

Arachne

by sylvanawood

Hermione travels back in time to find a missing Horcrux. She meets a young Severus who prepares for his first Potions lesson. Written before DH, now AU.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 7

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Disclaimer: Nothing you recognize belongs to me. Just borrowed. Will be returned. Snape is welcome to stay, though.

My beta readers, Maggie and Melusin, deserve much thanks and the highest praise, a lot of chocolate, flowers and relaxing music. All remaining errors are my fault.

This is my contribution to the SS/HG Exchange Summer Round 2007. It was written for vanityfair00, the prompt was: Time-Turner fic where Hermione goes back to Snape's early days as a teacher, preferably his first day.

Chapter 1

"Do come in and sit down. Can I get you something to drink? Firewhisky? A cup of tea?"

"I didn't come here to exchange pleasantries. If you have something to say, then say it."

"Oh, please, don't look at me like that. I told you that I will explain everything to you. Nothing I did was meant to hurt you or to offend you. I did it out of necessity. I hope you will believe me."

"Explain!"

"All right, but please, stay until you've heard everything."

"Miss Granger! Stop wasting my time and get on with it."

"I'm just collecting my thoughts. This is a long story, after all. It started the day we wanted to lure Voldemort into the trap. The day Harry wanted to defeat him once and for all. You know?"

"I'm not daft. I was there. Now get to the point, if you please."

"Well, that's what I'm trying to do. And I'm afraid that our memories of the event will differ quite a bit. So, if you could kindly abstain from interrupting me constantly... as I said, it began when we lured Voldemort into the trap."

I woke up with a start.

Someone had Stunned me, and I felt disorientated. After fumbling with a layer of thin fabric over my face, I remembered that I was wearing Harry's Invisibility Cloak and realised where I was: I was lying in a small, dark alcove in the corridor leading to the Headmistress' office.

A quick glance around showed me that the corridor was empty. I adjusted the cloak, grabbed my wand firmly and ran towards Professor McGonagall's office. I should have been there earlier; I was needed for the trap we were going to spring on Voldemort.

A few more turns in the dimly lit corridor brought me to the gargoyle guarding the Headmistress' office. But instead of having to use a password to enter, the moving staircase had already been extended and remained static; the gargoyle was gagged and bound by stony ropes and looked like an overgrown, stuffed turkey. Furious stony eyes stared at me, but I only whispered a quick apology and continued up the stairs.

Breathless, my heart beating wildly, I stopped at the open door and tried to calm myself, afraid that my exhausted gasps would alert Voldemort to my presence.

For it was indeed Voldemort who stood in the room, facing Harry and laughing in a high-pitched voice. Harry stood opposite Voldemort, his green eyes flashing angrily. I scanned the room, searching for Ron and you, who should have been standing at Harry's side. Then I saw the two of you, both lying on the ground on opposite sides of the room. Ron lay curled up in a ball and was frighteningly quiet. You, on the other hand, were writhing and foaming at the mouth. Your wide-open eyes rolled madly. Something had gone terribly wrong.

"I will kill you now!" Harry screamed at Voldemort. "We'll see who laughs last."

"Oh, is that so, little Harry? Well, if you must. But do hurry up. I haven't got all day

Whilst he was mocking, Voldemort was casting protective spells and circling Harry with smooth, dance-like movements. Harry just stood there, waiting for his moment.

"Having second thoughts, Harry? Rightly so! I am the wizard who fears no other and who is feared by all. I am Lord Voldemort. I am eternal. You cannot kill me." Voldemort's voice was sending shivers down my spine. I swallowed several times, knowing what I had to do, trying to get over my panic.

"Maybe he can't, but I can. Try to stop me," I said from the door, quickly stepping to the side when Voldemort spun around and hurled a hex in my direction.

"Ah, Miss Granger to the rescue, I see," he said smoothly. "Yet another silly girl who wants to sacrifice herself for our little Harry here. So many dead heroes already; one more will hardly matter."

I raised my wand, pulled the Invisibility Cloak off me and aimed a forceful Stunning Spell at Voldemort, who shielded my hex with a loud booming sound that made my stomach turn and my teeth hurt. However, while Voldemort was deflecting my Stunning Spell, I had conjured my trusted flock of canaries and quickly sent them towards him with an *Oppugno*.

Completely taken by surprise, Voldemort took a moment to understand what was attacking him. The sharp beaks of the small birds mercilessly hacked at his head and arms while he flapped his hands to fend them off.

Using the moment of Voldemort's distraction, Harry raised his wand and yelled, "*Avada Kedavra!*"

I stared at Harry's face as it changed expression from anger and despair to hatred and pain. Mesmerised, I watched the green flash leave Harry's wand and saw how Voldemort turned around slowly, a mad grin almost splitting his snake-like features in half. He didn't even make an effort to evade Harry's curse but just raised his arms as if wanting to embrace death. His body crumpled.

At that same moment, Harry started to scream and then uttered a high-pitched laugh. I watched in horror as the colour of his eyes changed from green to red, to green, and back to red.

"Think of Ginny," I cried, "of your parents, of Sirius, of Dumbledore. You are loved, Harry!"

For a moment it seemed as if Harry would be able to push Voldemort's spirit out of his body, but he was taken over again and forced to speak.

"Just look at the perfect, young body you are giving me, Harry Potter. Your pitiable little bouts of love cannot defeat me this time, for I have control where you have none. The traitor Snape told me how little you can control your emotions, Harry."

That creature... that thing that controlled Harry's body, paused and looked at your writhing form with malicious glee. He kicked you in the ribs and then continued silkily, "This was one of the few occasions where the traitor didn't lie to me. You will learn this control now, Harry. I shall teach you..."

Voldemort's inflection and way of speaking coming from Harry's mouth, spoken with Harry's voice, were almost paralysing me. It was so horrible... I've never heard or seen anything that horrible before. At that moment, I understood the meaning of the saying "there are things worse than death." I am convinced that death would be preferable to being controlled by such a creature, and I know that Harry thought this, too. I was so shocked; I just stood there, mute, not knowing what to do.

"Kill... kill..." Harry rasped with his own voice, but seemed to lose the struggle again. I gripped my wand tightly and slowly raised it.

"Oooh, little Miss Granger will kill her best friend. Isn't that shocking?" Voldemort chuckled evilly. "Will you call it mercy killing, little girl? Is that what you will tell your friends when they find you with his dead body?"

He threw his head back and laughed ecstatically. His body was twitching; apparently, Harry was still fighting inside. Voldemort shook himself, or rather Harry's body, and stalked towards me with jerky, long strides, trying to raise Harry's wand, but Harry was still resisting.

"Look at me, Miss Granger. Aren't you tempted? The most powerful wizard ever known is in the firm, young body of your friend. Just think of all the raw magic when I perform the Flesh, Blood and Bone Ritual with this perfect body. Perhaps you would like to provide the blood of the enemy? No?" He blew me a kiss, and I cringed.

"My spirit, my soul in his body can only be an improvement, can it not? He wasn't the brightest fish in the pond, our little Harry. His pompous recitation of all the Horcruxes he'd found was incredibly funny. He thought he had destroyed them all and that he could surprise me." Now Voldemort was laughing so hard that tears were streaming from Harry's red eyes.

"Who would have thought that little Dorcas Meadowes would be of so much use after all this time?" He raised his arms like a dancer, made a few steps to the side and smiled. "I will absorb Harry's soul in my loving embrace until nothing is left of him. Soon, I shall have full control!"

But Harry chose that moment to struggle violently. Voldemort stumbled, eyes turning from red to green, and Harry, for it was Harry's way of speaking, choked out, "Kill me, Hermione. Kill me now." He ground his teeth with a sickening sound, exhausted from the effort of resisting the evil wizard who possessed him. His eyes, still green, stared at me in horror and resignation.

I really didn't know what else to do. I couldn't see any other solution. I raised my wand again and Stunned Harry... I attacked my best friend. Then I sent *Atrificus Totalus* his way for good measure. I was crying when I saw Harry crash to the ground. Ropes flying from my wand added a third layer of confinement to Harry's petrified and Stunned body.

"I am so sorry, Harry," I whispered and sat down, my legs giving out under me. I didn't sit long, though; I had to know what was wrong with you and Ron. Too shaky to walk,

I crawled over to Ron, felt his pulse, and found, to my relief, that he was alive: his pulse was steady, his breathing free and deep. I left him and stumbled to my feet to go and look after you.

A *Finite Incantatem* stopped your spasmodic writhing, releasing you from the Cruciatus Curse that tormented you. However, your body continued to shake violently, and it looked as if you were choking on your own tongue. I sat down at your side and held your head, trying to prevent you from hurting yourself through your seizures.

I had no idea what else to do to give you release, and I didn't dare to wake Ron, so I sent out my Patronus and hoped that some of the other Order members had survived and would be able to come and help me.

"This is indeed different. I see.... So you hadn't known that the seventh Horcrux was made with Dorcas Meadowes' death.... Voldemort killed her himself.... He was very pleased by her death...."

"Yes, Minerva told me that he killed her. But none of us knew exactly how she was killed. And you weren't in a state to be asked. So Minerva had this idea..."

A week later, I sat in Professor McGonagall's office. She had just been released from St. Mungo's after having been severely injured when she fought with Aurors, and other members of the Order of the Phoenix, against the Death Eaters, giants, and disgruntled goblins who'd attacked us on several fronts. While our side had succeeded in capturing a good number of Death Eaters and driving the remaining enemies away, it hadn't gone without grave and painful losses. Just as you predicted, Voldemort had issued a full frontal assault, planning to take over the Ministry of Magic and Hogwarts at the same time and to make Hogwarts his own headquarters.

And your deception worked. You led him to believe that Hogwarts' defences were weak and that Harry was fearfully hiding inside the castle. As Voldemort's most trusted advisor, you had accompanied him to the Headmistress' office where Harry was hiding, surrounded by Foe-Glasses, Sneakoscopes, and other warning devices. At least that was what you told Voldemort. Harry was to confront an isolated Voldemort there, supported by Ron, you, and me. The plan was that you would show your true colours at the appropriate moment. But something had gone wrong. Although I was hidden beneath Harry's Invisibility Cloak, I had been Stunned on my way to the office and had lost precious time. You and Ron had been attacked and defeated, and in the end, Harry was facing him alone. I didn't know what had happened at the time, but that confrontation between Harry and Voldemort hadn't gone as planned at all. And if Voldemort could defeat three talented, fully trained wizards at once without weakening how could we ever hope that Harry could beat him?

"He must have another Horcruxone we didn't think about," I told Minerva, who looked pale and poorly.

"This is the only possible conclusion. Yes, I agree." Minerva pondered. "It was good thinking on your part to Stun Harry; that has bought us time to find out what we can do now."

"I couldn't kill Harry. I just couldn't ...," I said dejectedly. "And I don't think it would have solved anything if I had. Voldemort was so certain, amused even. He'd just have created another body for himself and returned. He knows how it's done after all, doesn't he? Killing Harry would just have released his soul fragment. We will have to find and destroy that Horcrux." I was so tired; I just sat there and rubbed my forehead.

"After all those years of secrecy... It took us two years to find all the Horcruxes. Or what we thought to be all the Horcruxes. We almost gave up; it was so hard to find them." Professor Dumbledore had given Harry clues and talking to his portrait helped, but his portrait only knew what the living version had already told us. We were at our wits' end more than once.

"And now there's another Horcrux, and I can't even start to imagine what it could be or where it's hidden. We need to keep this a secret, Minerva! There are still too many Death Eaters out there." At that point, I was rather desperate.

"Yes," Minerva sighed. "That's the sad truth. Somehow, they must have heard what happened, and they know that their master isn't dead. They will try to get hold of Harry's body and attempt to free their master. We have to find a really good place for Harry to stay, and we can't afford to let him or Voldemort wake up #19 while the Horcrux isn't destroyed."

"The only clue we have is what Voldemort said before Harry cast the curse: 'Who would have thought that little Dorcas Meadowes would be of so much use, after all this time?' That's what he said after he took over Harry's body. Wasn't Dorcas Meadowes an Order member who was killed in the first war? I talked to Professor Dumbledore's portrait again, and he was as surprised as we were. He remembered details about Dorcas Meadowes' death, when it occurred and that Voldemort had killed her, but none of that pointed to an item that could have been used."

Minerva thought about that for a while, tapping her lips with a finger. "Dorcas Meadowes... I remember her, too. She was in the Order, a young woman, excellent in Charms. She was spirited, amiable, and an accomplished duellist. Yes, I've heard that it was Voldemort himself who killed her. She must have put up quite a fight."

"And with her death, he must have created a Horcrux. But what item did he use? We've destroyed or ruled out the founders' artefacts. Nagini is dead. The old diary is destroyed." I shook my head, completely hopeless.

I think that hopelessness made Minerva cringe. She had never seen me quite so disheartened. I think she pictured me as the ever-optimistic problem solver; somewhat like you always pictured me as the never-quiet know-it-all....

"We've been asking so many questions, doing so much research, and now I have to start all over again... and alone. Ron isn't in any state to help me." I moaned.

"How is he?"

"Oh, he is recovering, but it will be a while before he can fight again. Voldemort must have aimed a Stunner right at his heart, judging from the symptoms. It's a wonder that Ron survived that."

"You can handle this. I have full faith in you, Hermione," Minerva said with a smile. "You have a name to start out with. That's more than you had for the Ravenclaw artefact. And we've learned that the Horcrux has to be created within hours after the killing, otherwise the torn soul will start to mend again. Thus, the name gives you a time and place. If I recall correctly, Dorcas was killed around the time Severus started teaching, or maybe a bit later. It was several weeks before Harry's parents were killed.... Have you asked Severus about her yet?"

"Snape isn't in any condition to be asked questions, sadly," I choked out, pitying you. "The Healers don't know if he'll ever come out of that series of seizures triggered by the prolonged Crucio. They told me that I'd surely kill him if I forcefully woke him up to get some answers." I felt uncomfortable and slightly guilty, and I must have looked it.

"I see," Professor McGonagall said, a gleam of understanding in her eyes. "But for Harry's sake, you were tempted to do just that, weren't you?"

"Yes," I cried worriedly, "and I hate myself for it. For a moment there, I thought that it'd be worth it if Snape died, if he just gave us the information we need. He must know something. Maybe he saw something that could help us. He was attending Death Eater meetings at that time, spying for Professor Dumbledore. Perhaps he saw something that didn't seem important back when he gave his reports to Dumbledore. It was his life against Harry's, or so I thought. But I couldn't do it. I looked at him trembling and twitching in his hospital bed... and I thought of all he had gone through as a spy in Voldemort's ranks. Of all the hatred and fear he'd had to bear from those who should be his true allies. Of his loneliness; the failure of others to understand how he could have killed Professor Dumbledore and still be Dumbledore's most loyal friend."

"We can't show Albus' Pensieve memory to everyone, sadly," Minerva threw in.

"No, but I saw it, and there is no way that I could harm Snape in any way now. I mean, even Harry was moved to tears when he saw Professor Dumbledore's memories..."

"What are Severus' chances?" Minerva asked. She must have been pleased that my old drive and passion were still there, ready to surface at the slightest provocation.

"He's in bad shape, very bad shape. He may not even live for much longer if the seizures continue to get worse." I paused and looked sadly at her. She looked depressed and wiped a stray tear away.

"Merlin, so many good people dead and injured, and we didn't really accomplish anything, did we?" I continued. "How I wish I could turn back time and do it all over again!"

Professor McGonagall looked at me sharply, an odd gleam in her eyes.

"Why don't you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Go back and find that Horcrux. Destroy it. Things will happen differently if you do...."

I was taken aback. "I would have to break about every single rule of time-travelling, wouldn't I? Not even considering the fact that there aren't any Time-Turners anymore."

"Rubbish," Minerva exclaimed. "What makes you think that?"

"Er... I was there when they were destroyed, in the Battle of the Ministry, remember? And you told me yourself how difficult and time-consuming it is to make new ones."

"That's correct, but luckily the Time-Turners weren't all destroyed; many of them could be repaired. Furthermore, the Time-Turners in the Ministry aren't the only ones around." Minerva rose and went to a chest of drawers, opened it, and took two small items out.

"Here, you should recognise this. It's the Time-Turner you used in your third year."

I took the small hourglass with great care and looked at it, surprised. "How far back will I have to go? One turn equals one hour, so that would be a lot of turning if I have to go back to the time when Dorcas Meadows was killed. And I don't know how else I could find out what Voldemort used for the Horcrux. If it could be done through research and through questioning people, shouldn't I have found out by now while searching for the other Horcruxes?" I swallowed and frowned, waiting for a reply. "It's not as if I could just hop back a few days and ask Snape, is it? I likely would run into myself and go mad. And Snape wouldn't tell me anything anyway; he'd have a fit and throw me out."

Minerva smiled slightly at me and nodded. "That's what he would have done, quite likely. And if there had been any indication about another Horcrux elsewhere, you would have found it. Our best chance seems to be time-travel." She paused for a moment, wrinkling her brows. "Yes, you would have to go back that far, back to 1981. That makes... let me see... eighteen years. And of course you are correct; these small Time-Turners aren't the right devices to go back that far with any degree of precision." She paused and winked. "That's why I have something else for you. Perhaps you recognise this as well?"

She gave the second small item to me; I stared at it in wonder. "That's Professor Dumbledore's watch!"

"Precisely." Minerva nodded. "And what do you know about this watch, Hermione?"

"Not much. I always wondered how he could tell the time with it, but then Ron got a similar watch for his seventeenth birthday, and I learned how it's used."

"Most of them can indeed be used as chronometers," Minerva confirmed. "But the main purpose of this one here is that of a chrononavigator. "

I stared at her round-eyed. "Oh!"

"Yes." Minerva smiled at my astonished face. "But, this is a well-guarded secret. There are very few chrononavigators around since only the most skilful wizards can make them. This is the only occasion where I can say that Divination has any use. Albus successfully combined Astrology, Charms, and Astronomy and created this amazing device. You remember the restrictions on time-travel?"

"Yes. You must not be seen. You must be extremely careful when changing anything," I recited.

"Exactly. That applies even more to long-term time-travel than to that of a few hours. Just think of the damage that could be done.... I will have to ask you to be very, very considerate and careful, Hermione, and only use it to gather information. Try to change as little of the past as possible. You won't have to mind so much about not being seen as no one will recognise you. But even the slightest changes can lead to a completely different here and now. I hope you'll remember this."

"Won't I have to destroy the Horcrux? Won't that be a rather significant change?"

"Unfortunately, yes. But we will have to take that risk. I see no other way to counteract what happened between Voldemort and Harry."

"All right. I'll do it," I said. "And how does this thing work?"

"Look at the twelve hands and the little planets moving around the edge. Each hand stands for a sign of the Zodiac. You'll have to make some calculations. You need to know the constellations for the year and month you want to travel to, including aspects and houses. I'm certain Sibyll can help you if you can't remember the Astrology."

I was horrified, and it must have shown on my face because Minerva laughed.

"She'll help gladly. You don't need to tell her any details, just say it's for Harry. And don't forget to make a chart for your return as well."

I nodded, and she continued, "When you have the charts, you set the little hands and adjust the planets until they show the desired constellation. A spin at the rim will get the hands and planets spinning, faster and faster, until you reach the exact day when that pre-set constellation takes place. Then all you need to do is to take the small Time-Turner and move to the hour you want to reach."

"That's fascinating." I felt the excitement rise in me. "So when do I go?"

"We need to make a few preparations, but it should be as soon as possible. How about we meet here again in three days? When everything is ready, you can start from my office."

"Minerva..., " I said hesitantly. "What if I can't come back to this exact time or later, but for some reason need to arrive earlier? Won't I meet myself? Will I go mad?"

"You shouldn't... you should come back a moment after you left." Minerva paused, pinching her nose. "But, if that isn't possible, try to avoid meeting yourself. Because if your two versions meet and see each other... you two will merge. It isn't possible for two versions of one person to exist at the same time, in the same space. When they recognise each other.... The two of you will be forced into one person again... with the joint memories."

"Oh, but that's not so bad," I was relieved. "Especially when one version of the Hermiones is prepared for this. I think I can handle myself."

"I hope so, Hermione. I really do hope so..."

"So, you were prepared to kill me."

