the Wizengamot asked.

"It isn't very often that students are dumb enough to be caught out after curfew twice in one night."

"Mr. Snape, I will ask you to keep a civil tongue in my courtroom."

"Pardon me, sir, but the Truth Serum has loosened my tongue."

"Other than to discipline the aforementioned students, did you see them at any other time that night?"

There was a pause, then, "No."

"Are you telling the truth?"

"Yes."

"Why the hesitation if you are telling the truth?"

"I had to be sure if I had seen them outside of the mentioned instances. I came to the conclusion that I had not."

"Moving on, did you see anything suspicious on your wanderings?"

"No -- yes."

"Explain yourself," Scrimgeour said in a curt voice.

"I did not see anything suspicious, which is highly suspicious. I normally see Argus or Mrs. Norris at least once. My wife also informed me that Lucius Malfoy was in the castle, but I didn't see him either."

"Why would you expect to see Lucius? He is a school governor, and as such, has other reasons to be present at Hogwarts."

"Hermione said he had business with me, thus implying he would need to see me."

"What is the general opinion toward you from your students?"

"Mostly loathing. Occasionally, some seventh year gets it into their skull that I am a good person to fall in love with."

With a nod from Scrimgeour, Dawlish stood and said, "The Ministry would like to question George Epps."

The boy looked decidedly ill. Dawlish procured a chair while the boy was making his way forward.

As soon as George was seated, Scrimgeour asked, "Mr. Epps, can you tell us what you saw in the dungeon the night Anna was murdered?"

"I was looking for Anna and went to the dungeons. When I got there, he," George glanced at Severus, "was kneeling on the ground. At first, I didn't think anything of it, but he moved and I saw blood on his hands. I decided I didn't want to get in trouble a third time, so I left."

"How certain are you that the person you saw was Professor Snape?"

"One hundred percent. I've had to look at him for years in class. It couldn't have been anyone else."

"Mr. Epps, did you see the person's face that was kneeling in the dungeons?" Ernie asked.

"No, but I saw the rest of him. It was him; I know it."

"Without seeing his face, you can be one hundred percent certain that the man you saw was Severus Snape?"

"Yes, well... yes. I've already told you."

"One last question for you, Mr. Epps. In your opinion, did Severus Snape have motive to harm Anna Bloom?"

"He hated her. He always picked on her in class; he always took points from us outside of class, too."

"Outside of class means out after curfew," Severus interjected.

"He always belittled her and told her she was not worth the dirt on his boots," George continued with conviction.

"All right, thank you, George. We have heard enough."

"One moment, please," Ernie said before George could stand.

"Mr. Epps, did Professor Snape reserve these comments just for Anna, or did he say them to others as well?"

"He would say things to the others but nothing like what he would say to her."

"Can you give us an example of the differences?"

"He always called Anna 'an annoying excuse for a Gryffindor', but would just call others dunderheads."

Hermione thought that she'd been called worse by him when she was a student, but decided that saying so would probably not help matters.

"Now, we thank you, Mr. Epps. You may step down."

Dawlish stood again and said, "Next, the Ministry calls Lucius Malfoy."

Lucius Malfoy walked as if he were king of the world. With a nod to Rufus Scrimgeour, Lucius took the seat that George had just vacated.

"Mr. Malfoy, you have been called to give testimony against Professor Severus Snape. What pertinent information do you have?" Scrimgeour said.

"Well, I was at Hogwarts the night little Anna was murdered. I am actually the person that George Epps saw with the blood on his hands." Here Lucius looked apologetically at George. "I had been on the grounds, waiting for Severus to finish his rounds, but missed him entering his chambers for what I thought was the night. I had already arranged to stay the night due to the fact that my business would have taken a long time. I took it upon myself to cast a charm on the door to Severus's chambers that would alert me when he left his rooms. Much to my surprise, the charm went off in the early morning hours. Thinking something was wrong, I went to investigate. And, clear as day, there was Severus. I hoped he would notice me so we could get our business over with, but he paid me no heed. Not thinking much of it, I set the charm to let me know of his return and went back to bed. At four o'clock, I heard a commotion outside my door. I was staying in the dungeons, of course. I threw on my robes and went into the corridor. Because of the chill in the dungeons, I pulled a hood over my head. I was shocked to see Severus crouched over the form of what, at one time, was a young girl. He took one look at me and went into his chambers. He warded the door, but I didn't notice anything except for the girl at my feet. I dropped to my knees and checked for a pulse. In the process, I got her blood on my hands. It must have been at that moment that poor George Epps came down the hall." Lucius fell silent after another look at George.

"Very well, Mr. Malfoy," Scrimgeour said in a hardened voice.

"Wait, sir. Mr. Malfoy, where exactly were your rooms located?" Hermione interjected.

"Directly across from the first unused classroom in the dungeons."

"Oh, so you were staying on the crime scene, then?"

"That was where I saw Severus and the girl, yes."

"Why, Mr. Malfoy, did you not report your findings right away? The Headmistress didn't even know you were in the castle that night." Hermione looked triumphant. 'I want to see Lucius talk himself out of this one,' she thought fiercely.

"Madam Snape, I know that if I had lingered, I would have been more of a suspect than the actual perpetrator. Using that knowledge, I chose to leave the scene without reporting the incident."

"So to save your own guilty neck, you left a mutilated body to be found by the next unlucky person? Mr. Malfoy, that is even cruel by your standards," Hermione said with malice.

"You have no idea how cruel I can be, Hermione," Lucius practically purred in return.

"Enough! You will both keep past grievances and histories out of my courtroom," Scrimgeour bellowed, trying to regain control of the situation.

With one last look at Lucius, Hermione sat down.

As she was sitting, Ernie stood up and said, "Mr. Malfoy, if you were the one that George Epps saw, and you had blood on your hands, what is to say that you didn't commit this crime?"

"Are you accusing me of something?" Lucius asked, his lip curling into what could have been a smirk.

"Perhaps. Mr. Malfoy, why don't you answer the question?"

"I had nothing against the girl. I would have no cause to hurt the innocent child."

Hermione stood again and addressed Lucius, "How do you explain away all of the acts that you committed while in Tom Riddle's service? Did you have *cause* to hurt all of those innocent people?"

"No charges were every brought up against me for those crimes. I was in Azkaban Prison for most of the last war. Sir, I don't see how this is relevant," Lucius said this last statement to Scrimgeour, who looked mildly annoyed.

"If you have no more *relevant* questions, Mrs. Snape? No? Mr. Malfoy, you may step down."

"The Ministry has no more witnesses. Mr. Macmillan, is there anyone you would like to call?"

"Yes, sir. Headmistress Minerva McGonagall is called on behalf of Severus Snape."

Minerva made her way to the same chair the others had used.

"Headmistress, would you please tell us about Severus Snape's reaction to hearing of Anna Bloom's murder?"

"Certainly. I broke the news to them the morning Anna's body was found. Both Hermione and Severus were shocked into silence; Hermione actually recovered first. Professor Snape reacted as anyone receiving a great shock would have."

