

And Then Rose the Phoenix

by karelia

Hermione Granger returns to the wizarding world eight years after she left.

I

Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: This story is also available in audio format on [mediafire](#)

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And Then Rose The Phoenix

My name is still known in the wizarding world, even though it has been nearly eight years since The-Boy-Who-Lived, The Chosen One, my best friend, finally defeated the world's most evil wizard.

It is time that the events be told as they happened; not shrouded by heroism as the *Daily Prophet* described it days after the final battle; not falsified by the glamourising ways of *Witch Weekly*; not in the sneering, lying manner purebloods, who could never accept that a mere Muggle-born helped defeat their lord, told it; and certainly not by someone who looks up to me for deeds I have not done.

The media circus drove me to turn my back on the wizarding world.

And it is only now that I am ready to return.

The events leading up to one of the fiercest battles in wizarding history started with the death of Hogwarts' Headmaster, Albus Dumbledore. We all thought Professor Snape had murdered the Headmaster in cold blood. I had no reason to disbelieve Harry when he described how Professor Dumbledore had pleaded with Snape. Harry's distraught voice when he re-told the events haunted me for quite some time.

But soon after I recovered from the shock of Albus Dumbledore's death, I could not help but ponder his murderer. I had known him for nearly six years, and during that time, Harry, Ron, and I had been repeatedly proven wrong about Severus Snape. Every time we had questioned his siding with the Light, we had ended up being rescued by him.

Unlike Harry, I had been absolutely certain that Snape was Dumbledore's man since I'd learned about his actions after the disaster at the Department of Mysteries in my fifth year.

And then he killed Dumbledore. I, like everyone else, was convinced he had conned the Headmaster...brilliant, gifted, and clever wizard Snape is—that he had always been siding with Voldemort.

What made me question Snape's true loyalties again was the fact that he could easily have grabbed Harry during the chase that followed the Headmaster's death to present him to Voldemort. Even Harry admitted as much after plenty of prodding on my part.

Of course, I was entirely on my own with my opinion that there might be more to Snape than met the eye. Harry might have admitted that Snape could have single-handedly offered him to Voldemort only to immediately dismiss the lack of action as a mere political move rather than seeing a potentially good side in Snape. I tried to talk to Minerva about it, but she was so engulfed in her grief that she forbade me to mention Snape's name in her presence. Even talking to Professor Flitwick, whom I had always considered one of the most reasonable and level-headed professors, led nowhere. He was busy sulking over the fact that Snape had stunned him that fateful night.

My emotions during the summer holidays following my sixth year were running rampant. I was not happy thinking incessantly about Snape's motives. But I could not help it. I withdrew from Harry and Ron as I tired of their constant Snape-bashing. It was impossible for me to share my thoughts with either of my best friends. Harry had a six-year history of hating Snape, and he certainly would not listen to my reasoning; therefore, Ron would not, either. The teachers I tried to speak to had been no help, and Order members were no different.

Yet, I continued to ponder Snape. Dumbledore had been known as the most powerful wizard and certainly one of the most intelligent. He had always trusted Severus Snape. I simply could not fathom that Albus Dumbledore had gone wrong with the trust he had put in Snape.

The Potions master was a gifted wizard and a powerful Legilimens, but even those traits were not sufficient to fool someone like Dumbledore for so long. I knew Dumbledore was not omniscient, I knew he'd made mistakes. But he had known Snape as a child, he'd seen him grow up, and I highly doubted he'd been fool enough to simply take Snape's word when he had approached the Headmaster after his stunt with Voldemort.

Shortly before the end of the summer holidays, a thought occurred to me, which would drastically change the direction of my future. The thought was logical, really, no matter how absurd it sounded.

What if Dumbledore had arranged his own death? If he had trusted Snape, and I never doubted that, and if Snape had been true about his loyalties, then Dumbledore would have left some proof, somewhere, that Snape was not a cold-blooded murderer. At first, this idea intrigued me. Then it taunted me. Then it occupied me. Eventually, it tormented me until I reached the point where I succumbed to my curiosity. I had to find out.