"No, I wasn't. Didn't you listen? For a brief moment I was willing to risk your life, but then I didn't want to, or I couldn't, really. And don't look at me like that. You wanted to hear the truth, and I'm telling you the truth."

"Risking killing me might have been better than that harebrained scheme the two of you came up with. I still don't understand how you could fool me like this."

"Severus, please! Oh, come now, don't pull your hand away.... Look, all I wanted was to get information from you, through you. I saw no other way to get this information and survive. I trusted you. I knew that if all else failed, I could go to you, reveal myself and not have to fear for my life."

"That's what you thought? Foolish, foolish... I could have killed you. Why didn't you go to Dumbledore?"

"Both Minerva and I were convinced that I'd be safe with you. And why would I have wanted to go to Dumbledore? If things turned out as we wanted, none of you should have been aware of my being there. There would have been too much of the future that Dumbledore could have changed with that knowledge, willingly or unwillingly."

"And I couldn't have?"

"You could have, certainly. It was just a choice we made, and it was a good choice. Don't you want to listen to the rest of the story?"

"Very well, then."

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 7

Hermione travels back in time to find a missing Horcrux. She meets a young Severus who prepares for his first Potions lesson. Written before DH, now AU.

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Chapter 2

Three days later, Minerva and I met again. I felt very accomplished when I put the star charts on the table. Minerva merely smiled and put a small pouch beside the stack of charts.

"What's this?" I asked.

"These are Galleons with a mint date from before 1981. I was lucky to find some in my own vault. That way, I could avoid nosy questions. Mind you, there are only a few, but they should be enough to get you through a month or so. If you need more, you will need to sell a few of the jewels here." She unpacked another small parcel, which contained a few necklaces, rings and bracelets, all in an antique style that wouldn't raise suspicions in the past.

"I didn't even think of this," I said, feeling guilty. "I was so absorbed in the charts, and Trelawney's constant nagging about my lack of inspiration didn't help much."

Minerva chuckled. "Poor Sybill! She has so few opportunities to gloat. Don't begrudge her the little triumph."

I couldn't suppress a smirk. "All right. This one time, I'll let her gloat. I won't need her help again; I have enough charts to go back in time, and forward again, for several months. Just in case..."

"Good idea. What else do you have? Do you have the cloak?"

"Invisibility Cloak, Marauder's Map, an 80's-style nylon bag with personal essentials. All set."

"And your spider-glasses?"

"Of course I have my spider-glasses! How could I go anywhere without them?" I laughed.

I don't think you know about this, Severus. My spider-glasses are eight very small lenses, set in a thin, complicated wire frame. They are unbreakable and my own invention.

The reason for this is that a while ago, I decided to become an Animagus, which didn't really surprise anyone who knew about it. You know that I've always been outstanding at Transfiguration, and it challenged me. I thought that something Peter Pettigrew could do shouldn't be too complicated for me. Minerva agreed to tutor me, and after a short time of intense training, I succeeded.

To the amusement of Minerva, and the utter shock and horror of Ron Weasley, my Animagus form had turned out to be a giant tarantula. I found that a spider could be quite useful, but Ron couldn't get over his disgust and revulsion. This had, eventually, caused our break-up. Whenever I had wanted to kiss Ron, he had flinched, apologised emphatically, but still seemed unable to suppress his reaction. I felt that a relationship under these circumstances wasn't possible and had initiated the break-up. I was less regretful than I thought I would be. Ron seemed relieved, and we have remained friends.

As you undoubtedly know, a spider can be useful in many ways, but it has the huge disadvantage of poor eyesight. Giant tarantulas can, at best, see dark and light shapes as well as movement. Their perception of their environment happens through vibrations, touch, an incredible sense of smell and sound, but not through sight. I know that this doesn't prevent them from being excellent hunters, but I found that I liked to see what was going on around me and not only to feel and smell it. That's how I came up with the glasses. Attached to my ears and forehead, the small wire frame with the tiny lenses transforms into a marking on the spider's body; the lenses, however, become part of my eight eyes and allow me to see almost normally when I am in spider form.

"YOU WERE THE SPIDER?"

"Yes. Don't be angry..."

"DON'T BE ANGRY? THIS IS WORSE THAN I THOUGHT!"

"No, it's not. Just listen, will you?"

After taking stock, I was ready to travel. A brief argument had convinced Minerva that her office wasn't the ideal place to start from and come back to; I feared that it wasn't safe enough by far. Thus, we went to the Room of Requirement where I walked up and down the corridor, envisaging a room with a huge clock, a comfortable sofa, a calendar, and all the *Daily Prophets* from the past and current month.

The room complied; a door appeared, and we entered. I hugged Minerva, who gave me some last-minute advice, and then I set the watch and spun the planets.

The Room of Requirement dissolved, and I had the sensation that I was flying, very fast, backwards. I knew that sensation from my third year. Only now I seemed to be flying so much faster. The air stream from the movement was hitting my face like an icy whip, and I started to feel cold. A blur of colours and shapes rushed past me at nauseating speed; my ears were pounding. For a moment, I was afraid that the time span was too big, that I couldn't survive travelling back that far. I tried to scream, but couldn't hear my own voice.

Then, all of a sudden, I felt solid ground beneath my feet, and everything came into focus again.

It took me a moment to get over the time-travel induced nausea. This had been a wild ride, much rougher than the few hours I had travelled back in time during my third year.

The room, however, seemed unchanged. For a moment, I wondered if time had changed for me at all, but a glance at the calendar and the stack of *Daily Prophets* showed that I was exactly where, and when, I wanted to be. The calendar showed September 1st 1981.

When I had talked the plan over with Minerva, we had both agreed that I should take some time to get acquainted with the Hogwarts from eighteen years ago, to get my bearings. I would need a little practice to move around in my spider form without being seen by anyone. Of course, I could have walked around under Harry's Invisibility Cloak, but I knew that Professor Dumbledore had an uncanny ability to detect people who tried to hide under Invisibility Cloaks. And I knew that you, Severus, have a similar ability, even if it's not as well developed as Dumbledore's was. If either of you had found out, my mission would have been over. I knew that a spider, even a giant tarantula, would arouse less suspicion.

As a second option, Minerva suggested that I should try to get information about items that could become potential Horcruxes at the Hog's Head: items like stolen or sold antiques, jewellery, weapons, things that could have a connection to Voldemort's past.

I knew that the barman at the Hog's Head was Albus Dumbledore's brother, Aberforth, so I had one person there I knew I could trust not to harm me, although Aberforth wouldn't know who I was or that we would be allies later. The plan was for me to rent a room at the Hog's Head and maybe ask for temporary employment. I thought that this was a good idea. I can serve drinks and clean up, and so far, every pub I've ever seen can use a pair of extra hands on weekends. I hoped that a few weekends of helping out at the pub might just get me the information I needed. After all, Harry, Ron, and I found the Locket Horcrux at the Hog's Head last year.

Aberforth Dumbledore had been involved in trading goods of questionable origin for a long time, and while I remembered from my fifth year that the pub hadn't exactly been a place where a young, single woman would feel welcome and secure, I also remembered that Sybill Trelawney had stayed there for several days while she was applying for the Divination position. If a Trelawney could do it, a Hermione Granger should be able to do it as well, I thought.

However, the most important part of my mission would focus on you, Severus. My ultimate goal was to be present at Death Eater meetings and observe as much of Voldemort's actions as possible. The safest way for me to accomplish that, I thought, was through you. As the allotted spy for Voldemort, you would be required to follow your Dark Lord's summons repeatedly. If I could come up with a routine to accompany you in my spider form, maybe hidden in one of your pockets, then, I hoped, I would be able to learn something about Dorcas Meadowes.

From old *Daily Prophets*, I knew that Miss Meadowes had been found dead on October 5th. That meant that she had been killed a month after school started at Hogwarts. I would have a month to find out how to best gather information about the details of the killing and about the item that was used to create the Horcrux. For a brief moment, I had considered actually hiding in Dorcas Meadowes' vicinity, but Minerva had strictly forbidden me to get close to the woman while she still lived.

"You will want to prevent her death, Hermione. I know you."

"But if I did, it would prevent the creation of the Horcrux, wouldn't it?"

"Think, Hermione. Voldemort would just kill someone else. Then we'd have the same dilemma: a thoroughly changed past, and who knows if we would even have the opportunity again to find out what the Horcrux was with another victim as its source."

"Oh, Merlin, my head hurts," I complained, rubbing my temples. "I am starting to understand why people go mad when they time-travel. How can anyone stand to just watch, knowing what will happen, and not prevent people from being killed...."

Minerva had glared at me. "Don't even think about interfering with the Potters' fate, Hermione. The consequences would be unthinkable. We might not even be here.... The world could be completely different.... Voldemort could have won if he hadn't been defeated by Harry that day."

I had hung my head. "I know... I know!" I wailed. "Are you certain that I am the right person to do this?"

"Yes. You have all the prerequisites needed. You will have to suppress your pity and compassion as hard as it is but I know that you are a realist, Hermione. If anyone can do it, you can. I would never trust something like this to Harry...."

"I hope you are right, Minerva. I hope I can live up to your expectations...." And so we had stopped discussing the inevitable and looked for other options to get the information needed.

Watching your younger self seemed the most rewarding and least dangerous choice. Your frequent meetings with Voldemort, and the reports you gave Albus Dumbledore about them, made you an invaluable source of information. I hoped that I could tap that source, disguised in my Animagus form. If that plan failed, I would have to spy on a known Death Eater to get the information I needed, and your connection to Lucius Malfoy made him the next logical choice. I fervently hoped that this wouldn't be necessary; I very much doubted that he would tolerate a giant spider if he found me.

So there I was, back in 1981, reading the original *Daily Prophets* from that time, finding that the headlines very much resembled those from eighteen years later, with reported Death Eater attacks, nonsensical safety instructions from the Ministry of Magic, and complaints and calls for more action from the readers.

With a sigh, I put the paper down and put on my spider-glasses. I tied Harry's Invisibility Cloak around my waist, put my bag on my shoulder and carefully opened the door, listening for any activity. Since I had chosen the early afternoon hours for my arrival, no students were around yet, and not even Filch was prowling around. Another quick glance up and down the corridor, and I cast the spell that transformed me into the giant tarantula. Halfway up the wall, I cautiously left the Room of Requirement to roam the unknown realms of a Hogwarts from eighteen years before our present time.

Hours after I left the Room of Requirement, I had found my way to the dungeons. Students had arrived on the Hogwarts Express half an hour previously, and everyone was waiting in the Great Hall for the start-of-term feast. I thought that this would be the ideal time to look around the dungeons and find the best place to hide for watching your

comings and goings.

Tired, because using eight legs for moving about was a lot more exhausting than using two, I was crawling around a corner, half hidden behind a buttress when I heard voices.

"Don't you think they'll miss us?" a voice said.

"No way. They won't notice. They'll be so worked up over the Sorting that they won't even think about anything else. We'll just sneak back when everyone is eating." A different voice, sounding young and confident.

"I have a bad feeling about this," the first voice spoke again. "What if he isn't at the Feast yet? We don't even know if he goes to the Feast."

"All the teachers go to the Feast, and he's new and the youngest. He'll be introduced, so he'll have to go. Dumbledore won't make any exceptions for the greasy git."

I listened attentively. Clearly these were students, and they were talking about you. But what were they doing in the dungeons? They had to be up to no good....

"We'll just switch the ingredients, and off we go. Boy, will he ever be in for a surprise when the Limb-Regeneration Draught develops into fireworks, and it's his own fault." The second voice chuckled.

"You're certain that that's what's on our syllabus first? How do you know?"

"Oh, come on, it was on Slughorn's syllabus for decades. My older brother told me."

"Now, Snape won't change anything in his first year of teaching. So it'll be that potion. And then his first year of teaching will be his last. Just wait until we can tell Potter all about it. I'm sure he'll be coming here for our Quidditch matches again, this year. Down with the Slytherins," the second voice proclaimed pompously.

"Ah... well, then. Let's get on with it. We want to uphold the proud tradition of our house after all, the house of the famous Marauders, sworn enemies of Slytherins." Both voices laughed nastily.

"Right..." The first voice paused.

I stretched my pedicel the part that separates my spider self's combined upper body and head from my abdomen. I wanted to see what was going on but would have lost my foothold on the buttress if I had stretched any further. So I cautiously started to move to get a better view, trusting that my brown colour made me almost invisible against the brown stones of the castle walls.

I was wrong. With an excited shriek, the first student threw his jumper at me, and I tumbled to the floor, thankful that the jumper buffered the fall.

"It's a giant tarantula," First Voice squeaked while I struggled to get free. "It must be someone's pet."

"No matter," the second voice said eagerly. "Now, it's ours. We can release it in our first Potions lesson or throw it into a cauldron. That'll show the git..."

I started to panic. Ending up as a potions ingredient wasn't on my agenda. I had to get away before those idiots hurt me.

"Watch out, it's getting away!" Second Voice called out. A pair of large, clumsy hands were trying to grab me, but I slipped through the fingers, only to be almost flattened by First Voice's similarly big hands. With barely a hair's breadth, I scuttled past the hitting hands and towards the wall, but was stopped again by a jumper thrown my way.

"Crazy beast. I'll get you, just you wait..." Second Voice said menacingly.

"Maybe if we let things calm down a bit?" First Voice suggested. "When it doesn't feel threatened, it might be easier to catch. It's someone's pet; it must be used to being picked up."

You're not quite as stupid as you look, I thought cruelly, trying to find a way out.

"Here, spider..." Second Voice coaxed, slowly closing in on me.

Meanwhile, First Voice slowly approached me from the side.

They won't give me a chance, I thought worriedly. *I will have to use my full arsenal.*

And while both boys closed in, I raised my upper body and my front legs in a threatening manner and produced a shrill hissing sound.

"What's that?" First Voice asked. "Is it purring?"

"It's a spider, not a cat," Second Voice laughed. "No idea what that sound is, but we have the spider cornered. On the count of three?"

The other boy nodded, but before the two boys could grab me, I shot some of my barbed defensive hairs towards my attackers, hitting one in the eyes, the other one in the nose. Both backed off immediately and started to scream.

"My eyes, my eyes, I'm blind!" Second Voice screamed, tears streaming down his face from his closed eyes.

First Voice only answered with a violent sneeze and endless coughing.

Serves you right, I thought and climbed up the wall to get out of reach. But before I could get away, I heard another voice. I hid behind a pillar and froze.

"What's this racket?" It was Filch, walking around the corner, a mop and bucket in his hands. "Oh, dear, what have we here? Why aren't the young gentlemen in the Great Hall where they belong? Sneaking around in the dungeons, are we? My, my, my, we're in trouble. Very big trouble." He smiled happily. "Follow me, Gentlemen. When the Feast is over, the Headmaster will want to see you."

"Spider," First Voice managed to spit out between coughs. "Attacked us..." And he pointed to the wall and continued coughing.

"A spider, you say? Attacked you?" Filch seemed to only now notice the miserable condition the two students were in.

"Big spider," Second Voice sobbed. "It's dangerous. Don't let it get away."

"Let's see..." Filch grabbed his mop firmly. "Wouldn't be the first spider to be sorry to crawl around here ... Where are you, creepy-crawly? Here, creepy-crawly...." And he came closer, almost looking straight at me. I prepared myself for another attack.

The gleam in Filch's eyes told me that he had spotted me. "Now, there it is..." He raised his mop, but before he could strike at me, I jumped at his hand and bit him with all my might, making certain that I released venom while I did so.

Filch shook his hand and howled. "Gerroff, gerroff..." His other hand flapped wildly in my direction, but was too far off the mark to hurt me. My pincers held on to Filch's skin for dear life. I had no idea what to do next, and fervently hoped that I wouldn't be forced to give up my Animagus form to prevent being beaten to death by the three

enraged, would-be spider-hunters. But before I had to make a decision, yet another voice made itself heard.

"Filch? What is going on here?"

The voice was low, soft and sounded dangerous. For me, it was the most welcome voice in the world since it belonged to you. I could have kissed you. I only hoped that you had more sense than to join in on the spider hunt.

"A giant tarantula, Professor," Filch whimpered and raised his hand, shaking it, dangling Me-the-Spider under your nose. "It attacked these students and then it bit me."

You looked quietly at me and then held out your hand, stroking my hind legs softly with your other hand; I would have purred if I had been a cat, and I let Filch's hand go. With a soft pop, I fell into your outstretched hand and sat still.

"Go and see Madam Pomfrey, Filch," you said quietly. "That bite needs treatment; there's poison in there."

"Thank you, Professor," Filch said sycophantically. "I'll go right away, sir." And with rapid, shuffling steps he went away.

"A Chilean Rose tarantula! Beautiful specimen," you murmured, your focus back on me. "Is this your pet?" You suddenly confronted First Voice, studying him with narrowed eyes. "Alfred Abercrombie, isn't it?"

"I'm Alfie Abercrombie, yes."

"Yes, sir." You snapped. "You will treat your teachers with respect. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir!" Alfie replied, eyes wide.

"So, is this your pet, Mr. Abercrombie?"

"No, sir. Patrick and I were just minding our own business when that beast attacked us..."

"Minding your own business, were you?" you said softly. I knew that tone, and I didn't envy Alfie Abercrombie. "Then, pray tell, what business did you have down here when everybody else is at the Welcoming Feast?" Your nose almost touched Abercrombie's. "Snooping around, stealing ingredients for illegal potions, weren't you?"

"Err... no, sir." Alfie said carefully. "We must have got lost. The moving staircases, you know." He glanced sideways at his friend, and I could have sworn that he winked.

"The moving staircases? I see," you said in an even softer voice. "Two seventh-year boys get lost in a corridor they have trudged twice a week for the past six years of their lives. Care to explain that to me?" you suddenly shouted, your face red.

"Sorry, sir." Second voice, no, Patrick spoke up.

"And you would be... Patrick Peakes? Yet another Gryffindor who can't find his way, I see." You stared at both boys for a long time. Then you nodded. "Messing up ingredients. Just as I thought. Give the new git a bit of a hard time, wasn't that it?"

You looked as if you wanted to hex someone. I sat very still, enjoying the warmth radiating from your hand, amazed at the passionate vibrations I felt from you, my once-loathed teacher. Having the added sensations of a spider had its advantages, I thought.

The boys just looked at you silently, too embarrassed to talk.

"That'll be detention with Filch for four weeks and ten points from Gryffindor. Each!" You scowled at their appalled faces. "Go straight to Madam Pomfrey. Untreated, those hairs can cause serious trouble. And now get... OUT... OF... MY... SIGHT!"

The two students ran away as quickly as they could, and I was alone with you.

You took a deep breath, looked at me closely, stroked me cautiously and murmured, "Looks like I am stuck with you, spider. At least for a while. You're not allowed as a pet, you know." You stroked me again and then let me glide into the pocket of your robes as you hurried towards the Great Hall where the Headmaster had yet to introduce you as the new Potions teacher and Head of Slytherin House.

I sat very still, finally having found my ideal vantage point for further endeavours. With a contented sigh, I folded my legs and curled up into a ball.

"I still can't believe that that was you, you foolish girl. I could have squashed you so easily..."

"Rest assured that I would have transformed in time, Severus. I'm not suicidal. But the risk was worth it. I hope you'll come to see it like that, too."

The rest of the evening didn't quite progress as I had hoped. Back in the dungeons after the Feast, you first went to your private store cupboard and took a large glass jar with a wide mouth off a dusty shelf. You cleaned and dried the jar thoroughly and then went to your private quarters. A wave of your wand summoned some moss, rocks, a few roots and thick, mossy branches for the jar; another wave of the wand arranged the items invitingly for a spider, that is. Then you took me out of your pocket and put me into the glass jar, closing it with a bit of cheesecloth tied to the rim.

"There, isn't that a fine home? Tomorrow, I'll get you a few fat crickets from Kettleburn, or perhaps a mouse."

I watched in wonder as you gave me an almost relaxed smile and then turned around to go to your desk. Sitting down, you opened several books and started to read and take notes on a piece of parchment.

I was very upset. Sitting in a cage wasn't at all what I had planned for my excursion to the past. This wouldn't do; I had to get out of this. I started to climb up the glass wall, and with the help of the hairs on my claws, managed to get up to the rim but couldn't think of a way to get through the cheesecloth. Desperately, I hopped towards it, only to fall down and land at the mossy bottom of my prison. After I had repeated this exercise three or four times, you looked up from your work, stood up and walked over to my cage.