"Professor McGonagall," Scrimgeour interrupted, "isn't Severus considered the foremost Occlumens in Europe?"

"Well, yes, but I don't see how that's relevant."

"He was able to convincingly lie to either He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named or Albus Dumbledore. Both of these men were very powerful wizards, trained in Legilimency. Did it not occur to you that he might have been faking his reaction?"

"No, it didn't. Occlumency is all well and good, but it doesn't prevent people from reacting to surprising news," Minerva replied with finality.

"Thank you for your *expertise*, Headmistress. If there are no further questions?" Scrimgeour looked pointedly at Hermione. "Very well, Headmistress, you may step down. It is time for us to deliberate."

"Wait, sir! We have one more witness. We would like to call Draco Malfoy on behalf of Severus Snape."

A rush of whispers permeated the courtroom as Draco made his way to the chair the others had vacated. He was dressed elegantly in black robes that were obviously expensive. His hair was short and neatly done. Hermione noticed a grace that he never had managed in school.

Once Draco was in his seat, Ernie asked, "Why have you decided to speak on the professor's behalf?"

"I owe him more than can ever be repaid, even from a Malfoy."

"You are here as more than a simple character witness. What information do you have?"

"Oh, but I am a character witness. I won't say that Severus couldn't have done this, but I will say that he didn't. The murder was not his style. The professor never did like to have blood on his hands. There was always too much of a chance that he could contaminate a potion. If he had committed this murder there would have been no evidence. Keep in mind that Severus Snape is a Potions master. Poisons are his forte. Brutality and savagery are beneath him." As Draco spoke, he kept looking at his father. Hermione wondered if anyone else had noticed that quirk.

"Can you say for certain that this murder was not Severus Snape's style?"

"Unfortunately, yes. We were both involved in circumstances where we had to witness the other doing unspeakable things. This murder was not the professor's doing."

After a pause, Dawlish stood up and addressed Draco, "These unfortunate circumstances, as you called them, didn't happen to be while you were both in You-Know-Who's service, would they?"

"Neither of us was in his service, though we were in his camp."

"Oh, that's right. You couldn't be initiated until you murdered Albus Dumbledore, but your good friend, the professor, got you out of *that* as well. Mr. Malfoy, how do we know that you wouldn't say anything to repay a favor?"

"I'm not so insincere to use my *good standing*," the words dripped with sarcasm, "to repay a favor."

The tension between Draco and Dawlish was almost unbearable. Scrimgeour cleared his throat, and it brought the two men back to themselves.

"I have no more questions for this loathsome wretch."

"Dawlish, mind your tone in my courtroom. I will not allow any such behavior," he said, looking at Dawlish. Turning back to Draco, he finished, "Mr. Malfoy, you may step down. Are there any more witnesses?" Scrimgeour glanced from Ernie and Hermione to Dawlish. "No? Very well, we shall deliberate."

As soon as the words left his mouth, what seemed like a roar swept the room as the members of the crowd turned and discussed what had just happened.

Hermione had been watching her husband throughout the entire questioning. He had barely moved since the chains had fastened around his arms and legs. The most movement she had noticed was during Lucius Malfoy's testimony. Severus had clearly been restraining himself from talking. Hermione was still wondering when all of the whispering in the courtroom stopped. Looking up at Rufus Scrimgeour, Hermione saw him gathering papers together. She wanted to watch Severus but knew that seeing the votes was more important.

"The Wizengamot has deliberated." Scrimgeour looked behind him to make sure everyone was ready.

"All in favor of clearing Severus Snape?"

A few people raised their hands. Hermione's heart broke. All she could do was stare at the people who hadn't raised their hands.

"And those in favor of conviction?"

The rest of the Wizengamot raised their hands. She couldn't believe it. People had to know he wouldn't have done this, especially for the motive that was given. She didn't realize tears were rolling down her face until Ernie handed her a handkerchief. She took it but continued to let the tears fall.

At long last, Hermione forced herself to look at Severus. He had let his head fall forward so his face was obscured by his hair. It was a sign of total defeat.

As if feeling Hermione's gaze, his head snapped up and his eyes met hers. If Hermione thought she was too numb to feel anything else, she's been mistaken. The look of defeat in his eyes practically tore her soul apart.

The guards who had led Severus in were placing his hands into chains again. A tap from one of them and the chair removed its shackles.

Ernie placed a hand on Hermione's shoulder, but she didn't really notice. The only thing she could comprehend was the feel of her world crashing around her. Ernie shook her shoulder, and finally, she looked at him.

"Hermione, I can't imagine how you feel, but we have to go. Once we get back to Hogwarts, we can start working on an appeal."

That last part cut through the fog in her mind. 'An appeal!' she thought. She moved to stand up, but her legs didn't want to support her. With Ernie's help, they managed to make it out of the courtroom and back to Hogwarts.

Author's Notes: This story is based off of events in Leo Frank's life.

A huge thank you to both Zen Lady and Sophi for their beta work.

As always, reviews and feedback are welcomed and appreciated.

Pending

Chapter 13 of 17

The appeals.

Disclaimer: I do not own anything that you recognize. Please don't sue.

The wizarding world allotted any inmate two appeals. Unfortunately, the accused had to wait six weeks between the trial and any subsequent appeals.

Hermione had spent at least some time each day for the last eleven weeks submerged in a Pensieve watching her husband's trial and first appeal. She would take notes on people's reactions, what information was the most condemning and how to counter it. And lastly, Severus's reaction to each person's testimony. The appeal had been held in the same courtroom as his trial, but the general public had not been allowed to attend.

His reactions to the testimonies and questions were the most intriguing to her. She'd noted during the trial that he was still except during Lucius Malfoy's testimony. This was true for the most part. The other person that had the most effect on Severus was Draco Malfoy. Severus looked like he had also been holding his tongue during that testimony. Hermione suspected that her husband's similar reactions were brought on by opposite emotions.

She really wanted to talk to Severus. The Ministry allowed her and Ernie one visit per week. Since it was two weeks before the last trial, Hermione was trying to get permission for two visits per week. So far, she had been completely unsuccessful. She told herself that her reasons weren't selfish, but all she really wanted was to spend more time with Severus. Ernie insisted on always having at least one question that needed to be talked about while they were there, but he would also give them privacy to talk about whatever they needed. Hermione felt they were much better prepared for this appeal than they had been for the trial and the first appeal. The extra weeks had been immensely helpful.

Also, to Hermione's surprise, they were getting help from a few unlikely sources. Arthur Weasley, who had been present at the trial, has been campaigning for Severus's innocence. His efforts have not gone unnoticed by the Ministry. But the biggest surprise had come from Rita Skeeter; she had turned her slander campaign around after the trial. Rita took up the torch of Lucius Malfoy being the guilty party. Her main sources for information were none other than Draco Malfoy and Severus himself.

