

Etude de Magie

by karelia

Sometimes, a coincidental find can change one's life entirely.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: Only the plot is mine and even that's inspired by legend.

Written for clannadlv in the LJ sshg_exchange Summer 2007.

Prompt: The final battle is over and Hermione Granger is missing. An unlikely character becomes obsessed with finding her...Severus Snape.

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He knew the damn book was vibrant with magic the instant he bent down to look at it more closely. Before he could even decide whether or not to pick it up, the book leapt from the ground right into his hands, and he stood there, in the shambles of the aftermath of the battle which had sent the Dark Lord to eternity, staring at the ordinary looking Muggle notebook.

"Severus! You *are* joining us at the Broomsticks to celebrate, aren't you?"

Severus pocketed the notebook in his cloak and turned to the headmistress. He'd not heard her approach.

"I doubt I'm welcome there, Minerva." Nor would he welcome the company of hundreds of boisterous students and a handful of deliriously happy and likely already inebriated staff because the war had ended with minimal losses. Despite having been forced to stay within the castle for the past six months, ever since the Dark Lord had learned that Severus Snape was everything but his trusted servant, his idea of celebration leaned more towards indulging in a quiet evening with the musical company of Wagner and maybe a Tolstoy to read...definitely an evening without the presence of students.

Minerva cast an almost motherly look at him. "Don't be daft, Severus. The Ministry has exonerated you, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named is no more, and ~~w~~*we* have reason to celebrate. Everyone knows your help towards our victory was invaluable. Even Harry Potter has acknowledged it! Now, come on, let's go join in the celebrations. You need to get out some now that you can!"

Sighing inwardly upon realising the headmistress would not take no for an answer, he let Minerva lead the way to the village and resigned himself to an unpleasant evening. The notebook in his pocket would have to wait a little while. It would probably turn out to be drivel fabricated by some lovesick Hufflepuff teen in any case, and he was unable to fathom his undue urge to read the book. Many teenagers warded their diaries against curious eyes and charmed them to provide a never-ending supply of empty pages to fill. He knew he'd end up using this journal for kindling as soon as he'd cracked the wards and read the first few sentences, just like many others he had confiscated during Potions classes over the years.

The exuberant atmosphere at the Three Broomsticks hit him like a Bludger. Forgotten were the recent deaths at the hands of the Dark Lord and the fact that a mere few hours ago a battle had been raging on Hogwarts grounds, causing considerable structural damage to the castle, all put aside in favour of celebrating victory over evil. Even

Potter, surrounded by Weasleys, Order members, Gryffindor sycophants and other students, showed that he could be civil in light of the victory.

"Hello, Professor Snape," Potter greeted him.

"Severus! Come have a drink with us! What can I get you? Firewhisky?" Lupin asked, rising from his seat.

Curtly nodding in confirmation and barely able to disguise the need to wrinkle his nose over ~~thawerewolf~~ buying the round of drinks, Severus sat down on the edge of the bench next to Minerva. Looking at the occupants of his table, he noticed that tonight, for once, there was a blatant disregard of House affiliations. Zabini was seated next to Potter's sidekick, Weasley, Miss Brown sat between Miss Greengrass and Mr Corner, and several Hufflepuffs were scattered between Slytherins and Gryffindors.

His reverie of his most unlikely survival was interrupted by the suddenly raised voices of Potter and Weasley.

"She can't just have disappeared. That's *not* like Hermione, Ron! What if some Death Eaters kidnapped her? I know most of them were captured, but not all! They might have been hiding nearby, waiting for their chance!" The volume of Potter's voice had risen considerably, and he was glaring at his best friend.

"Look, Harry, all I'm saying is that she doesn't talk to me beyond courtesies these days, you know that! If she had planned to go anywhere at the end of the battle, she wouldn't have told me! I haven't a clue where she is!" The redhead replied heatedly.

"Gentlemen, might she have just Apparated to her parents?" Minerva asked. "The way she worked and then fought in the battle, I'd not be surprised if she fled the scene to enjoy some peace and quiet."

Severus grudgingly admitted to himself that Minerva was right. He had never cared for any member of the Golden Trio, but Miss Granger's recent ingenious achievements had coaxed some respect for the girl out of him.

