

And So It Comes To This

by odogoddess

It's been eight years since Voldemort's fall, and Snape just wants to be left alone in his misery at Azkaban, but his new legal counsel has made it her mission to get him out of there. She will stop at nothing to see him restored to Wizarding society. Will Hermione manage? Or are the odds stacked against them both?

1 - Severus's Request

Chapter 1 of 3

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Additional Warnings: UST, solo sex, voyeurism, sex whilst restrained

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Azkaban, 2006

The boy fell, and with him their hopes.

Cold fear lanced through him along with the howling sleet, and he fought to stay upright in the gale, cursing his voluminous robes, then himself for not thinking. His potion still worked, and he did not need the robes.

He cast them off and felt the rain drench him instantly. No time for a repelling charm, he thought. No time for anything really. The boy had fallen and it behoved him to get the boy up. The boy could not be dead. The boy was resolution, restitution, retribution. The boy was salvation and humiliation. The living boy would be absolution.

Snape persevered through the storm, only idly aware of the flashes of light from the hexing and cursing from both sides. There were none flung his way, and this alone told him his potion continued to work. It would work for another day. It would work long enough.

He made it to the boy's side even as his master did. Voldemort raised his wand, and Snape did not move. He was between the two, and he would accept the curse... after he revived the boy, who was clearly having trouble breathing.

Resuscitare might or might not work non-verbally, but there was no time, and he had an appointment to keep. Snape raised his wand even as Voldemort began to recite the curse... and a stray branch brought his wand down to hit his own thigh even as he shouted out "Resuscitare!" and the killing curse struck him right between the shoulders.

Snape convulsed, wheezing, gasping for air and woke coughing.

Eight years after the events and the dream was still as sharp as bramble thorns, but instead of tearing at his palms, it tore at his mind.

He ached in the cold of his cell and imagined another blanket. He did not wish for one, because it was pointless, but with his mind he fashioned one of deep, heavy wool. It was wonderfully warm, and it smelt lemony, the clean scent he associated with kitchens and the washerwomen he knew growing up.

The clang of the cell door jolted him, and he frowned at the sight of his assigned legal counsel.

She entered and stood to the side of the doorway, allowing the guards to pass by her. He struggled to free himself of his thin, threadbare blanket before they roused him and tore the material. He stood, and they held him at wand point as he stripped, shivering, looking only at the floor.

He would not look at her whilst one of the guards roughly ran ungentle fingers through his hair, peered in his ears, his nose, down his throat. He closed his eyes when those fingers grasped his cock and lifted it, then his bollocks.

Without prompting, he turned and bent forward, and he heard a muttered protection charm and felt those fingers thrust into his anus, pressing, searching, and prodding his prostate painfully before withdrawing. His jaw remained clenched, but he made himself straighten up again, refusing to show any pain, any emotion whatsoever as the guards shackled his ankles, then asked her if he'd need his hands.

She must have shaken her head, because they placed the neck shackle over his head, cinched it, then crossed his wrists in the back and cuffed them together, then slid the chain through his neck shackle. The shackles and cuffs were magic-enhanced so he did not bother to assess them; they would only tighten if he did so, and the guards at Azkaban did not concern themselves with such trivial things as a prisoner's circulation. Without the Dementors, there was plenty of work for the 'wicked wizard watchers' as the press likened Azkaban's heavily trained guards.

Satisfied with his harmlessness, they put a small stool down for his visitor's use and left. Severus drew in a shaky breath, turning to sit atop his rumpled blanket, still naked, steeped in cold misery. He ignored her. She hadn't visited for over four months, and he wondered now why she had returned even as he resented her presence at his humiliation.

Prisoners had no rights. The only right he had once he'd been stripped and tattooed was when they asked if he wanted to receive visitors. If he said yes, he could not change his mind further on, nor could he deny anyone wishing to see him. If he said no, the only visitors he would get, the only people who would be allowed access to him, would be Ministry officials, healers and his legal counsel. Considering the humiliating process prisoners were put through for a visit, he'd said no.

Snape knew the procedure by heart now and as this was the eighth time he'd seen her since she took over as his legal counsel, he assumed she'd become used to it, also.

He was itchy now, but at least the itch distracted him from the shame of the procedure. He said nothing about it, though, wincing as he recalled the first time she'd visited and he'd evinced discomfort to her gentle inquiry as to his health.

She'd called the guard who had been overzealous with *Scourgifying* him (the procedure prior to examination) and had caused severe irritation to his eyes and penis. She had insisted on a healer and then stayed to ensure he got treated properly.

He'd been examined, and it had been diagnosed as lice. He'd been shaven before her and drops had been placed in his eyes. Then ointment had been carefully applied to his sore genitals, and he'd been left on the cot before her, naked and bald with a painful erection.

As soon as the healer had left his cell, he'd curled up as much as the shackles allowed, shaking, and told her to leave. Thinking he was crying, Hermione had touched his shoulder in a comforting way, and he'd shuddered hard, fighting but failing to keep from an orgasm, helplessly ejaculating all over himself and the cot.

Eight years he'd been alone, and friend or lover in longer still had not touched him. With the depressing, unhygienic environs and lack of any form of stimulus, he'd long since stopped touching himself, so even the rough manhandling had made him react, far more her soft, gentle hands.

He still got a raging erection at the memory of that, and he could not hide such a thing from her, so he pushed the memory away now and waited, remembering instead the visits that followed.

He had not spoken to her for the next four visits after that, curling up on his cot and facing the wall until she'd given up, or perhaps her time had run out, and left. She was persistent, though, he'd give her that. She'd been sending 'care packages' to him twice a month since her first visit.

On her sixth visit, she'd managed to breach his silence by reading the official review of his case aloud, his anger at their findings making him react. His anger at her forcing his conversation had made him taciturn, a condition that remained to date.

"I'll send you more books and loo rolls."

He said nothing. Her 'care packages' of toiletries, loo rolls, books, and writing material, were all items the guards got first crack at and he received after their 'inspection'... if there was anything left.

"It looks like you could use a new blanket," she mused.

"This one serves." It was one she had given to him after her first visit. It still reminded him of that visit, and his eye twitched now at the invasive memory.

His voice was rough, dry, but she was glad to hear it.

"All right. Is there anything else? More parchment and ink?"

"I won't tell you anything."

"You won't have to unless you want to."

He stared straight ahead. "Why have you come?"

She pursed her lips and admitted, "I've been busy."

This was an understatement; although he had no idea she had spent the last four months from early sunup to well past sundown filing petition forms, arguing, and acquiring a social network at the Ministry. She had pursued tedious and sometimes seemingly pointless meetings and performed demonstrations and sat through endless questioning and bargaining sessions, simply to gain a chance for his release.

"I finally received permission from the Ministry to allow use of a Pensie--"

"No."