Hermione, for the first time, looked forward to reading the *Daily Prophet*. More days than not, Rita wrote a new article proclaiming Severus's innocence and wrongful imprisonment.

The morning of her scheduled visit to Azkaban, Hermione opened the paper to find this article on the front page:

The Consequences of Our Misdeeds

By Rita Skeeter

This reporter knows firsthand that misdeeds receive due consequences. I will say woe be to the Ministry and Wizengamot when the consequences of their recent actions are realized.

The conviction of Severus Snape will probably carry longer lasting effects than can be imagined. An innocent man is sitting in a cell in Azkaban Prison while a murderer walks free. We heard testimony that Professor Snape would not have murdered Anna Bloom in such a brutal fashion because he is too vain. No matter the reason, I agree with his innocence. (Continued on page 2.)

Granted, Hermione didn't agree with everything Rita had to say, but the general idea was there. If the media was on their side, Hermione was more confident than ever of their possibility for success.

Around midday, Ernie arrived to escort Hermione to Azkaban.

A different guard than normal led them to Severus's cell. This guard had the presence of mind to wait in the corridor instead of hovering.

Hermione noticed that Severus looked healthier than she had seen him since his arrest. There were no visible marks of abuse or neglect.

"Hermione," Severus said by way of a greeting. He moved closer to the door of his cell.

"How are you feeling? You look better than you have in a while."

"They are learning new tricks. I haven't been physically beaten since the trial. Now they are using more subtle forms of abuse."

"What do you mean?" Hermione said as she took a seat in front of the cell.

"They enjoy informing me how splendid you look now that I'm out of the picture. Things that simpletons think of, nothing more."

Hermione made a small sound of disbelief in reply.

"Think nothing of their harmless words."

"Severus, what would make them cause to say such things?"

He looked grateful at Hermione naiveté. "You looked stunning at my trial and appeal. They are simply voicing their jealousies."

"Oh." Hermione looked sheepish.

"Now, Professor, we have some questions that we would like to ask for the upcoming appeal," Ernie broke in from his position behind Hermione.

Severus nodded.

"Do you know what sparked Draco's desire to testify?" Hermione asked.

"Not for certain. Though, he has it in his head that he owes me a life debt."

"Really?" Hermione was intrigued. "What would prompt him to think that?"

"My most shameful act," Severus replied without looking at either of them. "Draco was the one appointed to murder Albus. When he started to falter, I had to step in and finish the job. If Dumbledore had lived, the Dark Lord would have killed Draco for his failure. In normal circumstances, this would qualify as a life debt. But, since I was working under other pressures, mainly the desire to save myself, the life debt should be void."

"That would explain many things." Ernie looked troubled. "So, young Mr. Malfoy really wasn't in Voldemort's service?"

"No more than I was at the time."

"Severus, why did you have to hold your tongue while Draco was speaking? He was defending you and you looked as if you wanted to silence him."

"I don't want to see the boy dead. His testimony could well rouse the attention of many unwanted parties, especially Draco's admittance that we were in Voldemort's camp but not his service. I merely wanted him to stop incriminating himself."

Ernie nodded and, having no more questions, left to wait in the corridor.

"Hermione, be careful of Lucius. I am sure that he is the one responsible for Miss Bloom's murder. I'd even go so far as to state that everything he testified was true except for the detail that he committed the murder instead of me."

"I agree. I always suspected it was Lucius, but I have no way of proving it. I've tried everything I could think of. Have you been able to view the *Daily Prophet* at all?"

"No, why would I read that rag?"

"You'll be glad to know that they're on your side. Rita Skeeter has completely changed her attitude. I haven't told you before now because I thought it was some hoax. Every few days she writes an article proclaiming your innocence. One came out this morning."

"That is good fortune. Maybe the Wizengamot will take into consideration that Rita Skeeter of all people is on my side," Severus said with humor.

"I'm glad to see you in better spirits. I was becoming rather worried about you," Hermione said, her tone sincere.

"The end is in sight. We had more votes in our favor at the last appeal. They should tip into 'not guilty' easily enough this time around."

"I will see you next week. I'm still attempting to persuade the Ministry into allowing me an extra visit, but I've been less than successful."

Severus caught her hand and brushed her knuckles with a kiss. "Thank you for the visit."

Hermione smiled and made her way out to meet Ernie.

Later that day, Hermione received a polite reply from the Ministry stating that extra visits were against policy, but thank you for bringing it to their attention. They promise to look into changing the rules.

Hermione scoffed and threw the letter into the fire.

On the morning of Severus's second appeal, Hermione woke with the dawn. She was nervous, but it was more a feeling of anticipation. Ernie would come by later to escort her to the Ministry. She chose to wear wine colored robes because red was a confidence color. She wanted to be seen as confident and collected.

While she had been dressing, the *Daily Prophet* had arrived. She was startled to see a picture of herself from Severus's trial on the front page.

Hermione Snape: Woman on a Mission

By Rita Skeeter

In conjunction with today's appeal for Severus Snape's wrongful conviction, I will be taking a look at the woman behind the infamous Professor.

Hermione Snape has been in and out of the public eye since her days at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Take my word that this witch can be a formidable opponent when people she cares about have been wronged. She has been an assistant to former Hufflepuff and current lawyer Ernie Macmillan in defending Professor Snape.

If this appeal doesn't have a pleasant outcome, I would hate to be the one on the receiving end of her wrath. (Continued on pages 2, 3, and 6)

'Wow,' thought Hermione. She had never read an article by Rita that was so complimentary. She would have to contact her and thank her for her efforts on Severus's behalf.

As she was folding the paper, Ernie came through the Floo. He smiled as he dusted himself off.

"What a nice article in the *Prophet* this morning," Ernie said with a wink.

"It was. Hopefully, the Wizengamot will have read it and taken it to heart."

Hermione stood and made her way to the fireplace.

"I can't wait to have my husband back," Hermione said just before tossing in the Floo Powder and vanishing.

Ernie appeared a moment later in the Ministry's Atrium. Hermione took his arm and went to register her wand.

Visitors' badges in place, they made their way down to Courtroom 3. It was the smallest and the one use most often for appeals. The only people who would be present were the Wizengamot, the prosecutor, the defense and Severus.

Hermione took a deep breath as she opened the door. Everyone was seated except for the two of them and Severus. He looked out of place in the brightly lit courtroom,

Hermione noted.

As soon as they reached their seats, Severus took his.

Rufus Scrimgeour stood and addressed them, "We are gathered to hear the last appeal of the accused and previously convicted, Severus Snape. What further information does the defense have on behalf of the convicted?"

"We have further information regarding the testimonies of others from the trial," Ernie said.

"Proceed." Scrimgeour sat.

"Draco Malfoy, the witness most distrusted, testified on his own volition. He does not owe Severus Snape any kind of payment or life debt; therefore, his testimony should be taken on good standing," Ernie explained. "Also, George Epps has been treated for a reoccurring Confundus Charm. His testimony cannot and should not be held in good standing because of this condition."