When Harry, Ron, and I received notification that Hogwarts was to remain open to all students who wished to continue their education, I decided to return for my final year—not so much to sit my NEWTs, but I saw my chance to find out whether or not Snape was Dumbledore's man.

Harry and Ron weren't particularly happy with me at first, but relented when I pointed out that I would be of more use to them doing what I did best: finding information in books. I trusted the boys' abilities to go out and find the remaining Horcruxes by themselves, but I'd be available to research anything they might need in their quest if I returned to Hogwarts.

Hogwarts was different, even worse than the despondent atmosphere that was prevalent after the Headmaster's death at the end of my sixth year.

Compared to the beginning of my seventh year, the end of the previous school year had been positively blithe.

Many students, especially the younger ones, did not return, and, for the first time in history, there was a healthy balance of Muggle-borns to the greater number of wizard-borns at the school.

School subjects became less important as I went on a quest to learn everything I could about the magical possibilities of leaving behind specific knowledge before dying. This was entirely new territory for me; I was only familiar with Muggles leaving a will which determined to whom their belongings went after passing on, but I'd never heard of anyone leaving behind specific information in a will. Wizarding families, however, tended to do exactly that. Wizards and witches were more likely to leave behind knowledge of lost spells or charms to their offspring rather than material values. Many recorded cases also involved memory vials placed in a person's Gringotts vault. Some records dealt with a proof of guilt or innocence by using an established Legilimens, similar to Muggle notaries. The Legilimens would look into the mind of the person in question, then record their findings on parchment, which was typically stored in a Gringotts vault or left with someone trusted. It occurred to me that Professor Dumbledore might have used his Pensieve to leave proof of Snape's lack of guilt behind, so I learned all I could about Pensieves. By the time the winter holidays arrived, I'd managed to build one of my own.

I realised quite early in the year that I was unlikely to have a chance to gain entry into the late Headmaster's Pensieve. McGonagall had cooled considerably towards me ever since I had dared to question Snape's guilt.

The Restricted Section of the library became my favourite place. An obscure, ancient text described a Pensieve charmed for the purpose of extracting memories from other Pensieves in the vicinity that might provide me with the truth about Snape. The charms required involved intricate and extensive wand movements as well as Latin incantations, all far beyond my seven-year Hogwarts studies.

At first, I was at a complete loss as to what to do. If I asked Professor Flitwick, he would want to know the reasons, and if I told him, he would refuse, I had no doubt. I tried to spin a lie, but I was unable to come up with any feasible reason that might convince him. That blasted Gryffindor compulsion to tell the truth! I tried so hard to teach myself these charms—to no avail. By February, I felt devastated. I had come so close to a solution, and yet, I had failed.

It was ironic that everything changed on Valentine's Day. I'd always disliked this day, and I knew Snape hated it. But it was the fourteenth of February when I found a Patronus waiting for me in my dormitory after I returned from dinner that night.

A Patronus in the shape of a phoenix.

The Patronus waited until I recovered from the surprise before it spoke. It was eerie, hearing Snape's voice come from a phoenix which was barely more than a figment of imagination.

Snape asked me for help. Me, of all people. That surprised me almost as much as finding his Patronus in my room.

He asked me to build the Pensieve I had already built. He also gave me the name and address of a retired Charms expert, one who would teach me the charms I needed to extract relevant memories from other Pensieves.

The Patronus then asked me to contact Snape by sending my own Patronus and dissolved.

Looking back now, it was the first agreeable Valentine's Day of my life: spending the evening by myself, pondering Snape's Patronus and its message, wondering if I should indeed trust him, and finally sneaking out to the library to see what I could find out about Alerio Alvah, the Charms expert Snape's Patronus had referred to.

When I was satisfied that Alerio Alvah was on the side of Light...he had spent many years as a highly respected member of the Wizengamot and was considered one of the foremost Charms experts in Europe...I conjured my other Patronus and sent a message to him.

