

It's Not Going To Stop

by livvy6

Spoilers!

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In The Deep

Chapter 1 of 5

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Victoria Whitfield

A/N: Big Thanks to my beta, Good_Witch!

Thought you had all the answers

To rest your heart upon.

But something happens,

Don't see it coming,

Now you can't stop yourself.

Now you're out there swimming...

In the deep

In the deep

In the Deep- by Bird York

I sat at his desk surrounded by the vilest of oddities floating in jars of formaldehyde. I didn't like to look at them, which meant that I had to keep my eyes on the task at hand: marking grades in his ledger. I spent most of my days like this, a sort of apprentice/gopher for his Defense Against the Dark Arts classes. Sometimes I would stop my work to glance around the room. Immediately I would be bombarded with the most spectacular looks of shock and puzzlement from the students. There was no need to wonder why. I knew the reason shock continued to be pasted on their faces. "Why?" was the question.

A billowing robe would sweep between the face of a wondering student and my own, and I took my cue to get back to my work. For months, life continued thus, working, hunched over, scribbling madly, recording notes and grades while enduring the rants and tirades of the man who was now my husband...who had been my teacher.

I slept in his bed and ate at his table in the Great Hall. I used to wear the school robes, but after a curt disapproval from my husband I went to Madam Malkin's and purchased a lightweight black outfit that suited my figure. I stood in front of the three-way mirror with my blonde hair piled up into a bun on the back of my head. It was a joke; really, my finer wavy curls kept escaping the sides.

"This black silk will do so nicely for you I think, and I believe wool for the winter, and the cotton...it will help you to breathe in the summer."

I murmured in agreement, but insisted the cotton to be in rose. I adamantly refused to wear black always and forever...even if my life would be one perpetual day of mourning. When completed, I struck a severe figure: blonde tendrils escaping from a high bun around my ears and neck to a high, tight, buttoned bodice. The black sleeves fit tightly down to my wrists and the waist was fitted snugly. The black skirt was long and voluminous, down to the floor. I was concerned about the fitted look of the bodice...I

felt it would be indecent...but I could cover it up with robes. I frowned at my reflection, turning to the side and straightening my posture. I felt secure and commanded respect, able now to appreciate my husband's preference for black. It invoked fear and awe, especially if the person wearing it had a continuously angry countenance to complete it. I wouldn't need that, of course. I was far too secure in myself for such nonsense.

Upon my return from Diagon Alley, I found Severus waiting for me in our chambers. He was impatient to know which items I had purchased. He saw the two black dresses and gave his silent approval. I learned early on that silence was good. He had a booming voice that could rival a Howler if he felt so inclined. So, with all this in the front of my mind, I took out the rose colored dress.

"It never ceases to amaze me as to the lengths to which women will go to irritate their men."

"I don't see anything wrong with my choice," I answered calmly.

"I DO!" he retorted menacingly.

"I am not going to have the same argument over and over again, Severus," I answered, my voice rising dangerously. "My dress is the same cut and style as the others, and, by the way, you had nothing bad to say about *them*. The color makes me HAPPY. Can you understand, Severus? I need some happiness in my life."

I took the dresses and put them away in the cabinet. I returned to his office and began to sift through the masses of papers on the desk. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw him slouching against the doorframe.

"Why do we keep doing this? I told you months ago you could leave. We aren't even a proper married couple!"

"Thank you, Severus, for reminding me," I answered without looking up from my work.

"I am going to meet some students in the forest for detentions. I will be home later."

I watched him walk out, defeated and sad. I felt defeated and sad. Whatever this was, it wasn't working, and we had tumbled down into some sort of civil cohabitation. In the beginning there had been so much promise. I could remember the early mornings of tension, waking up and feeling his hardness, which he excused as a morning difficulty for men. But then during work, brushing by and feeling the similar hardness against my leg, I hadn't dared to let him know I knew. Then there was the way he kept watching me make potions. His eyes would soften as if he were a thousand miles away. Two weeks ago, during a harmless flirtation/argument over the correct way to stir a particularly difficult potion, he had kissed me and called me "Lily". Since then he had brooded alone, had been crueler towards his students, and had made one girl cry. Later, after that particular episode, I had taken him to task over his bullying, abusive behavior.