Hermione was impressed. Of course, she had foreknowledge of all of this, but presented to the Wizengamot it seemed much more profound.

Whispers had broken out among the Wizengamot. "How was the Confundus Charm found?" asked a witch from the back of the last row.

"I knew what signs to look for, and when we questioned George again, I noticed the symptoms," Hermione replied.

More whispers ensued.

"Very well, are there any other comments that need to be made?"

"Sir," Dawlish addressed the room, "we don't know when the Confundus Charm was placed on George Epps. With that uncertainty, he may still have been completely under his own faculties at the trial."

"So noted. The Wizengamot will now deliberate."

Author's Notes: *We are nearing the end. I have to thank my wonderful betas, Zen Lady and Sophi, for their marvelous work. Thank you, ladies!*

Feedback and reviews are very welcomed and much appreciated.

Release

Chapter 14 of 17

The Wizengamot's decision.

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"The Wizengamot has reached a decision." Rufus Scrimgeour stood and surveyed the room. "The Wizengamot stands by the original decision of guilty as charged. Mr. Severus Snape will still receive the Dementor's Kiss."

"No!" Hermione exclaimed before she could catch herself. The ringing in her ears drowned out all other noise. Ernie was saying something, but he seemed miles away. All she could feel was utter nothingness.

"Severus Snape has exhausted his appeals; therefore, this courtroom needs to be vacated. The convicted will be transported back to Azkaban," Rufus Scrimgeour said as a dismissal.

"Hermione, let's go. We can still talk to Professor Snape if we hurry." Ernie was trying to guide her toward the door.

"I can't, Ernie. He and I were both so sure this would be the end of this mess. I can't see the hurt in his eyes. Please, don't make me face him now," Hermione pleaded.

"Hermione, think for a moment. Won't you feel even worse if you don't talk to him?"

She finally allowed herself to be led to the door. Severus was being put back in handcuffs by two Azkaban guards. His head was bowed so his lank hair hid his face.

"Severus..."

All he did was shake his head in reply.

Hermione didn't realize she could feel worse, but that reaction proved her wrong. She knew that if Ernie hadn't still been holding her arm she would have collapsed.

"Severus, please."

The guards started to move him down the corridor, but he resisted for half a second. She knew he was listening.

"I will do anything to get you out of there. I love you and have faith in your innocence." This last was said to his retreating back. The guards didn't care that they were taking her husband away.

The Ministry of Magic had finally relented after the appeal and granted Hermione two visits per week. It had been a week since Severus's last appeal and much had happened. The *Daily Prophet* was now running an almost daily smear campaign against the Ministry. Rita Skeeter was in charge of that.

Hermione was writing letters to both the new Minister of Magic, Gawain Robards, and Rufus Scrimgeour personally, with urgings to commute Severus's sentence.

Minerva McGonagall was cashing in on any favors people owed her to try and get the verdict overturned. Hogwarts really needed its Potions master back. Arthur Weasley was also pushing for the sentence to be commuted from a Dementor's Kiss to life in Azkaban. The Kiss was scheduled for three weeks from now.

With all the pressure to the Ministry, there was talk of the Minister stepping down. 'Good riddance,' thought Hermione; she only hoped it was true. Though, she shouldn't be too hasty. The Minister was the only person to have responded to any of her letters. He sent a reply last week stating that he was 'looking into the matter.' This was, by far, more acknowledgment than she'd received from anyone else.

Hermione decided she should stop reminiscing and get out of bed. Her next visit to Azkaban was scheduled for this afternoon.

The *Daily Prophet* had already arrived by the time Hermione finished her morning ablutions.

Surprise Move by Minister Robards

By Marcus Bliithe

In a controversial move, the Minister of Magic stepped down late last night. Though, his final act as Minister is that makes this move so shocking. Minister Robards commuted Severus Snape's sentence from the Dementor's Kiss to life in Azkaban.

This last minute act has caused quite an uproar. The community at large has wanted Severus Snape to get his comeuppance since the murder of Albus Dumbledore.

Hermione dropped the paper and ran to the fireplace. Grabbing some Floo powder, she called for Ernie. She could not keep still. Pacing to and from the door did not help release much of her excitement.

At long last, Ernie's head appeared in the fire. "Hermione what on earth has got into you?"

"This," she said as she knelt so Ernie could see the *Daily Prophet*.

"This is wonderful news! You were going to Azkaban this afternoon, right?"

"Yes. Oh, Ernie! Severus will be so relieved."

"I would say so. Listen, Hermione, Hannah is sick so I'm playing Mum. Please tell the professor how happy I am about this."

"Sure thing. Give my wishes to Hannah."

Ernie smiled and his head spun out of view.

Hermione was too excited to simply sit in her chambers. It was a Saturday, so perhaps Minerva wasn't too busy, Hermione reasoned.

She made her way up to the stone gargoyle, which opened upon seeing her.

"Thank you," Hermione said as she passed.

The office door was open when she reached the top of the stairs. The Headmistress was sitting behind her desk staring at the *Daily Prophet*. She looked up once Hermione had entered the room.

"Hermione, you must be so relieved. I can't believe our efforts worked." Minerva sounded shocked.

"Yes, I am scheduled to visit him this afternoon. I'm taking the *Prophet* with me to show him the good news."

"I am sorry that you and Severus have to deal with this mess. If only Minister Robards had granted Severus a full pardon..."

"It's all right, Minerva. We're one step closer. Scrimgeour may yet overturn the Wizengamot's ruling."

"He might, dear. He just might."

The guard just wasn't walking fast enough. Hermione tried to give him that hint by walking in front of him, but he would not speed up.

After what seemed like an eternity, they reached Severus's cell. He looked to be sleeping. The guard banged the cell door with his hand, and Severus snapped into a sitting position.

"Your *wife* is here," the guard said with as much disdain as possible.

"So I've noticed," Severus sneered.

"Thank you, sir," Hermione said politely. "If you wouldn't mind leaving us?"

The guard leered at her then turned away.

Hermione waited until he was gone before she pulled the *Prophet* from her robes.

"You'll want to read this." She pushed the paper at him.

He looked at her inquisitively, but took the paper anyway.

Hermione knew immediately when he got to the relevant information because his eyebrows shot up. Severus looked from her to the paper and back at her.

"Is this true?"

"Yes, there had been rumors of the Minister's resignation, but your commuted sentence is the biggest shock," she explained.

"For everyone, it seems."

"We're one step closer to your freedom. Perhaps we can get Rufus Scrimgeour to overturn the sentence completely."

"Perhaps, but don't count on it. Rufus has a reputation for being steadfast and stubborn."

"You're right. I just like the idea of you coming home."

"I know. I like that idea too."

"Soon, I promise, we'll get you out of here soon."

"I look forward to that moment."

Hermione awoke during the night with a terrible sense of dread. She dismissed it as part of a nightmare and went back to sleep.

"Hermione! Oh please, Hermione, wake up!"