For part of her seventh year at Hogwarts, the brain of the Golden Trio and the youngest Weasley boy had been considered the fairy-tale couple, and everyone had predicted a fairy-tale future for them. Molly Weasley had been ebulliently planning the dream wedding of the century to take place shortly after the couple completed their schooling...until Miss Granger had learned of young Mr Weasley's fondness of Muggle betting, his perpetual winning streak assisted by magical means.

The spectacular break-up had been heard all over the castle and resulted in the redhead sulking and Miss Granger burying herself in research that had become invaluable to the Order. Not only had she devised a charm that enabled a wand to act like a Foe-Glass, but she'd also developed it further so that any hex thrown with ill intentions would multiply manifold and return to the one who'd cast it. No enemy had any chance with such charmed wands as the outcome of the latest battle had proven.

When Severus looked up again, Potter and Lupin were standing up.

"I'll go with you, Harry. I'll stop by Tonks...she's probably bored, having to fill in all the paper work about Death Eater transfers to Azkaban at the Ministry..."

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It was well past midnight when Severus finally reached his quarters after depositing a rather inebriated Minerva at the door to a Hufflepuff guest room...Gryffindor Tower was not safe to inhabit after the battle. *Merlin, she must have had half of the bar inventory...if she'd stuck to Firewhisky, she'd not be so pissed*he thought as he took down the wards. Knocking off his shoes, which immediately rushed to the cupboard in the wall just beside the entrance door, he extracted the diary from the pocket of his cloak and slid out of it, dropping it carelessly. The cloak floated onto the waiting hanger next to the shoe cupboard and righted itself, ready in pristine condition for whenever its owner required it next.

Finally able to relax, something he was never capable of doing in a crowd, Severus fixed himself a glass of Ogden's and plunged into the sofa nearest to the fireplace, which lit with a wave of his hand.

After staring contemplatively into the fire, unwinding from the events of the day and the socialising of the evening, and finally feeling peace spreading through him in small but persistent waves, Severus took the Muggle notebook in his hands.

First he felt for wards. There were many. Some were easy to take apart, others were well beyond a seventh-year Hogwarts student. Eventually, he managed to open the book.

He stared at the blank pages incredulously. Nobody would just ward a book to that extent and not write anything in it. He pondered his possibilities for a moment before trying several revealing spells. Finally, words appeared on the page.

*Tell me your name, please.*

Severus snorted to himself. If he didn't know better, he would have thought this was one of Flitwick's Charms projects, but the Charms professor would not use anything made by or for Muggles. He grabbed a quill and wrote his name down, then watched the book's words fade completely before right underneath his name, another sentence appeared.

*You may read.*

Slightly puzzled, Severus leafed through the pages. Indeed, the book was full of hand-writing now...neat, tidy writing, all in black ink. At the top of each page, there was a date, he noticed. Turning to the beginning of the book, he started to read.

*13th October, 1991*

*The good thing about my old school was that at least I lived at home with Mum and Dad. Learning magic is wonderful, but I feel terribly alone. I don't think any of the other first years like me. They all think wanting to learn new things is so not cool. I can't wait for the Christmas break; at least I'll see Mum and Dad again, and they don't mind that I want to learn all the time.*

Severus almost rolled his eyes. It had to be Miss Granger's diary; he did not know of any other students who put studying before anything else. She had probably spelled it so that any teacher would be able to read it. He snorted to himself, skipped a few pages and started reading again.

*13th June, 1994*

*I am happy that Sirius escaped. It would have been such injustice to find him Kissed, and it would have devastated Harry. But I feel for Professor Snape. He can't be happy, not knowing that Sirius really is innocent. And he was so close to an Order of Merlin!*

*I am glad the school year is over. I'm looking forward to spending the summer with Mum and Dad, travelling to France, forgetting about magic for a while. Well, I don't think I can forget about it, but it'll be nice to pretend to just be an ordinary young girl, with no worries about the killer of Harry's parents rising to power and a possible war.*

Although Severus was somewhat surprised at the young girl's insight of the events at the end of her third year, he was close to discarding the diary. From what little he'd read so far, if the entire book contained mere snippets of her thoughts and what was happening in her uneventful life, it would be a waste of time.

