

Home

by ravine

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Insert standard disclaimer here.

This is my first fanfic submission - Please be honest but gentle! Special thanks to snapemylove for helping whip it into shape.

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Phineas Nigellus Black cleared his throat as he re-entered his portrait in the Head's office. Albus Dumbledore broke his silent contemplation of the painted bowl of lemon drops in his frame and raised an inquiring eyebrow.

Phineas shrugged. "That child has injured himself quite thoroughly this time."

Dumbledore sighed heavily. "My foolish, foolish boy." He gestured the other Headmaster to join him in his frame for a sweet. "He has finally started to learn."

In the semi-darkness of Grimmauld Place, Hermione Granger sat vigil. One of the couches was transfigured into a soft bed that conformed exactly to the still figure upon it. She kept a damp flannel in hand. A bowl of cool water sat next to her, its contents red-tinged.

When she dabbed at his face again, his hand shot up to catch hers. His grip was both surprising and surprisingly strong.

"Shhhh," she soothed, clasping her free hand over his and giving a gentle squeeze. "You're safe, among friends. It's all right."

"My wand?" he whispered.

"What's left is shattered."

"Good." The smirk was in his voice, even if the muscles of his face could not quite form it.

"Bloody foolish, interrupting the *Priori Incantatem* by jamming your wand into his temple," she said.

"It worked?"

Hermione paused. "We don't know. After you skewered him, Harry managed to throw a killing curse just before some large charge of magic erupted. Voldemort is dead, and his soul was drawn off to goodness only knows where. Harry's not conscious, but otherwise appears uninjured." She freed her hands and fussed with the flannel.

"Good," he repeated.

"You absorbed one hell of a backlash." He opened his eyes to meet her concerned gaze. "All that magic. We... We can't heal the damage. I've tried everything I know. Madame Pomfrey, Professor McGonagall, that Healer from St. Mungo's. We tried every spell we can think of, every remedy we can find. Even Tonks."

He croaked an interruption, "You *didn't* allow."

"No gods! But she did have a few good ideas that we tried. Nothing seems to be working." She tossed the flannel into the bowl, frustrated, and rattled off his symptoms. "You have been unconscious more often than not for days. You randomly seep blood from wounds we can't find, and no bandage or healing spell will stop it. Your pulse runs too high, then too low, randomly. You convulse for eleven seconds every."

"Hush, girl." It was his turn to quiet her. "You can't heal me."

Dumbledore absently tossed a lemon drop toward the top of his frame, catching it before it reached the bottom edge. "I expect I shall enjoy his company on the next great adventure," he said to no one in particular. "Still, I had rather hoped she..."

The office door swept open, and the Headmistress rushed into the room. "Minerva, so glad to see you well."

She hurried to one of her bookshelves and began skimming titles. "Albus," she acknowledged with a flourish of her hand. "And the rest of you too." The Headmistress fetched a stool to view the higher shelves.

"Can I help you find something?" Dumbledore asked. She paused to consider what she might say.

"I'm afraid I don't quite know what I'm after," she said. "It's Severus."

Dumbledore smiled sadly. "I know, my dear. Phineas checked up on the boy for me. I'm afraid there's nothing here to help you." Minerva waited for him to continue. "Would you take me to Grimmauld Place?"

Hermione went quite still. She stared at Severus Snape, not quite ready to believe what she was hearing. "But... But... What did you do?"

Blood began to seep from his forehead, and Severus closed his eyes again. Hermione grabbed the flannel and wrung it quickly, then wiped at the blood and held the cloth in place until the bleeding seemed to finally stop.

"It's crude magic. Ancient." He barked a short laugh. "Beautiful, and it cannot be countered."

"You must have missed some information. Tell me what it was. I'll go to the library."

"You cannot research this. It's too old, found only in oral traditions."

She refused to give in. "Which culture? I'm sure I can find something."

"No, you won't." Severus managed a small smile at her stubborn demand. "According to the songs, the magic pulls the soul home."

"Voldemort's soul is at the Riddle manor?" she asked, incredulous.

"You misunderstand. The soul is drawn to the soul's home, to the souls that complete it."