Groggily, Hermione turned toward the sound of the panicked voice.

"Harry? Harry, what's wrong?"

Harry was shaking uncontrollably. He looked horrible. Dirt covered his trousers and his shirt had grass stains on it. Fully awake, Hermione got up and went to comfort him.

"You're not going to want to touch me," he said just above a whisper.

"Why ever not? Tell me what happened. Let's sit down, Harry. You don't look so good."

Harry just looked at her for a moment then sat down on the floor.

"C'mon, Harry. Severus and I are civilized. We do have chairs." She took his hand and pulled him up. He reluctantly followed her to the chairs by the fireplace.

"*Lumos*. Now, Harry, tell me what's wrong."

Hermione became very worried. She didn't think she'd ever seen him look this upset.

"I don't know where to start..."

"How about the beginning of the events that led to you bursting into my rooms before dawn on a Sunday morning."

Harry was resolutely looking at anything but her.

"You can tell me, whatever it is."

He drew in one shaky breath and looked straight at her.

The look of complete guilt in his eyes was overwhelming. Hermione actually gasped.

"I'm going to start at the end, and then go to the beginning." Harry paused here and looked to be gathering every bit of courage he had. "Professor Snape is dead."

Hermione just looked at him. "Pardon me?"

"Please don't make me say it again. It's true. I was there."

Hermione couldn't believe what she was hearing. Because she couldn't believe it, she couldn't cry.

"Speak quickly, Harry, before I throw you out for playing a morbid prank," Hermione said in a hard voice.

"I knew something was going to happen. Rufus Scrimgeour had approached me about helping him move Snape. Scrimgeour told me that they were moving Snape to prepare him for the Kiss. That was all I knew to begin with."

"Who all was involved?"

"More people than I can say. Rufus Scrimgeour, Dawlish and myself were the ones to get Snape out of his cell. We were to transport him to a forest clearing somewhere in Scotland. Others were going to meet us there. I assumed they were going to help us move him to his new location. I figured that they were the people that were going to get him ready for the Kiss. I didn't understand at the time, but Scrimgeour had said that I would enjoy the experience."

Harry paused and looked at Hermione. She looked back with cold eyes.

"We took a Portkey from Azkaban Island to this clearing. The first people I noticed were Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy. They were standing in the middle of the copse of trees like a king and queen at court. Both were wearing their best robes. Narcissa had her hand on Lucius's arm, like they were out for a stroll." Harry shuddered. "Anyway, as soon as we dropped the Portkey, Malfoy threw a curse at Snape. I don't know what it was, but Snape just went completely still. I looked around, and people were acting like this was a Quidditch match or something. This must have been a set-up from the Malfoys, but I didn't realize that at the time."

Harry looked around and conjured a pitcher of water. After taking a swig, he continued, "Soon, everyone was throwing curses. Nothing major, jelly legs, bat-bogey, harmless ones, really. I had joined in at this point."

Harry was resolutely not looking at Hermione again.

"After a few minutes of this, Lucius Malfoy sent up red sparks. Everyone stopped throwing hexes and curses. *A Finite* later and all of the curse effects were gone. Lucius Malfoy now stepped forward and knelt next to Snape's head. 'You're innocent,' he said. 'For all your trouble, you're going to die. Just like Anna Bloom.' While he was talking, he had conjured a knife. He took the knife and laid it against Snape's cheek. People were actually laughing. I felt sick at this point. I didn't know this was going to happen. I couldn't stop it even if I'd tried. There must have been forty wizards and witches in that clearing."

Hermione noticed Harry was shaking again.

"I will spare you the details, but Malfoy used that knife with precision. He cut off Snape's fingers first, then his hands, saying, 'We wouldn't want to get blood on your hands, now would we?' Here people started muttering about Draco. I really wanted to leave at this point, but I simply couldn't. Someone had to be able to tell you what happened."

The truth was finally hitting Hermione. Tears were rolling down her face as Harry continued talking.

"I tried not to watch because it was getting gruesome. Malfoy made some major cuts and would let him bleed, but would heal them before Snape could lose consciousness. Narcissa was being 'the good wife' and holding his cloak and gloves for him. She also provided what must have been a Blood-Replenishing Potion. Anyway, the knife thing must have gone on for at least fifteen minutes. Finally, Lucius seemed to tire of it, though he was not done. He transfigured the knife into a hot poker. Lucius now took to burning designs onto what was left of Snape's body. His chest and legs took the brunt of Malfoy's attention. The smell of burning flesh was starting to make people sick. When Lucius tired of that, he let everyone have a turn at doing more harmful curses and hexes. Someone used *Sectumsempra*. It hit his face and tore open his cheek. To end the group's 'fun time,' he sent up red sparks again. This time, instead of taking his time, Lucius walked to him, whispered something, and stabbed him in the chest with the red-hot poker. This was the only time Snape screamed. He had been silent through everything else."

Harry paused to take a drink.

"Seeing that Snape was left to die, people began to leave. I wanted to rush to him, but I didn't know what they would do to me. So I waited for everyone to leave and approached what I was sure was going to be Snape's body. To my amazement, he was still alive. He must have felt my presence because he tried to speak. I told him it was me, and that I had no idea this was what they had planned. He shook his head at me, so I shut up. He then said two words to me: Hermione and ring. That's the only reason I have this."

Harry held out his hand, and in his palm was Severus's wedding band.

Hermione started to sob at this point. She knew that Severus would never willingly let someone take his wedding band, and certainly not Harry Potter, of all people.

Harry tried to hand the ring to her, but she shook her head and ran to the bedroom.

Author's Notes: *This is the original ending to this tale. There is an Epilogue, which will be posted shortly. I have written an alternate ending, but will not post it for a few days. This is how the story of Leo Frank's life ends.*

As always, feedback is welcomed and appreciated.

Epilogue

Chapter 15 of 17

The aftermath and an unexpected visit.

Disclaimer: I don't own anything relating to Harry Potter.

Someone stumbled across the body of Severus Snape later that same day. No legal action was taken against anyone involved because too many high-ranking officials had ties to the crime; Wizarding Britain would have been left without a governing body had everyone been convicted that was involved.

Three days after the body was found, the funeral was held at Hogwarts. Severus would have wanted it that way. Hermione sat in the front row with Ernie at her side. She tried to keep her composure but had a terrible time.

She hadn't spoken to Harry since that night when he tried to give her Severus's ring. It was probably better that way. She didn't know what her reaction would be if she saw him now.

"Hermione, you have a visitor," came Minerva's voice through the Floo.

"Send them down."

Hermione was reading at her desk when Harry Potter stepped out of the flames.

"Hermione," he said.

She made a great show of closing her book. She finally looked up and said, "Yes, Harry?"

"I came to give you this." He held out Severus's wedding band. "He wanted you to have it. It was the last thing he said. I'll leave forever as soon as you take this, if that's what you want."

Hermione just watched him for a moment. "Sit down, Harry."

He sat.