*Waste of time? It's not as if you're likely to do anything useful at this time of night, hours after the Dark Lord was sent into oblivion, hopefully to stay*he snorted to himself, skipped another few pages, and started reading again.

20th September, 1995

*When I woke up this morning, I thought it'd been a dream. But I realised pretty quickly that it wasn't. The necklace is real, solid. And my sight really has become more than three-dimensional; I noticed it when I looked at Lavender...her entire head is filled with boys and make-up and making out. It's so hard to believe, though. Meeting the Lady of the Lake. It was an incredible experience, although I'm a bit scared of the future now. Of course I knew there'd be a war, ever since Trelawney's prediction and the events in the Shrieking Shack at the end of my third year, and last year's happenings only proved the prediction correct. But to actually "know".... I hope Professor Snape will survive intact.*

Severus moved straight on to the next entry.

13th January, 1996

*It's been almost four months since I first met the Lady, and although it's been tough at times to get away from Harry and Ron for the training she suggested, I'm so glad I consented. My newly found ability to see people as a whole, not just from one side, is, at times, overwhelming. I also find it enlightening. The Lady was right, of course, when she suggested I look at everyone, not just my friends, for I would gain insight that way. I'm learning. I don't know if I'll ever be worthy of being a priestess like the Lady suggested, whether I'll manage to pass all the hurdles, but all I can do is try.*

Severus drew a sharp breath. As far as he knew, the Lady of the Lake had not shown herself to anyone in decades; his own great aunt had been the last one known to make her acquaintance. But she'd been much older than Miss Granger when the Lady appeared before her.

He continued to read, skimming through entries dealing with trivialities and seeking out the ones pertaining to the Lady of the Lake. Over the years, more and more people in the wizarding world had lost the knowledge of the old ways, and these days the Lady of the Lake was perceived by most as legend rather than reality. The curse of modern life, with its technology, life in the fast lane, and an increasing religious movement preaching patriarchal values, had snaked its way into the wizarding world mostly unnoticed, and the younger generations no longer knew of or were interested in values that were once firmly established, but had no place left today. Severus was not surprised the Lady had chosen a Muggle-born to help preserve the old values and ensure the unseen would not be ridiculed as was the case in the Muggle world.

13th July 1997

*I am still filled with a sadness I find chilling to the core. Poor Professor Dumbledore, poor Draco, but, oh, goddess, poor Professor Snape! Being forced to kill must be unspeakably terrible, but being forced to kill a loved one, I cannot fathom how he must feel. It's been weeks, but I cannot think of anything else. I know I must concentrate on the task before me, but how can I? I yearn to take his pain, but all I can do is offer spiritual healing to him...thankfully this kind of healing disregards space and time; I have no idea where he is. The Lady's presence soothes me, and I am grateful that I see her more often now, although she is not always around.*

*Being with my parents seems strange these days. I think I realise more than they do that our worlds have become drastically different. I'm glad to leave for The Burrow next weekend.*

*She was worried about me?* Severus shook his head in disbelief and continued to read.

13th August 1997

*I did not want to explore my true feelings, but the Lady was of course right. I feel relieved now that I have done so, and even though my dream will never become reality, I no longer need to suppress it. He will never find out unless he finds this diary, which is about as likely as him returning to Hogwarts.*

*Any normal person would dismiss my feelings as a schoolgirl or teenage crush. I know it is not. Training my spiritual powers with the Lady seems to have made me skip a major step of the growing-up process. My "make-up" consists of a circle perfectly drawn with charcoal right on my third eye to help me focus. My interest in "boys" is non-existent...there is only one man, and I'm likely doomed to spend the rest of my life alone. My preferred reading is that which satisfies my striving for knowledge, and my favourite pastime is to apply this acquired knowledge to real life situations. I guess I could be considered weird by anyone my age and probably the majority of people.*

Severus frowned. *What is she on about?* He turned the page.