"A retrieved and untampered memory is allowed by the Wizengamot now."

"No. I won't."

She sighed. She did not bother to tell him it had taken a lot of favours and funding to get to this point. She knew such exhortations would not move him.

Hermione knew he was innocent. Severus knew he was innocent. Hellfire, even Harry knew he was innocent, but Snape was more persistently stubborn than a horny

Cornish pixie. He'd refused to say a word in his own defence, refused Veritaserum testimony and, at the time of his arrest, Pensieve memories were considered unreliable.

Since then a new enchantment had been discovered, allowing one to ascertain whether a memory was tampered with or not. More importantly, the Wizengamot had finally been convinced of this new method and allowed for use of Pensieve memories as testimony.

"What would you like then? I can send yo--"

"Just go. I won't give you a memory. I don't care what you offer me."

"I'm not asking as your legal counsel. I'm asking as a friend."

"I have no friends."

"Why won't you let me prove your innocence?"

He finally dared to look up at her. No matter how often she witnessed his degradation, he still acutely felt the humiliation and the shame over his nudity, his ~~his~~ vulnerability.

"I killed Albus Dumbledore."

"And you let Voldemort try to kill you to protect Harry!"

Her eyes flashed, and he suddenly noted how warm that brown shade normally was compared to her currently fiery expression. He sneered, though, hoping she would not notice the hopeful rising in his lap.

"A mistake I'm sure I won't make again."

Hermione made an exasperated sound, and he looked back to the wall, counting the tiles even though he knew how many there were. It kept his eyes from being assaulted by the sight of her, although he could still smell her.

It had been so long since he'd seen a woman. Granger's soft, sweet scent was clean even as it was cloying. A powdery honeysuckle overlaying the warm musk that had to be her own womanly scent.

Snape cursed silently as his erection sprang up, and he turned from her, bending his knees up onto his cot.

"Severus..."

"Go."

"You're a stubborn man."

"Who wants to be left alone."

"It's no shame, you know. It's just a sign that shows you're still human, much as you might like to claim otherwise."

He ignored this and then inhaled sharply when he felt her hunker down beside his cot, the scent of her that much stronger...

"I never claimed I wasn't human," he grated out through clenched teeth. "I only claimed I wasn't innocent."

"You took a killing curse for Harry."

He fought to keep from reacting when her hand touched his back, tracing the perfect lightning bolt scar he'd been told he had back there now. It started at the nape of his neck and went halfway down his spine.

This was a new gambit, he thought. He wasn't sure if he'd be able to win at this particular game, but he was damned if he didn't at least try.

"I told you," he managed to say in a shaky voice. "That was a mistake."

"I don't think so. I think the mistake was that you didn't intend to live. Someone up there must want you alive." Her fingers left his back.

He found his courage and sneered, finally glaring at her directly. "You ascribe mortal feelings to Muggle gods, Miss Granger."

She had the audacity to smile knowingly at him, but merely replied, "Actually, I was referring to Dumbledore, Severus."

He looked away at this.

"Leave me. I don't wish to discuss anything further."

"I don't think I will."

He glared at her again, but finally turned his face away, uncomfortable with the look in her eyes.

He could not gainsay her. Prisoners had no rights. If a visitor came, he could not say he did not wish to see them. If a visitor wanted to stay the full extent of allowable time - up to two hours on any day - they could. The only thing a visitor couldn't do was touch him, or any other prisoner, for longer than a minute. It was a safety measure enacted by his manacles.

If he touched a visitor, even accidentally, his neck shackle would begin to choke him whilst alerting the guards. If a visitor touched him, they could safely do so for only one minute before the shackle began to choke him. The safety of the visitors was not of concern; all visitors were able to Apparate out at any time. Prisoners could not, thanks to a restraining charm placed upon them on their arrival.

"Do as you please. You Gryffindors always feel you are above everyone else."

"And you Slytherins always mistrust people."

"You've given me no cause to trust y--"

"What? You didn't even have loo rolls when I first came! I sent you those and blankets and books an--"

"So you admit you give me these things in order to gain my trust?"

She glared now. "No! I give you those things because it's the decent thing to do!"

"Ah, yes, Gryffindor nobility," he derided. "I choke on it."

"So I take it you actually prefer to be in this freezing cell with nothing to do, barely anything to eat, not even anything to wipe your arse with when--"

"I did not ask you!" His voice was a wheeze now, the cold of Azkaban having worked on his lungs over the years.

He visibly calmed himself. "I would not ask. I will not."

"So you prefer stubborn pride to your freedom?"

"What freedom could Albus Dumbledore's confessed murderer find outside these walls? Would you follow me everywhere as a bodyguard to protect me from those intent on exacting their vengeance?"

"I would prove you had a reason. I would prove there were mitigating circumstances. I would get you out of this filthy hole and see you back in proper Wizarding society where you belong!"

Snape breathed evenly, deeply, then turned toward her, letting his feet back down to the cold floor. This had the effect of revealing his erection, but he told himself he no longer had anything to hide from her and noted instead the widening of her eyes, the slight blush that crept along her cheekbones. It made his erection throb.

"Miss Granger. I have *never* belonged to 'proper' Wizarding society."

She met his eyes. He did not elaborate, and she finally sighed.

"What would it take for you to let me help you?"

Despite himself, he shivered, both from cold and from desire, then cursed himself as her gaze softened, and she took off her jacket, shook it out, and draped it over his shoulders.

The smell of it made his head swim.

"There. You can warm up, and we can talk."

Using her wand, she retrieved the small stool from the entry and sat across from him.

He could not look at her now.

"Perhaps, there is one thing. If you really wish to help me..."

"Go on."

"It is... personal."

"In the six months since I've been assigned to your case, I've been witness to some of your very personal travails here, Severus. I've kept my silence, and I'll swear that to you under Veritaserum."

"I'm sure. It's just... I'd like a memory."

She frowned, and he clarified, "I'd like you to retrieve a memory for me and let me view it in the Pensieve... alone if possible."

She considered this. "What memory? From whom?"

He cursed his pale skin as he flushed but managed to say, "A woman. A whore. In Knockturn Alley. Her name is Esmeralda, but they call her Murry the Furry."

"All right. What memory would she have that--"

"You'd have to pay her," he interrupted, staring past Hermione's shoulder. "I might have enough in my account still. She usually insists on two Galleons."

"What memory would I be asking her for?"

"One of our coupling."

Hermione considered this, finally frowning. "To what purpose?"

He glared at her now, feeling the throbbing ache between his legs, furious at being forced to confess his feelings.

"Dammit! A man has needs! Even one as wretched as I."

It was Hermione's turn to blush as the full impact of his request struck her. So that's why he wanted to see the memory alone.

She nodded, though, decision already made. "All right. I'll do it if you at least consider my request."

"Done."