"I won't pretend that we're okay because we're not. You had a hand in killing the man I love. I know you didn't know what was going on, but that doesn't matter to my heart. I will take Severus's ring because that's what he wanted. Also, the next time I want to be anywhere near you, I will contact you. I don't know when that will be, so don't ask. I still want you as a friend, but it is going to take a long time before I can stand the sight of you again. I ask you to please respect my wishes."

Harry nodded and placed the ring on the edge of her desk.

"Hermione, I really am sorry for what I've done," he said before turning and heading out the door.

The very next day, Rufus Scrimgeour pulled the same stunt that Minister Robards had when he resigned. The day he stepped down from his position as Chief Warlock, Scrimgeour granted Severus Snape a full pardon. Of course it was a little too late[;] the people responsible were still going to get away, but it made Hermione happy to know she could tell Severus she was right after all.

Having Severus's name cleared made moving on easier for her. Though, she still struggled day to day with the knowledge that murders were out free, and her husband had been robbed of his life.

Hermione had received a letter from Lucius Malfoy three days after the funeral. She had been very surprised when he hadn't attended the funeral of his 'old friend', but was glad he hadn't ruined that day for her. She was out by the lake when the owl arrived with the letter.

As soon as she detached the parchment, the owl flew away.

Dearest Hermione,

Narcissa and I send our sincerest apologies for missing your husband's funeral. We were indisposed due to events that followed your dearly departed husband's murder. I look forward to our next meeting.

Lucius Malfoy

"Bastard!" Hermione spat as she crumpled the letter in her hand. Tears were falling down her face and landing in her lap.

She let the sobs overtake her body until she could barely breathe. She had not allowed herself to cry since Harry told her what happened.

Hermione felt a hand on her back and started because she hadn't heard anyone approach.

"Madam Snape," a voice said from directly beside her.

She turned her head to see Draco Malfoy standing there. Rubbing the tears from her face, she tried to compose herself.

"Yes, Mister Malfoy?" she said with only a slight waiver in her voice.

"I wanted to tell you that Lucius can never hurt anyone again."

Hermione stared at him for a moment before responding, "What do you mean?"

"My father can never hurt you or me again," Draco said with great emotion. Relief could be seen on his features.

She watched him, trying to figure out the meaning of his words. All at once, his meaning became clear to her. "I owe you more than I can ever repay, Draco," she replied softly.

Draco smiled and turned, walking quickly toward the gates.

Well-Known Member of WIZARDING Society Gone Missing

by Rita Skeeter

Three days ago, infamous member of wizarding society, Lucius Malfoy, disappeared. His wife, Narcissa Malfoy, reported the incident to the authorities after Lucius failed to return home one night. Lucius has long been suspected of multiple murders. Though never charged, this reporter believes that Mr. Malfoy got what was coming to him.

The Ministry has not stated what course of action it was going to take. I personally hope they leave Lucius Malfoy's body to rot wherever it turns up.

Author's Notes: Thank you to everyone who listened to my concerns about this fic. GinnyW, in particular, can be thanked for the alternate ending. Another huge thanks to Sophi and Zen Lady for their beta work.

Reviews and feedback are appreciated.

Release Version B

Chapter 16 of 17

The Wizengamot's decision.

Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter.

"The Wizengamot has reached a decision." Rufus Scrimgeour stood and surveyed the room. "The Wizengamot stands by the original decision of guilty as charged. Mr. Severus Snape will still receive the Dementor's Kiss."

"No!" Hermione exclaimed before she could catch herself. The ringing in her ears drowned out all other noise. Ernie was saying something, but he seemed miles away. All she could feel was utter nothingness.

"Severus Snape has exhausted his appeals; therefore, this courtroom needs to be vacated. The convicted will be transported back to Azkaban," Rufus Scrimgeour said as a dismissal.

"Hermione, let's go. We can still talk to Professor Snape if we hurry." Ernie was trying to guide her toward the door.

"I can't, Ernie. He and I were both so sure this would be the end of this mess. I can't see the hurt in his eyes. Please, don't make me face him now," Hermione pleaded.

"Hermione, think for a moment. Won't you feel even worse if you don't talk to him?"

She finally allowed herself to be led to the door. Severus was being put back in handcuffs by two Azkaban guards. His head was bowed so his lank hair hid his face.

"Severus..."

All he did was shake his head in reply.

Hermione didn't realize she could feel worse, but that reaction proved her wrong. She knew that if Ernie hadn't still been holding her arm she would have collapsed.

"Severus, please."

The guards started to move him down the corridor, but he resisted for half a second. She knew he was listening.

"I will do anything to get you out of there. I love you and have faith in your innocence." This last was said to his retreating back. The guards didn't care that they were taking her husband away.

The Ministry of Magic had finally relented after the appeal and granted Hermione two visits per week. It had been a week since Severus's last appeal and much had happened. The *Daily Prophet* was now running an almost daily smear campaign against the Ministry. Rita Skeeter was in charge of that.

Hermione was writing letters to both the new Minister of Magic, Gawain Robards, and Rufus Scrimgeour personally, with urgings to commute Severus's sentence.

Minerva McGonagall was cashing in on any favors people owed her to try and get the verdict overturned. Hogwarts really needed its Potions master back. Arthur Weasley was also pushing for the sentence to be commuted from a Dementor's Kiss to life in Azkaban. The Kiss was scheduled for three weeks from now.

With all the pressure to the Ministry, there was talk of the Minister stepping down. 'Good riddance,' thought Hermione; she only hoped it was true. Though, she shouldn't be too hasty. The Minister was the only person to have responded to any of her letters. He sent a reply last week stating that he was 'looking into the matter.' This was, by far, more acknowledgment than she'd received from anyone else.

Hermione decided she should stop reminiscing and get out of bed. Her next visit to Azkaban was scheduled for this afternoon.

The *Daily Prophet* had already arrived by the time Hermione finished her morning ablutions.

Surprise Move by Minister Robards

By Marcus Bliithe

In a controversial move, the Minister of Magic stepped down late last night. Though, his final act as Minister is that makes this move so shocking. Minister Robards commuted Severus Snape's sentence from the Dementor's Kiss to life in Azkaban.

This last minute act has caused quite an uproar. The community at large has wanted Severus Snape to get his comeuppance since the murder of Albus Dumbledore.

Hermione dropped the paper and ran to the fireplace. Grabbing some Floo Powder, she called for Ernie. She could not keep still. Pacing to and from the door did not help release much of her excitement.

At long last, Ernie's head appeared in the fire. "Hermione what on earth has got into you?"

"This," she said as she knelt so Ernie could see the *Daily Prophet*.

"This is wonderful news! You were going to Azkaban this afternoon, right?"

"Yes. Oh, Ernie! Severus will be so relieved."

"I would say so. Listen, Hermione, Hannah is sick so I'm playing Mum. Please tell the Professor how happy I am about this."

"Sure thing. Give my wishes to Hannah."

Ernie smiled and his head spun out of view.