13th September 1997

*Hogwarts has become a strange and sad place. Many students haven't returned for the new school year, not that I'm surprised. If I'd told my parents everything that's been going on over the years, they would have physically prevented me from coming back. Harry and Ron are still out chasing Horcruxes...they've only found two more so far. I'm diligently keeping notes for them so they can come back and be at least sort of up-to-date with the curriculum. Not that there is much of one. Professor Slughorn refused to return to school, and Professor McGonagall has not found a DADA or Transfiguration professor, either. Because of her headmistress duties, she can only teach a few hours a week, which leaves a lot of initiative to students if they wish to further their Transfiguration education.*

13th October 1997

*So much has been happening over the past few weeks. Harry and Ron returned, right on my birthday. I was so happy! Ron asked me to be his girlfriend, and I decided to give it a try. All is well. Not that I can't forget him entirely, but I can try and make a life, a happy life for myself without him. Sometimes, Ron is so sweet, I forget I've loved another, even though the memory of seeing him then only returns with much greater force. Maybe it'll fade over time.*

*Harry is already getting restless...he wants to hunt for the remaining Horcruxes. Not that I can blame him. At least the Order members now treat us more like the budding adults we are instead of children.*

13th December 1997

*I am both happy and sad. Happy because Professor Snape has returned. Professor McGonagall, with the help of the Order, has managed to have him cleared of all charges when she found Professor Dumbledore's extensive evidence that he had insisted Professor Snape enter an Unbreakable Vow with him in order to save Draco Malfoy from becoming a murderer. I think he is forced to hide from V. now. Happy because now I get to see him every day. Sad because of the same reason. My feelings have not lessened, and sometimes it feels strange to find myself in Ron's arms, imagining to be in someone else's. The Lady urged me to review my feelings and to be honest with myself. I am, I cannot deny what I feel. But it does not make life easy. I shall spend Christmas at home with my parents. It will enable me to gain some distance, if only for a few days.*

*So she dreamed of someone else while with the Weasley boy.* Severus felt momentarily sorry for Molly, who had spent that Christmas holiday making plans for a fairy-tale wedding. From what he remembered, Miss Granger had broken up with her boyfriend shortly before Valentine's Day. By Ostara she had already been working hard on the spells that would lead to the demise of the Dark Lord. He vaguely remembered granting her permission to exit the castle that spring night, thinking she might wish to participate in a spring ritual. Taking a deep breath, Severus turned the page and read on.

13th March 1998

*I have not updated my diary in months; my life has become busier than usual. I am not happy, but busy enough to keep morbid thoughts at bay. Ron is still sulking, but at least Harry is talking to me again. It still hurts that Ron was so dishonest. He admitted that he would not have told me about his betting activities had I not found out myself. I cannot find a basis for a relationship if honesty is lacking. I realised recently I can be something akin to happy if I'm on my own. I won't know until I leave, of course, since now I'm seeing him every day, but I have hopes nevertheless that I will find some happiness. When my schooling is finished here, I'll likely follow the Lady's suggestion and join the community on the Isle. Maybe some months of silence will unscramble my mind sufficiently to further my spiritual education...I don't know.*

13th May 1998

*Between working on the spells that will hopefully help bring V. down, preparing for the NEWTs, and practising my healing powers the Lady instructed me, I don't have time for anything. Not that it matters. The only time Ron speaks to me is when he tries to convince me to give him another try. I cannot. I tried once, and lack of trust in him aside, how could my conscience be clear while trying to fool myself? I should never have entered a relationship with Ron in the first place, or at least broken up when I found myself dreaming of him while in Ron's arms..*

13th June 1998

*The school year is finally coming to an end, and a battle seems inevitable. If I survive, I shall follow the Lady's advice and join her on the Isle. Oath of silence or not, I feel my path is laid out for me, and I need to follow it.*

It was early morning now, and Severus decided to go for a walk to clear his head. His mind was reeling *A witch who's barely reached adulthood, and the Lady of the Lake has taken her under her wing already. How powerful must she really be...* He lost himself in thoughts and finally concluded, *Not necessarily powerful. No, of pure heart.* The realisation made him shudder...having perceived himself as tainted for decades, purity of the heart was not something comprehensible.