She hesitated. "I... I'll ask, but I'm not sure they'll allow me to leave you alone with a Pensieve."

He shuddered slightly, but forced himself to release an even breath.

"I... trust your discretion, Miss Granger."

She smiled at him, an expression that made his stomach feel as if it was twisting, and gently, briefly, squeezed one of his knees.

"Scoff if you will, but I'm glad you're starting to trust me, Severus."

* * *

Hermione stepped into her tiny quarters and flopped into the chair closest to the fire.

She was exhausted.

First there was this visit to Snape, after four months of daily haranguing at the Ministry to permit his testimony via Pensieve in order to have the chance, the mere chance, of re-opening his case and now a stalemate. The man was the most stubborn one she had ever met! He even had Ron beat.

She sighed now with the pained fondness that swept over her at the thought of dear Ron, seven years gone now, victim of the delayed effect from a Death Eater's curse at the final battle.

She had thought she knew what she wanted to do with her life, until that fateful battle. It wasn't Ron's death, though, but his life that had made her turn from thoughts of getting training and working for the Ministry as an Unspeakable. He had so wanted to become an Auror and it was unfair he would never get his chance. It was equally unfair that the Death Eater that killed him got off scot-free thanks to his legal counsel.

Hermione determined then and there at the trial that she would become legal counsel herself, defending those who were not guilty and ensuring to the best of her ability that those who deserved Azkaban received it in full.

Harry had applauded her decision. He'd been dumbstruck when he first saw the unmistakable outline of Severus Snape limned in green and golden fire, taking the brunt of the Killing Curse for him. He'd learnt later that the golden fire was the *Resuscitare* Snape had meant for him, but which had been sent through his own body thanks to a beneficent gust of wind. The healers told him the *Resuscitare* must have been given with every bit of strength Snape had at the time.

It was the only thing that had saved Snape; the clash of conflicting spells confusing Voldemort who stopped his curse and lowered his wand even as the once-again invisible Snape fell unconscious to the ground, only to hear the dreaded *Tu Est Mortalis!* from Potter's lips, and feel the power within him diminish.

The loss of his magic had been more painful than the sword of Godric Gryffindor that had ended his mortal life.

If it hadn't been for Snape's actions, Harry had whispered to the incredulous remaining members of the Order, he would have died at Voldemort's hands.

As it was, Harry's insistence had also condemned Snape to Azkaban since no one would even have thought to look for an invisible man amidst the battle wreckage.

Arthur Weasley, the first to arrive at Harry's side, had quickly found the gasping, injured Snape and placed a Bubble-Head Charm over him. Hermione had remained at his side until the Aurors came. If it hadn't been for her insistence, he might not have received any treatment at all, but she'd been stubbornly insistent that a Healer see to him.

The power of the Killing Curse had nearly cooked his organs, including his lungs and heart, and only Arthur's rapid and inspired use of the Bubble-Head Charm and an organ regeneration potion had saved him. Well, that and the *Resuscitare* he'd intended for Harry that had kept him from dying at Voldemort's hand.

We owe him a lot more than just a memory to wank by, Hermione sighed to herself now, feeling near tears at her failure.

Murry the Furry, so named, she'd discovered because of her penchant for wearing fur coats no matter the weather, had utterly refused Hermione's request as well as her money.

"Let 'im rot where he belongs, girly," had been the whore's last bit of advice before taking twenty galleons for her silence, then sauntering toward a customer more to her liking, leaving Hermione feeling conflicted. She'd been relieved the meeting was over, but upset that she hadn't been able to get what Severus had asked for.

It was the *only* thing he'd asked for his entire time at Azkaban. This she knew because she'd read his entire file before visiting him the first time.

She already knew of the security procedures since Snape had not been her first client at the infamous prison. However, since he'd been assigned to her, she'd refused other cases. He was her only case until he got free. This she had promised herself, so that she would stay focused and determined.

Fortunately, living expenses were not an issue for Hermione. When she turned 21, she had received custody of the large trust fund her parents had set up for her which included the monies they had set aside for her Muggle-style education, monies she had not required. Thanks to the use of magic for so many things, living in the Wizarding world cost her far less than it would have in the Muggle one.

Meanwhile she wondered what Severus would say to one of the offers the Ministry had made in his regard; one she had been unable to bring up so far.

The Head of Magical Law Enforcement had suggested an alternate means of dealing with Snape that would satisfy both Ministry and public, if the public ever found out about it. Snape could gain his freedom if he allowed them to remove his memories of the Wizarding world and release him to the Muggle world with falsified documents and sans wand. He would have his freedom, but not his memories or access to the magical world.

The thought of this had so horrified her that she'd been frozen in her seat; although it ~~had~~ kept her from leaping up and slapping the odious man who made the offer and ending up in gaol herself; However she returned to the offer from time to time in her mind. She still had not filed the official client refusal form for the offer, merely marking the form with 'client remains undecided'.

And now I've failed him in this one simple request, she sighed.

Hermione was not very well versed in the matters between men and women; although she was not a virgin. Men weren't the only ones who could visit whores, and when her 21st birthday had arrived, she had decided it was past time to learn what she had up to then only read about.

Hiring a highly paid gigolo via owl from a service well-known for its discretion, Hermione had been thoroughly deflowered and then paid for a few extra sessions to get the somewhat put upon young man to answer her many questions as well as demonstrate some of the things he had told her about.

Sex, she had learned, was very different for men than for women, almost a driving need rather than a slowly building want. The prostitute had told her men felt rather desperate after two weeks without release and were gagging for it by end of a month if they had none.

Severus had been confined, alone, for eight years. Whilst she supposed he could wank - in that filthy cell, surrounded by dank, grey walls with no company aside from guards at feeding time and visits from his legal counsel - how could he stir up any desire? How must he feel?

She remembered now her disastrous first visit with him, when her genuine concern had caused him to be so poorly treated. When his eyes had been nearly swollen shut from the soap and his genitals turned sore looking and red, she had not been able to ignore his distress.

She'd insisted on a healer, and one had been sent for. Having seen how he'd been mistreated at her own behest, she'd insisted on being present for his treatment. In for a penny, in for a pound, she'd thought, knowing Snape would probably not appreciate her presence, but damned if she'd allow him to be mistreated any further.

She had been pleased to see the healer place drops in Snape's eyes that had rapidly brought the swelling down. It had been horrifying, though, to watch the healer shave Snape's head, and embarrassing to watch him perfunctorily shave his chest and groin, pushing his sore-looking penis from one side to the other or holding it up and away from the razor as he'd shaved his hefty scrotum.

Despite herself, she had not been able to look away. Her innate curiosity, coupled with her interest in him, kept her eyes riveted to the proceedings. Even as her cheeks warmed, she found herself remembering moments when, as a student, she had wished him to be in humiliating circumstances. Now, those thoughts shamed her.

