

Shadows

by whitesilence

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Chapter 1 of 1

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The years after his victory over Lord Voldemort had treated Harry Potter, on the whole, very well. He married Ginny Weasley two months after she graduated from Hogwarts, and they immediately purchased a house on the edge of Hogsmeade and set about starting a family. His parents had left him enough gold in his vault that he didn't have to work, yet he accepted the offer to become a broom maker, developing and testing newer and better brooms. So he spent his days testing the newest line of Quantum broomsticks and returned home in the evenings to a house full of children, organized chaos and, occasionally, a peeved Ginny. On those nights, Ginny would announce that she was having a girl's night and that she didn't want to see anyone male or under the age of twenty for the next twelve hours. On those occasions, he would graciously gather the children and bundle them through the Floo to their grandparents' house, where Grandma Molly would stuff them full of delicious food and sweets and Grandpa Arthur would regale them with stories of the latest magicked Muggle devices gone wrong. After being stuffed full himself, Harry would leave for a few hours at the pub. If he was lucky, he'd catch Ron and they would call up Seamus, Dean and Neville, and the five of them would go for a pint.

But this time, Harry didn't want to bother Ron; he had just married Luna Lovegood, and Harry really didn't want to go to anywhere else on his own. If he did, news of an imagined fight and break up with Ginny would be all over the *Prophet* tomorrow morning, and then he'd really be in for it. Not to mention all the ridiculous mail it would generate. That left Hermione. So he stood now before her tall brick town house in the middle of Muggle London. With a sigh, he grabbed the cast iron ring clenched in the jaws of a fierce lion and let it fall back onto the thick heavy front door.

A minute later, Hermione answered the door in a burgundy velvet dressing gown, holding a large black kneazle to her chest. She blinked up at him in surprise.

"Harry?"

"Hello, Hermione."

"Ron out with Luna?"

He nodded. She gave him a wry grin and opened the door further. "Come in and have a seat in the sitting room. Do you want some tea or something a bit stronger? I have a half decent bottle of merlot in the pantry." She was halfway down the hall before she was done speaking.

Harry stepped into the small foyer and looked around. The walls were painted a cream color, the floor covered in dark hardwood. The windows were very tall. In the daytime the house must have looked big and airy with the large windows and tall ceilings, but Harry thought it a bit oppressive at night. Hermione had been living in the townhouse since the end of the war, but he had never really visited her at home. As Hermione disappeared into the kitchen, the black kneazle jumped out of her arms and stalked back to sniff at the cuff of Harry's trousers.

"Hello there, Solaris." Harry bent down to scratch the cat-like creature behind the ears. But it turned away from him with a sniff and padded into the book-lined sitting room to perch on the arm of the couch. The midnight black kneazle had appeared soon after Hermione had moved into the house, taking the late Crookshanks's place at her side. Harry sat down in one of the old looking armchairs near the cheerfully crackling fire and was surprised by how pleasant and welcoming the room felt. Hermione came

in a few minutes later carrying a wine bottle and two glasses, followed by a floating tray of cheese and crackers. She directed the tray down onto the coffee table as she poured the wine. She handed him a glass.

"So, what brings you to my doorstep on this lovely Friday evening?" she asked as she chose a slice of cheese and seated herself across from him on the couch. Solaris moved silently to curl up on her lap and steal a bit of her cheese.

"Ginny's been having a rough patch and needed a night off is all." replied Harry. "I haven't been home much to help with the kids, what with the Quantum Leap coming out in two weeks."

Hermione nodded sagely. "And how is the formula I gave you working? Did the runes come out right?"

"Yeah, they came out perfect. So perfect, the Quidditch Federation is thinking of outlawing it. But we'll see what they say when all the teams are clamoring for the Leap. It'll revolutionize the broom making industry!"

Hermione smirked but said nothing as she scratched Solaris behind the ears.

"Who would've thought, Hermione, that Hogwarts' biggest know-it-all would be using her smarts to make better Quidditch brooms?"

At the mention of her old nickname, Hermione's smirk faded, and she turned to look into the flames dancing merrily in the fireplace. "Who, indeed? I know it's only been six years, but Hogwarts feels so long ago, doesn't it?"

Harry agreed. "I feel like the Harry Potter who killed Voldemort was an entirely different person as well. It seems so strange, like it was all a dream."

"Until you wake up at night, sweating from some nightmare about the war, then it seems quite real." She hesitated. "Do you still have them, Harry?"

"What, the nightmares? Yeah, mostly around the anniversary of Dumbledore's death. I see it happen in my dreams over and over again. Sometimes I'm Petrified. Sometimes I'm not. Those are the worst. It's too bad we only ever found Snape's robes; Moody swears he hit him with the Killing Curse."

