

For the Sake of Tears

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Response to prompt #45 Postwar, Hermione and Snape have to work together to find Harry, who has disappeared into the Muggle world.

Only Chapter

Chapter 1 of 1

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Chapter One

For the Sake of Tears

It was over. Done. Finished. Harry Potter had finally done what the entire wizarding world had expected of him. He had gone up against Voldemort and ended him...for good this time. Thank God it was finally over. He was exhausted, in mind and body.

It had been a long battle. Not just today's, although that one waged on and on to Harry, but the entirety of the war. From the age of one, his destiny had been created. From the age of eleven, this was what he'd been trained to do. And his trainer, his mentor, a man he loved as much as he could have any father, Albus Dumbledore, was not alive to share in the defeat of the Dark Lord. This weighed heavily on Harry's heart.

He, Ron and Hermione had searched for, and destroyed, every Horcrux. It was painstakingly slow and had taken more time and research than either Harry or Ron had wanted to spend, but they had to. Voldemort would not die as long as there were Horcruxes out there. Harry had hoped that his followers would fall when Voldemort did, but no such luck. Some were being rounded up by the Aurors, and some were making their escape. He knew they would be searching for rogue Death Eaters for many years to come.

He looked up as he thought this and into the eyes of Severus Snape...the one who'd murdered Dumbledore. The git actually smirked at Harry. *Glad I killed your master for you, eh, Snape? Well, you'll get yours. I swear it. I will see to it personally! You may have been cleared, but I will never forget what you've done.*

Not wanting to see the satisfaction in his former professor's face, Harry looked to his right instead and saw Ron Weasley. Standing and whole. He looked a little worse for wear, cuts here and bruises there, but there he stood, where he'd always stood, right by Harry's side. Harry then turned to his left and saw Hermione Granger. Also standing and whole, although she, too, looked just about like Ron did. He closed his eyes and felt the relief he'd been holding inside slowly flow out of every pore of his being. Those two, Hermione and Ron, were his peace.

When he opened his eyes, he looked across the battlefield and met the eyes of Ginevra Weasley. His love, his life, his soul. She was still standing as well, and he wanted to weep from the beauty of her standing there, looking at him with unmasked adoration and the purest love shining in her eyes.

They had made love the night before, despite the fact that he'd ended things with her. Truth be told, he hadn't expected to survive this war, and he'd wanted her to be able to go on. Oh, he knew how much she loved him. He felt the same. So, when she'd come to his room, he hadn't turned her away. Instead, he loved her with all that was inside of him, willing her to hear what he said with his actions that he could not utter with words.

Suddenly, The-Boy-Who-Lived-Yet-Again was ripped from his thoughts by shouts of victory and happiness rising through the crowd. He couldn't find it in himself to cheer as he looked out among all the wounded and dead. So much blood... Remus. His last link to his parents, dead. So many others...

"Harry, mate, you did it! You did it!" Ron shouted and slapped his friend none too lightly on the back. "We are free...thanks to you!"

Hermione turned to him then, smiling brilliantly through her tears. "Oh, Harry, I never doubted that you would triumph! How must you feel?" Laughing, she said, "I suppose numb! I know I do." When he continued to look on in silence, Hermione asked, "What is it, Harry? All right?"

Turning to Hermione, Harry answered, "No, actually, I'm not all right. What I am is done." He suddenly grabbed both Ron and Hermione, pulling them into a tight embrace.

The three stood there, holding on to one another, tears streaming down their faces, reveling in the fact that they were still there. As Harry held his two best friends, both closer and loved more by him than any family, he once again looked into Ginny's eyes. "I love you," he mouthed.

Tears sliding down her face, she mouthed back, "I love you, too. So much."

Releasing his friends, Harry Potter backed away from them, slightly bowed, and then Disapparated. He didn't tell a soul where he was going...

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Seven Years Later

Ginny Weasley was lying on the beach in Norway, soaking up the sun. She had gone with her brother, Bill, and his wife, Fleur. Their kids were also in attendance, Arthur and Will.

Arthur would be starting Hogwarts this September, and Bill wanted to make this vacation special for him. He'd invited all of his family, but only Ginny and Gwen could make the trip.

Thinking of her daughter, Ginny looked up from the romance novel she'd been reading, *The War Inside*, to check on her. "Gwendolyn Molly Weasley! Come back closer to the edge, love. You know better than that!"

Pouting, her daughter replied, "But, Mummy! Arthur is way out there!" She pointed to where her cousin was further out, riding the waves. "I'm a big girl now...nearly seven! I can go where *he* can!"

Bill snickered. "She reminds me of another stubborn little girl I once knew, always thinking she could keep up with her brothers."

"Hush, you," Ginny told her brother. "You're not helping!"

"Yeah!" Will agreed. "Me too! I'm eight! Bigger than she is!" This time, Ginny snickered at Bill.

"You heard me, young lady. If I have to tell you again, you will have to come out of the water. You, too, Will. Your mother would kill me if something happened to you while she was at the beauty salon!"

Twin groans came from the sea, but the children reluctantly obeyed.

Ginny shook her head and tried to read again. *Stubborn little whelp! She has to argue with everything I say, always wanting to explore or go where she shouldn't! Reminds me of her father...*

Ginny closed her book and sighed. *No, don't do this to yourself, Ginny. Don't. It's been seven years and not a word to anyone.*

But she still ached for him. Sure, she'd dated, but she had always put Gwen first. After a few disastrous relationships, she'd decided to wait until her daughter started Hogwarts to try again, and that was just fine with her.