"If you continue with this, you'll injure yourself, you stupid thing," you murmured. "And if I let you out, you'll get into mischief. I can't always run after you and save you." You knocked against the glass.

I only got more desperate. I rose up on my hind legs and started to produce my shrill sound of displeasure and warning again. Then I continued to attack the cheesecloth roof.

You shook your head and took the cloth off the jar. One final jump, and I sat on the rim, scuttling quickly towards you. You stretched out a hand; I jumped on it and then ran up your arm until I had reached your shoulder. There I settled down and held still.

"Oh, very well," you said, sounding slightly amused. "But don't complain if you accidentally get squashed; I have better things to do than watch out for you all the time." You sat back down at your desk and continued to work while I watched from your shoulder.

You were writing up lesson plans and something that looked like a speech. When you had finished, you stood up and started pacing up and down, memorising the speech,

murmuring passages of it in a barely audible voice. This went on for a while, and I had almost dropped off to sleep when someone knocked on the door.

"Come!" you said. You radiated a sudden tension that made me wide-awake. It was a kind of excited, fearful alertness, paired with confidence. I found it difficult to analyse, not being used to detecting such strong feelings as a spider. Outwardly, you remained composed; your voice was steady and your stance calm and collected.

The door opened, and Headmaster Dumbledore entered. I thought my heart would stop, or what substituted for a heart in a spider. Dumbledore had been killed two years previously by the same man I was now trusting to help me find a solution to the Horcrux dilemma, and seeing the Headmaster alive and cheerful again almost broke my heart.

You had offered the Headmaster a seat in front of the cold fireplace and sat down in an armchair opposite him. Dumbledore smiled gently and gracefully accepted the glass of Firewhisky that was offered.

"I don't want to trouble you for long, Severus. I am aware of the late hour. I merely came to see how you were faring, and if you're all set for tomorrow, or if I can help you with anything." His blue eyes shone kindly from behind his half-moon glasses.

"Thank you, Headmaster, but I am fine. Everything is prepared; there won't be any problems," you said quietly.

"There was some trouble earlier this evening, wasn't there?" Dumbledore asked.

You nodded. "Yes, two students out of bounds. They were found, and punished, accordingly."

"Two seventh-year Gryffindors, weren't they? Old enough to remember you as a student here...." Dumbledore paused and studied you sitting stiffly in your armchair, holding on to your own glass of Firewhisky as if it were a lifesaver. "I know how difficult this is for you, Severus. They won't respect your authority easily. If I can be of any assistance, please tell me."

"That won't be necessary, Headmaster," you said coldly, but I felt the suppressed tension: a mixture of worry, affection for the old man, and an effort to distance yourself. "I will find means of establishing my... authority... with the students. I do not expect that they will confuse me with Professor Slughorn for very long."

Dumbledore chuckled gently. "I'd say that looking at you, there is little danger of that. Don't be too hard on them, Severus. Horace's criteria for his Advanced Potions class weren't the same yours will be, I daresay. Please don't let the students suffer for his foolishness. My friend Horace has many good qualities, but being objective isn't one of them, sadly." Dumbledore smiled again.

"Very well," you said with a slight sneer. "I shall treat them as fairly as they deserve to be treated. Is there anything else, Headmaster?"

"Have you been summoned recently?"

"No, and I would have alerted you if I had been summoned. Just like I did last time."

"Yes, of course. Well, then I had better go and get some sleep." Dumbledore's eyes twinkled. "Go to bed, Severus. You are well prepared; you will do well tomorrow. And, as I see, you have adopted an ancient good-luck charm." His finger pointed towards me and came a bit too close. I rose my front part and started to hiss.

You took me off your shoulder and stroked me gently. "She's an interesting creature. Lively and almost foolishly determined and brave." You smirked. "She must be a Gryffindor pet."

"Why, thank you on behalf of my old house, Severus." Dumbledore chuckled. "From the way she attacked those two poor boys, I would rather have thought that she wasn't overly fond of Gryffindors. Maybe you can make a true Slytherin out of her. Will you keep her?"

"For the time being. If no one claims her. Eventually, I will ask Professor Kettleburn to find a permanent home for her. "

"Good," Dumbledore said. "She seems to like you, by the way she relaxes in your hand. Does she have a name?"

"I shall call her Arachne. That is a proud name for a spider. I think she deserves it."

"Arachne. A good choice. Take care of your friend here, Arachne. He needs the good luck tomorrow. All the best to you for tomorrow, Severus. You know that my office is always open to staff?"

"Yes, you've told me twice already," you said, the smirk moving into a slight sneer.

"There you have it; I'm getting old. I had better go now. Goodnight, Severus."

"Goodnight, Headmaster."

You finished your work, carefully put me/Arachne back into the glass jar, but you left it open this time. Then you went to the bathroom. When you came back out, I saw to my amusement that you were wearing an old-fashioned grey nightshirt that ended just below the knees and revealed your legs. I was glad that a spider couldn't giggle and waited for you to settle for the night.

When you slept, I left my cage and crawled out of your quarters through a vent in your bathroom. I didn't dare transfer back to human form in your rooms; I didn't know what kind of warding spells you used to protect yourself from intruders. So I transformed when I was outside in the corridor and then made my way out of the castle under Harry's Invisibility Cloak. I walked to the Forbidden Forest where I used the Time-Turner again and travelled back in time a few hours. I straightened my hair with Sleekeazy's and put on a bit of make-up so I didn't look too young. Then I Apparated to Hogsmeade where I went to the Hog's Head. I had no trouble renting a room there. I ate my meal in the pub and kept my eyes and ears open, but didn't hear anything of interest. The barman agreed to take me on as a helper on Saturday nights, which made me glad. Back in my room, I stretched out a bit, and after a few hours of sleep, I went back to Hogwarts.

In the early morning hours, you were still asleep. I returned to my cage and rested there until you woke up.

"Merlin, I can't believe the risk you took. There was so much that could have gone wrong. How Minerva could have allowed this escapes me."

"It was a war, Severus. In our time, where I left, and back then, where I arrived. I saw no other option. Apart from the little fact that you would have died, how could I have left Harry trapped in his body, together with Voldemort? It would just have postponed the problem. Years later, some of his followers would have found the body, Voldemort would have broken free of the confining spells, and everything would have started anew. And then we wouldn't have had you, nor Harry, nor Dumbledore, nor any hope.... I just had to take the risk. Don't you see?"

"Don't pretend that my life would have been a factor in your decision, Miss Granger. You always took foolish risks, and you rarely thought about the consequences. And in the greater scheme of things, my life isn't important."

"Well, it was important enough to me and to Minerva. No, it wasn't the predominant factor for my decision. I'll give you that. But I wanted you to live. Can't you accept that? And we were on a first-name basis in the Order. Can't you call me, 'Hermione', please?"

"Hermione, then. But that's no reason to hold onto my hands like this. Surely you aren't trying to tell me that you have had a schoolgirl crush on me all these years?"

"Of course not. I didn't even like you very much, although I always respected and later admired you. But things have changed for me. And it's easier to tell you everything when I can hold your hands. It's so good to feel your warmth again...."

"There is no reasoning with you, as usual. Hold on then, if you must.... So, you found my grey nightshirt amusing?"

"Yes, but I also found it endearing. Do you still wear one?"

"I don't think that is any of your business. Get on with your tale..."

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 7

Hermione travels back in time to find a missing Horcrux. She meets a young Severus who prepares for his first Potions lesson. Written before DH, now AU.

Disclaimer: Nothing you recognize belongs to me. Just borrowed. Will be returned. Snape is welcome to stay, though.

My beta readers, Maggie and Melusin, deserve much thanks and the highest praise, a lot of chocolate, flowers and relaxing music. All remaining errors are my fault.

Chapter 3

The next day was a Wednesday. You got up early and only dressed in a shirt and black trousers, nervously paced up and down in front of your fireplace while you drank a cup of coffee, frowning and murmuring all the while. Clearly, you were preparing yourself for your first Potions lesson, which, so I guessed, would be the seventh-years' Advanced Potions class. Oh, how I wanted to see this!

While you were still walking up and down, I climbed up the longest branch in my cage and jumped out of the jar altogether. I scuttled quickly to the wall and climbed up, wondering how I could get to the classroom unseen. Then I saw your robes hanging on the door of an armoire. Hoping that these would be the robes you would wear to class, I hid in one of the pockets.

You didn't notice.

Radiating vibrations of tension, excitement and something that smelt remarkably like fear, you finally put your robes on and left your private rooms in a hurry. Instead of going to breakfast, you moved directly to your office where you resumed the nervous pacing. I felt an odd sensation of sympathy for the young man who was too excited to eat before he gave his first lesson. This was so different from the cold, unemotional, arrogant teacher I knew. Come to think of it, you looked unmoved and cold, but my spidery senses told me that this clearly wasn't what you felt.

After what appeared to be an endless time, you stopped, took a deep breath and left the office. Walking briskly, you threw the door open, swept into the classroom and closed the door behind you with a bang. I heard suppressed giggles that were countered with a cold, "Silence." I hoped that you would stand still long enough to let me climb to the rim of the pocket to glance outside; a few strands of spider silk would keep me in place and comfortable. After a few moments of just standing there and glaring at the students, my wish was granted. You strode to the front of the room and sat down at your desk.

You started the class by taking the register, and when you reached the name of Alfie Abercrombie, you looked up and paused.

"How delightful that the moving staircases allowed you to get to class on time without getting lost," you said in a low voice, almost a whisper. "Let us hope that your skills in Potions surpass those of navigating the castle."

A few of Alfie's mates giggled, but you silenced them with an icy glare. After finishing the register, you stood up and walked to the blackboard.

"As students of this advanced class, you have proven in the past to not only have an interest but also a certain aptitude for the subtle science and exact art of potion-making," you began, speaking in a low voice and ignoring the muted giggles from the back benches. "After six years of studying and honing your skills, I expect you to understand the beauty of the softly simmering cauldron with its shimmering fumes, the delicate power of liquids that creep through human veins, bewitching the mind, ensnaring the senses... By now you will have learned how to bottle fame and brew glory. And in your last and final class, you will learn how to even stopper death if you were accepted into this class based on more than just influential relatives or an old name." With these words, you swept towards the four culprits in the last row and looked down on them menacingly.

"That would be five points from Gryffindor, Mr. Peakes, five points from Ravenclaw, Miss Van Snyder, five more points from Ravenclaw, Mr. Patil, and five points from Hufflepuff, Miss Winterbottom. There will be silence in this class. One would expect that seventh-year students might have learned some sort of self-discipline over the years." You sneered at the four students' surprised stares and walked back to the blackboard. A flick of your wand made a list of ingredients and instructions visible, and you continued.

"You see here the ingredients and instructions for the Entrail-Reinsertion Wash. You will brew the first stage of the potion in the second half of this class. You have the first forty-five minutes to write an essay about the different ingredients, their properties, and their interaction. Your homework will be a detailed analysis of the method of brewing and how it was developed. Begin."

Glaring at them sternly, you sat down again and studied the register. After forty-five minutes, you Summoned the parchments and opened the door to the store cupboard for the students to gather their ingredients. While they started to cut up fanged geranium roots and to crush dragon eggshells, you read through the essays. After a while, you stood up and prowled around the classroom.

"Your technique of cutting up those roots is abysmal, Mr. Peakes," you said, smirking. "Who can tell me why Mr. Peakes' geranium roots won't be buffering the caustic effect of the crushed dragon eggshells? Yes, Miss Pritchard?"

A tall Slytherin girl had raised her hand. "Only the smooth surface of the thinly and evenly sliced roots will produce enough sap to stick all of the eggshell powder to the root slices. The powder and the sap have to interact. Those unevenly cut slices will contain pockets of poorly coated shell powder, and areas where no powder sticks at all. There won't be a thorough mixture of sap and powder for the potion to be efficient."

"Very good. That makes ten points to Slytherin. And why don't we extract the active compounds in the sap and mix them with the powder? Mr. Abercrombie, perhaps you can tell us? But only if you didn't get lost in the instructions." You raised an eyebrow and sneered down on the unfortunate student, who stood before you with a red face.

"I don't know, sir," Alfie Abercrombie said with a mutinous expression. "I've never brewed this potion before; how should I know?"

"That'll be five points from Gryffindor for cheek and another five for being ill prepared. Ever since your third year, you have prepared potions ingredients with a similar technique. A dry powder is bound to the surface of a root or bulb, held there by the resin, gum, or sap that interacts with the powder." You sneered at Abercrombie again and then asked the class, "Is there anyone who can tell me why that technique is used?"

The same Slytherin girl raised her hand again. You smirked at her and nodded.

"The magically active compounds in the saps are often unstable without the other substances present in the root or bulb. It would be very expensive and time consuming to extract all the compounds that are needed to keep the active compounds stable. It is much cheaper and easier to just use a thin slice from the whole plant."

"Here we have a young lady who has learned to think beyond her textbook," you said with a contented nod towards the girl. "You are correct, Miss Pritchard. That makes another five points for Slytherin. You are a fine example for your noble house."

The girl blushed, pleasantly surprised. I thought to myself that I had done just as well, or better, in your classes, but I never got any praise from you. It looked like you had started to favour your own house straight away.

Your eyes returned to Alfie Abercrombie. "I suggest you start to think, not follow instructions blindly, Mr. Abercrombie. I am surprised and appalled at the level of knowledge in this Advanced Potions class. I wouldn't have accepted half of your number. Why exactly are you taking Advanced Potions, Mr. Abercrombie? Enlighten me, please."

"I always had good marks in Professor Slughorn's classes," Alfie replied with a sulky expression. "Professor Slughorn was of the opinion that I had an intuitive knowledge of potion-making. He knew my great-grandfather, who was Chief Warlock on the Wizengamot for several years. Professor Slughorn said that I have what it takes to become a good potions brewer." While he'd been speaking, Alfie had raised his chin, clearly proud of his relative.

"Is that so?" you said in a low and dangerously soft voice. "Very well. Professor Slughorn has his methods of teaching, and I have mine. And in my class, you will be judged according to your knowledge and aptitude, is that clear?" Your voice had become louder, and your nose almost touched Alfie's. "If you want to remain in this class, Mr. Abercrombie..." You looked up and glared at the other students. "And that goes for the rest of you, too. If you want to continue this class, I expect you to work hard. I don't expect less than an Exceeds Expectations on all of your Potions N.E.W.T.s. And now, continue with your work."

There were no other interruptions; the students brewed the first stage of their potion all of them were sufficiently skilled to avoid dangerous situations, and when you dismissed them, they shuffled off more or less agitated. The Slytherins looked smug and hopeful; they had picked up on the favouritism you had employed for your own house quickly. The other students grumbled, since many of Slughorn's favourites had considered Potions an easy class and were rather displeased that it was now turning out to be one of the toughest classes instead.

The second Potions class of that day, single Hufflepuff-Ravenclaw third-years, was more or less uneventful. A few well-placed deductions of house points had assured you of the undivided attention of that class. You gave them a slightly modified version of the same speech you had given your Advanced Potions class, and I stayed in your pocket all day and watched.

In the early evening, the prefects of Slytherin house were coming to your office to confer with their new Head of House. This was a rather dry and formal meeting that reminded me very much of my own meetings with Minerva when I had been a prefect: the same formality, the same boredom, maybe a bit less warmth. I was rather surprised to find that you possessed a dry wit similar to Minerva's, but I also thought that your kind of humour was completely wasted on your students.

The evening ended uneventfully. While you were in the bathroom, I crawled from your pocket back to my cage, and when you came out in your ridiculous, grey nightshirt again, I stared at you through the glass of my cage.

"Ah, Arachne, there you are," you said. "I missed you earlier. Been crawling around again, have you?" I didn't move.

"Well, it's easy to end up as a potions ingredient around here, so you'd want to be a bit more careful. You're such a beauty; it would be a shame if something happened to you."

I had climbed the wall and hopped out of the cage again. I crawled towards your hand, and you stroked me cautiously and then put me back.

"Time to get some sleep. Goodnight, Arachne."

So ended your first day of teaching at Hogwarts. I, however, made another time-jump and spent another uneventful evening at the Hog's Head.

Over the next two days, we established a kind of routine. I would hide in your pocket during the day, something you noticed soon enough and tolerated with amusement. You took great care not to put anything into that pocket that could hurt me. I slept through most of your lessons and was wide-awake and alert in the evenings when you read or marked essays. When you went to bed, you put me into the cage where I waited until I could leave for Hogsmeade.

Sometimes you talked to me in a soft voice, commenting on the events of the day with dry humour and a sharp wit. I enjoyed those moments; I found them highly amusing and only wished that I could add my own remarks to yours, since you commented on all the things that had caught my attention, too. This was something I hadn't expected at all. I found that I actually started to like you as a person, and not only respect you as a teacher and an ally. I decided then to try to get to know your older self better after my return to my own time if we both survived the confrontation with Voldemort.

I wondered when you would be summoned to a Death Eater meeting for the first time after starting to teach. For a little while, I panicked, thinking that you might not be summoned at all, and that you would use other means to get information to Voldemort. I knew that as Voldemort's spy, you would have to provide some information eventually, but I wasn't certain if you perhaps used a secret code and merely sent messages.

However, when Minerva and I had come up with the plan, she had told me that you were summoned regularly in your function as Voldemort's spy after our fourth year. I tried to convince myself that this would be the routine used by you and Voldemort in 1981 as well.

On Saturday morning, a bright green flame flared up in the fireplace of your office. Someone had opened the Floo connection, and a head appeared in the flames.

"Severus, may I come through?"

"Professor Kettleburn? Of course, please come."

The green flame flared even higher and began to spin, and a moment later an old man stepped through. I recognised him; he had been Hagrid's predecessor as Care of Magical Creatures teacher and by the time of his retirement had only had one remaining leg and a total of five fingers on both hands. In 1981, he was missing the leg already, but his hands still seemed to have their full set of fingers.

Kettleburn was limping towards you, smiling. "No need to be so formal when no students are around, boy. Call me Lysander."

"Thank you," you said. "Was there a reason why you wanted to see me?"

"As a matter of fact, yes. I brought the crickets for your spider." Kettleburn took a cardboard box with small holes out of his pocket and handed it to you.

"That wasn't necessary. Thank you. I could have picked them up easily from your office."

"Of course you could have, but I'm a nosy, meddling old codger. I wanted to see your spider. Where is she?" Kettleburn grinned disarmingly at you, but you only raised an eyebrow and smiled slightly.

"She's right here in my pocket. Most of the time, she sits on my shoulder or in one of my pockets. I don't know what she means by this, but that's where I usually find her."

"She seems to crave the warmth. May I hold her for a moment?"

You searched in your pocket and carefully took me in your hand. You presented me to Kettleburn on your open palm, and I crawled onto the old teacher's hand and let myself be admired.

"A perfect specimen. Such a beautiful girl. Nice, long, shiny hair, covering the legs evenly, and quite dense on the body. A lovely colour, too. And her temperament is rather fiery, or so I've heard?"

You smirked. "She is amazingly strong-willed for a spider. Docile when you're calm, aggressive when someone bothers her. She even hissed at the Headmaster."

"Did she now?" Kettleburn laughed. "But Dumbledore seemed to be quite taken with her when he told me about it. I daresay that most of our colleagues are less... ah... enthusiastic about your idea of a pet."

"She's not my pet. I can't keep her. I don't really have the time to care for an animal at the moment, although she would make a good familiar. I will keep her until the first Hogsmeade weekend, and if no one has claimed her by then, I will try to find a permanent home for her."

"I know someone who would pay you twenty Galleons for her. She's perfect; she could be very valuable for breeding... Hey, what did I say?" Kettleburn gave me back to you after I had raised my upper body and front legs threateningly and started to hiss. "Here. She really seems fixated on you, Severus. Maybe it's your voice, your smell, or the emotions you transmit, but she seems to like yours, and not mine." He chuckled. "There you have it; even a spider prefers the young bloke to the old codger."

You smiled coldly. "Can I do anything else for you?"

"No, I'd better go now. I have to mark some essays." Kettleburn grabbed a handful of Floo powder and left.