Without thinking where he was going, his feet carried him to the edge of the lake, as if he was hoping to meet the Lady herself. Severus snorted *As if.... It's not like I'm worthy of making her acquaintance...* He stared, unseeing, across the lake, oblivious to the breeze gaining strength rapidly.

Only when he hit the ground hard, the sudden and unexpected motion catapulting him out of his stupor, did he realise he was no longer on the edge of the Hogwarts lake. There was a lake, and he was standing right beside it. But the greenery was more lush, more full, trees nearby hanging heavy with fruit, and the magic so vibrant, the air seemed rainbow-coloured. He looked around to see where he had landed so suddenly and involuntarily, who might have put him there, but there was nobody.

"Stop chastising yourself! Have you still not learned to forgive yourself for some silly mistakes done in your youth? Have you still not learned to strive for happiness? You will be of no service to humankind if you continue spending your days revelling in misery. You are needed here, in this difficult time, for you are one of the few left who understands the old ways!" The Lady of the Lake was floating in front of him, her mouth not moving, her voice audible only to him.

Severus, for the first time since childhood, was too overwhelmed to speak. He bowed to the Lady, and her face softened.

"It is in the human nature to be happy, to overcome your past, your past mistakes, for if you refuse happiness for yourself, you will never be able to instil it in another, and it is the ability to *give* happiness that is ultimately rewarding." He nodded mutely, her words of wisdom rolling in his mind.

As suddenly as the Lady had appeared, she now faded rapidly out of his sight. The lush greenery disappeared, and Severus found himself once more on the edge of the Hogwarts lake. He took a deep, shuddering breath and slowly walked back to the castle, oblivious to the sun rising above the mountain, oblivious to the early autumn chill in the air.

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"Severus, if you have a moment, please come to my office." The headmistress' head disappeared from the fireplace, and Severus followed her into her office.

"Mr Potter."

"Professor Snape," Potter acknowledged with a slight nod. "Minerva suggested to consult you. We've not been able to find any trace of Hermione in over two months, and I fear the worst. Some Death Eaters are still roaming freely."

For a moment, Severus wanted to make Potter feel uncomfortable, make him squirm, but his conscience would not allow it. "You need not worry about Miss Granger. She is safe."

Minerva glanced at him curiously. "What do you mean, Severus? What do you *know*?"

Severus took a deep breath. "She has joined the Lady on the Isle is what I know."

Potter cast him a blank look, and Minerva gasped. "The Lady? On the Isle? How... Oh, Merlin." She sank into the nearest chair.

"What are you talking about?" Potter asked, looking from Severus to Minerva.

Minerva was still recovering from the news, so Severus answered Potter's question. "Have you ever heard about the Lady of the Lake, Potter?"

"There's a legend about her. She turns up rarely and then takes a witch under her wing to help her grow spiritually. But... but it's a legend!"

"It most certainly is not," said Minerva. "The knowledge has disintegrated. What with a war fought and Muggle technology trickling into the wizarding world, old knowledge has become lost. But the Lady of the Lake is real."

She paused for a moment, looking curiously at Severus. "I've wondered when she would take someone on again. It's been so long. And high time for old knowledge to be spread again if the wizarding world is not to disappear completely. Being able to use magic is one thing, but even that is in danger of disappearing as everyone starts embracing convenient Muggle methods." Minerva sneered the last words.

Severus nodded pensively. She certainly had a point.

"But how... how can one single person's spiritual growth help with all that?" Potter asked, bewildered.

"In the same way that one single murder will affect the energy levels on earth negatively, one single person's spiritual power can affect energy levels in a positive way. Not only that, but that one person can and will ensure to spread this rise in energy levels until once more the good and pure reigns over evil," Minerva explained.

Harry Potter looked positively lost, so Severus continued the explanation. "It is a phenomenon that cannot be explained, like the hundredth monkey effect." He rolled his eyes at Potter's expression of utter blankness before continuing. "Muggles were observing monkeys on some island and discovered that monkeys suddenly started to wash sweet potatoes in the river before eating them. At first, there was barely a handful of monkeys doing it. Then other monkeys, mainly younger ones, followed suit, and eventually, the entire colony washed their potatoes."