Gwen had often asked about her father, and Ginny had never lied to her. She wondered if it made it easier for the child to know that Harry had never even known that Ginny was pregnant. They had only been together the one time, but apparently, that was all it took.

A piercing scream broke Ginny from her musings. Looking up, she realized that it was Gwen screaming, and Will was struggling to get her out of the water. She and Bill both ran for the water, Bill only getting there seconds before her.

"What? What is it, Will?" Ginny demanded.

"I...I don't...it was..." Tears began to form in his eyes.

"Take a deep breath, son," Bill told him while rubbing his back reassuringly. "Tell Aunt Ginny and me what happened."

"G-G-Gwen was bitten!" he explained while he sniffed and quivered.

Bill looked at his niece, lying still in her mother's arms. She looked very pale, and her lips had a slight blue hue.

"Bitten by what?" Ginny wanted to know. "What has done this to her?" When Will remained silent, his aunt screamed, "TELL ME! NOW!"

"Gin... Wait here," Bill said. Looking to his son, he asked, "Can you show me?"

"I can," Arthur said, out of breath, as he came running up to the scene. In his hand he held a plastic box he'd been putting seashells in. He lifted it slightly, and Bill gasped at what was inside.

"Ginny, Gwen has been stung by a lobalug," Bill told her quietly. "We need to get her inside now and contact the staff mediwitch."

"What? A lobalug?" Ginny rose with her unconscious child in her arms. "Refresh my memory, Bill. What exactly is that?"

Bill told her, "Remember, it's that little creature that has a poisonous venom sack? You can only find it here in the North Sea. When it feels threatened, it will blast poison at the attacker. Gwen must have startled it." Turning to make sure his boys were following them, he whispered to Ginny, "I think there is a potion for this. Let's talk with the mediwitch and get more information."

As soon as they reached Ginny and Gwen's room, Bill sent his Patronus for the hotel mediwitch. She arrived shortly after.

After she was let into the room, she introduced herself. "Hello, my name is Madam Grant. Where is the harmed one?"

"Just there," Ginny said as she pointed her trembling finger towards the bed.

When the mediwitch examined Gwen, her already big eyes rounded even more. "You say she was stung?"

"Yes," Bill answered. "By a lobalug."

"Goodness! Are you sure then? You've seen it?" Madam Grant inquired.

"Yes, we did. My son captured it and has it in a box. There is no mistake."

"There is nothing to be done for her here, sir. I would suggest you take her to the hospital." Madam Grant looked very worried.

"Yes, of course," Ginny replied, quickly going into her room to change into her summer robes.

"Thank you, Madam," Bill said as the woman left the room.

"Bill," Ginny started, "would you mind terribly Flooing Hermione and asking her to meet me at St. Mungo's? You need to stay here with the boys, and I don't want to go alone."

"Of course I will. Just go, and don't worry. Things will be fine, I'm sure. Fleur and I will pack your things and take them back to your flat."

Ginny thanked and kissed her brother on the cheek, gently picked up her daughter, and Apparated to St. Mungo's.

She frantically ran to the information desk as Gwen was starting to look worse. "Excuse me, Miss?"

"Yes, how may I help you? Oh, Ginny, is that you? It's me, Katie Bell. Well, Katie Wood now..."

"I'm sorry to cut you off, Katie, but this is an emergency. My daughter needs to see the Healer right away."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Of course. What is the matter with her?"

"She was stung by a lobalug and..."

"Ginny!" Hermione Granger came crashing into the hospital. "How's Gwen? Is she all right?"

Suddenly, silent tears came pouring from Ginny's eyes. "I don't know! I haven't been here long." Turning to Katie, she asked, "Can we take her back?"

"Yes, follow me." She laid a reassuring hand on Ginny's shoulder. "It will be okay."

Not long after they had laid Gwen in the cot, the Healer came in to examine her. "It appears your brother was right. This is lobalug poisoning. There is a potion for this."

Sighing with relief, Ginny told him, "Great! Do I only give it to her once or..."

"Well, we don't keep this particular potion in stock. Because of some of the ingredients, it's really impossible to."

"Well," Hermione started, "can't you just brew it now?"

"It's not that simple, Miss... Or is it Mrs...."

"Granger. Miss Granger. And what is so complicated about it?" She knew she was sounding short and impatient, but she was feeling that way. What was this bloke's problem?

"It's an extremely complicated potion to brew for one thing, and..."

Sighing, Hermione turned to Ginny. "Look, let's go ask Professor Snape. If he won't brew it, perhaps he would tell me how to."

"Professor Snape?" the Healer asked. "The one who murdered Albus Dumbledore? You would trust him with this child's life? She will need this potion within the next ten days!"

Putting her hands on her hips, Ginny told him, "He was cleared of all charges, and yes, if he can and will brew the potion, I would trust him. I would do anything for my child!"

Rubbing her friend's back, Hermione told her to calm down. "Listen, why don't you stay here with Gwen, and I will go ask the professor. I will come straight back here with his answer. Okay?"

"Yes. Thank you, Hermione. I didn't want to leave her."

After kissing Gwen's pale cheek, Hermione walked outside and Apparated to Spinner's End.

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Severus Snape was sitting in his chair by the fire reading an offer from Mr. Parkinson. It seemed that he wanted Severus to marry his daughter. Ever since he'd been cleared of all charges, people had been treating Severus like some sort of hot commodity. He snorted. Let everyone think what they would...good or bad...it mattered not to him.