At the mention of Snape's name, Hermione's face went blank, and she turned her gaze to the fire place. To Harry, she looked like she was lost in her memories so he left her alone, swirling the wine around in his glass. His mind began to drift back to the War. The search for Voldemort's remaining Horcruxes had consumed their lives. What should have been his last year at Hogwarts had instead become a time of anxiety-laden relocations and dark fear. By the time Harry was able to face his lifelong adversary, he had been exhausted, relying heavily on Ron and Hermione for strength and endurance. He had defeated Voldemort, pushed him beyond the veil hidden deep in the Department of Mysteries, but it had been a near thing, he had narrowly avoided being pulled through himself. When he picked himself up to face Ron and Hermione, he had seen Moody and Snape facing off amongst the rubble of the auditorium seats out of the corner of his eye. He heard Moody shout the Killing Curse and saw Snape's black robed form illuminated in green, but later, after the Aurors arrived, they had not been able to find any trace of his body, only his robes remained.

"Ouch!" Harry glanced up to see that Solaris had dug his claws into Hermione's leg. She shot the kneazle an irritated look. "What did you do that for?"

Harry could have sworn the kneazle grinned mischievously. Hermione shook herself out of her thoughts and took a sip of her wine. Sensing her change in mood, Harry took the opportunity to ask her, "So, had any boyfriends lately?"

Hermione nearly choked on her wine. "Harry! I told you, I've been much too busy with my research into the physics of Apparation to do any dating. Research that directly contributed to the formula *you* are using to get your brooms banned by the Quidditch Federation, might I remind you."

"It's alright, Hermione. I was just joking!" he laughed. "I know how important your research is."

The mood lightened considerably after that, and the two old friends spent an enjoyable few hours reminiscing about the past. It was past midnight by the time Harry stood up to leave. After a short goodbye and a promise to visit again soon, Harry crossed the street to the shadow of a large oak tree. Just before he Disappeared, he looked back and thought he saw a tall, thin man silhouetted in the window...

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Cold hands grasped at his arms, pulling him towards the fluttering fabric of the veil. Harry struggled as he called over his shoulder for help. Seeing his predicament, Ron ran over, hooked his arms under Harry's armpits and pulled. Harry gave one final push against the grabbing hands and kicked out with his feet. He hit Voldemort square the chest, sending him flying backwards into the darkness. The release of Voldemort's fall sent him crashing into Ron. They quickly picked themselves up, turning to survey the rest of the room. As he turned, Harry saw Moody facing off with a tall hooded figure that could only be Severus Snape.

The former Potions master was quick, but not quick enough to defeat the old Auror. Moody slipped to the side on surprisingly agile feet and slashed the air with his wand. "*Avada Kedavra!*"

The man's trademark black robes seemed to hang in the air for a second, back lit by the green light of the curse before falling. A cry for help from Tonks, two rows down, distracted Moody from looking too closely at the puddle of black on the floor.

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Hermione shut the door behind Harry and turned back to face the sitting room.

"You're horrible, Severus."

The black kneazle shifted, flowing smoothly into the form of a tall, thin man with long black hair and a beak-like nose. Most would not consider him handsome, but to Hermione, he was devastatingly irresistible.

"So are you, Hermione. You could have told Potter you were busy and sent him away. Instead, I had to endure four hours of Gryffindor sentimentality." He huffed.

She grinned. "You could've left the room."

He stretched luxuriously and used his reach to pull her into his arms. "And miss having my belly rubbed? I think not."

Her hand came up to stroke his cheek. "Severus Snape, closet hedonist? Who knew?" she giggled. If not for Severus, they would never have been able to find and destroy all the Horcruxes as quickly as they had. He had been her most valuable resource in the search. Books were all well and good but in this case, information first or second hand had been better than any printed reference. And not only had he been a good source of information, they found that they worked together flawlessly. The thought that she had almost rejected his offer of help sent chills down her spine. She was glad that he had been trust worthy after all was said and done. But it saddened her that her research partner would never receive the credit he deserved. Instead, he was forced to spend his life shut up in her house or in the form of a kneazle. When she had seen the bolt of green light flying toward him from Moody's wand, her heart had constricted painfully. She had continued to feel winded until she had been able to return to her parent's home and found him sitting on their front step.

"I would give anything for you to be able to stalk down Diagon Alley in broad daylight again. You know that, Severus."

"I am grateful simply to be alive, Hermione. I am glad that you were the one to find me, trust me and take me in. Anyone else would have left me to die. My life with you, a half-life though it may be, is more than I deserve." He tilted her head up and kissed her deeply.

She pulled back slightly and murmured against his lips "Let's go to bed, love."

He nodded in response and scooped her up in his arms. The lights extinguished as he made his way up the stairs, leaving only shadows in the room.

Author's Note: Special thanks to **Not So Saintly**, who very kindly agreed to beta read this story even though I promised her a different one. This story would not be half as good with out her help.