If *that* had been embarrassing to her, she thought it must have been mortifying to Snape who said nothing, even when the ointment had been carefully and methodically stroked into his reddened penis, causing a surprisingly large erection.

She had no words for what it must have been like for him after the healer had silently left them alone, and he'd turned away from her, shaking, demanding she leave him.

Compassion was always her downfall, she knew. Instead of leaving, she'd gone to him, intending comfort, adding further ignominy instead to his humiliating ordeal as her touch unintentionally caused him to ejaculate.

What level of need must he have been feeling, she thought now, for him to climax so forcefully, *so long*, at her merest touch?

The same oddly disparate warm and cold sensation ran through her at the memory as it had at the time, raising goose pimples on her arms and making her cheeks grow warm again. There had been nothing she could do at the time to assuage Snape or to salvage the situation. She'd softly apologised and left and had not returned for two weeks, owling him various items in the interim.

He'd refused to say anything for several visits, maintaining a chilly composure and refusing to answer any of her questions at all. It had taken a great deal of effort for her to get him back to the level of trust needed between client and legal counsel. When she'd heard of the new Pensieve enchantment, she had opted to stay away from Severus and work toward obtaining a means, a chance, of gaining him a re-trial.

If that hadn't worked, she'd been determined not to return until she had something to offer him in regards to his case that he might find of interest.

Hermione stared at the Pensieve on her front table now and sighed.

2 - Living Memory

Chapter 2 of 3

It's been eight years since Voldemort's fall, and Snape just wants to be left alone in his misery at Azkaban, but his new legal counsel has made it her mission to get him out of there. She will stop at nothing to see him restored to Wizarding society. Will Hermione manage? Or are the odds stacked against them both?

On her next visit, she could not help but note the rapid glance he gave to her arms as she stepped aside to let the guards go past her after they'd 'secured' him for her visit. She also could not help but note the rapidly hidden disappointment she could sense from him.

She waited until the guards had locked the cell door before reaching into her pocket and pulling out the miniaturised Pensieve. She re-expanded it with a wave of her wand and placed it beside him, atop his pillow, and then withdrew a vial from her other pocket. She tipped its contents into the Pensieve, and then looked back at him.

His avid eyes remained on it until she cleared her throat. He had, she noted beneath his shackled wrists, a rather poorly concealed erection, but she steadfastly ignored it to look only in his eyes.

"It's, uh... not what you think."

Anger flashed in his eyes at lightning speed, and she hurriedly explained, "I think it might serve your needs. It's just... I couldn't get the memory you specifically asked for."

Black brows converged. "Why? Is she de--"

"She's alive. But she refused to give her memory. I offered her up to ten galleons for it, but..."

Snape considered this and got a slightly sour look to his face, then gestured with his chin to the Pensieve.

"What's this then? From another whore? Were you bandying my pathetic story of need about the entire breadth of Knockturn Alley?"

He looked furious, and Hermione raised a placating hand.

"No, of course not. I asked Esmeralda to keep her silence, and I'm positive she will."

"Because whores are so trustworthy," he sneered now.

"No, because I gave her twenty galleons for it."

He looked up at this, aghast, before looking away, cheeks flushed now with pure shame.

"The memory is from me."

He went pale at this before the flush returned full force as he stared at her, mouth open with astonishment.

"I didn't think you'd want me asking anyone else," she explained. "And I didn't want to return to you empty-handed. I... I hope it suits."

That was all she managed to say before turning from him and moving to the door, which was as far as she could get.

Once there and still facing away from him, she sat on the stool and pulled a book, an hourglass and a pair of old-fashioned earmuffs out of her pocket.

He watched her as she calmly sat and put the earmuffs on, then pointedly turned the hourglass and set it on the floor and picked up her book to read.

Snape stared at the Pensieve, then back at the hourglass and closed his eyes. He could not help it. He had to look.

He pressed down with his shackled wrists on his aching penis, letting the cold chill his ardour, then looking back one more time to the hourglass, he touched his fingers to the swirling vapour of Hermione's memory.

* * *

Hermione entered the room, and her sheer, gauzy garment nearly made him swoon.

She was wearing a see-through nighty of shimmering midnight blue.

She moved to the bedside table and lit the candle with a wave of her hand, then uttered, "Nox."

The room went dim but for the candlelight, and she sighed deeply as she lay back atop her bedcovers.

Snape watched as Hermione writhed slightly, eyes closed, before sliding a hand down her torso, cupping her breasts along the way before slipping between her legs. He swallowed hard, feeling his almost painful erection throbbing with his pulse.

She began to lift her nighty up with her other hand, and the body she revealed to him stole his breath away.

Hermione was perfection - toned, smooth skin like porcelain - silky curls amassed on the pillow, thicker and kinkier curls decorating her mons pubis, tribute to her womanhood.

He watched now, almost breathless, as she stretched her legs apart and ran her hands down along her body, over and over, lingering over her pert nipples before sliding down, down to her dark thatch.

He could see the gleam of moisture between her legs and felt a corresponding surge of wetness from the head of his cock. He closed his eyes and breathed heavily for a moment or two.

When he opened his eyes, he gasped, as Hermione was holding her labia wide open with the fingers of one hand and gently stroking along her slick lips with the other, bypassing the coral nub of her clitoris.

She did this over and over before finally flicking the tip of one finger over that swollen bit of tender flesh and sighing, gasping.

"Severus..."

"Hermione," he said in a strangled whisper, awe-struck at the realisation that she had done this... *for him*.

This was entirely too much for him.

"*Gods!*" was all he had time to cry out before pleasure took him.

* * *

Hermione was just getting interested in her book when she thought she heard her name. Fighting the urge to turn and look, she checked the hourglass and kept resolutely reading her book.

When Severus cried out and she heard a loud crash, she prayed he'd forgive her and turned, then hurried up to him.

He lay on his side, eyes rolled back in his head whilst his cock decorated his neck and chest with thin white ropes of semen. The Pensieve lay on its side as well, the memory licking at the edges of the bowl, and she swiftly gathered it up and placed it back in the vial. Then she turned back to Severus, who was still shuddering, his cock still contracting with each motion, no longer spurting forth, but obviously still labouring to complete climax.

Soon both lay still, but Snape remained unconscious.

* * *

When Severus woke, he was uncertain of events, but Hermione merely bade him drink water from the glass she held for him. She apologised as she let him go, afraid to help hold his head any longer thanks to the spell on his shackles.

Once she released him and he swallowed, his head cleared, and he glanced quickly down. He was still naked, but she had covered him with her jacket, and he was clean and dry, no presence of semen. He looked at her then, but she merely smiled and asked if he was all right.

He nodded rapidly, feeling ashamed at his extreme reaction. He had never lost consciousness from orgasm before. He hoped this would not be a regular occurrence.