Severus considered Pansy as he gazed into the flames. Not his first choice, or any choice, really, but he decided to weigh the pros and cons of such a union before dismissing it all together.

They would have to have separate bedrooms, of course. He was planning on selling his childhood home, and with the money he'd been able to save over the years added to that, plus the potions he was now selling to various apothecaries, he would be able to buy a somewhat larger home in the wizarding world.

He would require one heir, preferably a male. If needed, he would have two children, but he only truly wanted one. He hoped to... Suddenly, Severus was interrupted from his thoughts by a brisk knock on the door. Agitated, he stood to answer it. *This better not be Minerva again, offering me a job.*

He strode to the door and yanked it open to the nervous lip biting of Hermione Granger. Severus scowled. "Miss Granger, to what do I owe the..." He looked her up and down with a disgusted look on his face. "Why are you here?"

"May I please come in, Professor Snape? I need your help desperately!"

Severus raised an eyebrow. *Desperate, is she?* He backed up and opened the door wider so that she could enter. He was curious as to what she needed.

After she walked in, she stood there, saying nothing. "Well? What is that you need, girl? I don't have all night for you to stand there staring at me."

Suddenly, she was more nervous than before. His attitude was making it worse. But she had to do this...Gwen would die otherwise. "Um... You see, what I need is..."

"Spit it out!" It was satisfying to see her jump when he yelled.

Sighing, Hermione took a long breath, composed herself and told him, "Gwendolyn Weasley has been poisoned by a lobalug. St. Mungo's doesn't seem to have the potion on hand, and we were wondering if it would be possible for you to brew it. We would compensate you for any ingredients and your time, of course," she quickly added.

Severus stood there, looking at Hermione with an unreadable expression. Finally, he spoke. "Tell me, Miss Granger, do you know anything of this potion?"

"No," she said, upset that she couldn't recall anything at all about it.

"Most of its ingredients are basic enough. However, it requires three very imperative things." She nodded, encouraging him to continue. "First, it requires three tears from a baby unicorn."

Hermione winced. Unicorn tears were very expensive, especially baby ones. Sighing, she nodded, wanting him to keep going.

"Second, it requires three tears from the mother." Hermione smiled. Those would be easy enough to get.

"And the third?"

Here, he smirked. "Three tears from the father."

Hermione paled. "What? The father? Professor, couldn't we substitute something? We have no idea where Har...um...the father is!"

"You know better than that. And I know that Harry Potter is the sire of Miss Weasley's bastard child."

"Don't call her that!"

"Why? That is what she is, is she not? People call me bastard all the time, and I assure you, my parents were wed when I was both conceived and born."

Not wanting to argue with him and cause him to not brew the potion, she simply said, "I don't know how to begin to find Harry. I have asked Ron repeatedly, and he assures me that he has no idea where Harry has gone."

He only stared at her once more, seemingly looking past her. Coming to a decision, he said, "I know how to find Potter. But it will cost you."

"WHAT? How? You know where Harry is, and you've never said a word? Why?"

"I didn't say that I know where he is, I said I know how to find him. As to why I never said anything, well, I don't really care where he is. Beyond that, he doesn't want anyone to know, or he would have informed one of you by now."

Hands on hips and fighting back her temper, she asked through clenched teeth, "How much?"

"To take you to Potter and brew the potion? Five thousand Galleons. It will be quite an inconvenience to me."

Doing some quick counting in her head, Hermione figured that between her and the Weasleys, they could come up with that amount for the cold-hearted git. She would have to dig into her savings she had put away for the new bookstore she wanted to open, but it couldn't be helped. "Fine. Half now and half when we find Harry and you've completed the potion. But you really don't need to go with me, Professor. Just tell me where he is."

"That is impossible."

Wanting to bang her head against the wall, she said, "But you just told me you could find him."

"Indeed, and I can. Albus placed a Tracking Spell on the boy at the beginning of your sixth year with only three people able to track him: Albus, Lupin, and myself. Seeing as how the first two are dead..."

"I see. Will this spell take you...us...directly to him?"

"No, but it will take us to his general area."

"Okay, when can you leave? The Healer said that Gwen only has ten days."

"I have no choice, then, do I? We shall go directly, as soon as I've packed a bag."

"A bag? Do you think we will be overnight then?"

"It's possible, yes. Why don't you Apparate home, pack a few essentials, and meet me back here in twenty minutes?"

"Okay. Please don't leave without me, sir. Harry has no idea that he even has a daughter, and since Ginny can't be the one to let him know, I would like to."

"I have no intentions of going without you, Miss Granger. Now, go. Time is wasting." He turned and quickly walked out of the room to grab some things he would need.

Hermione noticed the papers he left lying on the table and thought about reading them. She decided against it because she knew that if he caught her, he would likely refuse to help Gwen, and really, it would be wrong to snoop...no matter how badly she wished to.

After a quick run to St. Mungo's to let Ginny know what was going on and get some of the Galleons from the twins, she Apparated to her flat and decided to take two days' worth of clothes...just in case...her toothbrush, and cosmetics.

She made it back to Severus' home with four minutes to spare. He let her in and went to his lab for something, telling her to wait a moment. Suddenly, the fireplace turned green, and a man's head popped in.

"Severus? You there? It's me, Roger Parkinson! I want to know what you thought of my offer for you to marry Pansy!"

Hermione sucked in a breath and backed out of sight, and he quickly turned his head to scan the room. "Who's there? Show yourself!"

"Roger, cease all of this bellowing now. What is it that you need? I am in a bit of a hurry."

"I want to know your decision regarding my offer. What say you?"