"How you must have laughed about the idiot who spoke to spiders!"

"Why would I have laughed? You were lonely, and I wasn't just any old spider. The only time I smiled about you was when I saw you in your nightshirt. That's something you don't get to see often."

"Stop grinning. I'll have you know that that type of nightshirt is very comfortable and totally acceptable in the wizarding world. STOP LAUGHING!"

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry. So, you still wear one of those, hmm? It's not really funny. Only, in the Muggle world, it's a bit outdated. As well you know... and then there was old Archie at the Quidditch World Cup..."

"I really can't see what's so funny. Who is this old Archie?"

"Uh... let's just say that he valued a healthy breeze..."

"STOP THAT INFERNAL GIGGLING! Didn't you claim to be an adult? Then act like one. I assume your tale isn't finished yet?"

"I'm sorry. No, there's still quite a bit of explaining to do. Just hear me out, please."

Later that day, you put me into my cage, told me firmly, "You stay here, no hiding in my pockets when I go out!" and left.

I was worried. I had no idea where you were going and when you would return, or if you had been summoned.

When you returned several hours later, you looked pale and drawn. You threw your travelling cloak over a chair, went to the fireplace and called to the Headmaster.

"Professor Dumbledore, can I come through?"

I jumped out of my cage in a hurry. I wanted to be in your pocket before you Flooed to the Headmaster, but before I could get there, Albus Dumbledore stepped through the flames into your room.

"You must be very tired, Severus. Sit down and get some rest. You look terrible."

You nodded and sank down on the sofa at the fireplace, looking forlorn and very young. The Headmaster summoned a house-elf and ordered a cup of hot chocolate for you.

"Now, get your strength back and then tell me all about it." Dumbledore pressed your shoulder briefly and sat down in an armchair facing you.

You drank down the hot chocolate in a few gulps. I wondered how you could drink the steaming liquid that quickly, but when you had finished, some colour had returned to your face, and you took a deep breath before you started to speak.

"The Dark Lord was pleased, Headmaster. He summoned me privately, without other Death Eaters around, and indicated that this would be his preferred method of receiving my reports unless there is need for a general meeting. I am to meet him every weekend at around the same time, upon his summons. He explicitly ordered me to socialise with my colleagues, as I did today. The Dark Lord thinks that listening to their gossip will give him an idea about how ordinary people think about his campaign. He trusts that not all teachers are loyal to you."

Dumbledore nodded and glanced encouragingly at you. "Good. We can work with this. Continue, please."

"He was especially pleased with my status as Head of House. He expects me to gain the trust of the Slytherin students and give them advice that benefits him." You pressed your lips tightly together and glared at the Headmaster.

Dumbledore returned your glare with a kind smile. "I'm well aware of the burden this imposes on you, Severus. It is a fine balance between counselling pureblood students to follow the directives and traditions of their families and actively sending them to become Death Eaters. Only a Slytherin can gain their trust sufficiently to do that. Only a Slytherin can walk that fine line." You were scowling, but he beamed brightly at you. "Oh, Severus, I'm so glad that we have you on our side."

"More like being caught between a rock and a hard place," you mumbled, but I, who by now sat on your shoulder again, wasn't sure if that comment had been loud enough to be heard by Albus Dumbledore. I, however, had felt the suppressed anguish, and my heart went out to you. I always had thought that Harry's fate was a hard and unfair one. But to me, your younger self's fate didn't seem much easier, although fairness demanded me to admit that you had mostly brought that fate upon you yourself, unlike Harry who had always been used like a chess piece.

"I can only repeat again and again how much this means to our cause, Severus, and how grateful I am. But now you should get some sleep. You look completely worn out."

I will take your full report in my office tomorrow. Goodnight." And with a friendly nod, the Headmaster stepped into the fireplace.

I cursed violently. What good did all my scheming, transforming and hiding do, if when the important things happened, I sat in a cage and might not even be able to listen in on the full reports you were giving the Headmaster? This wasn't good. I would have to go to Hogsmeade as soon as you were asleep, but instead of watching you and following you wherever it was you were summoned to, I had to help out at the bar of the Hog's Head to do my 'general spying'. Finding the artefact that was used with Dorcas Meadowes' death had to be my first priority, after all.

The thought of the young woman being killed soon made me depressive. How could I sit here and speculate about the 'use' of Dorcas' death when I could neither warn nor help the poor woman? Not for the first time, I heartily cursed the inventors of time-travelling devices. With a sad sigh, I waited for you to go to sleep. Then I made my way to Hogsmeade to start my new job.

The work at the bar was fairly easy; most of the patrons were very quiet, more the type to listen than to talk. The barman, Aberforth Dumbledore, wasn't very talkative either, but I hoped that I might get some information through him over time.

Halfway through the evening, I saw to my surprise how you came to the pub, accompanied by Professor Kettleburn and some other Hogwarts teachers, neither of whom I knew. They must have retired before I started school. I tried to watch you, but all I saw was that you were sitting quietly with your colleagues, drinking a glass of Firewhisky. Professor Kettleburn did most of the talking; he laughed heartily and drank with gusto.

After a while, your colleagues left, and you moved to the bar, ordering another glass. I felt rather weird serving you the drink. I very much wanted to talk to you, but didn't quite know how to start a conversation. I thought I made a rather poor barmaid, but then, I wasn't paid for talking to the guests, but for serving them drinks. Just when I summoned my courage and approached you, I saw you flinch and jump up from your barstool. You threw a few Knuts on the table and left in a hurry. You must have been summoned, I thought. But instead of following, I had to stay the rest of the evening and serve drinks until the pub closed for the night.

None the wiser than before, I cleaned myself up in my rented room and then secretly went back to Hogwarts where I wondered in my cage what the next day would bring.

"So it was all planned after all. You approached me deliberately... I think I've heard enough, now."

"No, you haven't. I hadn't planned to approach you directly at all. I thought what I told you about Minerva's and my plans made that clear. I think you are rather deliberately trying to misunderstand me. Why would you do that? I'm not asking anything of you that you don't want to give. I only ask that you hear the whole story before you condemn me."

"Then why did you want to talk to me? You could have spied on me as the spider. I didn't tell you anything of importance..."

"Because I had started to like you. Didn't you listen? But being talked to as a spider is a bit different from being acknowledged as a human being... and as a woman. It may have been foolish, but I just wanted to talk to you. Can't you understand that? Haven't you ever tried to approach someone you found interesting?"

"Perhaps. Continue."

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of 7

Hermione travels back in time to find a missing Horcrux. She meets a young Severus who prepares for his first Potions lesson. Written before DH, now AU.

Disclaimer: Nothing you recognize belongs to me. Just borrowed. Will be returned. Snape is welcome to stay, though.

My beta readers, Maggie and Melusin, deserve much thanks and the highest praise, a lot of chocolate, flowers and relaxing music. All remaining errors are my fault.

Chapter 4

The next few days brought nothing new. You taught, I listened, and the students slowly understood that Severus Snape was nothing at all like Horace Slughorn. Almost every Potions lesson in that first week of teaching had resulted in one or more detentions, together with a significant loss of house points for all houses, except Slytherin.

According to your master's wishes, you kept socialising with the other teachers and spent part of your free periods in the staffroom. The changes in house points after your lessons didn't go unnoticed, though. Some of the teachers watched the development with amusement, others with anger. You weren't popular; that much was clear.

One of your fiercest opponents was Minerva McGonagall. Much to my amusement, she challenged you at every opportunity and even started to wager with you on the House Cup and the Quidditch Cup. You informed her arrogantly that Slytherin house would have won both cups by the second year of your teaching, which granted you some furious comments on house bias. You countered coldly that the days of bias based on influential acquaintances, and other important connections, were over. For you, Slytherin house was what counted, and Slytherin house would get your full support. Minerva couldn't find a good argument to counter this and went off in a huff.

I was wondering how the two of you had become such trusted friends over time. While Minerva had pretended to distrust you after you killed the Headmaster in my sixth year, she had, in reality, known of Dumbledore's reason for trusting you. She had supported you and helped you to hide. Her hateful comments had been nothing but a clever disguise, meant to cover your tracks. By that time, you had already moved up to be Voldemort's most trusted advisor. It had taken some time for me to understand this, and Harry and Ron never grasped the idea. However, seeing the two of you together gave me no indication as to how this close friendship could have developed. I suspected that it would have taken years for the two of you to recognise the value in each other.

"You are stating the obvious, Hermione. Why would such old news help me understand your inane actions, pray tell?"

"I'm just trying to give you an idea as to how I saw you, and what I felt about you. I was confused, and it took a while for me to see clearly and understand my own feelings. I do now, but I still struggled back then."

On Wednesday evening, you were drawn out of your usual routine of reading and marking essays by a knock on your door. When called, a young woman entered.

"Miss Pritchard, is there a problem?" you asked.

"I wondered if I could talk to you, sir," the girl said with downcast eyes.

"Sit down and tell me what it is you wish to talk to me about." A tap of your wand on the desk made a cup of tea appear, which you handed to the girl.

"I, err... that is to say... I was wondering if you could give me some advice, sir." She nervously sipped at her tea.

You scowled impatiently but quickly schooled your features into indifference. "If I can..."

The girl looked up, and her eyes widened when she saw Me-the-Spider sitting on your shoulder. She stared at me in frozen fascination, swallowing hard several times, unable to say anything.

You sneered, took me off your shoulder and gently put me into my cage.

"Perhaps you could find your voice again, Miss Pritchard. My time isn't unlimited," you said, but not unkindly.

"Sorry, sir, it's just... never mind." The girl swallowed again and started. "It's my family. We're an old family, untainted purebloods for many generations with nigh a Squib amongst us. All of us were in Slytherin house, of course. And for quite some time now, we have been wondering..."

I saw you press your jaws together as if you knew what was coming. You nodded. "You've been wondering how you should react to the more recent, ah, political developments in wizarding society. Isn't that it?"

Daisy Pritchard looked relieved. "Yes, sir. I know that my parents wonder what the best way would be, for the benefit of the family. And I do, too. But..." She stared at her hands holding her teacup.

"Out with it, Miss Pritchard."

"Err... you know, it isn't a secret that you are a close friend of Lucius Malfoy... And the Malfoys seem to be, ah, rather supportive of the alternative cause. So I thought that maybe you could tell me what is expected of me. Do I..." She swallowed hard and then bravely raised her head to meet your cold stare. "Do I have to join... you know... that organization?" She blinked.

"Is that what you wish, Miss Pritchard? Speak without fear. It isn't a sign of weakness to be cautious; it is a sign of intelligence."

Daisy hesitated for a long moment, seeking something in your eyes. "It is not my wish," she finally said decisively. "While I strongly support the elevated status of pureblood nobility in society, I find myself rather dismayed about the activities pursued by this... ah... Dark Lord." Another swallow, and she continued, "I am, however, well aware that even pureblood families are treated with... less than perfect respect when they openly oppose the new, ah, political players. I wish to support my family and am willing to do what it takes."

You looked at the girl for a long time. My own tiny spider heart beat wildly. In the past, I had invested little thought as to what it might cost a Slytherin pureblood family to resist Voldemort. I had seen the Weasleys' example and deduced that this would be the proper behaviour of any independent and proud wizarding family, pureblood or not. Obviously, that was a mistake. I recognised the courage in the girl, the quiet acceptance of a fate imposed on her from powers she had little influence on. This type of courage was so different from the vociferous, spur-of-the-moment, demanding Gryffindor type of courage... I wondered what course of action you would recommend to the poor girl.

When you finally spoke, it was in a gentle and very smooth voice. You radiated respect and understanding something I had never seen from you when you were dealing with students in my own time.

"I understand your dilemma, Miss Pritchard. And my advice to you is to act like a Slytherin." A small smile curled your lips when you saw the girl's confused frown. "To join a cause and be an active member of such an organization as the... alternative political power is, calls for a certain type of personality. You need a certain passion for the cause and some rather single-minded determination. You could almost call it fanaticism." You paused and studied her reaction. When she looked at you calmly, without a hint of fear or anger, you continued. "From what I know about the leader of this movement, he values all kinds of support. Be they financial, political, or through being one of his minions who carry out his orders. I happen to know that he values the old pureblood families just as much as any self-respecting Slytherin should. And as long as he doesn't encounter blatant opposition from their ranks, he will be rather grateful for any support these old, influential families can give him. He was in our house, you know. If you look at other families, like the Malfoys for instance, you will see that they are working towards maintaining their influence with the current political powers... and towards supporting the new movement. They do both in moderation. It is never a mistake to be cautious. And every true Slytherin will understand that."

The girl nodded, her face lightening up. "I think I understand, sir. I think this is something my family could do."

"The support, even if it isn't shown openly, of a family like yours, Miss Pritchard, will be more valuable to the leader of the new movement than any rash action and self-sacrifice could be."

"I understand," Daisy said. "Thank you so much, sir. I think that your advice is good and that my family can live very well with this." She stood up and moved to the door. "It is a real pleasure to have you as our Head of House, sir. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Miss Pritchard."

When the girl was gone, you stood at your window and stared out into the night.

After you finally went to sleep, I climbed out of my cage and watched you. It had never occurred to me what exactly your duties as Head of Slytherin entailed. And now that I knew, I understood a lot more about the obvious house bias you had always displayed. I was quite certain that the other Heads of House faced similar problems from their pureblood members, but they weren't in a situation where they were conflicted between the demands of one master and the expectations of another. I thought that you had done very well. You had, after all, prevented Miss Pritchard from becoming one of the fanatic followers of Voldemort without outing yourself as one of his opponents. The Pritchard family would do what many traditional pureblood families had always done: show Galleons to the right people in the right places from either side, to have a way to back out, regardless of the outcome of the conflict. I thought that you could be proud of yourself and hoped that the Headmaster would see things as I did.

Saturday approached quickly, and I knew that you would go to Hogsmeade again. You would meet the other teachers in the Hog's Head, have some drinks with them, and then probably study the goings-on in the pub until you were summoned.

After you left, I climbed out of the cage and left your quarters through the vent in the bathroom, left the castle, jumped back in time and Apparated to Hogsmeade.

When I started working, it was early evening and there was hardly anyone there. The majority of the patrons would come in later.

Half an hour later, I saw the Hogwarts teachers arrive. The Professors went to the bar, greeted me noisily and ordered a round of Firewhisky before they sat down at a large table on one side of the room.

Hags, warlocks, a few goblins, several dwarves, a group of younger wizards, and a very old witch entered the pub successively, but there still was no sight of you. I went on with my work but had to wait another half an hour until the door opened again and you came into the room.

I watched you secretly, hoping that this time you wouldn't run away quite so soon. The human perspective was quite different from the spider's point of view, and where you

had appeared overly tall, authoritative, and dangerous to Me-the-Spider, you now had lost a good bit of your threatening appearance. You were just an ordinary young wizard, I thought, a confident young man, no longer a boy. Your long, gangly limbs moved with the impressive grace I was so well acquainted with; there was no boyish awkwardness left. Your hair was flopping into your eyes and frequently swept away with an impatient gesture.

You looked around the pub briefly, ordered a glass of Firewhisky and sat down at the table with the other teachers. Just as you had the other night, you drank in silence, occasionally replying to the odd question but neither smiling nor laughing nor initiating a conversation with your colleagues. This didn't prevent Kettleburn from engaging you in conversation every so often, but I noticed how the other teachers shot suspicious and partly annoyed looks in your direction.

Only about half an hour later, most of them excused themselves and left. Kettleburn and the old Muggle Studies teacher stayed a few minutes longer but didn't get you to lighten up, or even become sociable. Instead, you scowled at anyone who looked your way twice.

"Ah, we'd better go now, too," Kettleburn suggested loudly. "Don't heed us, Severus. We're old blokes and need some rest. You stay and have some fun."

A dismissive nod from you sent them on their way.

So that was the socialising Voldemort was so interested in? I thought in puzzlement. I hadn't seen the teachers talk much; all they had been doing was drinking. But that shouldn't concern me. I should be finding out if there were any interesting antique artefacts for sale, if any had been stolen, and the general gossip about jewels, heirlooms and their owners.

After your colleagues left, you moved to the bar. I was Scourgifying glasses and cups and glanced at you when I thought you weren't looking but noticed soon that you were secretly studying me from beneath your curtain of black hair. I banished the clean glasses to their racks and went to the tables to clean up a bit.

When I came back, a stack of empty mugs floating behind me, I saw you scowling and trying to avoid looking my way. While I passed you, one of the younger wizards, who had come into the pub earlier, grinned at me appreciatively. He seemed to have forgotten why exactly he had left his peers and had gone to the bar.

"My, you are a pretty one," he said, looking me up and down lewdly. His hand moved towards my posterior, clearly intending to pinch. But before he could as much as touch me, I had my stack of mugs hovering on hold and my wand at his throat, snarling, "Don't even think about it!"

Wide-eyed, the drunkard retreated. "Jus wanned to be friendly. Pretty girl like you shouldn't be alone..."

"I shall decide on that myself, thank you very much, and now let me do my work." I snarled and glared at the wizard with narrowed eyes.

"I like a girl when she's feisty like you." The drunken wizard leaned in on me again. "Sh... Just wanna be friendly..." He grinned at me, swaying slightly.

I took a deep breath and was just about to start to give him a piece of my mind when a deceptively smooth voice drawled from beside me, "Didn't you hear that the lady wishes to be left alone?" You had stood up and loomed threateningly over the drunken wizard, sneering down on him.

"Ok, ok, di'n't know she was your lady, matey..." The drunkard turned around, stumbled, and staggered back to his friends."

I spun around and glared at you. "Thank you, but I can deal with the likes of him on my own," I growled.

"Certainly, but I prefer peace and quiet, and it didn't look as if you would grant me that anytime soon." Your glare would have been frightening if I hadn't noticed your interest earlier. So I just shrugged and turned back to my work.

After a few minutes, more customers had come to the bar, and I was serving them drinks and talking to them. I kept my voice down, but a few glances in your direction showed me that you were listening attentively, although you were pretending not to. I thought that you must have learned quite a bit of acting over the years since your acting at that moment wasn't all that convincing. A slight shiver of worry started in my stomach, but then I reminded myself that you had successfully fooled Voldemort until the very end, so your acting skills must have improved dramatically rather soon.

"There is another pub here where you could rent a room, and work," you suddenly said, not looking at me but studying your whisky instead. "It's a bit more... appropriate... for a young woman like you."

"And what's that supposed to mean?" I asked, staring at you with narrowed eyes.

You looked at me fully for the first time and sneered. "This... establishment here... may just not be up to your standards." You looked me up and down, frowned, and continued, "You look like you're used to better things."

"Maybe once, I was," I said, a bit friendlier. "But maybe I can't afford those standards any longer." I shrugged and stared at my hands, wondering where this conversation would lead me. I was improvising wildly...

"I see." You were silent again, staring at the wall.

After a few moments of silence, I asked tentatively, "And you? Do you live here?" *Oh, just great, Hermione*, I thought. *Now he'll think you want to chat him up.*

You raised an eyebrow and shot me a sharp glance. "I teach at the school, close to the village."

"Ah, Hogwarts, isn't it? Aren't you a bit young to be a teacher?"

"Hogwarts. And since when does age qualify someone to be a teacher?"

"It doesn't," I said, smiling apologetically. "You just don't see many teachers that young. Your students must love you." I grinned.

"Oh, certainly," you replied, your voice dripping sarcasm. "Especially since I remember all their little tricks so well."

I snorted. "Not quite the sluggish old schoolmaster they expect, are you? So what do you teach?"

"Potions," you replied curtly, your piercing black eyes staring hard at me.

"Ah, the subtle science and exact art of potion making," I said, suppressing a smile.

"You didn't attend Hogwarts." It was a statement, not a question.

"Right," I said, staring back with narrowed eyes and hoping that you wouldn't question any further. I hadn't really thought about a plausible back story for myself. "Why?"

You merely shrugged, murmured something and turned away.

Oh, great, I thought. *And now I sit here and wait until he is summoned. And what good will it do me? Stupid, stupid, stupid.* I sighed and closed my eyes.

When I opened them again, I found that you were staring at me.

"Can I help you with something?" I asked cattily.

"No," you said. You stood up, grabbed your travelling cloak from the coat hook in the lobby and walked out.