I received a note, delivered by an eagle to my room, the following morning. *I suggest we meet at the Three Broomsticks. Let me know the day of the next Hogsmeade weekend by return*, the note read. The eagle waited for me until I had written the date on a parchment; then it took off.

The Pensieve ready, I continued studying the charms I would need. Even though I knew I could not do it on my own, there was no harm studying...it would hopefully speed up my project since it was still more than two weeks before my first meeting with the Charms expert.

In the meantime, I received word from Harry and Ron. Assuming that Nagini was one of the Horcruxes, they had found all but one. I still like to think their success was, at least partly, due to my extensive research, but it mattered not. What mattered was putting an end to Voldemort's evil reign.

Thankfully, the next Hogsmeade weekend went ahead despite the usual rumours of threatening Death Eater attacks. The village swarmed with Aurors. The atmosphere

was stifling, and I was grateful there was no shopping I needed to do. Owl order business was thriving due to the constant threat of attacks and kidnappings, and I made as much use of the option as the next person.

I headed straight for the Three Broomsticks and had no trouble recognising the ancient, white-haired wizard known as Mr Alvah. I knew from the information I found about him in the school library that he was close in age to the late Headmaster and looked no less flamboyant in his bright green silk robes, probably the same ones he wore in the picture I had seen of him in a Charms journal. His pose amused me...he sat leaning deep into the chair reading the latest issue of *Charms Today*, and his feet were resting on top of the table next to a giant mug of butterbeer.

During our first conversation, I learned that Alerio had not only known Snape since childhood but he had also been close to Professor Dumbledore.

By the time we parted company, I knew Alerio believed in Snape's integrity. He had also given me the titles of the Advanced Charms books he thought would help me gain the knowledge I needed to charm the Pensieve.

Over the next few months, we kept regular contact, and I learned all I could about Charms. We met at the Three Broomsticks every Hogsmeade weekend so I could practise the relevant charms under Alerio's supervision. On these occasions, I also learned several *Ignoro* spells, which came in handy on several later occasions as teachers generally only looked for the common ones we learned during Charms lessons at Hogwarts. Knowing these spells, I was able to study what I wanted, right under a teacher's eyes.

Snape's Patronus visited me occasionally, carrying warnings of impending attacks on wizarding families and sometimes Muggles with wizarding offspring. When I received such a warning for the first time, I panicked. I couldn't go to McGonagall for fear that she might work out the source of my knowledge. Other Order members might not believe me, so I settled on sending my Patronus to Harry and urged him to inform the Aurors.

Then, all I could do was wait and hope not only that Harry trusted me sufficiently to act upon my instructions but also that he could convince the Aurors to act accordingly.

Finally, just when I thought I would burst from the sheer tension of not knowing whether the wizards and witches in danger had been saved, I received a message from Harry's Patronus. *Mission accomplished, family hidden with the Fidelius* Quite a few lives were saved with the same method, but it was this first warning from Snape which led me to drop most of my doubts about Professor Dumbledore's killer.

Then, all of a sudden, events started to happen in quick succession. On the eve of my first NEWT exam, Snape's phoenix Patronus was waiting in my room when I returned from dinner. It instructed me to go to the gates of the Hogwarts grounds immediately.

I sneaked out unseen, grateful for the knowledge I had acquired over six years roaming the castle at odd hours with Harry and Ron.

Snape met me at the gates. Before I stepped through, I asked him to convince me that it was him. His reply, a long-suffering sigh followed by, "Although I have no doubt you wanted to curse Mr Malfoy when he hexed you in your fourth year, your teeth most certainly look better now," almost made me giggle.

It was rather dangerous for him to be there, I thought, but my mind blanked completely when he told me the reason he'd asked me to meet him at such short notice.