"I say that I haven't had time to think on it as yet. I will have to let you know later, as I have an urgent matter that needs my attention just now. I will let you know within the week. Will that do?"

"I suppose it will have to, won't it? Who's that you've got there with you, Severus?"

Severus glared at Hermione. "No one of consequence, I assure you. Now, I must take my leave. I will be in touch, Roger."

"Fine, Severus. Talk to you soon." When Roger Parkinson left, Severus put out the fire. "Shall we?"

When she nodded, they stepped outside, and he warded his house. Turning to her, he said, "You have half the Galleons?" When she nodded and handed them to him, he told her, "Grab onto my arm, and do not let go for any reason whatsoever. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand." She shrunk her bag, put it into her pocket as he'd done with his, and took hold of his arm, holding tightly so that she would be able to stay with him, and he activated the Tracking Spell.

When they reached their destination, it was in front of a sign that said *Welcome to Victor, Montana, USA! Population 903!* Severus snorted. "Victor, indeed. Arrogant prat."

Hermione bit her tongue. She really didn't want to anger the man. "What now, sir?"

"Now, Miss Granger, we find some mode of transportation and search."

Her eyes widened. "Search? This place has a population of nine hundred!"

"Then I suggest we get started." Sweeping his arm in front of him, he said, "After you."

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After a few hours of searching, Hermione was getting irritable. "This is useless! At this rate, we'll never find him!"

"I see patience is not one of your virtues, Miss Granger." He smirked. "I suggest we get a room, rest, and then get some dinner. We can search some of the bars this evening."

"Oh, no! I can't get a room! I didn't think to bring Muggle money, and I certainly don't have American Muggle money!"

"Just leave that to me. Wait here so that I can get the rooms. I want you rested and alert before we start searching the bars."

"I don't believe we will find him in a bar, sir," Hermione said indignantly.

"Perhaps not, but we cannot discredit them. If nothing else, we can mark them off this list."

"Fine," Hermione said in a huff. Then something occurred to her. "Um, sir? I don't have any money to pay for us both dinner..."

"I thought as much. I shall get our food." He walked into the motel. After they had their rooms, he told her, "Meet me back in the lobby in two hours, and we will eat. Then, we will look through the bars."

"Fine. Two hours then."

When two hours had passed, they met back in the lobby as planned. Severus told her, "I have been thinking. There is something called a sports bar right around the corner from this motel. We can start our search there and eat as well."

"Okay. I hope the food is good. I am starving."

After they found a table and ordered, Hermione asked, "Sir? Could I ask you something?"

"You may ask..."

"Well, I was wondering if you are seriously considering marrying Pansy Parkinson."

Raising an eyebrow, he asked, "Why? What difference is it to you if I do?"

"Well, none, but I was just curious. Is that a face you want to wake up to every morning?"

He said nothing, only stared at her. After awhile, he said, "I suppose you think yours would be an improvement?" When she said nothing, only blushing, he continued, "At any rate, I would not wake up to her every morning, as we would not share the same bedroom."

"Well, why not? You would be married; wouldn't you want to sleep with your wife every night?"

"What? You mean you think that just because you are married you would share a room?"

"Of course! Why wouldn't you and Pansy, or any husband and wife, share a room?"

"You mean that the husband should leave his mistress' bed and crawl into the bed of his wife?" He smirked at her expression.

"Mistress? Well, for heaven's sake! Why would a married man need a mistress?"

Laughing, he told her, "How very naïve you are, Miss Granger. I can assure you that most married men keep a mistress."

"But why? If you love your spouse and make love with her, why would you need to do that?"

"Because, in the wizarding world at least, a lot of marriages are arranged, such as Roger is attempting to do now, and most couples are *not* in love as you say."

"How very sad," Hermione replied. "I would hate to think that the man I was married to left my bed to find happiness in someone else's. I would try to make him want me."

"I find it hard to believe that Muggles do not have the same habits in this manner. I admit that when I was younger, my parents shared the same room. After I was older and the arguments were more frequent, he slept on the couch or didn't come home at all."

"Some Muggles do, I suppose," she conceded, "but I would like to have a marriage like my parents have. They are in love and happy. And they still share the same bed."

"I see. How long have they been married?"

Smiling, she told him, "Thirty years."

"And you think that in the whole thirty years together that neither one of them has ever had a lover?"

"Absolutely not! How dare you say such a thing? My parents love each other."

"Well," he told her smugly, "you would be the expert on that. I can only say that I find it highly unlikely."

"You would!"

Chuckling at her, Severus began eating again. Not being able to stand the quiet, Hermione started up another conversation...about Potions this time. He found he rather enjoyed conversing with her. After the Potions talk, they simply slid into a different topic with ease.

Suddenly, the door opened, and someone at the bar yelled, "Potter! It's about time you got here! I told you my wife is due any day now, and I want to leave early!"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," Harry mumbled, making his way to the bar.

Both Severus and Hermione jerked at the sound of that voice. They would both know it anywhere. Could they be so lucky as to have found him in the first bar they went in to? "Harry!" Hermione exclaimed with obvious joy.

She couldn't believe it was really him. He had hardly changed at all. Hermione felt her heart could burst with joy at this moment.

Harry jerked his head in the direction of her voice, and his face lit up with pleasure. "Hermione? Is that really you?" Smiling, he started towards her. "How did you...?"

Jumping up, she ran to embrace him. "Oh, Harry! It's so good to finally see you again! I've...we've all...missed you so much! I want to catch up, but there is something really important..." Her voice drifted as she noticed the direction Harry was looking. "Let me explain, Harry..."