I stared after you, shook my head and cursed myself angrily. Not only did I fail to learn anything new about potential items for a Horcrux, but the whole scheme of watching and talking to you in the Hog's Head had been so harebrained... It wasn't as if I could follow you in my spider form to the summons that had undoubtedly come... or could I? I frowned and chewed on a fingernail. I would have to wait until it was almost closing time, but then...

The evening stretched out endlessly, but finally I was able to leave. I threw my apron down and ran upstairs to my room. Two turns should do it, I thought. I took the Time-Turner out again and moved another two hours back in time. The Invisibility Cloak hid me from prying eyes when I sneaked down the stairs again and slowly moved to the lobby. There it was, your travelling cloak. Avoiding looking inside the pub and seeing myself there, I half hid behind the coat hook, took the Invisibility Cloak off and quickly transformed into my spider form again.

A leap, a bit of frantic scrambling, and I was where I wanted to be: in your cloak pocket. With a sigh of relief, I settled down to wait for you to leave the pub. I didn't need to wait long. You came, grabbed the cloak, and ran out. A few steps, and you Disapparated, I-the-Spider with you.

I trembled in anticipation and fear while you walked somewhere in quick, long strides. Only a few more moments, and I would witness your private meeting with Voldemort. I waited.

After a few minutes, you opened a door. You walked on, possibly through a corridor. Then you went down some stairs. I was wondering where we were when a, "Good evening, Professor" in Filch's whiny voice cured me of any notion of being in a secret Death Eater hideout. I didn't need to hear your clipped, "Filch!" to know that we were at Hogwarts.

Completely baffled, I waited until you had put your cloak away after entering your private rooms and then crawled out of your pocket. My cage was empty, as it should be. All the time-hopping and scheming had led to nothing, and I was none the wiser.

Hissing softly in annoyance, I crawled back to my cage and went to sleep.

"Stop laughing."

"Of all the ridiculous schemes and ill-conceived plans you and your cronies ever came up with, this has to be the most stupid one. Heavens, the risks you took ..."

"Well, if it amuses you. I was rather depressed. But that changed soon."

"Continue, then."

Sunday progressed rather uneventfully. You slept in, went to breakfast, worked, read... and in the afternoon just disappeared. When you were gone, I sat and gaped. Where did you go? Were you summoned? Shouldn't you have told the Headmaster? Had I misunderstood something last week? Should I try to attach myself to you through another time-jump? *No*, I thought. *Not again. Who knows where I'd end up this time? For all I know, he may just be going to see a Quidditch match* Resignedly, I stretched my eight legs, hoped for your safe return and waited.

Four hours later, you returned, all pale and drawn again. One glance at you told me that you must have been with Voldemort. Damn! I had missed it again. I quickly scuttled over to you and crawled onto your shoulder, taking comfort from your presence. You smirked, stroked one of my legs and grabbed a handful of Floo powder.

"Professor Dumbledore? I'm back..."

"I've been waiting for you, Severus. Just step through." The voice of the Headmaster resonated through the Floo before the green flame died down.

With a tired sigh, you took another handful of Floo powder and stepped through to the Headmaster's office. Professor Dumbledore stood there, waiting for you, a tray with food and a steaming mug standing on a table.

"Eat something first, Severus, then you can tell me about your meeting." He smiled kindly and sat down on an ottoman opposite the fireplace.

You accepted the offered food with a nod of your head and tucked in. For a few minutes, only the sounds of chewing and swallowing could be heard, together with the merry humming of the Headmaster, who leaned back, eyes closed, a happy expression on his face as if he was remembering something very pleasant.

When you had finished eating, you took the mug in both hands, stared at the steam curling up from the hot liquid and began to speak. Your voice was weak from exhaustion.

"The Dark Lord was very pleased about the development with Miss Pritchard. He wants to have the old families on his side and seems rather lenient towards them." You breathed deeply and closed your eyes. "He was actually amused about the advice I gave the girl. At least my suggestion didn't put the girl and her family in any more danger." You sighed and shook your head in disgust.

"It was well done, indeed, Severus. It was just the right thing to say under the circumstances. I knew that you would do well..." Albus Dumbledore's eyes twinkled when he smiled kindly at you.

"There are more pressing matters than my influence on the students of my house. I fear that the Potters' whereabouts have been betrayed again. They must move as soon as possible. The Dark Lord will not wait much longer to go after the boy."

Dumbledore nodded. "The Order members protecting them have already been alerted. I warned them as soon as I received your Patronus with the message. But we can't let them flee immediately; we can't allow a correlation to be formed between your summons and their actions."

"Good," you said. "But not good enough. There is a spy in the ranks of your Order of the Phoenix, Headmaster. There must be. I cannot see how else the Dark Lord could get this information so quickly. It must be someone close to the Potters." You glared at the Headmaster again. "You know my thoughts on this. You know that I am convinced that it is Sirius Black who is betraying them. Who else is so trusted? Who else has proven himself to be capable of murder?"

Dumbledore sighed and shook his head. "James Potter is convinced that Sirius can be trusted. In fact, he demands that we stop questioning the activities of Sirius Black. But if it isn't Sirius, who could it be? It pains me to suspect Remus Lupin."

"I don't trust Lupin either, but I don't think he would betray his friends. If he did, Fenrir Greyback would triumph because he directs all werewolf activities in the Death Eaters' ranks. And while I may not be the most trusted of the Dark Lord's minions, a triumph like that would have spread around the ranks, and I would have noticed. No, not Lupin."

"I hope that you're right, Severus. I really do. Little Peter Pettigrew doesn't have what it takes," Dumbledore said, getting up from behind his desk and pacing around his office. "He is devoted to James. It must be someone else then, if it isn't Remus."

"I still say it's Black," you hissed. "It's typical of Potter to ignore warnings about his bosom pal; Potter is far too arrogant to heed any warnings. If it weren't for Lily and her son..."

"Well, for now they are safe, and I shall try to convince them to hide completely," Dumbledore said. "Is there anything else, Severus?"

"Not that I am aware of, Headmaster, but perhaps you would like me to give you a full report again?" Your voice wasn't more than a hoarse whisper by now. I hoped that Dumbledore would have pity and let you get some rest before giving your full report.

"Yes, I think that would be best. Listening again and taking notes will give me details I may not have noticed the first time around," Dumbledore said and patted your shoulder.

Has he no mercy? I thought. I raised myself up and hissed at Dumbledore. I felt, more than I saw, that you were very close to breaking down from exhaustion. I knew that you had faced worse hardships, but couldn't that report have waited until the next day? I thought that Dumbledore should have known how exhausting the maintaining of a high Occlumency level over several hours was. Irritated, I scrambled off your arm, ran across Dumbledore's desk and up one of his bookshelves. Wasn't there an easier way for you to get the information to Dumbledore?

"Why don't you just use Legilimency on me, Headmaster?" you asked tiredly. "You know that I don't mind, and that way you could see what I saw."

Dumbledore stared at you and frowned. "Severus. The trust between us is still a very sensitive thing. I will not violate it by intruding your mind. I trust what you tell me."

"You could see more if you just looked. But I know... you know and I know that my Occlumency skills could easily show you things that weren't there and hide others. Even Veritaserum wouldn't be of help." Your glare could have frozen water.

I thought that Legilimency would have been a good idea. But I found both of your reactions rather telling. As Dumbledore had said, the trust between the two of you must still have been rather fragile at that point. And while he appeared to be a trusting man, Dumbledore never trusted blindly. All this twinkling and smiling was giving him a harmless, and slightly dotty, outward appearance that was quite deceptive. He never was harmless, and he was dotty only when he could afford to be.

Furthermore, it wasn't only his trust in you that counted. You had to trust him; you had to believe in his cause, to keep doing what you were doing. Dumbledore had to make you want to work for him, want you to trust him, so you wouldn't be only doing it out of a sense of obligation. Therefore, he had to approach you like a Magizoologist approaches wild magical creatures: with a lot of patience and love. Then, perhaps, he'd get the kind of trust he wanted.

I marvelled at how successful he was now: with you, later with Harry, with everyone else in the Order. If only he had taken that much effort with Tom Riddle back when Riddle was still a child... I had to forcefully shake myself out of my ruminating; you were still glaring at Dumbledore, who was giving you a sad smile.

And then it came to me. Why didn't you use Dumbledore's Pensieve? Didn't he have it, back then? I would have to find out. Now, where did Harry say he kept it? Right. There was the cabinet behind your chair, and the door wasn't closed properly. Slowly, I crawled from the bookshelf to the wall and up to the ceiling, which is no small feat for such a large spider as I am in my Animagus form. I crossed the office as quickly as I could, spun a short silk rope and swung to the cabinet. Approaching the door, I could look inside and saw the faint, silvery light that told me that the Pensieve was there.

And what now? I couldn't just transform and tell you to use the Pensieve, could I? If you didn't manage to hex me quickly enough, Dumbledore certainly would do it. Annoyed, I attacked the door and hissed again.

"What's the matter with your spider?" Dumbledore said and looked around.

You turned around as well and saw me sitting on the cabinet, screeching. "I don't know; my mood doesn't seem to agree with her tonight. You walked across the office and carefully took me from the cabinet. I scuttled up your arm and settled down on your shoulder.

Dumbledore stared at me for a moment, then his eyes swept back to the cabinet. I was worried; I didn't want to be too obvious. If Dumbledore suspected that I wasn't what I pretended to be, my short career as a spider spy would be over. So I jumped off your arm once more, ran over Dumbledore's desk and up the glass cabinet that held Godric Gryffindor's sword. Up there, I started to act just like I had on the cabinet. I hissed, pretended to attack the glass surface and acted all excited.

"Perhaps the light in here is confusing her," you suggested as an explanation.

I took that as my cue, ran over to the shelf with the Sorting Hat on it and attacked that, too.

"I think you may be right," Dumbledore said, amused. He approached me and stretched his hand out. I gracefully stopped my attack and crawled onto his hand where I sat still. He stroked me gently with his long, thin fingers. "Amazing creatures, spiders. So useful, so skilled, and yet, people are horrified when they see them." He smiled again and handed me over to you. You put me in your pocket and cleared your throat.

"Perhaps I can give you my full report now, Headmaster?"

"I think I have a better idea," Dumbledore said, tapping his lips thoughtfully with a finger as he went to the cabinet. "Or maybe it's your spider's idea." He chuckled and levitated the Pensieve out of the cabinet; a flick of his wand set it down on his desk.

"A Pensieve?" you asked.

"Yes," Dumbledore said. "You can put the memories you want to share with me in there, and then we can watch the scene together, if you agree."

"I do. This makes things so much easier," you said, and I sighed in relief. Finally, we were getting somewhere.

"Very good. Two pairs of eyes see more than one. As a matter of fact, I think I shall lend you the Pensieve. I don't need it often, and on the few times I want to use it, I can come to your office." Dumbledore seemed really excited. "You needn't exhaust yourself so much this way. Furthermore, it would be helpful for you to store memories that are difficult to hide, even for as strong an Occlumens as you are. And as you are working for me, you will accumulate quite a few such memories. I shall bring it to your quarters tomorrow when you have a free period. Then you won't need to come here after the summons; merely Floo me, and I'll come through."

"Very well, Headmaster. Thank you." Your lips curled slightly, but not enough for a sneer. You put the tip of your wand to your temple, extracted several silvery strands of memories and gently let them fall into the Pensieve. A deft swirl of the silvery substance, and the Pensieve was ready. Both of you put your faces close to the surface and fell into the memories. I had crawled up to your shoulder in the meantime, to get a better view, and fell with you.

I held onto your robes for dear life, and after you and Dumbledore had steadied yourselves, Dumbledore chuckled and pointed to your shoulder.

"Look at that spider! She doesn't let you go anywhere without her, does she?"

You shrugged, staring intently at the scene in front of you. "I don't mind. She's actually quite useful. When I get agitated, she moves away. When I am calm again, she comes back. A good indicator for my ability to conceal my emotions." You moved closer to the scene.

"Why, that's useful indeed," Dumbledore said, and you nodded.

I watched the conversation between you and Voldemort attentively. The surroundings didn't reveal much, neither did the conversation. It all happened exactly like you had told Dumbledore moments before. There was not a word about Dorcas Meadowes, only Voldemort's triumphant outbursts about his plans to soon kill Harry Potter. I was rather disappointed when we left the Pensieve, and you put the memories back into your head. But at least now I knew that you would be summoned by Voldemort every Sunday evening, not on Saturdays, like I had thought.

Dumbledore murmured words of thanks and patted you on the shoulder. "Go to bed now. You look completely exhausted. Goodnight, Severus."

"Goodnight, Headmaster."

"That was a huge risk you took there. And you must have changed the past in that moment; you are aware of that?"

"I am, and I am very glad that I did. Aren't you?"

"That remains to be seen."

"Dumbledore seemed happy with the Pensieve idea. And he was clever, too. He knew that you couldn't convincingly alter your memories that quickly. He'd see exactly what you saw and still could say that he trusted you."

"Yes, and I was glad, too, because it helped us see things we might have overlooked otherwise. He did trust me."

"I know."

On Monday evening, Dumbledore came to your private quarters again, the heavy stone basin that was the Pensieve floating behind him in the air. With a wave of his wand, Dumbledore moved the Pensieve to your desk and thanked you again for letting him see your memories.

The rest of the week passed as uneventfully as the last. The only memorable exception was the first detention of the two seventh-year Gryffindor students who had tried to catch me on their first day back at school. You went to the hospital wing, where they were cleaning bedpans, and watched them for a while, smirking and making snide remarks about their abilities to find their way around Hogwarts. I enjoyed those moments and gleefully watched the boys work until you left the two students to Filch to oversee the rest of their detention and walked away with Me-the-Spider sitting proudly on your shoulder.

The next Saturday came, and with it my birthday. *Happy second birthday to me*, I thought and tried to imagine my parents with baby Hermione somewhere else but found the idea too surreal to dwell on it. Instead, I decided to celebrate in style. I had to go to the Hog's Head for work anyway, even if I didn't really hope to learn anything important there anymore.

Nevertheless, I liked the idea of being human again, to watch you with your colleagues and maybe to even speak a few words with you. I had to admit that you fascinated me. The younger version of you was rather different from the teacher I knew, and yet recognisable as the same person. Many of your mannerisms were familiar, but I also noticed insecurities and moments of fear and tension that simply weren't detectable in your older version. With the Snape I knew, every trace of more complex feelings was hidden under a thundercloud of anger. If I wanted to learn something about you, my best bet was to approach your younger self. Thus, when you put me into my cage again before you left for Hogsmeade, I repeated the routine from the weeks before; I left your quarters and the dungeons, went back in time and Apparated to the village.

I didn't have to wait long before the teachers arrived and started drinking. After a while, you arrived as well, gave me a sharp glance, nodded a greeting and went to sit with your colleagues. I tried to start another conversation with the barman, but he stubbornly refused to tell me any gossip, just as he had last time, and merely told me to get on with my work.

The teachers soon left, except for you who came to the bar and ordered another Firewhisky for yourself. You were drinking methodically and in solitude, and I had just summoned my courage to approach you again when I saw that a woman had sat down beside you, smiling, frequently touching you on the arm and talking to you. I felt a jolt of jealousy shoot through me, and my heart started to beat painfully. I hadn't even thought of the possibility of your being involved with a woman; what if you actually had a friend or lover...? Swallowing, I listened to the conversation while I busied myself with cleaning glasses.

"I'm not interested. Unhand me this instant..." That didn't exactly sound like a conversation between lovers. I didn't question the relief that coursed through me. I approached you just as I heard the woman laugh and reply, "Oh, come on, love, I can promise you a good time, no taboos. I will fulfil your most secret desires." She pulled at your sleeve again.

"Didn't you hear that the gentleman wishes to be left alone?" I leaned over the bar and stared menacingly at the woman.

"Ok, ok, why didn't you tell me that you have a little girlfriend, sweetheart?" the woman said, grimaced at me and went away, hips swaying.

You had turned around and glared at me, but your eyes glittered and your lips curled slightly. "Thank you, but I can deal with the likes of her on my own," you said silkily.

"Certainly, but I thought that I'd spare you the trouble; it saves time." I smirked at you. "Would you care to join me for a drink? It's my birthday, and I don't want to celebrate alone today. I can take the rest of the evening off, and I have a good bottle of Black Forest Erklung stacked away."

"Congratulations," you murmured. "But I'm not good company."

"You're the only one I... well... know here, apart from the barman. You'll do." I took the sting out of my words by smiling at you.

"Why are you here, if you don't mind my asking?" you inquired after the barman had brought the bottle of wine for us. "Are you looking for permanent employment?"

"No, I'm just waiting for my aunt to send me a message." I had come up with a back story to explain my presence in the pub. I didn't think that it sounded very plausible, but no one would expect to hear all of the truth about anyone, anyway. "The message might come today, or tomorrow, or in four weeks."

"And when it comes?"

"Then I'll leave the country and follow her to Tibet. She studies Yetis there." I saw how your eyes widened slightly; obviously, you didn't believe one word I said. I shrugged. "I want to leave the country. My parents died recently, and my aunt is my only relative..."

You frowned. "I see. And will you study Yetis as well?"

I smiled. "I wouldn't mind joining the International Task Force to conceal the Yeti. Sounds like an interesting job to me. I'm very interested in the charms that are used to disguise such large areas from Muggles."

That caught your attention, and soon we were animatedly discussing advanced theory of Charms. I found that you were just as interested in current research on Charms as I was. I just had to be careful not to mention theories and spells that hadn't been invented in 1981. Then I remembered that you had been the boy who had invented spells like *Levicorpus*, *Langlock* and *Sectumsempra* during your years as a Hogwarts student, and I slowly moved the conversation towards the more experimental aspect of Charms, a topic you were very knowledgeable in and told me about almost animatedly. I saw with pleasure how your face flushed slightly; your eyes were glittering, and your lips were curled into a relaxed smile instead of the scornful sneer that seemed to be glued to your face most of the time. Obviously, you were as delighted with the conversation as I was. We were both surprised when the barman interrupted us because he wanted to close.

"Thank you for spending the evening with me," I said. "I enjoyed our conversation very much. For a Potions teacher, you know an awful lot about Charms," I added admiringly.

"You're not bad yourself." You gave me an almost boyish grin, barely concealed by the façade of correctness and respectability you usually hid behind. "If Hogwarts ever needs a new Charms teacher, I shall recommend you to the Headmaster. But I don't know your name..."

"He... Helena Webb." I hoped that you hadn't noticed my slight hesitation.

"Helena." You looked at me as if you approved of the name. "I'm Severus Snape," you added.

"Severus," I said. "It was a pleasure to meet you. Thank you for the lovely evening."

You bowed slightly, turned and left. I stared after you, frowned and went up to my room where I hid under the Invisibility Cloak again to secretly leave the pub, use the Time-Turner and return to Hogwarts. My empty cage waited for me; I settled down for the night and relaxed. I really had enjoyed the evening; who would have known that you could be such good company? I hadn't really learned anything new, but it still felt to me as if my visit to the pub had accomplished something. Refusing to analyse my feelings any further, I fell asleep.

On Sunday, you left for your meeting with Voldemort again. When you came back, you showed your memories to Dumbledore, but the meeting didn't bring any new insights. Voldemort was angry because the Potters had escaped him once again, and he had ordered you to keep your eyes and ears open and try to find out from Dumbledore where the Potters were hiding. Dumbledore and you discussed the possibility of luring Voldemort into a trap by giving him fake information about the Potters' whereabouts, but Dumbledore dismissed the idea soon. He didn't want to risk your status as a spy and refused to use the Potters as bait for a trap.

After an uneventful week, I went to work at the Hog's Head again on Saturday, and when the other teachers had left, you came to the bar, and we talked while I worked. I saw with pleasure how your cold exterior melted while you talked about a topic you loved. I skilfully moved the conversation from Charms to Potions and listened attentively to your ideas, smiling at your sarcastic wit, laughing about your ironic comments on the troubles and tribulations of a teacher at Hogwarts. While you talked to me, you almost looked happy. I found that you looked attractive when you were relaxed and couldn't understand how I could ever have found you ugly and unpleasant. When we parted, we had basically made a tentative appointment for the next Saturday, and when I returned to my cage that night, I told myself firmly that I had to stop enjoying myself so much and start seeking what I had come back in time to find. There was still no mention of Dorcas Meadowes.