Voldemort had planned an attack on my parents for that night. Snape not only put his life in danger by informing me...danger coming from both Death Eaters and any Aurors who might have been patrolling Hogsmeade...but he also had prepared a safe house for my parents and a plan to move them there. All I had to do was go and inform them of the planned attack and Apparate them to Snape's safe house, where he'd be waiting.

I sat my Transfiguration NEWT exam, very tired, but relieved with the knowledge that my parents were safe. The rescue mission probably dampened my NEWT result, but by that time, exams held little meaning for me. I was merely relieved it was over, and I hurried to my room to catch up with some much needed sleep.

Snape's Patronus woke me up a few hours later, telling me the Dark Lord had received information that most of the Horcruxes had been destroyed. He was now plotting an attack on Hogwarts.

The message made me forget how little sleep I'd had and made me realise how little time I had left to do what I had vowed to do: have proof of Snape's innocence ready in time for the inevitable battle. Even if I had had any doubt left as to Snape's loyalties, his actions the previous night spoke volumes of his recitude, and proving it was no longer a matter of simple compassion for saving someone a jail sentence. It had become my personal crusade.

The Pensieve was nearly ready to extract memories from other Pensieves in the vicinity. Only a few more charms needed to be applied, and now was the time to finish the project. The lengthy *Solum Veritas* charm was the most difficult to perform as the incantation had to be spoken with a certain rhythm, and it took me a while to pronounce the words correctly. It was the most important charm as it alone ensured that only true memories entered the Pensieve.

By breakfast the following morning, the Pensieve held sufficient information to exonerate Snape.

Building the Pensieve had been hard work. Charming it to extract true memories from other Pensieves was yet harder. But nothing quite prepared me for what I saw when I stepped into the Pensieve to watch the evidence. The first scene must have taken place towards the end of my fifth year; Professor Dumbledore offered the Defense Against the Dark Arts position to Snape, and he refused outright. I was surprised at that, remembering that every student seemed to know how much he had been after that position for years. However, the late Headmaster used his persuasion skills, and Snape eventually gave in.

The next scenes were verbal fights between Snape and Dumbledore, with Dumbledore always winning the argument, from convincing the Defense professor to not act against Draco Malfoy, despite the young Slytherin taking liberties that no Gryffindor would ever get away with, to the request to ignore Harry's temper, to the demand to kill.

The last two scenes in the Pensieve were heart-breaking. Dumbledore convinced Snape to kill him should Draco Malfoy fail the task, which the Headmaster fully expected. His argument of age and how he had lived a fulfilling life did not help me...I was reduced to a sobbing mess by the end of watching the scene. The next one unfolded, showing Alerio, more sombre than I'd ever seen him, with his wand drawn, witnessing an Unbreakable Vow Dumbledore had forced Snape to take. Snape would either kill Dumbledore if Draco failed to kill him, or he would die himself. Dumbledore stressed how important it was for Snape to continue to live, for otherwise Tom Riddle may well win the war.

As I watched the events in the Pensieve, my perception of Snape changed drastically. He turned from the intelligent but sarcastic teacher, who was always in a foul mood, to a man who valued the side of the Light to the extent that he was willing to do *anything* to save it. He'd displayed a level of integrity I had never witnessed in anyone and a cunning that made Salazar Slytherin look pale in comparison.

Seeing the memories also answered a question I had asked myself many times since Snape's Patronus had appeared on Valentine's day...why me?

Because despite Snape's constant baiting in and outside the classroom, he considered me the brightest mind at Hogwarts and considerably more open-minded than any Order member save Lupin. To say that revelation surprised me is a gross understatement.

My NEWT exam that morning was Charms. I was grateful because after all the studying I'd done on Advanced Charms, the exam was child's play, even though I had to fight sleep.

After the exam, I sent my Patronus to Snape, informing him that the Pensieve project was complete. Then I finally succumbed to the need for sleep until the alarm woke me the following morning.

Snape's Patronus was waiting for me. My next task was to inform Lupin of not only the Pensieve but also of the impending attack on Hogwarts. The Patronus also promised to let me know anything of importance as and when such information became available.