Harry turned furious green eyes on Hermione. "How could you? How could you come here *with him*?" He couldn't believe it. Hermione...more that anyone...knew how he felt about that git. If he'd had his wand, he would have hexed Snape on the spot.

Severus smirked at Harry's anger while Hermione tried to explain. "Because it was very important that we find you! We needed his help. You see..."

Holding up a hand to stop her, Harry said, "Enough. Don't say another word. I can't believe you! I won't speak with you while he is here, and I have to start my shift tending the bar." Harry knew that he if he didn't go, he would say something to hurt Hermione. He really didn't want to do that.

"But, Harry, you honestly don't understand! This is a matter of life and death...a death of someone, who I can assure you, is very important to you!"

"I left England for a reason, Hermione. I didn't contact anyone for a reason. Now, I will talk to you, but not around him and not now. I can meet you tomorrow. Say around ten? There is a café down the block from here."

Hermione's mouth was wide open in disbelief. "I suppose that will have to do."

"If you want to talk to me, it will. Talk to you then," he said, dismissing her as he walked to the bar to start his shift.

Turning her hurt eyes to Severus, Hermione quietly said, "I am going to go back to the motel now. Coming?"

"Yes, I believe I will." Severus was angered on her behalf, and that fact bothered him. He was actually enjoying her company, and that confused him. At the moment, he just wanted to go to his room and think for a bit.

When he walked her to her door, she turned and looked up at him. "Thank you, for... for..." Suddenly, she couldn't hold her emotions in any longer, and she threw her arms around him and started weeping.

He didn't touch her in any way, but he didn't push her away either. When she'd cried herself out, she let him go and backed away. "If you are quite finished blubbing on me, Miss Granger, I will go to my room."

"Wait! Don't go! I mean..." Sighing, she said, "I just don't want to be alone right now. Would you come into my room for awhile?" Attempting a small smile, she added, "Actually, I was enjoying our discussion about Ancient Runes and would like to finish it. If you wouldn't mind, that is."

Rolling his eyes, he said, "Fine. I will come in, but only for a short while. I expect we will be able to go home tomorrow after your little tête-à-tête with Potter."

Her eyes filled again, but she refused to let the tears fall. "Right then." Hermione unlocked and opened her door. After they'd entered, she said, "Well, I would offer you something, but I am afraid I don't have anything."

"That's quite all right. I don't want anything." He watched her move around the room nervously and sighed. "Sit, Miss Granger. Potter's behavior towards you was uncalled for. You know this."

Letting the tears fall, she told him, "I know it was, but it doesn't hurt any less. It's been seven years since we've seen each other, and he just brushed me off!" She lowered her head to her hands and cried silently.

Not understanding why he cared, he walked to her and gently rubbed her back. "Ssh. He will treat you differently tomorrow because I won't be there. You'll see."

Looking up at him somewhat hopeful, she asked, "Do you really think so?"

"Yes, and I believe you do as well."

She leaned into him and whispered, "Thank you. I'm sorry. It's just been a very emotional day for me."

"Understandable."

She looked into his eyes, and before she knew what she was doing, she kissed him. Encouraged because he didn't push her away, she licked his lips with her tongue.

He gave in to the moment, opening his mouth and allowing her to taste him as he did her, and then pulled back.

"Miss Granger... We cannot. You are... vulnerable, and I don't want to take advantage of you or the situation. As you said, this day has been emotional for you."

"I thought I was the one that started this. If you don't want me, that's one thing. If you do, then..." She let the sentence hang, waiting to see how he would react. She really wanted to feel comfort after the way Harry had treated her, even if it was from Severus Snape. Besides, she had really been enjoying his company before Harry walked into the bar. It was almost like a date there at the end.

Severus looked down at this willing woman in his arms. She was right. She did start things. He couldn't deny that he was becoming attracted to her, and he really wasn't one to turn down sex when it was so freely offered, but how far did he want to take it? "Are you sure? Do you really want to do this *tonight*?" He stressed tonight, wanting her to know it would not go any further.

"Yes, yes, I do." She understood it was only going to be the one time, but at the moment, she didn't care. Hermione pulled him to her once again, wanting to just feel something, anything, as Harry had left her feeling cold. He'd hurt her, and she felt as if he'd torn a hole in her heart. She wanted to fill it.

Hermione laid back and pulled Severus on top of her, kissing him. He braced himself on his elbows and kissed her completely, enjoying it. He grabbed his wand and cast a contraceptive spell.

She began rubbing his back, and he started kissing his way down her neck, licking and nibbling as he went. "Mmmm. You taste delicious, Miss Granger."

"Hermione," she gasped out. "Call me Hermione."

Saying nothing, he worked his way down as far as he could while she still had her shirt on. Rising up, he said, "Let's remove this."

"Yes," she agreed and sat up, taking her shirt off and unhooking her bra. She watched him watching her, and it made her feel slightly erotic. Smiling, she slowly took the rest of her clothes off.

"Your turn," she said, drawing his attention back to her face. "Would you like me to help you?" Instead of answering her, he simply took his wand once again and removed his clothes. He smirked and moved back to her.

"I believe we were about here," he said as he started kissing her neck once more. She sighed with pleasure and enjoyed the feeling of his mouth on her, making her forget her hurt.

When he moved to toy with her breasts, she moaned with pleasure. Her breasts had always been very sensitive. Hermione ran her fingers through his hair, ignoring the slight greasy feel. She could forgive that since he was doing all sorts of things to her with his mouth and tongue.