"I still don't understand."

"Where is your home?"

She cocked her head, not quite following. "Oxfordshire. And Hogwarts."

"Why?"

"My family is there, of course, and my friends are at Hogwarts. And Crooks, and y... Oh. I see. Home: Those I love, who love me."

His eyes sparked briefly with pride. "Bits of Voldemort's soul have already been destroyed. He had no 'home,' no family or friends. He could not be completed, so the magic simply extinguished him."

"So he is dead?" Severus nodded. "What about the Horcruxes? The one we hadn't managed to nullify before the attack, and the one we haven't found?"

"The magic drew his soul toward completion. It needed all the pieces, so it pulled them from wherever they might reside."

Hermione grinned. "Then he is truly vanquished?"

"Completely. No existence in any dimension of space or time, save memory. When Harry awakens, you can examine the scar and confirm that the Horcruxes are empty."

Hermione leaped to her feet. "I have to get the others!"

Severus began to convulse, and she rushed back to his side. One, two... Fourteen seconds this time. As his body stilled, she wiped his face and hands with the flannel.

"But why are you..."

Gasping a bit for breath, Severus said, "The magic bound our fates. It's drawing me 'home' too. The Dark Lord got by a bit more quickly, thanks to the dead body. Mine is just catching up."

Hermione held one of his hands between hers. "But you have a 'home.'" He nodded.

"My 'home' is with Albus Dumbledore. And with Lily Evans. I loved her once, you know."

Hermione hadn't known that, but neither did she care. "So you just die?"

"I begin the next great adventure," he corrected. Tears began to run down her cheek. "Easy now. I no longer regret the life I chose. Don't do so on my behalf. I will go to a place I belong."

Her voice barely above a murmur, she asked, "But what about me?"

Minerva McGonagall hurried awkwardly into Grimmauld Place, carrying a large parcel containing the portrait of Albus Dumbledore. "Honestly," she muttered. "Apparating with a portrait. 'Easy as a slice of rhubarb pie,' indeed!" She knocked softly on the door of Severus' sickroom, entering when she received no answer.

She took less than a moment to digest Hermione's tears and Severus' convulsing body. "Miss Granger! Is he all right?"

"He's alive," Hermione said, at the same time shaking her head that no, Severus was not all right.

Minerva hastily unwrapped the portrait. "I've brought a visitor." She set the portrait up next to the bed as Severus stilled. She patted his hand and brushed his hair out of his face. "I will be just outside, dear."

The portrait took a long look at Severus. "Hello, Severus."

"It's done, then?" Severus asked.

Dumbledore chuckled. "No, I'm afraid you don't get off quite that easily."

Severus reopened his eyes. "Oh."

"Good to see you too, you foolish boy." Dumbledore regarded him sternly.

"It worked, sir. The 'power the Dark Lord knows not' and Potter threw the killing curse and "

"And you sacrificed yourself for right. You called on the indefeasible magic of love, and still you do not understand how to claim that power for yourself."

Severus appeared confused. "Sir?"

"Where is your home, Severus?" Dumbledore's voice gentled.

"You, sir. Your soul is my soul's home. And Lily, she too is home."

"And?"

Severus convulsed again. Hermione readied the flannel with one hand and wiped at her tears with the other. "The convulsions are longer and closer together, Professor Dumbledore, and his heartbeat is more erratic. I don't know how much more..."

The portrait smiled kindly. "You have done well to care for him."

"Thank you, sir."

"I love him dearly, also. Does he remember that you do?" Hermione's chin wobbled again. The portrait winked at her. "Truthfully, I do not wish him to join me just yet."

"Neither do I, Professor."

Suddenly, Severus bolted upright. Stiff-bodied and with a panicked expression, he looked from Dumbledore to Hermione and back. He gasped for breath, drawing only a little air.

"My boy, it's all right. You do have a choice, you know."

"Severus!"

Severus' gaze locked on Hermione. She did not speak, nor did she try to hide her tears. He drew a deeper breath, and his body relaxed back into the bed. She grasped his hand tightly.

"I'm..."

"Shhhh," she whispered. "You are home."