I sat my Potions NEWT that morning, after I'd run to the Owlery to send a note to Remus.

I realised how true Snape's perception of Remus was when I entered the Great Hall to be greeted by the last living Marauder. He had delivered a letter to McGonagall and then waited for me in the Great Hall under the pretext of having a message for me from Harry and Ron. I applied some of the Ignoro charms I had learned from Alerio, and we sneaked out to the Shrieking Shack so we could talk without anyone overhearing us.

I told Remus everything: my activities since the start of the school year, Snape's Patronus turning up, his warnings that had led to saving several lives, the Pensieve with the evidence, and the impending attack on Hogwarts. Remus understood why I could not tell Minerva; the Headmistress did not seem to be herself at times, and even Order members questioned her ability as a leader. He promised to take care of Snape's warning, taking a weight off my shoulders.

When I entered the Great Hall again, this time for dinner, Harry and Ron were waiting for me. Both had been asked to come to Hogwarts because Voldemort was about to attack, they told me. Ron remarked what good timing it was as they'd just destroyed the second-to-last Horcrux. Now, only Nagini carried a small piece of Voldemort's soul.

I returned to my room late that night, having enjoyed the company of my two best friends for the first time in many months.

Snape's Patronus was waiting, and there was a rather large package on my desk. I eyed it warily...it might have been a Portkey, left there with ill intentions. When I started checking it for Dark magic, every spell I used proved my suspicion. The amount of Darkness emitting from the package could have led me to believe the Dark Lord himself was wrapped inside of it.

As I was pondering my next step, the phoenix started to speak.

The package contained the shrunken corpse of Nagini. The last fragment of Voldemort's soul lay on my desk.

* * *

I set out to find Harry and informed him of Nagini's death, still unwilling to disclose my source. Thankfully, trust had never been an issue between us, and he agreed to inform the Order of the latest events.

Voldemort and his Death Eaters, in typical cowardly manner, surrounded Hogwarts in the early morning hours. Had we not been forewarned, most students would have walked right to their deaths. There were no lessons that day to give students a break from the exams, and with the summery weather, most would have headed to the lake or the Quidditch pitch right after breakfast.

Instead, some Aurors, Order members, and older students sneaked out into the grounds and took the Death Eaters by surprise, giving our side an advantage.

Ron and I had taken down several Death Eaters when Bellatrix Lestrange put a stop to our success. Duelling with her was hard work, and more than once I doubted whether we'd see the next minute alive. Suddenly, I sensed Snape's presence. As if by some miracle, Ron comprehended my first attempt at conveying a message via Legilimency, telling him not to attack Snape.

The ex-professor had chosen the perfect timing for his arrival. Bellatrix shrieked at him to kill us, but instead, he silently *Avada Kedavra'd* her into Nirvana.

And then, the unbelievable happened.

Minerva McGonagall, whom all of us had always, unanimously perceived as the Headmaster's right hand, his confidante in all matters magical, the person whom we thought had mourned the loss of Dumbledore more than anyone, exposed herself. She staggered towards Snape who was standing near Ron and me, bent over the body of the Death Eater he had just liberated the soul of, and uttered a cackle that rapidly grew into a maniacal, hysterical laughter. When she finally calmed down, she turned to me and said, "Thanks, Mudblood."

I was too shocked to hear her spit such a foul word to reply, and so was Ron.

When Snape smirked and told her not to give credit where it wasn't due, I spent a most terrifying moment doubting his loyalties. Had he fooled me? Had he fooled the Pensieve?

Snape then proceeded to cast a Binding Spell on the Headmistress and told her the show was over. Mentioning Minerva had seen Bellatrix as her greatest competition, he threw an Invisibility Cloak at me, handed me a vial with a greyish liquid and instructed me to approach Voldemort from behind, throw the vial at him, and then help Harry. Snape had said Voldemort's name without flinching, I noticed in a daze.