When he started moving lower, she instinctively spread her legs. Looking up at her, he asked, "Would you like me to... pleasure you with my mouth?"

Hermione blushed a shade of scarlet. Nobody had ever *asked* before! She didn't want to say anything; she just wanted him to continue making her feel.

Severus lowered his head and licked her just above her hairline at the bottom of her belly. She quivered in anticipation. He lifted his head once more. "Do you want me to continue, Hermione?" He knew he was embarrassing her, and that excited him. "Would you like me to give you oral pleasure?"

"Severus..." she moaned. "Please."

"Please what? All you have to do is tell me what you need. I want to hear you say it." Her moans and sighs of pleasure were driving him on, filling him with need. But, God, she was so sexy lying there, excited for him, begging him to pleasure her with his mouth, yet too shy to actually say it. "What do you want?"

"I want your mouth on me! Oh, God, just put your mouth on me!"

Quivering a bit, he leaned in and laved her with his mouth, licking and plunging with his tongue and fingers until he brought her to release.

She cried out, pulling his hair lightly. "Yes!"

Smirking smugly, he raised himself up and nestled between her thighs. "I do believe you enjoyed that."

She said nothing, moving her hips to encourage him to enter her. He didn't move. "Severus! What are you doing to me?"

"Admit it. You enjoyed that, didn't you?"

Her faced reddened again, but this time there was a hint of anger mixed with the blush. "What's not to enjoy?" When he only looked at her, she told him, "Yes, I did. I really enjoyed having your mouth on me."

Smug once again, he entered her in one swift, blissful movement. This time, Hermione stilled. "I do believe you are enjoying this."

Laughing, he rolled, pulling her on top of him without missing a stroke. "What's not to enjoy?" He decided to lay back and enjoy the show and sensation of her rocking him to release.

When he felt her tightening, he lazily stroked her clit, bringing her pleasure once more. Her release triggered his. She fell forward and lay on his chest, getting her breath back.

"I know it sounds cliché, but I don't know what to say other than that was terrific. Thank you." Hermione felt sated and somewhat embarrassed. She wasn't seeing this man and wasn't going to start now, but the sex had been incredible.

She wasn't the kind to have one-night stands, but she couldn't bring herself to regret this. It was exactly what she'd needed, and she was grateful he had at least taken the time to make it pleasurable for her, even if he did purposely embarrass her, the git.

"The pleasure was, well, not *all* mine," he started, smirking, "but very pleasurable indeed."

Hermione laughed and got off of the bed. "I am going to take a shower. Will you be here when I get out?"

"No, I think I will go to my own room and shower." He got off the bed, cast Scourgify on himself, and started dressing. He looked up to see Hermione leaning against the bathroom doorway, watching him. "Yes?" he asked, feeling a little uncomfortable.

Smiling, she told him, "Nothing. This was really nice." When he raised an eyebrow, she immediately said, "Not just the sex, although that was great, but the dinner and conversation as well. I almost regret I won't see you that way again."

He said nothing. This was becoming an awkward situation, and he hated awkward situations. He had enjoyed himself, too, but tomorrow they would go home where they would likely never see each other again.

Feeling weird in his silence, Hermione simply told him, "Goodnight, Severus." She refused to say Professor Snape just now.

Bowing slightly, he said, "Goodnight, Hermione." He turned and walked out of her room, shutting the door gently as he left.

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Harry sat in the booth in the back of the café, annoyed. It didn't matter that he'd been thinking of going home. He couldn't believe Hermione had come here with Severus Snape. It didn't matter to Harry that Severus was cleared of all charges. He never liked him, and he never would.

He looked up when he heard the door open. In walked Hermione, a somber look on her face. He felt badly about the way he'd talked to her the night before, but she had to understand...under the circumstances. He waved to her, and she walked over to him.

"Hello, Harry," she said coolly. She had obviously built up her defenses and was not going to let him hurt her again.

Harry sighed. He loved Hermione and didn't mean to hurt her as much as he obviously had. "Please, sit down." When she sat, he said, "Let me start by apologizing to you. I'm sorry I was so cold to you, but Hermione, Snape! You know how I feel about him..."

"Stop, Harry. I do know how you feel, which is why I would never do anything to upset you without a very good reason. I love you."

Harry felt ashamed. "I know. I love you, too. But I hate him, and when I saw him, well, it took me back to part of what I wanted to get away from in the first place."

Hermione took his hand. "Harry, I have something to tell you. Something important. It's the reason I showed up here with Professor Snape in the first place."

"What is it? Ron? Ginny?" Harry was starting to get worried.

Taking a deep breath and deciding to just get it out, she told him, "Harry, you have a daughter. Her name is Gwendolyn Molly Weasley. She is six, almost seven. She was poisoned by a lobalug yesterday and will die if we don't get the potion brewed within ten days from the time of the sting."

"What? What are you on about? A daughter? I have a daughter?" Shaking his head and trying to take it all in, he said, "Wait! Die? Why aren't you brewing then? Jesus, Hermione!"

"Because, Harry," she patiently started, "I need a specific ingredient. One that only you can give."

"What? What do you need? Are you sure she will be okay? Will she get the potion in time?"

"Three of your tears are what I need. But, Harry, they have to be fresh. You have to come back. You will, won't you? She has nine more days, but after that..."

"Are you mad? Of course I will. I can't believe you'd think I wouldn't!"

"Well, I never thought you'd leave and never get in touch with us again either, but here we are. Ginny has had to raise that baby by herself, Harry James Potter!"