Hermione was too excited to simply sit in her chambers. It was a Saturday, so perhaps Minerva wasn't too busy, Hermione reasoned.

She made her way up to the stone gargoyle, which opened upon seeing her.

"Thank you," Hermione said as she passed.

The office door was open when she reached the top of the stairs. The Headmistress was sitting behind her desk staring at the *Daily Prophet*. She looked up once Hermione had entered the room.

"Hermione, you must be so relieved. I can't believe our efforts worked." Minerva sounded shocked.

"Yes, I am scheduled to visit him this afternoon. I'm taking the *Prophet* with me to show him the good news."

"I am sorry that you and Severus have to deal with this mess. If only Minister Robards had granted Severus a full pardon..."

"It's all right, Minerva. We're one step closer. Scrimgeour may yet overturn the Wizengamot's ruling."

"He might, dear. He just might."

The guard just wasn't walking fast enough. Hermione tried to give him that hint by walking in front of him, but he would not speed up.

After what seemed like an eternity, they reached Severus's cell. He looked to be sleeping. The guard banged the cell door with his hand and Severus snapped into a sitting position.

"Your *wife* is here," the guard said with as much disdain as possible.

"So I've noticed," Severus sneered.

"Thank you, sir," Hermione said politely. "If you wouldn't mind leaving us?"

The guard leered at her then turned away.

Hermione waited until he was gone before she pulled the *Prophet* from her robes.

"You'll want to read this." She pushed the paper at him.

He looked at her inquisitively, but took the paper anyway.

Hermione knew immediately when he got to the relevant information because his eyebrows shot up. Severus looked from her to the paper and back at her.

"Is this true?"

"Yes, there had been rumors of the Minister's resignation, but your commuted sentence is the biggest shock," she explained.

"For everyone, it seems."

"We're one step closer to your freedom. Perhaps we can get Rufus Scrimgeour to overturn the sentence completely."

"Perhaps, but don't count on it. Rufus has a reputation for being steadfast and stubborn."

"You're right. I just like the idea of you coming home."

"I know. I like that idea too."

"Soon, I promise, we'll get you out of here soon."

"I look forward to that moment."

Hermione awoke during the night with a terrible sense of dread. She dismissed it as part of a nightmare and went back to sleep.

"Hermione! Oh please, Hermione, wake up!"

Groggily, Hermione turned toward the sound of the panicked voice.

"Harry? Harry, what's wrong?"

Harry was shaking uncontrollably. He looked horrible. Dirt covered his trousers and his shirt had grass stains on it. Fully awake, Hermione got up and went to comfort him.

"You're not going to want to touch me," he said just above a whisper.

"Why ever not? Tell me what happened. Let's sit down, Harry. You don't look so good."

"Hermione, you have to come with me. Snape is at St. Mungo's; we have to go."

"What are you talking about? He was fine. I saw him earlier."

"I'll tell you once we get there. Please, Hermione, just come with me. It's not good."

The panic in his face spurred Hermione into action. She grabbed her wand off of the bedside table and with a flick, her nightclothes turned to presentable robes. As soon as she had reached for her wand, Harry had gone out to the fireplace. She followed him and together they Floo'd to St. Mungo's.

As soon as they reached the lobby of the hospital, Hermione was asking Harry questions. "First of all, how do you know he's here? Harry, please tell me, what is going on?"

Harry shook his head and walked to the information desk. He whispered something to the woman behind the desk and she responded in a low voice. Hermione struggled to hear what was said, but they were talking too softly.

With a quick glance at her, Harry started down the corridor behind the desk. Hermione had to run to catch up with him.

"We're going to the fourth floor. He's in the critical ward up there. I know he's here because I brought him. I'll tell you everything once I know he's not dead," Harry said in a low voice as they walked. They reached the lift at the end of the hall and Harry impatiently pressed the button.

Hermione was still in shock. What did Harry have to do with Severus's being here? Why would he have been near Severus in the first place? Hermione shook her head and watched Harry. He looked to be in bad shape. She noticed that he had yet to stop shaking. He seemed genuinely concerned about Severus's well being, which was at once a relief and a bad sign. His condition had to be really serious if Harry was this worried.

Finally, the lift arrived. Harry paced the length of the lift until it reached the fourth floor. As soon as the door opened, Harry practically leapt out. Hermione scurried to keep up. The critical ward was on the left side of the hall once you got off the elevators.

A Healer met them at the door. "If you are not family, I can't let you in the ward."

"I don't need in, I just need to know if Severus Snape is dead yet?"

"No, but he is not well. We thank you for your prompt action in bringing him in, Mr. Potter."

"No need. I should have done more." This last was said in barely a whisper.

Hermione wanted to see Severus, but she wanted to know what was going on first. "Harry, we're here and Severus is still alive. Can you please tell me what you have to do with this, and why he's here at all?"

Harry heaved a sigh and said, "Hermione, I am sorry. I had no idea it was going to be this."

Hermione simply looked at him, willing him to continue.

"Rufus Scrimgeour had approached me earlier today about helping move Snape. I didn't see why he would ask me, but I agreed. Scrimgeour mentioned something about me enjoying the event, but I didn't understand at the time. He, Dawlish and myself met at Azkaban this evening with a Portkey. They told me that we would be transporting Snape to a forest somewhere. Other people were to meet us there. So far, I hadn't had any reason to doubt them. They told me they were moving him to prepare him for the Kiss. We took the Portkey from Azkaban Island to this clearing. The first people I noticed were Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy; they were standing in the middle of the clearing like a king and queen at court. Both were wearing their best robes. Narcissa had her hand on Lucius's arm, like they were out for a stroll." Harry shuddered. "Anyway, as soon as we dropped the Portkey, Malfoy threw a curse at Snape. I don't know what it was, but Snape just went completely still. I looked around, and people were acting like this was a Quidditch match or something. This must have been a set-up from the Malfoys, but I didn't realize that at the time."

Harry looked around and conjured a pitcher of water. After taking a swig, he continued, "Soon, everyone was throwing curses. Nothing major, jelly legs, bat-bogey, harmless ones, really. I had joined in at this point."

Harry was resolutely not looking at Hermione.

"After a few minutes of this, Lucius Malfoy sent up red sparks. Everyone stopped throwing hexes and curses. A *Finite* later and all of the curse effects were gone. Lucius Malfoy now stepped forward and knelt next to Snape's head. 'You're innocent,' he said. 'For all your trouble, you're going to die. Just like Anna Bloom.' While he was talking, he had conjured a knife. He took the knife and laid it against Snape's cheek. People were actually laughing. I felt sick at this point. I didn't know this was going to happen. I

couldn't stop it even if I'd tried. There must have been forty wizards and witches in that clearing."

Harry was shaking again. He looked like he would rather do anything than say any more.

"I will spare you the details, but Malfoy used that knife with precision. He cut off Snape's fingers first, then his hands, saying, 'We wouldn't want to get blood on your hands, now would we?' Here people started muttering about Draco. I really wanted to leave at this point, but I couldn't. Someone had to be able to tell you what happened."