Your next summons brought more excitement. Once again, the Potters' whereabouts had been betrayed, and Voldemort had been elated. Dumbledore was very concerned. Nevertheless, he assured you that the Potters would be safe, and that all measures were being taken to ensure their safety, even though they had moved to the third safe house in just a few weeks.

You remained suspicious. You warned Dumbledore not to trust anyone in the Order before the spy was found out. He agreed with you that the danger was severe but proclaimed himself unable to urge the Potters into complete hiding if they didn't want to. I almost fell off your shoulder when I felt you radiate a huge wave of anguish and disappointment, but Dumbledore couldn't seem to convince James Potter that his family's whereabouts were betrayed as soon as they had moved to another hiding place again.

"The Order will have to deal with this, Severus. We will give them all the protection we can. And the Potters are more than capable of defending themselves, don't forget that. We can't force them to do anything."

You ground your teeth and didn't reply. When Dumbledore left, you stood at the window and stared outside for hours. I wished that I could help you, could reassure you, or help convince the Potters of the danger they were in. I knew how real the danger was; I knew how soon tragedy would strike, but I remembered Minerva McGonagall's directive: let things happen, focus on the Horcrux and nothing else. Only, that last part wasn't that easy. I had started to focus on you far too much, and I wasn't certain that I could just stop being interested in you if and when I ever found out about Dorcas Meadowes and the Horcrux. I sat motionless on your shoulder, absorbing your warmth, feeling your sadness and your helpless anger. It was long after midnight when you finally put me into my cage and went to bed.

When I could be certain that you were asleep, I left my cage and crawled over to your bed-side table. From this vantage point, I could watch your sleeping figure at leisure. You were lying on your back, one arm bent under your head. As usual, you wore your grey nightshirt, but the top buttons were open. I could see a bit of your pale chest; your skin looked smooth and soft.

Your face was sad; a frown wrinkled your brows, even in sleep. Your long, black lashes cast a shadow on the thin, well-defined cheekbones. The large, hooked nose towered over your face like a high chimney towers over a factory. Your thin lips were relaxed in sleep and looked almost inviting.

I watched you for a long time, not questioning my motives for the thorough scrutiny any longer. I knew why I stared at you as if I wanted to imprint each of your features into my memory. A Hermione Granger never lies to herself. I had to admit that I had started to feel deeply for this young version of you. I was rather concerned that I had fallen in love.

"You're so quiet. Don't you believe me?"

"It is irrelevant whether I believe you or not. Tell me the rest of your tale."

"All right. Just give me a chance to set things right, will you?"

"I shall listen. Now, proceed."

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 of 7

Hermione travels back in time to find a missing Horcrux. She meets a young Severus who prepares for his first Potions lesson. Written before DH, now AU.

Chapter 5

Realising and accepting my feelings didn't make my life as your pet spider any easier. While I craved the close contact with you, it was very frustrating at the same time. What chance of winning your affection did I have as a spider? And did I want to win your younger self's affection at all, knowing that I would have to leave again soon? Would the feelings I thought I had for the complete version of you – the mixture of young and older Severus – would that feeling change when I came back and met the older version of you again, hopefully on the way to recovery? Would you even remember me? And how would you react to that loathsome know-it-all, that thorn in your side, being in love with you? Would you reject me? Would you despise me? Would you be able to forgive me for invading your privacy as Arachne the spider? I didn't have the answers to these questions; all I knew was that I wouldn't want to give up my hopes, that I would want to explore these feelings with you, the older version, because you are the complete Severus Snape, the result of the many different Snapes of your past. And yet, I felt that this was unfair to your younger self, that your younger self had a right to be seen individually, to be treated as an independent entity. I was very confused.

You, on the other hand, appeared slightly softer. You talked to me more; you stroked me more frequently. I could only hope that the person, Helena, might have induced these changes as it certainly wasn't my spider self. So what would I do if you, your younger you, returned my feelings? I had no idea what to do. Once again, I cursed the inventors of time-travel devices, understanding more and more why the danger of losing one's mind through extensive time-travel was so real. I presumed that I wasn't the first person who had fallen in love with someone in the past and had to deliberately stop myself from pondering on the reliability of the reality as I knew it. I wondered just how often the past had been changed by time-travellers... and then I shook myself and reminded myself why I was here. Dorcas Meadows would be dead in less than a week, and I still had no clue about the artefact that would be used as the Horcrux.

On Tuesday, our evening was once again interrupted by a knock on the door. After your call, another seventh-year Slytherin student entered, a wild smile on her face, eyes shining fanatically.

"May I speak with you, Professor Snape?"

"What is it, Miss Yaxley?"

"It is known in our House that you have good relations with some families who are very supportive of the pureblood movement that's stirring up the Muggle-loving fools at the Ministry. I would not be surprised if you supported that movement yourself. Am I wrong?" She looked at you with shining eyes.

"Politics should be left out of students' affairs, Miss Yaxley. As Head of House, it is my duty to support you in your academic endeavours. If my advice is needed outside school matters, I shall give it, but this should be an exception, not the rule. You should focus on your N.E.W.T.s and nothing else. "

"Oh, but Professor, we don't live in an ivory tower. This is our world; we have to shape its future. But that's not why I'm here. I wanted to ask your permission to be absent for some special occasions. Only at times that don't interfere with classes and study, of course. But I feel that I have obligations that go beyond school... and I have acted on that feeling." She beamed at you, and you glared back.

"You have joined the Death Eaters."

"Yes, I have."

"You see me very surprised, Miss Yaxley. I would have expected you to focus on your schooling. You could have joined any organization of your choice after your N.E.W.T.s."

"If you had been our Head of House last year, I might have consulted you, sir. As it is, I made the decision last summer, together with my brother. I just thought you should know."

"Thank you for telling me this. I will not forbid you to leave school when you have... ah... other duties. However, if you will heed my advice, then you should stay out of the more, ah, physical assignments for the time being. I am a bit surprised that you have been recruited so early, as you are not fully trained yet."

"It meant a lot to my father, sir. He is a strong supporter of the cause. He is very proud that my brother and I were granted the honour to join. I don't think he will object to my heeding your advice, though. He thinks proper purebloods should have the best education they can get. And since he has a seat on the board of governors of Hogwarts, he works towards promoting the best education for those who should count in the wizarding world. The proper education."

"I am glad that you and your family put so much weight on proper education, Miss Yaxley. Is there anything else I can help you with?"

"No, sir, that was all. Thank you, sir. It is a pleasure to have you as our Head of House."

And with a proud smile, Miss Yaxley left.

As soon as she had closed the door, you jumped up, and I had to brace myself against the wave of anger that radiated from you. You went to the window and hit the frame repeatedly then you returned to the fireplace, Flooed the Headmaster and told him about the young Death Eater in his school. Afterwards, you paced your living room for hours before you finally sat down on the sofa where you fell asleep.

The next day, your good mood seemed to have vanished completely. You scowled and sneered, glowered and growled, belittled and berated... and the mixture of violence and hopelessness you radiated almost drove me away from you. As it was, I spent more time in my cage watching you than I did sitting on your shoulder or in your pocket. The emotions you radiated were so strong that I wondered how you could have so much control over your outward appearance, how you could use Occlumency so efficiently that even a strong Legilimens like Voldemort couldn't find out what you were feeling, how anyone could think of you as cold and unemotional. And yet, that was what you looked like: calm and unmoved.

Saturday was almost here, and I looked forward to meeting you in Hogsmeade again. I also dreaded that weekend since Dorcas Meadows must have been murdered around that time. You put me in my cage as usual on Saturday afternoon, and once you were gone, I left the dungeons and went to Hogsmeade to wait for you there.

You didn't come. I spilled the drink of the third guest in a row and snapped at my employer, paced around nervously, almost losing control over the stack of glasses and mugs that was floating behind me when I was clearing the tables. The evening dragged on endlessly, and when the pub finally closed, I told the barman that I couldn't continue to work there any longer. I told him that I would keep the room but would be too busy with preparations for my journey to be relied on to help out in the pub regularly. Then I rushed back to Hogwarts, down to your quarters and you weren't there either.

You must have been summoned outside the normal routine. The same questions went through my head again and again. Were you present at Dorcas Meadows' murder? Did you have to participate? Were you in danger? Midnight came, and you still weren't back. Nervously, I left the cage and literally climbed the walls of your rooms, not knowing what else to do.

The night was at its darkest when you finally returned. You were deadly pale but full of nervous energy, muttering something under your breath and pacing up and down in front of the fireplace. You radiated so much anger that I didn't dare approach you.

Finally, you took a handful of Floo powder and called out to the Headmaster. It took a few moments before he replied, but once he saw your face, he didn't ask questions but came to your rooms instead. Trying to calm you, he offered you chocolate, but you refused harshly, almost rudely.

"I have no time for this, Headmaster. There was a general summons. The Dark Lord is very happy. One of the Order has been killed. The witch Dorcas Meadows."

"Dorcas? Dorcas is dead?" The Headmaster's face turned chalk white, his eyes glazing over until they were a dull, bluish grey. He sank onto the nearest chair, his whole figure shaking.

"He killed her himself. He summoned us for a general meeting, boasting about it, mocking the primitive and transparent attempt to deceive him to give the appearance that the Potters were still residing where they had been a week ago. Is that true, Headmaster? Was Dorcas Meadows a decoy?" You glared at Dumbledore, who listened to you with a dazed expression.

"I... No... I didn't know... I would never have approved of something like this..."

"Is that so?" You growled. "And why, then, did Miss Meadows pretend to be Lily Potter and wear a red-haired wig?"

"Did... did you see her?"

"What was left of her, yes."

"Heavens help us," Dumbledore lamented. "She was one of the Order members who was assigned to protect the Potters... I can't no, I won't even finish that thought. Lily Potter would never have agreed to such a scheme. Not even for Harry. Not Lily. Dorcas must have come up with that idea herself. She was a strong witch, very skilled..."

"It would take an exceptionally strong wizard or witch to hold their own against the Dark Lord. I think you are the only one who could, Headmaster..."

"Dorcas could have dealt with four Death Eaters at once and still have time to help out a friend in distress. But if Voldemort came for her..."

"Let's go into the Pensieve, Headmaster, then you can see for yourself. I don't quite know why, but this death was a great triumph for the Dark Lord."

I shuddered. I had been sitting on your desk listening, enraptured by your account of the event that had brought me back in time. But now I needed to be close to you to see the scene for myself. I quickly scurried towards you, ran up your back and settled on your shoulder. And I arrived just in time because you had already extracted the silvery memories, and they were swirling in the Pensieve. A moment later, we were in the scene.

"You saw it? Well, yes, you would have."

"Yes, I did."

"No one should have to see something like that."

"I quite agree."

"And you found what you were looking for?"

"In a sense..."

Voldemort stood in the centre of a group of Death Eaters who had formed a circle around him. You led Dumbledore to one of the masked Death Eaters who had exactly your height and stature; it must have been the Severus of your memories. Each of you stood on either side of your memory-self and watched how Voldemort slowly spun around and looked at the assembled group. His red eyes were gleaming; a horrible smile was twisting his face. Low cracks and pops indicated that there were still more Death Eaters arriving. When finally all was silent, Voldemort addressed his followers.

"I have called you today, my Death Eaters, to witness how Lord Voldemort treats his enemies, for he has many. You, my faithful servants, fight these enemies for me. Hardly anyone can withstand my formidable Death Eaters, so I usually need not concern myself with these enemies."

"However, every now and then, there is a witch or wizard of exceptional skill who is a worthy opponent for your master. Today, I had such an opponent. A woman who fought bravely: a witch who belonged to the Order of the Phoenix; a witch who cherished the illusion that she could deceive your master with her actions that she could mislead me."

"This woman was shown the error of her ways."

With a snap of his fingers, a dark, human sized bundle appeared at Voldemort's feet. I stared at it and saw to my horror that what I thought was dark fabric was a cloak soaked with blood. Voldemort stooped down to the still figure and pulled the hood off its head. Then, he lifted the head with one hand. The rest of the body remained on the ground; the head had been severed. With his other hand, Voldemort groped for something at the figure's middle and, when he found it, lifted it up. It was a slim, fragile looking human hand. He straightened up, and with loud laughter waved the head and the hand towards the Death Eaters, spinning once full circle while he did so. Some of the Death Eaters shied back, some leaned forward to get a closer look, some hissed, others laughed.

I don't know if spiders can vomit... more than their digestive juices, that is... but spider or not, all I wanted to do was to get rid of my stomach's contents and then hide somewhere. A glance at you and Dumbledore showed me that you must have had similar feelings; you were both deadily pale, all expression wiped from your faces. You were staring at the scene as if forced to do so by *Imperio*.

When Voldemort had completed his circle, he lifted the head to his face and started to talk.

"Little Dorcas Meadowes. So lovely, so strong, no *Imperio* could stop her. Instead of trying to save her life and beg, she mocked me. ME! Then she attacked me with such fury and skill that it made me wish she had been one of mine. Oh, how I would have rewarded her...."

"Instead, I had to cut her hands off to stop her from hexing me. Such delicate hands!" He lifted the pale hand to his lips and kissed it.

"And did she beg for mercy? No, not our formidable witch, Dumbledore's little pawn. She spat at me, bleeding prettily all the while from her arm stumps. It was almost a pity to end her suffering, but look how surprised she was when the Killing Curse hit her... Those beautiful eyes, all wide and surprised. I just had to cut the head off, too, to maintain symmetry." He threw his head back and laughed, throwing Dorcas' head and hand to the floor.

"This is how Lord Voldemort treats his enemies," he repeated in a low, smooth voice. His face twisted into a horrible grimace. He laughed again and took something out of the pocket of his cloak. "And it was the work of one among you who made your master's triumph possible."

He approached one of the Death Eaters who stood almost opposite from where you were standing. The Death Eater's identity was concealed by his hood and mask; I had no idea who it could be. He was a bit chubby and of medium height and fell to his knees when Voldemort approached him.

"You have served me well. Take my most precious treasure. Guard it and take good care of it until I ask it back from you." He handed the item to the Death Eater. All I could see was a flat, shiny something. The shine was metallic, golden maybe a plate, or a badge. I couldn't see it very well. My heart nearly stopped. Could this have been the Horcrux? But where was it now, and who was that Death Eater?

While I was still wondering, you and Dumbledore had left the Pensieve. You were both still very pale and sat down without speaking. After a few minutes, you summoned your bottle of Ogden's Old and two glasses, and without asking, poured a generous amount for each of you. You both downed the alcohol in one gulp, and you refilled the glasses.

"What was that all about?" Dumbledore finally choked out. "Does he always boast about his murders like that?"

"Yes, he does," you replied. "He only kills his best, his strongest enemies himself. His servants deal with the less important ones."

"And who was that Death Eater the one who was rewarded? What did he or she do to be singled out? Perhaps that was the spy in the Order? And what was it Voldemort gave him? Do you know?"

"From the way the Death Eater moved, I'd say it was a man," you replied pensively. "But his height, his stature there was nothing unusual about him. There must be at least a dozen wizards among the Death Eaters who would fit that description. I do not know what he did to deserve such a reward. I doubt that it was the spy; the Dark Lord does not want to draw attention to his spies. I may be wrong, though. However, the activities of Order members are always of interest to Death Eaters... Maybe he found out that Dorcas was guarding the Potters."

"That's possible. And the item, did you see what it was? He called it his treasure..."

"It must have been something from his past... I have seen scenes like this before. In fact, he gave me his old inkwell when you accepted me as a teacher, but he didn't present it to me in public."

"Yes, I remember your telling me about it. It's just an old inkwell; there is nothing special about it."

"It was once used by the Dark Lord and that should be reason enough to make it a treasure for any Death Eater."

"You are probably right, Severus. And now I must go and tell Dorcas' family about her death, and the Order... Merlin, I thought I would never have to see things like that again after Grindelwald was defeated..." Dumbledore buried his head in his hands, his shoulders slumped. "And I shall impose the importance of going into hiding upon the Potters once again. This was too close. The Potters must go into complete hiding, and soon." His voice broke.

You stood up and walked over to him. For a moment, I thought you would press his shoulder, but you just stood there and looked down at him with an unreadable expression on your face.

When Dumbledore finally looked up again with dull reddened eyes, you helped him to his feet and led him to the fireplace. "Get some rest first, Headmaster," you said very gently. "You can't help anyone when you break down. You need to get some of your strength back."

"So should you, Severus. You look just as pale and sick as I feel."

"I'm a Death Eater. I'm used to such sights," you said, but your voice lacked conviction.

Dumbledore just nodded sadly and left through the fireplace.

When he was gone, you went to your bathroom and took a long shower. Then you went to the window and stared outside until dawn.

The next few days followed the same routine as always, but I just went through the motions without knowing or caring what I did. My mind worked frantically. I had to get away from here and find out what the Horcrux was. I wondered why Dumbledore hadn't made the connection later when he learned about Voldemort's efforts to become immortal... If he had made the connection, the item would have been destroyed, or at least mentioned by the time Harry got involved in the Horcrux hunt. But he hadn't, and the ball was back in my court. Either I found out what it was and destroyed it or nothing would change, and the events of the evening of the confrontation would unfold just as they had before.

Perhaps I could get a message with a clue to Dumbledore somehow? A message that would alert him to the fact that there were seven, and not six, Horcruxes? I was still pondering that possibility, thinking through the pros and cons and constantly confusing myself with the different actions and their potential outcomes. I hardly noticed that it was Tuesday again when you took me out of my cage in the afternoon and walked to the trophy room.

Filch was there, overseeing yet another detention of the two Gryffindor students who had tried to catch me on their first day at school. They were busy polishing old House Cups, Quidditch Cups, and Medals for Magical Merits. Filch gleefully pointed out each dull spot they had overlooked, each speck of dust that was still attached to the shiny trophy.

You strode into the room and greeted Filch. Then you watched the two students. "Your last detention... for now. My, my, isn't that delightful?"

They glared at you and continued their work.

"Let's see... In your first detention, you were cleaning bedpans in the hospital wing. The second comprised spreading dragon dung in the greenhouses for Professor Sprout. The third had you polishing all the telescope lenses in the Astronomy Tower, and now you are here in the trophy room. Four different locations in four weeks, and Filch showed you the way. I really do hope that you have learned to find your way around this school, now. There is almost a year left, after all; we wouldn't want you to get lost again. Isn't that true, Arachne?" And with a smirk, you stroked my leg. I started to hiss softly, which made the two students cringe and step as far away from you as they could without running away.

With a gleeful chuckle, you spun on your heels and swept out of the room to your next class. I was in your pocket again, thinking about the five weeks I had spent in your company and wondering what to do about the Horcrux. The sight of the two Gryffindors polishing the trophies had lightened my mood considerably. I laughed and remembered how Ron had had to polish trophies in our second year after he had been hit with the slug-vomiting charm and had to serve detention with Filch for that stunt with his father's car. Ron had vomited slugs all over Tom Riddle's Special Award for Services to the School and had to clean that shield several times...

... ..

Ron had vomited slugs all over Tom Riddle's Special Award for Services to the School.

Tom Riddle's Special Award for Services to the School was a flat, burnished gold shield.

A flat, shiny, golden item. Just like the item that was given to that Death Eater by Lord Voldemort.

Lord Voldemort aka Tom Riddle.

When I had arrived at that conclusion, I could hardly wait to get out of your pocket and back to the trophy room. The shield would be there, undamaged, in 1992, our second year. That meant that no one had destroyed the Horcrux between now and then.

Voldemort had won the award when framing Hagrid for opening the Chamber of Secrets. The Chamber of Secrets that could only be opened by a Parseltongue. Tom Riddle was a Parseltongue, and he was the heir of Slytherin. The Award had been an item of triumph for him.

Everything fell into place now. Voldemort had always used items for his Horcruxes that had a special meaning for him. Nagini was an exception, being alive and not an item of triumph. However, she certainly was meaningful to Voldemort, having sustained him for so long. But mostly, he had used items that had belonged to the founders like Slytherin's locket and ring, Hufflepuff's cup, Ravenclaw's wand, or items like the diary that spoke of his triumph as the heir of Slytherin. This award had been given for the same event... Now, if that wasn't meaningful, what was?