"I didn't know! Why did you, or Ginny, not tell me?"

"We didn't know where you'd gone or how to find you, you git!" Hermione was becoming agitated.

"You seem to have found me just fine now. How was that?"

"Because of the Tracking Spell, how do you think?"

Harry looked confused. "What Tracking Spell?"

"The one Professor Dumbledore placed on you at the beginning of our sixth year? That only he, Professor Snape and Professor Lupin could activate?" When he only stared at her blankly, she gasped, "You didn't know, did you?"

"No, I didn't. And it hardly matters now. How did you get Snape to do it? I know it cost you something."

Hermione sighed. Severus had left that morning after she assured him that she and Harry would come straight to Spinner's End as soon as they arrived in England so that he could complete the potion. He told her he would begin it as soon as he got home.

"Five thousand Galleons. But really, Harry, it will be worth it to cure Gwen. Don't you think?"

"Of course I do. I will pay it myself. Let's go to my place so that I can get my clothes, and we will go home." Home... He had all kinds of anxiety over that word.

Something suddenly occurred to him. "Um, Hermione? Is... Well. Is Ginny seeing anyone now?"

"No, Harry, she isn't. You?"

"Nobody serious. A few dates here and there, but..."

"Right. Same with her."

Harry tried not to feel jealous at the fact that there had been others with Ginny. With his daughter. His daughter! He had a daughter! This was going to be hard. "What about you? Did you and Ron ever get married?"

Laughing, she told him, "No, we are just friends now. Actually..." She suddenly had an image of Severus Snape between her thighs, pleasuring her. Clearing her throat, she told him, "Actually, I am not seeing anyone at the moment."

As soon as Harry had packed his clothes and left a note and another full month's rent to the landlord, he and Hermione Apparated to Spinner's End.

Hermione knocked on Severus' door and willed herself not to feel awkward. She couldn't help herself. When he opened the door, she blushed. "Professor," she said in way of greeting. "I have Harry."

"Yes, Miss Granger, I can see that. Come, Potter. After I add your tears, this potion will be finished, and you may take it to St. Mungo's and administer it to your... daughter."

Harry and Hermione followed Severus to his lab. The professor used a spell to extract three tears from Harry and quickly added them to the potion, stirring it fifteen times anticlockwise.

Severus watched Hermione out of the corner of his eye. He couldn't help but think of her begging him and then being on top of him, riding him for her pleasure. Her virginal little blushes that shouldn't have been, but were somehow, appealing to him. He sighed.

"The potion is complete." Turning to Hermione, he asked, "Do you have the rest of my Galleons?"

"I have them," Harry spat. He took them out of his pocket and threw them on the table. "There. Done."

When he'd seen the Galleons, Severus handed Harry the potion. Harry immediately took it and turned to Hermione. "Let's go," he said.

"Go on out, Harry. I will be right there. I just want to ask Professor Snape something first."

"Fine," Harry agreed, not wanting to be in the same room with that git any longer than he had to be.

When Harry left, Severus looked up and asked, "What is it, Hermione?"

It didn't get by her that he'd used her first name. "I was wondering something. Have you made decision about marrying Pansy?"

"Why do you want to know? Are you in the market for a husband?"

"Oh, for heavens sake! I was only wondering." When he said nothing, she asked, "Well? Have you?"

"No, I haven't."

She wasn't sure why that relieved her, but it did. "Okay. I have to get to St. Mungo's. I'll see you..." She had started to say later, but realized that she likely wouldn't, so she settled for, "Around. Goodbye, Severus."

Harry rushed to St. Mungo's, but when he got there, he was suddenly nervous. He had no idea what to say. He stopped at the door to his daughter's room, watching Ginny lean down and stroke her hair while she whispered what Harry was sure were encouraging words into Gwen's ear.

Hermione noticed how Harry hesitated. "Harry, go on in. I will wait out in the lobby."

"NO! I mean, it's okay. You can come on in with me..."

"Harry, I don't want to intrude. I think you need this time alone with them," she said, gesturing towards mother and daughter. "Go on now. Go on in," Hermione encouraged him as she nudged him on the back. As he entered the room, she backed away.

Hearing someone the door open, Ginny turned and was suddenly face to face with Harry Potter, the great love of her life and worst tormentor. Mixed feelings battled inside her. "Harry..."

Harry looked from Ginny, who was even more beautiful to him than she was before, to his daughter lying in the bed. She had a pale complexion and jet-black hair. He couldn't tell how long it was, but he could tell it was past her shoulders and slightly wavy. He noticed that she had none of the Weasley freckles. He wondered what color her eyes were.

"I don't know what to say to you or even where to start," Ginny said, "but I was wondering if you were able to get the potion?"

"What? Oh! Yes, I have it here. Should we call the Healer? I mean, Snape said all we have to do is gently rub her throat and slowly pour it..."

"I think we can handle it. If you could gently rub while I pour?" Ginny noticed that Harry seemed in awe of Gwen, and for that she was grateful. She didn't want him to resent their daughter, no matter how he felt...or didn't feel...about her.

Swallowing hard, Harry rubbed his nervous hands on his pants and nodded. Ginny got into the bed behind her daughter, gently lifted her head, and told Harry, "Okay, hand the potion to me. I will tilt her head back some and slowly pour while you rub. Ready?" He nodded that he was, and they began.

It took only moments, but after all of the potion was finished, Gwen slowly opened her bright green eyes. "Mummy? Are you here?"