"I'm afraid I can't leave the Pensieve, but I hope you do think about my request." She swiftly shrank the Pensieve and stuffed it in her pocket, before taking her jacket back.

He swallowed and then nodded again. "I will."

"Good. Farewell then, Severus. I'll see you next week."

She smiled at him before giving in to her impulse and gently kissing his forehead, then Apparating from his cell.

Even though he couldn't emit any more semen, Severus had to masturbate to a painfully dry climax twice before he got any sleep that night.

* * *

The following week, Hermione did not waste time, setting up the Pensieve as before and going to the doorway where she sat on the visitor's stool and pulled her book, the hour-glass and a sturdier looking set of ear-muffs out of her pocket. He wondered why she had changed her earmuffs, then flushed at the thought that she probably had heard him.

Despite this, he stretched out on his cot and put his head by the Pensieve, then touched his hands to its surface.

Severus was expecting the same memory and, in fact, would have welcomed a chance to re-examine it, but to his surprise, this was a different one.

For one thing, it started in what appeared to be a cosy sitting room...

* * *

Hermione entered the room, wearing nothing but a silky robe.

She aimed her wand to the prepared fireplace and uttered, "*Inflammaré*."

When the fire was well lit, she said "*Nox*." The room darkened, and she was lit only by the firelight.

Snape watched as Hermione lay back on the rug by the fire and ran her hands down her body, clearly enjoying the silken feeling of the material. He wished he could touch it, too.

She slid a hand into her robe and began to caress her breasts, and he moved closer, wishing he could touch her ~~there~~ *taste* her.

She moaned and writhed on the ground, thighs parting, and the robe's silky belt slid between them to kiss the juncture. Severus swallowed.

Her hands were running freely over her body now, stroking, gently pinching, caressing. Soon her robe was splayed open, and that fine porcelain skin and tangle of thick curls lay bared to his gaze.

"Hermione..."

He watched as she touched herself shamelessly, pressing, rubbing, *tweaking*, moving toward that pinnacle, just as he did.

When she slid a finger inside herself and her head fell back with a moan, Severus felt himself coming, but fought to remain in the vision. This was entirely too good to drop out of it.

"Severus," she moaned as she frigged herself with one, then two fingers, sliding in and out of that wetness that he could almost smell, almost taste.

"Oh, sweet..." he gasped as he realised his erection had not subsided with his climax, but remained firm and ready.

He began to stroke it to her rhythm, wanting so badly to touch her, to know her.

They both strove to find pleasure, fingers pressing and pushing against eager flesh.

If I give her what she wants, I'll never see this again.

This was what went through his mind as orgasm carried him away again, out of the Pensieve and to the grey confines of his cell where he thanked Hermione silently for the regular supply of absorbent loo rolls.

* * *

"Have you made a decision?"

He shook his head. "I need more time to consider it."

Those warm brown eyes assessed him, but she finally nodded.

"All right. Then I'll see you next week."

* * *

The day before her visit was the worst for him.

Knowing what was coming, his entire body thrummed with tension. He'd needed to masturbate nearly every night in order to get any sleep at all. However, he'd firmly told himself he wouldn't the day before. It wouldn't do, after all, for him to be replete when she arrived.

The entire day was an exercise in self-inflicted torture.

Images from the Pensieve scenes kept coming back to him, and he lay on his cot, uselessly tossing and turning and trying to ignore the heavy, needy sensation between his legs. He felt like he was going mad.

He'd finally fallen into a fitful sleep to awaken thrusting against the mattress, and only the pain from biting his wrist had kept him from finding completion.

He lay gasping in the dark, feeling the throb from abused flesh both above and below his waist and sighed with frustration.

* * *

The next visit went much like the one before.

To his relief, Severus did not lose contact with the Pensieve until the vision and both orgasms had ended, however he found himself with an erection that would not die, despite his climax.

He tried masturbating to no avail; it was too sensitive and too soon. He splashed a little water on it and nothing happened. He finally lay hunched in keen misery until the hourglass emptied and Hermione cautiously turned to glance back at him. He said nothing as she put away the hourglass, book and earmuffs, then moved the stool closer to him.

He kept his hands over his crotch, futilely trying to hide his tumescence, even as he wondered why it refused to go away.

Hermione noted his misery and opted to speak despite both of their discomfort.

"I've read of this. Sometimes when a man's need is too great or gone too long unanswered, he'll develop a persistent priapic state."

He cleared his throat and said nothing.

"I take it climax didn't help?"

He shook his head, refusing to look at her.

"I think I know something that might."

He did look up at this, only to jump as she leaned closer and placed a warm, gentle hand on him.

"W-wha-"

"It's okay. Just count off the time so I don't touch you longer than a minute."

She began to gently rub his erection, and he groaned, even as his thighs clenched tightly and his back arched. The amazing sensation was almost agonising.

He could say nothing as she stroked, moving his foreskin back and forth over his swollen, red glans, merely watching as she masturbated him without apparent shame or disgust.

He did not count off the time, but it was far less than a minute later that orgasm struck with blinding intensity. He spasmed, keened, and finally fell back atop his cot as he painted them both with his plentiful emission.

After it was over he clenched his hands into fists to keep from grabbing her, from kissing her. He couldn't touch her, not if he wanted to live. She could touch him, but he could not touch her. He sucked in breaths that felt more like sobs and tried to clear his mind of pointless thoughts.

He watched as she used her wand, waving away his indiscretions.

He stared at her and finally muttered, "I... I appreciate that. Hermione."

She smiled then and whispered, "Think nothing of it. I'm glad to help."

The pained look he gave her made her frown.

"Is something else wrong?"

"No." He cleared his throat.

How long could this go on? He could not keep doing this indefinitely, no matter how pleasurable it was. She was only doing this to get memories from him, testimony as it were. She did not desire him.

This thought basted him with relief as he finally relaxed. *This* he understood. No one desired him. He sighed. No one ever had.

"Well... have you made a decision?"

Severus looked at her, shackled wrists uselessly covering his genitals where he sat on his cot and nodded.

"I'll give you the memory... on one condition."

He frowned at this, wondering why he'd said that. The words had just come out of his mouth sans filter.

"Name it."

He looked down now, wondering what he could ask. Make it impossible, unlikely, and unrealistic... anything so she could not fulfil it and maybe, just maybe, the Pensieve memories would not have to stop.

"I... I would like the opportunity to experience the real thing... if you ever get me out of here."

There was a silence and he closed his eyes to await her response. She wouldn't, he knew, but would she--

"With me, you mean?"

His gaze snapped up and he nodded carefully. To his surprise, Hermione smiled in a mildly flirtatious way.

"I think I'd like that, Severus."

He swallowed as his cock began to stir, and she turned to fetch a vial from her pocket. "Shall I?"

"No."

She stopped in the middle of opening the vial and waited.

"Let me give you the memories you want."