I did as bid, ignoring Ron's pleas not to trust the *murderer*.

When I reached the core of the fighting, I realised Harry could not go on for much longer. He looked completely exhausted, and he was injured, blood trickling down his face from a slicing hex.

I threw the vial at Voldemort and rushed to Harry's side, still under the Invisibility Cloak.

Reaching Harry took no more than mere seconds, but when I did, Voldemort was already screaming in agony, rapidly losing control over his body. Whatever that potion Snape had given me was, it did good work. I threw off the cloak and told Harry to ready himself to kill the megalomaniac.

As I tried to concentrate in order to cast the Killing Curse on Voldemort together with Harry, I looked up for a moment...and locked eyes with Snape.

He nodded, almost imperceptibly, and suddenly, I knew we could rid the world of the evil wizard who had caused so much death and destruction. I motioned for Harry to cast the Curse, and together, we said the words. Before we had even completed the incantation, a green flash struck Voldemort, and he collapsed on the ground, just as the green from Harry's and my Curse reached him, wiping out any possibly remaining life force.

Voldemort was dead. For one moment, we looked at each other, totally elated, until someone swore, and then there was a thud of something heavy being thrown on the ground.

I turned, only to find myself at wand point. McGonagall had managed to Unbind herself, and by the look of it, she'd brought down both Snape and Ron before making her way towards Harry and me.

She looked like a hag gone crazy, and her shrieking voice had more resemblance to Voldemort's in his last minutes than the one I'd known for nearly seven years.

As she stood there with her wand pointing at me, calling me Mudblood, lamenting about the death of her one true master at Harry's and my hands, and how she was going to take revenge, I thought yet again my life was about to end. I knew Snape and Ron were lying motionless on the ground, Harry was as shell-shocked about the Headmistress as I was, and others were still busy fighting remaining Death Eaters, completely oblivious to McGonagall holding me at wand point.

Suddenly, she collapsed. Luna Lovegood and Neville Longbottom had fired several hexes at her back and were now walking almost leisurely towards us.

Luna, serene and unconcerned as always, told me conversationally to grab hold of Snape and disappear with him before any Aurors turned up to arrest him.

I didn't even know if Snape or Ron were alive, but I heeded Luna's advice. After all my efforts to prove that Snape was not a cold-blooded murderer, I really didn't want to see him shipped off to Azkaban, especially not straight from the battlefield, especially not when he was the one to ensure Voldemort's death.

After I checked Ron and realised he was only Stunned, I dealt with Snape. Of course, disappearing with an unconscious, fully grown man, no matter how skinny, from the grounds of Hogwarts was easier said than done. He was too heavy for me to lift, and I did not dare use any spells as I had no idea what injuries he had sustained. I was on the verge of giving up hope, vowing to myself that I'd run the Ministry down if that was what it would take to keep him out of Azkaban.

Aurors were appearing everywhere now, rounding up Death Eaters, Portkeying injured students and Order members to St Mungo's, and taking first statements from those with no injuries.

Some Aurors had already reached Harry, Luna, and Neville, and I prayed fervently that they'd take their time. They would reach Snape, Ron, and me next. I saw, almost in a daze, one Auror slowly move towards me.

Suddenly, I felt the air around me vibrate. Then, a phoenix appeared out of nowhere to land on Snape. I recognised Fawkes and nearly wept with relief...Snape would be safe. Fawkes pointed his head from me to Snape and let out a doleful sound. I grabbed Snape's hands and Fawkes took off with us just as the first Auror arrived.

I held onto Snape's hands for dear life, with no idea as to the method of a phoenix's travel. I could not see anything; not that it was dark, but more like how I'd imagine what it feels like being inside the centre of a tornado, except that there was no whirling sensation.

Before I had time to worry about impending nausea, Fawkes landed us gently inside a building.

Still holding on to Snape's hands, I looked around and realised we had landed in the living room of a cottage. There was a fireplace with some dying embers, a number of windows providing ample light, and quite a few bookshelves filled to the point of splitting. As my eyes wandered from the shelves to the only door in the room, it burst open and in came my parents.