Harry was speechless. Ginny laughed with joy as she answered, "Right here, baby. How do you feel?"

"I'm not sure. Who is that man?" To Gwen, he looked like the pictures of the man that her mummy had told her was her daddy...the famous wizard who'd killed that evil lord.

Suddenly, Ginny remembered Harry. In her joy that her baby had awoken, she'd almost forgotten he was in the room.

She looked at Harry, but answered Gwen. "Do you remember the name, Harry Potter? Those pictures I showed you?"

Gwen nodded, her eyes growing big as she looked to her father. "My dad?"

"Yes, honey. This is your dad. Gwendolyn Weasley, I would like to introduce you to your father, Harry Potter."

Harry smiled and reached out a hand, unsure of what exactly he was supposed to do. "Hello, Miss Weasley." That stung a bit. He wondered why Ginny hadn't gave the child his name. He would see about changing that as soon as possible.

Giggling from being called 'Miss Weasley,' Gwen said, "Hello, Mr. Potter. You have the same eyes as me! Nobody else in my family has this color."

Smiling, he told her, "I know. Only they are beautiful on you."

"I am going to get the Healer," Ginny said. "I want to make sure all is well and see when I can take her home. Harry? Would you stay with her for a bit?"

Looking up at Ginny, Harry told her, "Of course. I'd love to." Turning back to Gwen, he said, "I think it's time I got to know my daughter."

Gwen yawned, but fought sleep. She really wanted to talk to her daddy in case he left again. She decided to find out. "Um..." She wasn't sure what to call him. She *wanted* to call him daddy like all of her cousins called theirs, but what if it made him mad? She decided not to risk it. "Mr. Potter? Are you going away for a long time again? I want to show you to my cousins so that I can prove I do too have a daddy. Can you at least stay until I do that?"

Harry's heart broke. He wondered what all she and Ginny had been through. He had done what he needed to do at the time so that he could survive, but at what cost? "No, I plan on staying here. I am not leaving again, Gwen."

"Here?" Her eyes lit up. "With Mummy and me? In our flat?"

"Oh, well, likely not there. But I promise we will see each other every day. I want to get to know you, sweetheart."

Gwen felt funny, but in a good way, when her daddy had called her sweetheart. "I could ask Mummy, Mr. Potter. I bet she would let you stay. We have a big couch! My uncle Ron sleeps there sometimes."

Harry smiled at the thoughts of Ron. He really missed him. "Gwen, you don't have to call me Mr. Potter. You can call me..."

"Daddy? I can call you Daddy?"

This time, Harry's heart swelled. "Sure you can, if you want. I'd like that."

Just then the Healer and Ginny walked into the room. After he'd checked Gwen and told them she could go home as long as she spent the next few days resting, Ginny looked at Harry. "Hermione left and said for you to contact her in a few days after you've gotten settled. Would you like to come with us? Help me settle Gwen in?"

"I'd love to. Ginny, we have a lot to talk about. But first, let me get this out of the way. I'm sorry. For everything."

Smiling, she told him, "We'll talk when the princess here is home and tucked in. Ready?" she asked them both, and together the three of them went home.

* *

It had been three months since Harry's return. He and Ginny had worked everything out, and Hermione was glad. They were getting married at the end of the year, but Harry refused to wait that long to change Gwen's last name to Potter. Gwen herself was ecstatic.

He often complained that because Severus had helped save his baby's life, he couldn't retaliate for Dumbledore's murder. Hermione shook her head when he'd said this. He would never like Severus, and she was sure the feeling was mutual.

Suddenly, the door to *Knowledge is Power* opened up, and in walked the man of her thoughts, Severus Snape. Hermione held her breath and watched him as he walked around her store and scanned her shelves.

He took his time, lingering over certain books. When he finally reached the counter, he had three books that he wanted to buy. "Hello, Professor Snape. How have you

been?"

He only raised an eyebrow at her overly polite greeting. Nodding towards the books, he told her, "I would like to purchase these, and I was wondering if you could order one for me that you don't seem to have on the shelves."

She looked down at the books he'd laid on the counter: one for Potions, one for Charms, and one for Ancient Runes. All the subjects they'd talked about at the sports bar. "What do you need me to order for you, sir?"

Rolling his eyes, he told her, "I was wondering if you could get me that book of poems you told me about? Lord Byron?"

Sucking in a breath, she looked up at him. "What's going on? Why are you really here? Did you decide to marry Pansy? Did you come to let me know?" Her face reddened. "Well, of course not. Why would you?" Flustered, she said, "I apologize. I would be happy to order the book for you."

"No. I will not be marrying Miss Parkinson. Actually, Hermione, I would like to start courting you, if you would be so inclined." He hadn't been able to get her out of his mind and decided he would stop trying. If she was willing, he wanted to see where this could lead.

Shocked and unable to hide it, she asked, "Why? Why me?"

Smirking, he told her, "Because, you have a face I could wake up to every morning."

Smiling, she said, "I see. Okay, I'm amiable." Inside, she was quivering with excitement. She hadn't been able to get him out of her mind. Not only was the sex terrific but also the conversations were great.

"Good. How about dinner tonight? Say seven?" He didn't want to wait another day.

"Yes, I would love to."

Looking at her, he laid the Galleons for the books on the counter. He picked his purchases up and turned to leave. When he reached the door, he turned back to her. Smirking, he said, "Oh, and Hermione? I only have one bedroom furnished right now." Then he turned and walked out.

Laughing, Hermione went to the back to place the order for the book of poems. She had the feeling her life was going to be very interesting from now on.