Hermione nodded, extending her wand to the Pensieve memory and then tapping it back into her own mind. She then pulled the stopper from the vial and began extending her wand toward him, but hesitated.

"I need all relevant events leading up to Dumbledore's death, that night, and the final battle. Ready?"

He closed his eyes and focused, finding it a bit difficult with his now rearing erection and finally nodded.

She touched her wand to his head and slowly, carefully withdrew a long, faltering silvery filament, a wisp of thought that she tapped into the vial and sealed.

"Thank you, Severus."

* * *

"Relevant as I'm sure this new information is, the case is sealed. All criminal cases are closed and sealed after seven years from the trial, to save us from exactly these circumstances, re-trials glutting up the system, adding to our administrative costs--"

"To hell with the administrative costs! We're talking about an innocent man imprisoned for life!"

Stringer, the Head of Magical Law Enforcement and his own legal counsel, an odious female that reminded Hermione of Rita Skeeter, pursed their lips.

"You have not filed all the client refusal forms regarding his acceptable alternatives."

Hermione faltered. "My client is still considering them."

"It. You filed the others already."

"Yes, of course. I misspoke."

Stringer smiled at her, a thin and superior expression that made her want to spit, but she composed herself.

"See that he finishes 'considering' soon. The offer can be rescinded after six months, and you've already had that time."

"I did not utilise four months of visitation due to arguing his case."

"Trying to convince us to use this new technique, you mean. Miss Granger, even if all of us trusted it, and we do not, how could you possibly testify to its accuracy when retrieving the memories of an accomplished Occlumens like Mr. Snape?"

She frowned, and he continued, "You can't. It was a fool's hope."

She drew in a breath. "I see. Very well. I have my work cut out for me."

"Yes. You'd best familiarise yourself with the procedure."

Hermione frowned. "Why?"

"A healer can do it, but your client has the right to ask his legal counsel to do it."

She sat aghast at the thought, but he merely nodded.

"If that's all then - you can see yourself out, can't you?"

Damn them.

Damn them!

Furious tears ran down Hermione's face, and she was too angry to push them off, walking so fast she was nearly running from the Ministry's alleyway entrance.

She stopped herself before she got to the end of the alley and drew in several breaths. She had to go to him. She had to tell him.

She pulled the vial from her pocket and swallowed. She had to give him back his memories.

What for? For them to take them away again?

She sighed, letting the last of the tears run free and shook her head.

That's assuming he even wants to undertake that alternative.

She didn't think a man like Snape would. She didn't see how he would. She could keep the information to herself, not even let him know, keep working on his case...

No. He deserves to know all his options. Even if they're ugly.

Wiping her eyes free of tears, she gathered herself and Apparated to Hogwarts gates. She had need of their library.

* * *

He sat frozen to his cot, face expressionless. She was not sure if he was stunned or upset.

"Severus?"

"Why did you not let me know this choice earlier?"

Hermione sighed. "To be honest, I didn't think you'd react well to it. I was trying to gain your trust and the offer smacks of..."

"Vengeance."

"Just so."

A shudder ran through him, and she shifted on the stool, moving closer. She badly wanted to touch him, but did not dare. She did not want him to think she was influencing him.

"So from no options to no mind."

"You would have your mind--"

"Devoid of knowledge. Value."

"You could relearn."

"What, Miss Granger? Without magic, I am a common Muggle. A Muggle with a primary school education level and naught but physical labour skills."

She drew in a breath, released it slowly.

"What you say is true, but the documents they provide, I could make sure they include details that would allow you to find work, non-menial work."

"Such as?"

"There are plenty of jobs in the Muggle world that don't require specialised knowledge. You learn as you go and gain competence."

"Office work? Bookkeeping and the like?"

"Yes."

He frowned, wishing he could run a hand through his hair, but he could not.

"How long can I consider this?"

Hermione winced. "Not long. It might be too long already. They told me they can rescind all offers after six months."

He closed his eyes at this, then put his head down.

"Leave me be."

"I'd really rather not lea--"

"You don't have to leave, but I need to be alone with my thoughts for a moment."

She nodded, got up, picked up the stool, and headed for the door of the cell where she sat and waited, wondering what decision he'd make.

3-And So...

Chapter 3 of 3

It's been eight years since Voldemort's fall, and Snape just wants to be left alone in his misery at Azkaban, but his new legal counsel has made it her mission to get him out of there. She will stop at nothing to see him restored to Wizarding society. Will Hermione manage? Or are the odds stacked against them both?

"Who would do it?"

She started suddenly, realised she'd nearly been asleep and checked her timepiece. To her surprise, there was an hour and a half left to her visit; he'd come to a swift decision.

"The procedure? A healer. Or... you could ask me, as your legal counsel to do it. I act in this regard as an Executrix to your wishes."

"My last testament, as it were."

She flinched. "In a manner of speaking."

"You would be the one to see to my immersion?"

She nodded.

"Very well. I accept the Ministry's offer."

Hermione stiffened and she felt the roll of parchment in her pocket shift. It was no coincidence; she knew if she pulled out the form, his acceptance of the offer would be on it since the paper was enchanted. A copy was doubtless on Stringer's desk as well as before the Head Warden of Azkaban.

All it required for completion was administration of the procedure, which, now that he was technically a free man, could take as long as was needed. When she was done, she would tap her copy of the parchment, affixing her magical signature and she could walk out of Azkaban with him.

"It needn't be done now. I can retur--"

"If it's all the same to you, Hermione, I'd rather get it done with now. One less night in this cell is my only consolation."

Hermione winced, then pulled out the vial. It contained the thoughts she had not yet returned to him, and she cursed herself for thoughtlessness when his calm voice intruded on her whirling thoughts.

"You may keep them, Hermione."

She looked at him, and he smiled slightly, the first smile she'd seen from him.

"It's not like I'll need them."

She swallowed at this bit of self-deprecatory humour and nodded. She tucked it back in her pocket and pulled out a tiny cauldron that she enlarged to full size. He gazed at it, and then back up at her.

"I figured this was apropos. What better container to hold a Potion Masters' memories?"

He swallowed, then nodded, his eyes suddenly bright.

"Indeed."

She began to step up, then paused.

"Severus. I would ask something of you."

He looked at her and nodded.

"I would like to... know you. Before we do this."

He swallowed, and she noted his cock twitched despite the look of distress that followed.

"I..."

She stroked his face gently and pulled back.

"It's difficult but not impossible. You've seen me. I'd like to know you, before--"

"Yes."

She waited and when he said nothing else, she realised he had given her his answer.

Without a word, she began to remove her robes, laying them atop the stool. Her shoes were simple slip-on affairs, and she did not wear hose so there was nothing to fuss with. When she pulled off her soft linen blouse, she looked back to him, and he sat as if entranced, gazing hungrily at her. He looked so hard she wondered if they'd manage to successfully complete their assignation.