* * *

For the first few days, I split my time between holding vigil over Severus, seeing Harry, visiting Ron at St Mungo's, answering Aurors' incessant questions about the events of the battle, and talking to Luna and Neville, who kept all newspaper and magazine articles which mentioned me.

Reading those articles made me nauseous. Each one mentioned Harry fighting Voldemort and my grand deed of helping Harry to defeat the evil wizard. There was absolutely no mention of Snape, who had provided me with the Invisibility Cloak and who had made the potion, which had weakened Voldemort so that we could kill him. There was no mention of McGonagall's true loyalties.

The Aurors I spoke to changed the subject as soon as I mentioned McGonagall. One of them assured me that she was in Azkaban awaiting trial, but he did not sound convincing as to the outcome. After all, she had been known as Dumbledore's right hand, and the wizarding world was somewhat slow and stubborn when it came to accepting a change of loyalties. Just like most could not fathom Severus being on the side of Light, they could not believe McGonagall as being the Dark Lord's One True Servant.

Six months later, Severus had finally recovered from McGonagall's curse. My parents, who had been a tremendous help with his recovery, returned home. I stayed, for I could not imagine a life without him. My awe of him, his strength, his fierce loyalty to the Light no matter what the consequences to himself had evolved into affection, if not love.

My interest in the rest of the wizarding world was waning fast. Harry had given in to Scrimgeour's demands and offers and became the Ministry's poster boy soon after he'd called me a traitor when I finally told him how I was able to tip him off so often in the last months of the war, completely ignoring the fact that without Severus' help, he would not have been able to kill Voldemort.

Ron married Lavender after an exceptionally short courting time. The reason for the hurried wedding became evident six months later in the shape of a new set of Weasley twins.

McGonagall was acquitted less than a year after the battle, for the Wizengamot simply could not fathom the idea of her being Voldemort's most faithful servant and excused her mutterings about revenge on Snape, resurrecting the Lord, putting the Mudblood under the Imperius as age-related dementia. When Alerio came by to inform us of the verdict, he was understandably furious, although Severus pointed out how painful it must have been for McGonagall to be thought of being afflicted with a disease typical for Muggles.

Alerio and I ensured that Severus stayed in hiding until a trial would prove him innocent of murder. We knew the Ministry was keen on sending him to Azkaban, and we wouldn't put it past them to conveniently forget about setting a trial, let alone ensuring it to be a fair one.

Severus and I had almost resigned ourselves to spending the rest of our lives in hiding. He often prodded me to visit my former friends at least occasionally, but the only people I ever wanted to see were Luna and Neville. They were happy and secure in their relationship and, unlike Lavender, did not see me as a threat. Alerio visited us frequently, even though he was getting on in age.

When he passed on, a couple of years ago, both Severus and I mourned him deeply. We were deeply touched to learn that Alerio had bequeathed his fortune to us and had prepared a letter addressed to the Wizengamot, exonerating Severus furthermore by recalling several conversations he'd had with Albus Dumbledore, one in which he had agreed to the late Headmaster's request to do everything in his power to keep Severus out of Azkaban.

We started to hope again for a positive outcome, but it was not until McGonagall's death last year that the Wizengamot finally decided to release enough evidence to declare Severus free of all guilt. She had recorded all memories relevant to her relationship with Voldemort in her Pensieve, and not only did she leave sufficient proof to be fully guilty of being the madman's right hand but she had also left ample evidence of her own efforts to convince Voldemort that Severus was Dumbledore's man.

We no longer need to hide, but we are happy with each other, and neither of us is concerned whether the wizarding world welcomes us or shuns us as long as we have each other.

Finis

A/N:

This was written for the Paintbrush and Quill Society at Phoenix Rising. The artwork for the story has been created by the talented Hill and can be viewed here: http://pics.livejournal.com/lady_karelia/gallery/00017gr8

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