After you went to bed that night, I left my cage and the dungeons, transformed and hurried to the trophy room. The trophies were sorted chronologically; one of the first I recognised was James Potter's Chaser badge, proudly displayed with the badges of the Gryffindor team that won the Quidditch cup in 1974. With a feeling of satisfaction, I saw that you had been awarded a Medal for Magical Merit in your seventh year. Lily Evans had an award in Potions... There was an award in Charms for Molly Prewett in 1965. How interesting... Amelia Susan Bones had won a Medal for Magical Merit in 1950... I was getting closer. There... Tom Riddle's Medal for Magical Merit... and nothing else. An "*Accio Tom Riddle's Special Award for Services to the School*" didn't bring the shield forward, either, which didn't really surprise me. Riddle must either have taken the award with him when he left school, or retrieved it later, and nobody noticed. And somehow the award had found its way back to Hogwarts by our second year, or earlier... How and why?

It was as if a veil had lifted from my eyes. Wormtail must have done it. Wormtail, who constantly betrayed his friends' hiding places. Wormtail, whose height and stature fitted that of the Death Eater who had been singled out the night of Dorcas' death. Wormtail, who lived at Hogwarts for years as Percy Weasley's, and later as Ron's pet rat. He had hidden the Horcrux in plain sight.

I had to sit down. Why hadn't I made the connection earlier? I had known that Pettigrew was the traitor in the Order when I was watching the Pensieve scene about Dorcas Meadows death. But I had been too frightened, too shocked by what I had seen there... I hadn't been in a state to think logically then. But I could now.

This was almost too easy. I had achieved my goal, fulfilled my task. Since I couldn't destroy the Horcrux here and now but knew where it would be in the future, all I had to do was to go back to my time, report to Minerva, destroy the Horcrux and find a way to get Harry's soul separated from Voldemort's... and then? Would I have to kill Harry in the process? Quite possibly. And you? I had come back in time to prevent your death as well, but that course of action would have done nothing for you at all. I simply couldn't go through with this.

I could think of an alternative, but Minerva had advised me not to risk it... I could return to the future, but before the confrontation took place. Maybe I could prevent your getting hurt this way; maybe I could prevent Harry being possessed by Voldemort this way... Shouldn't your lives be worth the risk of meeting myself? I thought it was worth it and decided that I would do it.

And that meant that I had to leave you.

My eyes stung, and my heart was heavy when I returned to the dungeons and Transfigured myself into Arachne. Once again, I crawled to your bed-side table and watched you while you slept. And I made a decision. I would stay with you until the end of the week. I would wait for you at the Hog's Head. Perhaps you would show up. Perhaps I could talk to you again, tell you that I had to leave and say good-bye. And the spider would simply disappear...

Saturday night came; I went to the Hog's Head, chatted briefly with the barman and then sat down in a quiet corner.

I didn't have to wait long until you arrived with your colleagues. You all went to the bar, and when the barman served your drinks, you looked around with a frown. When you finally saw me, your eyes lightened up, and I gave you a small wave. You said something to Kettleburn, nodded at the other teachers and came to my table.

"May I join you?"

"I'd be delighted."

I smiled at you, feeling stupid and insecure. I didn't know if I could hide my feelings from you, or if I even wanted to.

"I've had word from my aunt," I blurted out. "I'm leaving tomorrow."

"Oh..." was all you said. You stared at me with glittering eyes, a frown creasing your forehead.

I swallowed and summoned my courage. "Would you like to have dinner with me? I've so enjoyed talking to you these past weeks I'd like to spend my last evening here, in your company."

You took a deep breath, frowned some more but nodded. "It would be my pleasure. But you must allow me to buy you dinner no, I insist!" You added when I protested.

I accepted, and we headed off to the Three Broomsticks where we found a quiet table in an alcove.

We talked animatedly again about Potions and Charms, Yetis and Kappas, and magic in general. We never spoke about politics or the reign of terror that held Wizarding Britain in its grip. We talked and laughed together, and talked some more, but eventually there was no denying that it was late and that the evening would have to end.

"I shall walk you back to the Hog's Head," you said, and I thankfully took your arm, enjoying your warmth and the feeling of being close to you. We walked without speaking, and when we reached the Hog's Head, I looked up to you, blushing crimson, and asked, "Would you, uhm, like to have a cup of coffee?"

Your eyes widened, and you swallowed and cleared your throat. "Yes, coffee... ah, would be acceptable."

I blushed again, took your hand and led you up to my room where I Summoned two cups of coffee from the kitchen. I turned to you to give you one of the cups, but you put it back on the table and took my hands instead. I noticed with surprise that your hands were shaking slightly.

"You know and I know that you didn't ask me up here to drink coffee," you purred with that irresistibly smooth, velvety voice of yours.

I swallowed, drowning in your eyes. "You found me out," I tried to joke, but my voice failed me. All I could produce was a croak. I stepped a step closer to you, transfixedly staring into those bottomless black eyes and gently stroking your knuckles with my thumbs since you were still holding my hands.

You stared back as if you saw something in my eyes that no one else had ever found there before. Your expression changed from confidence to longing, to wonder, to insecurity, to amusement, and back to longing. I couldn't understand how I could ever have found your eyes emotionless or empty.

You didn't reply to my quip; you merely lowered your head and kissed me.

It was a soft and tender closed-mouthed kiss that apologised for being forthright, and at the same time, asked for permission to proceed. When I kissed you back in earnest, your lips opened slightly, and your tongue probed carefully.

I opened my lips and let your tongue in, letting my own tongue explore your mouth as well, savouring the feel and taste of you. I marvelled how someone could be so expressive with his lips without saying anything. And then I stopped thinking altogether.

The kiss deepened, tongues explored and entwined, lips sucked on lips, hands grasped at hair and necks, bodies were pressed together until I was certain that you could feel my tight nipples through the fabric of my robes and smell my arousal, just as I could feel your erection between us.

"Come to bed," I panted when we broke the kiss to catch our breaths.

"Are you sure?" you asked in a shaky voice.

"We don't have time for games." I smiled up at you and pulled your head down for another kiss.

We finally did make it to the bed. Our increasingly passionate kisses were only interrupted by our frenzied undressing until we lay on the bed, skin touching skin, both impatient for more contact.

Despite the frenzy, our joining was simple, deliberate, and very intense. You made love to me with devotion and full concentration, and I gave myself over completely. Our coupling was tender, filled with sadness, almost desperate, and deeply satisfying.

"I wish times were different and my life wasn't filled with obligations," you whispered. "Then I could ask you to stay."

"I wish the same," I murmured. "Then I could stay."

We didn't sleep that night. We made love again and again, and only when the sun came up did you kiss me tenderly one last time and say softly, "I must leave you now."

I smiled, trying to put on a brave face, but I felt the tears starting to fall.

"Heavens, how beautiful you are," you said, wiping the tears off my cheek with your thumb. I leaned into your hand and kissed your palm.

"Liar," I whispered, knowing full well how flushed and dishevelled I must have looked. Sleekeazy's and sweat had stuck my hair to my head, and yet I felt how wisps had come loose and curled into a frizz. No one in their right mind would have found me pretty.

You only shook your head, wiped a few more tears off my face, turned around and left.

"Now do you believe that I didn't plan to seduce you? That I acted on impulse and gave in to my feelings?"

"Hrmph."

"Merlin, Severus, what else can I do to convince you? It's almost the same situation you were in with Dumbledore, all these years ago. You won't believe Legilimency... you taught me Occlumency too well. I can't take Veritaserum; you taught us how to resist it efficiently. All I can offer is a look at my memories in a Pensieve..."

"That won't be necessary."

"Are you certain? Look, why would I lie to you, anyway. What could I gain? All I want is to be close to you, if you'll let me..."

"I am certain. Won't you finish your tale now? No, you can stay right where you are, as long as you keep your hair out of my nose."

"Thank you."

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 of 7

Hermione travels back in time to find a missing Horcrux. She meets a young Severus who prepares for his first Potions lesson. Written before DH, now AU.

Disclaimer: Nothing you recognize belongs to me. Just borrowed. Will be returned. Snape is welcome to stay, though.

My beta readers, Maggie and Melusin, deserve much thanks and the highest praise, a lot of chocolate, flowers and relaxing music. All remaining errors are my fault.

Chapter 6

As soon as you left, I packed my things and Apparated back to Hogwarts. I debated with myself if I should take another look at you in my Arachne-the-Spider form but decided against it. The longer I stayed around, the harder it would be to leave. You would just have to accept that the spider had run away, or died, or whatever spiders do when they migrate.

Back in the Room of Requirement, I checked the star charts, set the dials on the watch to November 30th 1999, the day of our initial confrontation with Voldemort, and jumped. The jump forwards to the future was just as exhausting and nauseating as the jump backwards had been. Slightly light-headed, I swayed when I felt solid ground under my feet again.

The calendar told me that I had arrived at the set date. A few turns on the Time-Turner brought me to the desired hour, which was several hours before the confrontation would take place. I thought that it should be possible to destroy the Horcrux and check that everything else was going according to plan before I moved forward in time a few weeks to shortly after I left Minerva. There was no way that I would let you suffer or let Harry be possessed again. I hoped that I could manage all this without meeting myself. I still had the Invisibility Cloak and the Marauder's Map.

I stuffed everything into my bag, threw the Invisibility Cloak over me, and headed off to the trophy room. From what I remembered, my other self would be at Spinner's End, discussing the plan for Voldemort's trap with you and the boys. Spinner's End had been our headquarters; you had offered it to Harry after Wormtail had been sent to assist, or keep an eye on, Draco Malfoy. The house had been put under a Fidelius Charm with Minerva as our Secret Keeper, and only she, you, the boys, and I knew about it. We had been hiding right under Voldemort's nose.

Relieved that I didn't need to watch out for my other self just yet, I approached the trophy room and opened the door. A woman was standing there, looking at the shelves. She had her back to me but spun around when she heard the door being opened. The woman was myself.

Damn! I thought, *Now I'll surely lose my mind.*

What was I doing here? I didn't have time to ponder since my other self asked, "Who's there? Show yourself," and immediately aimed hexes in my general direction. I pulled the cloak off and used the brief moment of surprise and shock to stun my other self. I had to do it; there was no guarantee that my other self wouldn't have killed me otherwise with Polyjuice Potion being such a popular strategy among our enemies.

Looking down, I saw that she was holding something golden and shiny in her hands. It was Tom Riddle's Award for Special Services to the School. So I had found out; we had found out about Dorcas Meadows' death. This had to be a different timeline; it wasn't the world I had left. Was this a consequence of my time-travel? I decided not to delve into that thought too deeply but to get the trophy out of my other self's hands instead. However, while I was trying to do that, I touched my other self and saw with horror how my hand just disappeared and was absorbed. I felt how my thoughts and memories swirled around wildly in my head and how my vision blurred. I was about to be sucked in by my other self the self that belonged in this time. I could only hope that I wouldn't lose all the memories of Arachne, my time-travelling alter ego. One of my last coherent thoughts as Hermione-the-time-traveller was, "And then I'll have been stunned and will arrive too late wherever it is I need to arrive..." Oh, the irony! Was history repeating itself?

With one last effort of my time-traveller-being, I raised my wand and whispered "*Finite Incantatem*", and then I lost consciousness.

I woke up with a start.

Someone had stunned me, and I felt disorientated. I was lying on the ground, angry and confused, and there was no one there besides me. We had found out about a seventh Horcrux from a captured Death Eater, and you and Dumbledore's portrait had made the connection with that shiny, golden item you both had seen in the Pensieve. After learning about this, I had finally made the connection with Voldemort's award the award that was still firmly clutched in my hands. No, wait, I had found out about it when I had travelled back in time. And it was I who had stunned me; I had stunned myself. A glance at my watch showed me that I had only been unconscious for a moment. I blinked and tried to clear my thoughts.

So we had both found out about the Horcrux. I had access to Arachne-Hermione's memories just as I could recall what had happened in the here and now with a little

probing and those memories were slightly different from what Arachne remembered. Both Hermiones were Animagi who transformed into spiders. Our past seemed to be the same, too: we knew the same people. Dumbledore was dead; Dorcas Meadows was dead; the Potters were dead; Cedric Diggory and Sirius Black were dead... and I sighed with relief since that meant that I hadn't caused any major changes.

Hermione and Arachne would learn to deal with the repercussions of the smaller changes. I was not ready to dwell on the memories with you too deeply, though. What if you had become someone completely different, were married, had children? I didn't think I could function with that thought right now, so I pushed it firmly from my mind; Arachne and I had both learned Occlumency from you, after all. Without Occlumency, Arachne-as-Hermione could never have come close to you without you finding out who she was... and there I was, thinking about you again. This had to stop.

I took the award, threw the cloak over myself, and ran off. But I didn't run towards the Headmistress' office as in Arachne's past... or was that Arachne's future? I ran to the kitchens instead, waved an excuse to the baffled house-elves and ran straight to the largest fireplace in the room. I uttered a password that opened a small door on the side that led to a labyrinth of narrow corridors. The house-elves use these corridors to get around easily when they don't want to Apparate. Running down several levels, I finally found myself at another door. A password I hadn't known I knew opened this door as well, leading into a labyrinth of yet more, and larger, corridors. I seemed to know where I was going, and after opening yet another door with a password, a room full of glistening treasure lay before me. I had come to Godric Gryffindor's vault.

In the middle of the room, Harry, Ron and Dobby (*Dobby?*) were standing, turning over cups, jewels and chain mail. You stood in a corner scowling and glaring at the three figures. Your eyes moved to the door when I entered, and you raised your wand.

"It's me. Hermione," I panted and pulled off the Invisibility Cloak.

"What took you so long?" you snarled, but Harry and Ron looked relieved when they saw me.

"You won't believe me when I tell you," I muttered. "And there's no time for it, anyway. Here's the Horcrux."

You stalked over to me on your long legs, and the sight of you almost took my breath away. I registered a slight impulse of wonder from Hermione-who-was-not-in-the-past, but that impulse soon disappeared. Apparently, the feelings Arachne had for you were welcomed by both of us.

"Give it to me," you growled and took the award out of my hands. I just stared at you, and you frowned, harshly asking, "What?"

"Don't mind me," I muttered and went over to Dobby and the boys, expecting you to destroy the Horcrux right away. Surprised, I saw that Ron was dressed in his dress robes, and a closer look at myself revealed that I was wearing dress robes, too.

Of course! I remembered now. Today was the formal inauguration of Minerva McGonagall as new Headmistress after more than two years of acting as Interim Head. It was also the day when Voldemort should be lured into our trap... He should be thinking that the wizarding world was focussed on the Headmistress, which would give him easy access and control over everyone who counted in the wizarding world in Britain since they would all be at the Ministry today. Everybody except Harry Potter, who was supposedly hiding at Hogwarts surrounded by protective devices.

What no one knew, except Minerva and ourselves, was that we had Apparated back to Hogwarts while everyone else was still celebrating at the Ministry. We would set the trap and then hope that some Order members and Aurors could be spared from defending the Ministry to come and help us against invading Death Eaters.

While I was still lost in thought, confused and at the same time fascinated by my altered memories, you had conjured a protective bubble around the golden shield. Harry, Ron, Dobby and I ducked behind a pile of treasure, and you cast the spell that would destroy the Horcrux.

You chanted the incantation, and with a loud bang, the Horcrux broke, showing a lightning-shaped gap. A strong wind rushed over us. After having destroyed all the other Horcruxes, we knew that this was Voldemort's soul fragment, now free, unbound and without purpose. You smirked and wiped the dust off of your robes. Then you touched the Portkey that would take you to your meeting place with Voldemort, from where you would lead him to Harry.

The boys, Dobby and I were still standing in the vault feeling triumphant when a deep and earth-shattering, 'thump, thump...' interrupted us. Dobby Apparated out into the corridor to take a look but was back in a heartbeat and shouted, "Dragon!"

"Let's get out of here, quick!" Harry yelled. "Damn, we didn't find the sword!"

"Dobby has it," Dobby squeaked and held on to Harry's shoulder while we ran towards the other end of the vault where a small, round door led to another corridor. Ron surprised me by casting a Flame Freezing Charm over all four of us while we were running. We had just reached the door when the dragon entered the vault from the other side and blew a heavy dose of searing flames our way. The heat didn't affect us, but the force behind the flames was as strong as an explosion, and we were thrown through the round door, stumbling and falling with part of the treasure from the vault flying and falling with us.

As fast as we could, we closed and locked the door behind us, hoping that the dragon wouldn't follow, and ran down the corridor. Crackling sounds from behind warned us that part of the room must have been on fire. Louder sounds, almost like explosions, were indicators of the foul mood of the dragon, who apparently was still blowing his flames around. The memory of what was going on here came suddenly and unbidden to me. We had found out about the vault of Gryffindor on the Horcrux hunt and learnt that Godric's vault was protected by Gryffindor's dragon just like Slytherin's chamber was protected by the basilisk. I was wondering what kind of monsters Helga Hufflepuff and Rowena Ravenclaw had left behind; creatures of air and earth we hadn't encountered yet, but maybe we would be spared and those two would be left to another generation. At least now we knew the truth about the school motto: 'Never Tickle A Sleeping Dragon'.

Clouds of smoke were billowing up the corridor and making breathing difficult. Despite Ron's Flame Freezing Charm, the heat became almost unbearable. Sweat was pouring down my body and was sticking my hair to my head. Luckily, we soon reached the gate that would bring us to Hogwarts' graveyard where Harry wanted to confront Voldemort. Ron and I hid under the Invisibility Cloak and went out first.

The graveyard was shaped like an ancient arena, probably influenced by Roman architecture. Since nobody was there yet, we gave the cloak back to Harry, who went back into the tunnel, casting another flame-repellent charm on himself and a Bubble-Head Charm because the tunnel was still full of smoke. Ron and I walked to the tombstones that stood in a circle in front of the arena's walls. Transfiguring ourselves into tombstones was fairly easy. All we had to do now was wait.

It wasn't long before we heard voices.

"Do you have the Polyjuice Potion, Severus?"

"Yes, Master, everything is ready. I shall send the owl, and then I only need to drink the potion."

"Proceed, then. This is the moment of my greatest victory. Tonight, I shall triumph over Harry Potter. Tonight, the wizarding world will put away with Muggles, with Muggle-loving fools and all that other nonsense. From now on, only sorcery in its purest form shall be practiced. We shall do away with the childish attempts at bumbling with a power that is far too great for the average wizard or witch; a power that only the most advanced and worthy sorcerers can grasp fully. Proceed, Severus, and call Harry Potter to us."

You took a small owl out of your pocket (you seemed to have kept up the habit of carrying your pets around) and whispered something to it. You threw it in the air, and it headed off towards the castle.

While you waited, you took something else out of your pockets a phial containing a potion and downed it quickly. You grimaced and writhed, boils erupted from your skin, and finally you changed completely. When the transformation stopped, you looked like a carbon copy of Remus Lupin. You fell to your knees, and Voldemort grabbed your hair, pulling your head back and pushing his wand to your throat.

A few moments later, Harry came running through the gate we had just left, a note clutched in his hands. He looked frantically around, and then he saw the two figures in

the middle of the graveyard.

"Remus!" he yelled, his voice heavy with despair.

"If you want him to live, you will have to fight me, little Harry. There is no one around to help you this time*Expelliarmus!*"

Harry stumbled backwards and watched open-mouthed as his wand flew through the air and was caught deftly by you/Lupin, who stood up, broke Harry's wand, and stepped behind the Dark Lord.

"You see, little Harry, there is no escaping me this time around. There won't be a*Priori Incantatem*. You don't have a wand. No one will Apparate here at the last minute, you know; we are on Hogwarts' ground, and, as everyone knows, you can't Apparate in Hogwarts. Your little bouts of love, of foolish sentimentality won't help you this time, Harry. I'm prepared. There's no one here to help you; there is just you and I. Severus, here, will stay out of it. Go, Severus, don't stand in our way."

You bowed, still looking like Remus Lupin, sneered at Harry, who looked at you with an expression full of hatred and disgust, and then moved to the circle of tombstones where you stopped between the stones that were Ron and I.

Harry wrung his hands and stammered. "I wouldn't be so certain of victory. If someone kills you, you'll be dead. I will be avenged, you know."