Potter shrugged, looking as if he was losing interest. Severus continued, "What turned it into a phenomenon is the fact that thousands of miles away, monkeys suddenly started to wash their sweet potatoes before eating them, without any of those monkeys ever having seen another monkey doing it."

Potter's face now displayed surprise and disbelief. Minerva nodded at Severus. "It is true, and this same effect applies to spiritual growth. You have one single person who has experienced this growth, knowledge, and she will spread it until the planet is once more in perfect harmony."

"Oh... I see... So, where is this Isle Hermione is staying on?" Potter asked.

Minerva let out an unladylike snort. "Only people who have been there know."

"But... but how will I find Hermione?"

"You don't, Potter. And you won't make this public knowledge either. Death Eaters have no interest in a rise of spiritual energy, since it affects them directly. If the few still around find out that a new priestess will emerge, they'll do anything to stop her. And I mean *anything*," Severus said sternly. It did not sit well with him that Potter might endanger someone under the protection of the Lady. It would also endanger Potter himself...the Lady was not known to be forgiving to males.

Potter looked questioningly at Minerva, who said, "Severus is right, Harry. The Death Eaters will find out soon enough once Hermione returns."

Severus was relieved the next morning when Minerva informed him that Harry Potter had indeed promised not to go looking for Miss Granger. He had no idea why, but the mere thought of the young girl tucked at something deep inside of him.

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Autumn turned into winter, Christmas came and went, and the wizarding world was still getting used to a time without war. Suspicion amongst each other was the order of the day until, finally, one of the last cores of Death Eaters was discovered and sent to Azkaban. By the time spring arrived, wizards and witches were tentatively accepting that a new era was beginning, one without threats for what one believed or what parentage one had.

From observing students and reading between the lines of the *Daily Prophet*, Severus pondered the timing of Miss Granger's return. He had no doubt that she would return to the wizarding world and follow her path of spreading harmony and balance amongst magical folk. The question was when.

It was time for the annual spring hunt for potions supplies. Severus grabbed a pocket knife and several silk pouches, donned his cloak, and exited the castle, heading towards the Forbidden Forest.

Hours later, his pouches were filled with fresh ingredients, and he walked back along the lake. It was longer this way, but he was not ready to leave the blissful solitude behind. He fleetingly hoped to catch a glimpse of the Lady, to maybe get some information on Miss Granger's progress. Then he snorted to himself. *As if...*

The sudden breeze ripped him out of his ponderings. He stopped and looked around, across the lake, but saw nothing.

"The hawthorn is coming into bloom, Beltane is approaching. The new priestess has accepted her task of being the May Queen. Will you be her May King?"

Although the Lady had spoken barely above a whisper, her voice sounded alluring, her words tantalising, and her eyes carried a dangerous glint as she rose from the lake, many times larger than life size, yet never resembling a giant.

Severus bowed before her, unable to speak.

The Lady of the Lake eyed him with curiosity. "Were you not told about the ritual? Or have you forgotten?"

He had...until now. The memory flooded back into his mind.

*He knew it was probably the last time he'd see his great aunt alive. It saddened him, for although he didn't know her well, she always instilled peace in him, no matter how brief their meetings; a feat his parents had never been capable of. He sighed to himself and entered her bedroom.*

*"Severus, my child. It is so good to see you. You spent far too much time at Hogwarts these days. You've grown, boy!" She looked him up and down and continued, "Have you had your nose broken again? It wasn't that Malfoy boy, was it?"*

*He nodded mutely.*

*She chuckled. "Ah, never mind, dear boy. It does not matter." Her eyes drifted into the distance, and she continued, "One day, the Lady will call upon you for assistance. Us women are powerful, sure, but there is a reason men exist, and it will be a great honour for you, for the Lady does not often request anything of men. There will be a priestess waiting for you, and you will have the chance to be with her."*

*He did not comprehend her words. All he realised was that one day, the Lady who had helped his great aunt to become spiritually sound, as she called it, would require something of him. It was enough for him...he realised he still had a fair few years of growing up to do.*

*"Don't be afraid, Severus. You may take a wrong turn at one occasion or another, but you will find happiness, and you will feel complete."*

"You'd forgotten." It was not a question.