After the class had departed, I had turned on him with blazing eyes that I had hoped would wither him into shame.

"How can you? How can you be so cruel? These are just children that are going to make errors and mistakes. They are LEARNING. Skulking around with your atmosphere of disdain is deplorable! Bad form, Severus! Bad form."

"SILENCE!" he had roared. "I will not be spoken to in that tone by you!"

He then had stridden to face me, towering over me with his fathomless eyes full of rancor. Then, he had spoken, his voice barely above a whisper.

"This is my class, Miss Whitfield," he had spat. "I will treat my students as I see fit, without your interference."

I had marched out of the room looking at him with nothing but the utmost loathing. I had decided to take up my plight with Dumbledore. If anyone could make Severus see the light, he would be the one to do it.

Ah, Madam Snape," he had said gracefully, "do come in."

"Headmaster," I had begun, "my name according to my 'husband' is Miss Whitfield."

"I see," he had stated slowly as he had risen to stand closer to me. "Please sit."

I had obliged and had gone right into my tirade. "Professor Snape doesn't think this farce should continue. I-I don't think it should. I know what you told me. But, he is so cold and ... *stuck*...somehow. He called me another woman's name." I had stopped abruptly, embarrassed about what I had revealed. I had felt flushed, but had continued. "That's how WRONG this all is. Not a proper marriage, not a proper friendship either. I'm tired, Headmaster. I'm weary of belonging to a man who doesn't see me as a gift, but as a burden."

Dumbledore had stood smiling down at me with his half-moon glasses magnifying his twinkling blue eyes. He had walked over to his desk and sat down.

"Lemon drop?"

"Thank you, no."

"Do you remember our discussion six months ago about your possible engagement to Professor Snape?"

"Yes."

"I recall that I was highly impressed with your Hufflepuff heritage. Do you know why?"

I had sat back and had frowned in concentration. "Because my family comes from a long line of Hufflepuffs?"

"Correct in part, Madam, I do recall your grandmother, though, was a Gryffindor?"

"Oh yes!" I had smiled. It was a great source of pride in my family, since Hufflepuffs are not considered to be anything but the "left-overs" of the magical world.

"In fact, there was a rumor that my great-great uncle Octavius was a Slytherin! But, I think it was just family lore," I had added disparagingly.

"Oh, I think not," Dumbledore had begun. "Your great-great uncle was indeed in Slytherin house, but these matters are not of great importance to the matter we have at hand."

The matter at hand, I had thought, gloomily. *I am a big failure at marriage, everything. I, the failure Hufflepuff, now married to one the greatest wizards of this age* Dumbledore had sensed my despair and had reached out with his comforting voice.

"Victoria, you are a Hufflepuff. Many generations of Hufflepuffs are behind you, and what is the virtue Hufflepuffs hold dear more than any other?"

"Loyalty," I had answered unswervingly.

"That's right, my dear," he had responded happily. "You have such a capacity for love and loyalty, and Severus needs that so badly. He is a very tortured and wounded soul. I fear for him. Remember when you agreed to marry him; we spoke of the possibility of his putting you away from himself. I told you to continue to love, to keep on being loyal to him. Can it be you have extinguished your abilities to continue?"

"N-no," I had quavered, "but he is so mean and bitter. I can't change that. No matter how much love, or loyalty, I give, or show...he has to will the change for himself! What can I do anymore for him?"

Dumbledore had weighed my words cautiously. Finally he had spoken. "Do you know the words of St. Paul?"

"Yes, I read the Bible."

"You came to me with your heart coming to a close towards Severus. Remember, 'Do not overcome evil with evil, but overcome evil with good'. Victoria, don't let your pride ruin what is so beautiful. It is not because of you he is so hurt and lonely. Use your gifts of love and loyalty; love him when he doesn't deserve it. It will start making an impression."