Voldemort threw his head back and laughed his high-pitched laugh. "I cannot be killed; I am eternal, little Harry. Lord Voldemort has defeated death. Prepare yourself; your moment has come at last. Rejoice, you will be able to join your parents soon."

"I don't think so," Harry said with a smirk. "We have destroyed all your Horcruxes, you know."

That was the signal, and Ron and I transfigured back into human form. A quick glance at you to synchronise our actions, and all three of us raised our wands simultaneously and cried, "*Expelliarmus!*"

Voldemort swayed and watched open-mouthed as his wand shot out of his fingers despite his desperate attempts to hold on to it and resist the charm. But our joint magic was stronger than his, and the wand flew in a high arc towards us. You caught it and broke it; you now had the two wands that contained a feather from Fawkes, and both were unusable. The three of us moved away from each other, our own wands raised.

Voldemort took a moment to get his wits back, but then he turned to Harry, raised his hands and hissed, "That won't do you any good. You will have to try to kill me. The prophecy says so. 'Either must die at the hand of the other, for neither can live while the other survives.' Did you forget that, little Harry? Did you not realise that I know the full prophecy now? If I can't kill you with my wand, I will kill you with my bare hands."

Red flashes left Voldemort's fingertips, but Harry dodged the curse deftly.

"You are so wrong on so many levels, Tom," he said.

"DON'T CALL ME TOM!" Voldemort cried and cast another wandless curse in Harry's direction, looking completely deranged now.

"You know, your interpretation of the prophecy is pathetic," Harry continued calmly, but alert towards curses and always ready to jump. His Quidditch reflexes did come in handy once again.

"First of all, it took you ages before you managed to hear the whole thing, didn't it? My, my, isn't that a bit weak for one who wants to be the most powerful wizard around?" Harry shook his head and tsked.

I thought that he could give you a run for sarcasm when taunting someone. So, he had learned something from you, after all. If the situation hadn't been so serious, I would have been amused.

"Now, listen. I will help you," Harry continued. "You know that the prophecy states that I have a power the Dark Lord knows not. What do you think that power is?"

"Oh, don't try to act so pompous, little Harry. Your so-called love won't help you. Will you love me to death?" Voldemort laughed cruelly and shot yet another wandless curse towards Harry.

"Wrong again," Harry growled. "Who said that I have to give love? The love I have in me is protecting me, defending me. But it's the love I generate; it's the love of my friends for me, even the love of a former enemy, that will bring you down."

Voldemort spun and cast a hex at you, which you dodged elegantly. "I should have known that you'd remain a traitor, Severus. You've been too smooth, too impenetrable... but you made a mistake, a very serious mistake, and you will pay dearly for it. Don't think you will get away with this, traitor. I shall give you over to Bellatrix. My sweet Bella will know exactly what to do with you."

You remained silent, a slight sneer curling your lips, but nothing else betrayed what you were thinking. Voldemort spun around again, stealthily trying to hex Harry, but he was too slow once again.

"You know, the love of these three isn't all the love there is. For our loved ones stay with us, and the dead witches and wizards who were buried in this graveyard are around and are waiting for you to join them, Tom. Imagine, soon you will see Salazar Slytherin himself..."

"Shut up, foolish boy. You don't know what you're talking about! It's All Hallow's Eve; the veil between the worlds is thin tonight..." Voldemort glanced around fearfully, staring hard at the mist that had formed in the circle and was concealing the tombstones, almost making them look like people.

"Come, Sirius!" Harry called. "Mum, Dad, Professor Dumbledore... Why don't you show Tom that death is nothing to fear? You need to learn to let go, Tom. For the fearless mind, death is merely the door to the next great adventure."

Voldemort's red eyes widened in horror when he saw how four dim shapes emerged from the mist, standing at Harry's side, smiling.

"Go away," Voldemort shrieked. "I'm not going with you. I still have my treasures, hidden and protected."

"You don't," you said quietly, moving steadily towards Harry. Ron and I followed you until we all had moved opposite Voldemort, in a semicircle, at Harry's side. "Potter destroyed the diary; that was number one. The next was the Peverell ring. Dumbledore destroyed it; that was number two." While you spoke, Harry ticked the items off on his fingers.

"Slytherin's locket, found in the Hog's Head while you were under the illusion that it was in a sea cave was number three. Number four was Helga Hufflepuff's cup. That was found in your vault at Gringotts. You know, the Goblins weren't too happy with the way you treated them last time, so they negotiated a very good deal for themselves and decided that they would help us in return." You sneered at Voldemort and kept moving. Ron and I mimicked you. We knew that we had to be alert when facing Voldemort, even though he didn't have a wand.

"Number five was Rowena Ravenclaw's wand, which you so stupidly entrusted to my care as a reward for killing Albus Dumbledore. How he would have laughed if he had known. You are aware that he was half-dead on the Astronomy Tower already, aren't you? He ordered me to kill him. I had promised to obey every order he gave me... that's how I killed him. I helped him end his suffering, but we don't want to split hairs. That would confuse you even more, wouldn't it?" You sneered at your former master and continued, "Number six was the snake Nagini. You used her as a vessel after your attempt at creating a Horcrux with the death of Harry Potter failed. That was exactly eighteen years ago to this day, at Godric's Hollow. But Nagini was saved; I ordered a Dementor to suck your soul fragment out, and now Hagrid is taking good care of her. I

daresay that she neither misses, nor pines for you.

"But that isn't all. The one that gave us most trouble was Horcrux number seven. You see, we guessed that you wanted to have seven soul fragments because of the power of the number seven. We thought six Horcruxes would have to be created. For the longest time, we didn't suspect that you had yet another one, that you didn't care how many times your soul had been split, that you wanted to have seven Horcruxes, seven powerful, magical objects to tie you to this world. But eventually we learned about it, and our ever-inquisitive Miss Granger here figured out what it was. I have to tell you that you are no match for this young woman."

"To be mocked by silly little girls and would-be spies with delusions of grandeur... Oh, how Lord Voldemort shall laugh when he steps on your dead bodies. Make no mistake, you all will die. Harry Potter, here, cannot kill me. And the rest of you aren't destined to do so, having wands or not."

He laughed his creepy laugh again and turned towards Harry.

"So what will you do now, Harry? Won't you come closer so you can kill me with your bare hands? What are you looking at up there? No one will come; no one can Apparate here, and the old fool's phoenix can't help you this time."

"Wrong again." Harry smiled gently and looked up to the ledge over the gate. "Dobby!" he called quietly.

With a soft pop, Dobby Apparated, holding Godric Gryffindor's sword in his hands.

"Dobby is here for Harry Potter," the elf said.

"And this is yet another magical being that the likes of you simply dismiss as unworthy, that your Death Eaters and pureblood minions treat like vermin; yet another powerful being who has bound himself to me through love."

Voldemort stared fearfully at Dobby, his hands outstretched as if to ward off whatever was coming his way. Dobby threw Gryffindor's sword to Harry, hilt first, and Harry caught it like he caught the snitch in almost every Quidditch game he had ever been in. Then Dobby joined our semi-circle, raising a hand while, as one, we raised our wands.

"You see, Tom, we don't believe in prophecies. We believe in taking our fate into our own hands. And none of my friends here want me to become a murderer, so we will kill you together. There is no other way to stop you. He raised Gryffindor's sword like a wand. For the love of wizardkind ..."

"Avada Kedavra!"

Yelled with five different voices, a blinding flash of green light shot towards Voldemort, followed by a deafening, roaring wind. We couldn't see who produced which flash; it was one giant Killing Curse.

Voldemort stared, unbelieving, and then he crumbled to the floor with a dumbfounded expression on his face. As soon as he lay still, Harry pushed Gryffindor's sword through Voldemort's heart to free the fragmented and tormented soul once and for all and to re-unite it with its lost parts. For this is the secret magic of Gryffindor's sword: it can heal a tormented and torn soul and make it whole again. With a thunderous, 'crack', something left the body. Voldemort was finally dead, unable to come back again.

The five of us stood gobsmacked. Then we all ran towards Harry; Dobby, Ron and I threw ourselves at him and hugged him fiercely. You were standing back, and when we came out of the hug, you shook hands with each of us. Something like a smile was hovering around your lips, and as you stepped back again, you gave me an odd look.

I couldn't stand to be far away from you now. For me, our night of passionate lovemaking had just been yesterday, and I felt irresistibly drawn to you. I was well aware that it had been eighteen years for you, and maybe you didn't even remember me.

"That was a beautifully executed plan, Severus," I said, beaming. "We have you to thank for this victory. Wizardkind will finally recognise you as the hero you are." I smiled up at you.

You looked at me oddly again, swallowed and said, "Hermione... I have to know this... Is your mother's name Helena? Are you my daughter?"

The smile on my lips faded. "No, her name is Jane. What makes you think that her name is Helena?"

"Because you look like her, like Helena, just like I remember her the flushed face, the hair sticking to your head, the wisps of hair curling around your face... Are... are you certain that you weren't adopted? I've seen you grow up from the time you were a little girl. I should have seen that likeness earlier." You looked at me almost pleadingly.

I swallowed hard several times, staring at you, looking for a way to avoid what I knew would come but found none. "I am Helena," I finally whispered hoarsely. "I time-travelled."

Your eyes clouded over immediately. Colour rose in your face, and your expression changed from hope and wonder to anger and pain. "What kind of a sick prank is this? Who put you up to this?" You glared at me and then at Harry, who was happily hitting Ron's back.

"No, no, don't look at me like that. Please let me explain. I had to do it. I had no other choice. Please, don't judge me before you've heard my story..."

"I hope you have a good explanation," you snarled, "because a day that should have been a triumph for all of us has been thoroughly ruined for me now. Get out of my sight. Go and celebrate. I will hold you to your promise and demand an explanation when the excitement here is over." You glared at me one last time, turned and strode away.

"There were a few days of confusion; the Death Eaters seemed to have lost the will to fight with the loss of their master and tried to flee or blame the Imperius Curse for their actions. Some escaped, many were caught, and when the reality of Voldemort's final defeat started to sink in, celebrations started in earnest. I didn't see much of you during the celebrations. I couldn't enjoy them. I had been afraid that you would be hurt by my actions, and it had happened like I had feared. You were angry and hurt, and I was desperate to set things straight. The last thing I want is to be perceived as a daughter by you. My feelings for you are anything but daughterly... and I'm so glad that you are here now."

"I could have done without the last part of the explanation since I was there, but I admit that it was interesting to hear the story from your point of view. You are aware that your little prank with the Pensieve changed everything, aren't you?"

"It seems so, doesn't it? Merlin, it feels so good to have your arms around me again. Do you forgive me?"

"Mmmmmmm."

"Oh, heavens, your lips are still so soft... this feels so good."

"You do realise that it will take a lot more explaining and grovelling before I can forgive you? To act like my pet spider... and to live with me in my quarters..."

"I tried not to be too nosey, but you understand that I had to do something, don't you? You probably would have come up with a better plan. Mmmm, don't stop, yes. But I was glad to have some kind of plan at all, and that was all I could come up with. You have to admit that it worked."

"So it did."

"Are you angry that I gave in to temptation and met you in human form as Helena?"

"I cannot regret it. The memory of Helena was what kept me sane at first. This memory was like a bright candle; it brought me through all the horror and darkness. I never gave up hope of finding her again one day."

"I am here now. I'm her. And I didn't lie to you about my feelings. But surely there were other women over the years?"

"Certainly, but my encounters with other women were mostly friendly and satisfying arrangements, a relief of tension, nothing more. I never found that connection between body, heart, and mind with anyone else that I had with her, with you. Even though it was only one night..."

"Yes, I felt it like that, too. I still do. And what happens now?"

"You will have to convince me that you're still interested in me. And I'm not easily convinced. I suggest you start right away. Yes... like that..."

The End

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 of 7

Hermione travels back in time to find a missing Horcrux. She meets a young Severus who prepares for his first Potions lesson. Written before DH, now AU.

This is a smutty bonus chapter, written for Melusin as a thank you for the beta stress.

A detail from Chapter 5

Bonus Chapter for Melusin, written as a thank you for the beta stress of the last SS/HG summer round.

It was a soft and tender closed-mouthed kiss that apologised for being forthright, and at the same time, asked for permission to proceed. When I kissed you back in earnest, your lips opened slightly and your tongue probed carefully.

I opened my lips and let your tongue in, letting my own tongue explore your mouth as well, savouring the feel and taste of you. I marvelled how someone could be so expressive with his lips without saying anything. And then I stopped thinking altogether.

The kiss deepened; tongues explored and entwined; lips sucked on lips; hands grasped at hair and necks; bodies were pressed together until I was certain that you could feel my tight nipples through the fabric of my robes and smell my arousal, just as I could feel your erection between us.

"Come to bed," I panted when we broke the kiss to catch our breaths.

"Are you sure?" you asked in a shaky voice.

"We don't have time for games." I smiled up at you and pulled your head down for another kiss.

We finally did make it to the bed. Our increasingly passionate kisses were only interrupted by our frenzied undressing until we lay on the bed, skin touching skin, both impatient for more contact.

You pressed yourself against me; your lips wandered from my mouth to my ears and down my neck.

"Like this?" you whispered, your voice still shaking.

"Mmmmm, don't stop," I murmured. My own face was half-buried in your hair, and I didn't mind at all that it was a bit oily. Your scent was driving me insane, and I wanted to rub it all over me.

"Tell me when I do something wrong," you murmured, and let out a surprised yelp when I lightly bit your earlobe.

I chuckled. "Everything you're doing feels fantastic," I whispered in your ear and felt you shudder. It wasn't only your voice that was shaking; your hands on my breasts, your whole body was shaking slightly, but persistently.

"Why are you trembling? Is something wrong?" I found your excitement an incredible turn-on, but it puzzled me, too. You had been so confident before we kissed.

"I... Uhm. I may need a bit of guidance with this," you murmured while you lifted your head from my neck and looked at me. A slight blush was spreading quickly from your cheeks to your chest.

I was perplexed. "What do you mean, 'guidance'? Just do what you want to do? I'm quite certain it will feel wonderful. Or is there something special you want me to do?" I swallowed and looked at you sheepishly. "I'm not all that experienced, you know."

You blinked rapidly, your jaws working. "I'm even less so," you finally choked out.

My jaw dropped. "What? Are you...?"

"A bloody virgin, yes. I never went all the way," you mumbled. A crease was forming between your eyebrows, and your blush deepened.

"Oh, dear," I gasped and drew you into another long and deep kiss. I had to because I was trying hard not to laugh.

I'm so very sorry, Severus, but I was afraid that I would start to embarrass myself. I mean, here I was, very much in love and lying in bed with a younger version of my stern and demanding teacher, and he tells me that he is a virgin. I know it's not really funny, but your older self's face was glaring at me in my mind, calling me an insufferable

know-it-all while you were asking me for guidance, and I felt like laughing hysterically. Of course I couldn't, wouldn't tell you, or laugh at you, because you wouldn't have understood and it would have hurt you. I would never want to hurt you, ever.

Kissing calmed us both down and renewed the excitement. When I felt composed enough again, I broke the kiss and stroked your cheek, smiling. "Good thing, then, that I'm not a virgin anymore although I'm not that far ahead of you."

You were just staring at me, the half-frown still creasing your brows. I had never thought that I would see you so vulnerable. I felt that almost reflexive urge to hug you, tell you it would be all right, get all caring and supportive, but I didn't think that you'd really appreciate any of this. Admitting your inexperience must have been awkward for you, and I felt very elated that you trusted me enough to risk it. So, instead of reassuring you, I giggled.

"It won't hurt you, you know no blood," I quipped.

Your frown turned into a scowl, but I just held you firmly in my arms, grinned cheekily and wriggled my eyebrows. And slowly, slowly, the scowl faded, and you started to laugh. You laughed so hard that you collapsed on top of me. Your laughter was beautiful and infectious, and we laughed together, bursting into new bouts of laughter simply by looking at each other. Finally, we were able to stop; we both had to catch our breaths. You were lying motionless on top of me, your head buried in my neck. When you finally lifted your head and looked at me again, the smile that was lighting up your eyes slowly changed into an expression of desire and longing. I felt your erection hard between us once again; it had faded a little while we had been laughing. The expression in your eyes took my breath away.

"Severus," I gasped. "I want you so much. Everything you do will be wonderful." I pushed you onto your back and kissed your lips, your face, and a line from your jaw to your collarbone, marvelling at the texture of your skin and breathing you in, all the while tasting and touching. Your accelerated breathing showed me that you liked what I was doing. I kept kissing you, moving down to your chest and to your nipples where I paused and nipped at each, being rewarded with small yelps, gasps and sighs. I put a hand over your heart and felt it hammer against your ribs. I savoured the warmth of your skin, the crispness of the sparse hairs on your chest and the smooth feeling of your naked skin under my hands. I had wanted to touch that skin for a while now, ever since I had watched you sleeping and realised what I felt for you. And now there was no stopping me.

My hands wandered carefully down your belly while my lips still lingered on your chest. I was licking your navel, and then I stroked your loins and closed in on your cock. You rose up with a soft groan when I finally touched it. I took a firmer hold and started to stroke. The sounds you made delighted and encouraged me. When I took your balls in my hand and squeezed softly, you moaned.

"Helena," you rasped out. "If you continue this, I won't last long."

"Then we'll just start all over again," I whispered before taking you into my mouth. A gasp, a few strokes with hands, tongue and lips, and you came. I smirked at your astonished and delighted face, and you reached down and pulled me up on top of you to kiss me again: thoroughly, long and lovingly. We were lost in that kiss for what appeared an eternity until I finally felt how you hardened again. With an unexpected twist, you turned us around until you were lying on top of me.

"Your turn," you whispered, and you did to my body what I had done to yours a short while before. Apparently, my moans and sighs of appreciation egged you on since you attacked all my sensitive spots with enthusiasm and tenacity, slowly exploring my body with your lips and hands. When your head had finally found its place between my legs, and your tongue, lips and fingers did the most marvellous things to my sensitive spots, I couldn't keep my calm any longer. I squirmed, moaned and sighed, praised and directed you until a first small climax shook me.

"Severus, I need you. I want you. Now," I cried out.

All I could hear from you was a low growl, but you moved up again, your weight resting on your arms. With a bit of fumbling from both of us, you found your target and slowly slid inside me. It felt incredible.

"Don't... don't move just yet," I breathed. This felt so right. We fitted together perfectly. None of my past encounters had been like this. I had thought that I had loved before, but these feelings were nothing compared to what I now felt for you. In comparison, my past 'experience' felt like crushes and teenage experimentation. Feeling you inside me, stretching me, filling me, was the most wonderful sensation I had ever experienced. I had never felt so complete before. I wanted to cry, laugh and shout at the same time.

"All right?" you asked softly. The look of wonder and joy you gave me made me think that this feeling of completeness might be mutual, not one-sided.

"Yes," I gasped. "Never been better."

"Nor I," you whispered and started to move, tentatively at first but with increasing confidence. I lost all sense of time and space; all my senses were filled with you, only you. My incoherent sounds were directing and encouraging you, and soon you were hitting just the right spots, again and again until I was gasping out in my ecstasy. With a groan of triumph and joy, you came shortly after me.

If that was your first time, you were a natural, I thought while we lay together, still joined, both sticky from sweat and other fluids and breathing heavily. But then it dawned on me that you would have been using very basic Legilimency on me. For a brief moment I panicked; I had completely forgotten to Occlude. But I calmed down quickly. Apart from my brief attack of silliness in the beginning, I had never thought about my real persona, about the future, about my task in the past. Besides, you hadn't been intruding in my mind but rather reading my emotions and physical reactions. My thoughts and feelings had been focussed on you alone anyway, and thus all you had seen while reading me were my honest and true emotions. Nevertheless, I chastised myself; I would have to be careful to keep some of my thoughts hidden now.

"I wish times were different and my life wasn't filled with obligations," you finally whispered. "Then I could ask you to stay."

"I wish the same," I murmured. "Then I could stay."

We rested a bit, whispering endearments to each other. After a while, you asked, "Can we do this again?"

I laughed softly and started to attack every inch of your body once more with hands and lips.

We didn't sleep that night. We made love again and again, and only when the sun came up did you kiss me tenderly one last time and say softly, "I must leave you now."