Severus nodded before taking a deep breath. "I would be honoured to participate." The words formed themselves; he only realised after he'd spoken them.

"Be ready at sundown on Beltane." With these words, the Lady faded out of his sight.

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For the past few days, Severus had been wondering how on earth he might have agreed to the Lady's request so readily. He did not find the answer, except that the Lady utilised powers no human being alive harboured. The only thought keeping him from outright panicking was the knowledge that he would not be recognisable to the May Queen, just as Miss Granger would not be recognisable to the May King. Although how this was to be accomplished, he had no idea.

He needn't have worried. Magic enveloped him from the moment he came to a standstill on the edge of the Hogwarts lake. Not able to fathom how exactly he was transported to the Isle, he let the thought go and felt overcome with deep content as he lay in the lush grass.

A young woman, clad in an indigo robe fastened with a simple jute belt around her waist, hair shaven entirely, approached him slowly. She motioned for him to get out of his robes, and he simply followed, having left behind every single inhibition he'd ever held upon entering the Isle.

He lay down in the grass again, following the silent instruction of the young woman, and she started to draw small circles along his spine in upward movements. The air suddenly filled with the scent of petitgrain, with occasional wafts of myrrh, lovage, and jasmine. One by one, the shaven woman massaged every single kink out of his body. From the spine upwards, then sideways, then downwards, first one leg, then the other, no part was left out. When she had finished tending his back, she tapped him gently on the shoulder and motioned for him to turn over.

For the first time since he remembered, Severus was so deeply and completely relaxed, he had not a single care in the world. When he turned, his erection stood out prominently. The woman just smiled...a kind smile...and started tending to his solar plexus, massaging gently in outward movements, up to his shoulders and neck, and downward to his toes.

Severus realised he'd dozed off when the sensation of something sticky on his stomach woke him. He opened his eyes and watched the woman as she waved her hand at his body, and his spilled semen vanished. She cast another smile at him and turned to leave.

"I... thank you," Severus managed to utter before she disappeared. She turned her head, waved, and was soon swallowed by the dark.

Severus relaxed again, and soon, sleep overtook him once more.

The gentle voice of the Lady woke him. "Are you ready? The May Queen has entered the cove."

He nodded, rose, and glanced downward. The sight made his eyes widen. His entire body was now covered with intricate Celtic designs, symbols, painted with ink harvested from an array of plants native to the Isle, all in deep blue.

The Lady held a mask before him and chuckled. "I won't be surprised if she does not recognise you." She cast an approving look. "You make a worthy May King."

Severus inclined his head slightly, donned the mask, and followed the Lady, who was floating towards an opening between the nearby trees. When they reached the first one, she stopped. "May you always enjoy the blessing of the goddess." With that, she motioned for him to continue.

Alone, Severus stopped for another moment and took a deep breath before heading deeper into the wood in the direction the Lady had indicated. It took mere minutes of walking, somewhat careful as he was unaccustomed to bare feet, and he reached the sacred cove.

The May Queen lay motionless on the soft ground, her chest only slightly moving in rhythm with her breathing. She, too, was naked but for a mask, and her body, too, was decorated with the most intricate designs in the same ink as his.

"My King." It was merely a whisper. *Has she spent a time of silence?* he wondered.

"My Queen."

Severus slowly lowered himself to the ground. Once on his knees, his fingers tentatively touched her feet, taking in every inch of her soft skin. Slowly, he moved along the inside of her legs, steadily upwards. Finally, the May Queen shuddered ever so slightly. Had his concentration not been entirely on her reaction, he would not have noticed.

Encouraged, he concentrated on her inner thighs, in still steady but now slower, lighter stroking motions. Ignoring her core, his fingers moved further upward, across her flat stomach, until they came to rest on her breasts. The May Queen shuddered once again, a "Please," escaping her lips in a raw whisper that rang of a yet unknown need.

He placed feather-light kisses, first on each breast, then across her chest, up to her neck, shoulders, earlobes, until finally coming to rest on her lips. *Soft. So Soft.*

Her tongue slowly, languidly tasted his lips and soon begged for entrance. Her hands moved from her sides to embrace his head, her fingers playing with his hair.