Soon, she was bare before him, and he drew in a shuddering breath, releasing it in a whisper of sound.

"Hermione..."

She moved toward him, pausing just before his knees.

"Are you close?"

He swallowed again and nodded tightly.

"Good. We've only one minute."

That said, she glanced at her timepiece and straddled his lap. Then without preamble, Hermione grasped his hardness and slid onto it, letting it pierce her deeply.

She gasped even as he did and began to kiss him heatedly.

To her surprise he was clumsy at that, even as his lower half moved in smooth, sinuous strokes.

Has he never kissed anyone?

But the question was unimportant as she showed him, rode him, and abruptly felt herself stuttering toward climax.

She pulled free of his lips to cry out, and she felt the warm tickle of his trickling seed in the same instant, felt his rigidity and saw how his mouth had fallen open and his eyes had rolled back.

Pushing down one more time, grinding down hard, she shuddered through her climax and fought to catch her breath. She glanced at her timepiece and drew back regretfully. There were eight seconds left.

She managed to stand back from him with two seconds to spare and watched him as he caught his breath.

His head hung down finally and his eyes closed.

"It figures," he murmured in a rough voice.

"What?"

"I finally get a real encounter with a woman and not only can I not touch her, but it must be quick, plus I am doomed to forget it."

She frowned. "You mean--"

"Whores, Hermione." He looked up now at her and admitted, "I've had naught but whores in my pathetic life. There was never time nor anyone willing, and I'm not the sort of man who would force his attentions where they're not wanted."

She closed her eyes at this and nodded her understanding. "I'm truly sorry."

"So am I."

She slipped her clothing back on in the ensuing silence. Soon she was back in her robes, and she used her wand to levitate the cauldron closer.

He eyed it, then her and nodded, closing his eyes.

"Sopio!"

He began to slide as the spell rendered him senseless, and she gently levitated him onto his back atop his cot.

The removal of so many memories whilst conscious would cause traumatic shock. It was best done as he slept deeply, undisturbed.

She drew in a deep breath and touched her wand to his temple.

"Memoria adultus abdere!"

It was the first, but most comprehensive spell she would be casting in the multi-stage process.

He had to have his memories of magic removed, but Hermione did not intend for most of his life to be lost to him...

* * *

"Severus?"

He shifted, drew in a stuttering breath and opened his eyes, glancing around rapidly, suspiciously.

"What?"

Jane Granger smiled at him reassuringly, and he frowned.

"Easy, dear. You're still recovering." She turned to the door. "Sweetheart! He's waking!"

He looked around, but nothing was familiar. Even his pyjamas were strange. They were soft linen and looked new. He'd used no pyjamas before, sleeping in his skivvies. He was used to damp walls with peeling wallpaper and cracked ceilings and creaky floors. This place was... heavenly. It looked like something out of the fashion magazines he'd sold one summer. His father had made him get a jo--

"My father!"

Mrs. Granger's smile faltered a little, and her expression became sympathetic.

"It's all right, dear. He can't hurt you anymore."

Severus tried to catch his breath, slow his thoughts, but they were muddy. Still, this woman seemed to know something of what was going on.

"He..." His pale skin coloured and he wouldn't look at her as he spoke. "He was hurting me Mum."

"We're so sorry, Severus."

This new voice made him look over and his eyes widened.

A very pretty, curly brown-haired girl had come into the room. Her warm brown eyes were filled with sorrow, and she sat beside him on the bed, displacing the other woman who shook her head and walked out of the room.

She touched his face.

"W-wha--"

"Severus, you need to know something."

"Where am I? What--"

"You're in my parents' home, Severus. We've been caring for you since we found out. It turns out my mother and father are cousins of your mother."

"Me mum."

"Severus, you... you're a lot older than you think you are."

He looked from her to his hands then and back at her.

"I'd like a mirror."

Hermione nodded and reached to the bedside table to hand him one.

He stared at his face for a long time.

"I look like my father," he finally said with disgust, putting the mirror down in his lap.

"I think you look very striking, very handsome."

He glared up at her, then stopped when he noted she was not making fun of him.

"How old am I?"

"Forty-six."

He winced at this, but asked, "What happened to me? How did I get here? Why can't I remember?"

Hermione drew in a breath. "We saw your picture in the papers. The Evening Post had an article about a man they'd found in grave medical condition and were seeking his family. He'd been found with papers, but wasn't employed, and no one had claimed him. The detectives eventually discovered his immediate family was deceased..."

"NO!" Severus wailed, and his eyes closed against the horrible truth he suddenly remembered. The vision of his mother, pale on the floor, blood trickling from her ear...

To his shock, the girl wrapped her arms around him, and he could not resist her compassion. The tears flooded his eyes, and despite his mortification, he began to sob into her shoulder.

"Mum!" he cried out from time to time, wishing more than anything he could see her again.

The girl held him blessedly tight, and when he felt the wetness on his own shoulder, knew she wept with him. Oddly, this comforted him and helped him calm.

Eventually he pulled back from her, mortified, and sniffed wetly, trying to swallow enough of his tears to ask, "She... she was buried?"

Hermione nodded, glad she had thoroughly researched not only Severus's file, but also his removed memories.

"A long time ago. Your father went to gaol, and he died there. I'm so sorry, Severus."

He shuddered, then drew in a deep breath and said, "I-I'm sorry. Please c-continue with your story."

Hermione took one of his hands in hers and squeezed it comfortingly. "Don't be silly. There's no need to be strong here. This is all something of a shock, and it'll take you time to get your bearings. There's no shame in tears."

He nodded, grateful for her compassion and waited.

"You apparently had a brain aneurysm. Do you know what that is?"

He frowned and shook his head.

"Apparently one of your blood vessels in your brain got a clot. The blood pooled up behind it, pressure built and the vessel popped. You could have died, but someone found you in the park and got you to hospital. You were there a very long time, unconscious and getting treated. After we saw the newspaper report, my mother thought your face and name looked familiar. She checked in our photo album and the family records and soon realised you were distantly related. She and my father asked about you at the hospital, and no one else came forward. My mother believes very strongly in family, so when no one else offered to help you, she told my father you were coming home with us."

He sniffed. "That's very kind. I... I don't remember anything. I can only remember things from when I was a boy."

"That's to be expected, per the doctors. You may not remember again. But we found out everything we could and got your papers from the Chief Inspector."

She gestured to a worn looking leather wallet atop a battered-looking passport.

He reached for them and looked inside.

A few old business cards were in place, apparently restaurants he frequented and the like. There were eighty pounds in the main compartment and another folded wad of hundred pound notes in another along with a bank receipt. It indicated he had a modest sum, if it was accurate.

There were no photos, and he closed it and opened the passport. His own face, so like his father's, stared back at him. Severus Doyle Prince. He stared back at her, and she lifted a questioning brow.