He looked at her with pure guilt written all over his face. Hermione was completely in shock at this point. She could feel nothing.

Harry continued, "I tried not to watch because it was getting gruesome. Malfoy made some major cuts and would let him bleed, but would heal them before Snape could lose consciousness. Narcissa was being 'the good wife' and holding his cloak and gloves for him. She also provided what must have been a Blood-Replenishing Potion. Anyway, the knife thing must have gone on for at least fifteen minutes. Finally, Lucius seemed to tire of it, though he was not done. He transfigured the knife into a hot poker. Lucius now took to burning designs onto what was left of Snape's body. His chest and legs took the brunt of the burns. The smell of burning flesh was starting to make people sick. When Lucius tired of the he let everyone have a turn at doing more harmful curses and hexes. Someone used Sectumsempra. He was blinded by that curse. To end the group's 'fun time' he sent up red sparks again. This time, instead of taking his time, Lucius walked to him, whispered something, and stabbed him in the chest with the still hot poker. This was the only time Snape screamed. He had been silent through everything else."

Harry paused to take a drink.

"Seeing that Snape was left to die, people began to leave. I wanted to rush to him, but I didn't know what they would do to me. So I waited for everyone to leave and approached what I was sure was going to be Snape's body. To my amazement, he was still alive. He must have felt my presence because he tried to speak. I told him it was me, and that I had no idea this was what they had planned. He shook his head at me, so I shut up. He then said two words to me: Hermione and ring. That's the only reason I have this."

Harry held out his hand and in his palm was Severus's wedding band.

"I told him to hang in there and turned a rock into a Portkey that brought him here. As soon as the Healers had him, I went back to the clearing to gather up anything that had been left behind."

Judging by the grimace on his face, Hermione took this to mean any body parts that had been left.

"I took his wedding band because I had no idea if he was going to live. It was the least I could do after the part I played in this." Harry hung his head.

Hermione took the ring from Harry's hand and walked into the Critical Ward without a word.

Author's Notes: *If you've stuck through until now, I thank you. This was never supposed to be a happy tale. This is the alternate ending. Any thoughts would be greatly appreciated.*

Thank you to Zen Lady and Sophi for their marvelous beta work.

Epilogue B

Chapter 17 of 17

The aftermath and an unexpected visit.

Hermione spent the next two weeks at St. Mungo's. She refused to leave the hospital. The Healers and Medi-Wizards had managed to magically reattach his hands and fingers. His other injuries were healing well and needed little extra attention. It was slow going, but he was going to be all right.

Hermione hadn't spoken to Harry since that night. It was probably better that way. She didn't know what she would do if given the chance. She had known that Harry hated Severus, but she didn't know that he would stoop to cursing a man just for fun.

One night while she was there, a Healer told her she had a visitor. She followed the man out to the hall. Harry Potter was standing there, looking very uncomfortable. When he glanced up at her, she saw the unease and questioning in his eyes.

Noticing the Healer was still around, she said, "Follow me, Harry." She led them toward the end of the hall. She turned and looked at him hard for a moment before saying, "I won't pretend that we're okay, because we're not. You had a hand in hurting the man I love. I know you didn't know what was going to happen, but that doesn't matter to my heart. Though, I do owe you thanks for bringing him here. I hope that some day we can be okay, but I don't know when that will be, so don't ask. I still want you as a friend, but it is going to take a long time before I can stand the sight of you again. I ask you to please respect my wishes."

"I am sorry, Hermione. I know that doesn't mean much. Please tell Professor Snape that I wish him a fast recovery." With one last look, Harry turned and walked away.

The very next day, Rufus Scrimgeour pulled the same stunt that Minister Robards had before he resigned. The day he stepped down from his position as Chief Warlock, he granted Severus Snape a full pardon. Of course it was a little too late, the people responsible were still going to go free, but it made Hermione happy to know she could tell Severus she was right after all.

"Severus, you can come home! They're releasing you today. The Healers thought it would be a nice congratulation present for being pardoned," she told him that afternoon.

"Good, I'm tired of these dimwitted Healers hovering day and night."

Hermione helped him change into his robes. He glared at her for her efforts. She smiled in return and left to fill out the release papers.

As they were heading home, Hermione remembered that she still had Severus's wedding band.

"Oh, Severus, here. You'll be wanting this back." She got the ring out of her pocket and handed it to him.

He stopped and looked at her hand in disbelief. "I thought I'd never see that ring again." He shook his head before continuing, "I asked Potter to give it to you because I was dying. I'm very glad he chose this once to listen to me."

Hermione placed the ring back on his finger where it belonged. Before she could stop herself, she stood on her tiptoes and kissed him on the cheek. To her pleasant surprise, he turned and kissed her. "I certainly have missed you, wife. I guess I will have to thank that brat for returning me to you."

"Don't you think it's time you gave Harry a break? Yes, he hurt you. He's hurt a lot of people, but he's a good man. You've been cruel to him long enough."

"Oh really? Does this mean that you've completely forgiven him for helping to injure me?" he shot back.

"No, but I'm not going to be cruel to him because of it. Severus, he's the reason you're alive. If it hadn't been for him you would surely have died that night!" She was becoming more upset by the minute.

Severus let out a loud breath before replying, "I suppose you're right. I will try my best to be civil, shall I ever see him again."

"That's all I ask. Now, let's go home." She placed her hand on his arm.

He turned toward her, and let her Apparate them back to Hogwarts.

Hermione and Severus were in their chambers a week after his release when there was a knock on the door. "Enter," said Severus.

The door open and Draco Malfoy entered the room. He was dressed in navy blue robes with silver stitching. Looking at Hermione, then Severus, he gave a small bow.

"I have come to tell you that Lucius can never hurt anyone again."

Hermione stared at him for a moment before responding, "What do you mean?"

"My father can never hurt you," he glanced at Severus, "or anyone again," Draco said with great emotion. Relief could clearly be seen on his features.

She watched him, trying to figure out the meaning of his words. Before she could work it out, Severus replied, "Draco, I owe you more than I can ever repay."

"We're even then," Draco replied with a smile. He bowed to the two of them and turned to leave.

Well-Known Member of Wizarding Society Gone Missing

by Rita Skeeter

Three days ago, infamous member of wizarding society, Lucius Malfoy, disappeared. His wife, Narcissa Malfoy, reported the incident to the authorities after Lucius failed to return home one night. Lucius has long been suspected of multiple murders. Though never charged, this reporter believes that Mr. Malfoy got what was coming to him.

The Ministry has not stated what course of action it was going to take. I personally hope they leave Lucius Malfoy's body to rot wherever it turns up.

Author's Notes: Thank you to Zen Lady and Sophi for their tireless work as betas. Also, a great thank you to GinnyW for putting up with my complaining about the endings. Thanks, dear!

This is officially the end. I hope you enjoyed, or at least, got something from this tale.