It was all the encouragement he needed to mould himself completely to her body, never leaving her mouth unattended, revelling in the sensation of her nipples hardening and her centre becoming wet. *Her taste. So divine.*

A whimper escaped her when he diverted his attention away from her mouth, back to the soft breasts that fitted his hands with utter perfection. Teasingly rolling her hardened nipples between his fingers, he captured her mouth again for a short moment before letting his hands explore lower parts, allowing his tongue to move downward, flicking at one nipple before tending to the other.

His tongue busy laving her nipples, he let his fingers slide further down, coming to rest for a moment on her wet folds.

This time, the sound that escaped her was one of delight as much as need. Unable to resist the lure of her moisture, he abandoned her breasts for a moment and tasted her, eliciting a moan from her as she followed his actions. *So divine.*

"Please... Now..." she whimpered.

He needed no second invitation and positioned himself at her entrance.

The May Queen wrapped her legs around his torso and urged him to enter. As he did so, his mouth crashed once again on hers, and their tongues danced as he pounded into her, their bodies moving in rhythm until she shuddered in orgasm. "Severus!"

Her muscles contracting intensely around his cock, he revelled in the pleasure his ministrations caused, and with the realisation that she had uttered his name *his* name...his insides tightened. "Hermione!"

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"How did you know it was me?" They'd been silent for a while, lying side by side, their arms and legs still entangled, but now Severus could no longer hold back his curiosity.

"I... I would know your voice anywhere," Hermione replied hoarsely.

Her answer pleased him, but he was worried about the lack of her normal voice. "How long have you been silent, Hermione?" Her name rolled off his tongue in the most exquisite way, as tasty as her moisture during their love-making.

"Since I joined the Lady here on the Isle, after the last battle," she whispered and looked at him intently. "Say my name again, please."

"Hermione." He said it slowly, returning her look, thankful for the light the moon was now casting on them.

"You make it sound so beautiful." Her gaze was one of wonder.

"You *are* beautiful," he replied.

"Tonight, yes. I dared not dream of this." She shrugged and laughed helplessly.

"And? What now?" He could not resist asking, his whole being filled with anticipation.

Never breaking eye contact, she said, "Whatever your wish is. You have done the Lady of the Lake the honour of consenting to be the May King. You are under her protection now."

"Hermione." He let her name hang in the cool spring air before continuing, "What about *us*? Or was this just a ritual to appease the Lady of the Lake?"

Hermione took a deep breath. "It would have been, had it been anyone else. Is there *arus*?" She looked away, her face suddenly filled with an expression of torture.

Severus moved and cupped her face between his hands, forcing her to look at him. "At the end of the last battle, I found a notebook. After I broke the wards on it, I started reading, at first out of sheer boredom, but soon out of fascination." He realised at that moment how powerful she had truly become. Anyone else would not have been able to hold his gaze; she never as much as wavered.

"What I learned was snippets of the life of a young girl who was growing into a priestess, to be of service to humankind.

"When the Lady of the Lake asked me to participate in the Beltane celebrations, *Iknew* it would be you, Hermione. How can I not admire you...

"How can I not... worship you?

"Love you."

He dropped his hands and looked away.

Her whisper made him turn. "Severus... Come here... Please..."

Her entire being evoked pure love, pure joy. She held out her hands, and he pulled her towards him, seeking entry to her mouth once more.

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Daily Prophet

September 13, 1999

In an unusual move, the School Governors' Board, urged by the Wizengamot, has unanimously voted in favour of including Ancient Magical Ways in Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry's curriculum for the first time in more than 200 years.

The new professor of Ancient Magical Ways is none other than Hermione Granger, who made headlines recently by marrying her former professor, Severus Snape, former Death Eater, Order spy, and Potions master at Hogwarts.

The Wizengamot concluded, after lengthy interviews and tests with Ms Granger, that she would fit the post perfectly.

In other school-related news, the boy who lived, Harry Potter, has accepted the position of Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher. He has been assured by the Ministry's Aurory that the curse put on the post by He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named himself was lifted with his demise.

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