"Prince? That was my mother's name."

"Well, that's the name your papers have. You must have changed it."

He considered this, looked at his oddly elegant if older hands and sighed. It was likely, actually. He hated his father. He sighed again, wishing he could see his mother, but accepting she was long gone now.

"I wish I could remember, but I'm not displeased. My father and I... we didn't get along."

"I'm sorry to hear that," she said honestly, taking his hand in hers again.

He suddenly noted a slight darkness on his skin near the cuff of the pyjamas and pulled free of her to stare. A tattoo!

"Oh, yes," she said as if remembering. "One of the detectives said you had two tattoos. Both are very old, probably from when you were a teenager. They are both of some now defunct street gang. They had one old record of an arrest made when you were about 17, but since you weren't of age, the record was sealed."

He had unbuttoned the cuff and stared at the repulsive looking skull and snake, before making a moue of disgust.

"There were no other arrest reports and your work records were exemplary so I think those are just mementos of your youth now."

"Work records..." he trailed off to ask, "What is the other tattoo?"

"You've some sort of symbol on your chest, not very big. And you've three scars. One looks like you were once bitten by a large dog. One looks like an old burn. And you've a large one on your spine that looks rather like Thor's lightning bolt."

He said nothing, considering this, and she took his hand back in hers. "They don't matter. What matters is you are getting well and have been given a new lease on life. Whatever mistakes you made in the past don't matter now. You can start fresh."

She squeezed his hand reassuringly, and he stilled, feeling the warmth of her fingers. It was almost as if he knew them, but that was impossible. He frowned now.

"I'm not married, am I?"

She smiled and shook her head. "No. The Chief Inspector had his detectives do a thorough background search, and it doesn't look as if you ever have been. They found your papers, of course, and they found out you've worked at a chemist and for an herbalist. The herbalist was the last place you were employed. He told the constables you'd been let go with good references, that you had requested leave. Per your passport, not long after that you did some travelling. Apparently, you'd not been long back to the country when the aneurysm struck. You were incredibly lucky not to have it happen whilst you were on holiday."

"I don't remember anything," he fretted slightly. Then he frowned. "Although... the herbalist sounds familiar. I do know a lot about healing plants. I remember an herbology book I had to read one summer... and astronomy. I was very good at both."

She smiled and nodded, gratified. She had very cautiously removed all his Hogwarts memories during his memory removal, but allowed him to maintain his adolescent summers, including any books not pertaining strictly to magic.

"See? It might all come back. And if it doesn't, it doesn't matter. You're staying with us until you're well and can get back on your feet, Severus."

He nodded, concurring, and abruptly yawned. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be. It's been a long day already for you."

"Yes. Although..."

"Yes?"

He flushed a little, to her surprise, and admitted, "I'm rather hungry."

She smiled then, and her beauty almost took him aback.

"Wonderful! That's always a good sign. I'll bring you something."

She let his hand go to hurry out the door, but he stopped her.

"Um..."

She turned back to face him and waited. "Yes?"

He looked suddenly shy, and she smiled, bemused at how sweet the expression was.

"I don't know *your* name."

"I'm Hermione Jane Granger. But you may call me Hermione, Severus."

That said, she stepped out of the room leaving him to his thoughts.

He studied the pleasant surroundings again and sighed.

Whatever had happened to him before, at least he had wound up in comfortable surroundings with people who cared about him. He had the feeling that this was not something he'd ever experienced before.

The life she'd described sounded lonely to him. An apparently wretched childhood, running around as a street thug, father in prison, sounded far too commonplace. But something had turned him around. He had an exemplary work record she said, and for some reason that filled him with pride. He could just about recall his medicinal plant lore, so he knew he'd be all right soon as regarded employment. Once he was back on his feet, he could repay these kind people and find his own place, make his own way.

But not alone this time.

He considered his circumstances and concurred with Hermione. He'd been very lucky. He might not have all his memories, but he had his life and he had newfound relations, although they were so distant as to be strangers. What if they'd not been there, though? What if they'd not been so kind? He would have wandered forever alone, confused and trying to make his way.

No, he decided then and there that he was going to make his life and find someone to share it with. Someone kind and pretty. Someone like Hermione.

He wondered now if she was taken, but rolled his eyes at the thought. He still felt young, but was 46 already, a middle-aged man. She was far too young for him, despite how he already felt about her. She wouldn't look at him that way.

He sighed.

Hermione suddenly stepped back into the room with a tray holding a bowl of soup, some sandwiches and a tea service.

"Oh, that's far too much."

She smiled at him again, and he felt his heart flutter.

"It's not just for you, but for me, too. I'm starving!"

She set the tray on his lap and gave him the spoon, then poured out their tea and picked up a sandwich.

"Go on. Dig in."

He nodded and began to eat. It was very good soup, and he smiled as he watched her eat with relish.

She caught him looking at her and raised a quizzical brow.

"You eat with such gusto. It's good to see."

To his surprise, she blushed. "Bad habit. I usually don't have a lot of time for lunch so I tend to eat in a hurry."

"You work?"

She shook her head. "In between jobs. I recently quit my last job. Too much pressure and too many heartless bastards."

He smiled at her language.

"What did you do?"

"I was a legal aid."

"Then you should find work again fairly quickly."

"Assuming I want to. I haven't had a vacation in many years. I need some time off to decide what to do next."

He nodded. "That sounds like what I apparently tried to do. Too bad I don't remember my travels."

Hermione nodded, then stopped, gesturing with her half-eaten sandwich. "Say - there's a crazy idea."

"What?"

"Once you're better, why don't we vacation together?"

He was taken aback.

"Y-you want to take a vacation with *me*?"

"Why not?"

He didn't know where to start. "Well, for one thing, we just met. For another, I'm a lot older and... it might look odd."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "I already knew all about you before you woke up. You just need to learn about me. And the first thing you need to learn is that I know my own mind, I'm very stubborn, and that I like older men."

He swallowed. That was certainly more than an indication of interest in him.

A spark of hope flared within him, and he smiled shyly at her.

Perhaps this time I'll truly have a life, not just a living.

"I'm uh, glad to hear that."

Her answering smile back was filled with an infectious cheer and sense of optimism, and he couldn't help but answer it with one of his own -filled with hope and a touch of his already growing feelings for her.

To his astonished joy, her smile grew rather wicked, and when she finished the last bite of her sandwich and leaned in to steal a kiss, he wasn't surprised in the least.

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Post A/N: I was inspired by many songs whilst writing this, but none so much as "Breathe Your Name" by Sixpence None The Richer

The amazingly talented odella created art for this piece, which you can find here:

http://www.odospadd.com/odogoddess/pics/_odella_sshg.gif

(Note: art is not worksafe, although no 'bits' are showing)