"When do I give up? I need my husband to love me. I need affection and respect."

"For right now, let us not worry about that point. Let us implement our new plan of action."

"Headmaster, he is so cruel to the children...he made a girl cry today. What am I to do? How can I stand by and allow him to vent his spleen on children?!"

"Severus is a difficult man. Let me bring him here and we will discuss this issue."

In no time at all the familiar black robes had come swishing into the Headmaster's office. My stomach was churning and gurgling. My husband in name both excited me and caused me great fear at the same time. He had paused by my side for a moment only to give me a hateful glance. There was going to be hell to pay later.

I had barely heard the discourse between the two men. Then, Snape had rounded on me with his eyes flashing and his jaw set. I had risen to the challenge as he had begun his diatribe.

"How dare you! I give you everything...the protection of my name and home...and you haven't the decency to keep our quarrels private! My classes will be run as I see fit, and you, my girl, will act as I see fit. You belong to *me*!"

His face had contorted beyond reason. I had felt my blood rise up to my face.

"I belong to no one! Especially since you have seen fit to keep me at arm's length in your bed, your classes, and everywhere else in this castle! Yet, I am your wife. Could you find it in yourself to respect my advice as your partner in all this?!"

He had begun clenching his fists as if he wanted to kill me right then and there. I had watched his eyes suspiciously, knowing he could do nonverbal magic. But little did he know that I was becoming an accomplished Legilimens behind his condescending back. I wasn't a stupid little Hufflepuff, incapable of such advanced magic.

I had felt it coming and had readied my wand. He had not said a word, but I knew *Langlock* had come to his mind. I had quickly drawn my wand and blocked his spell. His black eyes had bored into my blue-green ones and he had cried "*Expel...*"

"*Levicorpus!*" I had shrieked. I had crossed to his face as he had hung upside down. Dumbledore had remained in his chair, humming happily to himself, drumming his fingers together, as if enjoying the show.

I had stopped inches from his face, which was upside down. "If you want to fight...I'll fight! But don't you DARE try to hex me nonverbally again!" I had walked a safe distance away and standing in dueling position, I had cried, "*Liberacorpus!*"

Snape had crashed to the floor and had leapt to his feet quick as a flash, so angry he didn't know what to say. I, on the other hand, had not changed my position from a dueling stance. I was ready for anything.

"I'm going to bed!" he had spat curtly. With that, he had stormed out of the Headmaster's Office with his robes billowing behind him. I had slowly lowered my hands.

"That went poorly," I had said sadly to Dumbledore.

"Oh, I think not, Victoria. Remember, there is more than one way to skin a hippogriff!"

Save Me

After an intense standoff and reluctant rapprochement, Victoria and Severus return to Spinners' End, where Victoria recalls the events that led up to her marriage to Snape.

A/N: Thanks again to my beta, Good_Witch!

You look like a perfect fit

For a girl in need of a tourniquet

But can you save me?

Why don't you save me?

From the ranks of the freaks

Who suspect they could never love anyone...

"Save me" by Aimee Mann

He refused to speak to me the rest of the night and the following day. I stayed true to my promise to Dumbledore to be loyal to my "in-name-only-husband", but felt at the close of my discussion with Dumbledore I had gained a type of loophole. I would be loyal, but would be loyal only to what was healthy and noble. No matter how vile his behavior, I would continue to stay, but I would no longer sit silently by and watch him destroy our lives with his bitterness. I figured one of two things would happen: either he would crack under the pressure and accept me as his true wife and love me, or he was going to put me away. At this point I didn't really care which avenue he chose.

After the second day of silence, he poured us some elf-made wine and sat down in the sitting room. He began slowly.

"How did you learn Leglimency?"

"It came easily to me. My mother was eager to help me to flourish in my natural talents, so I have been working hard for many years now."

There was another awkward silence.

"It seems you have more magical abilities than I was aware," he said finally.

"I never saw myself as being special, and my tastes run along charms work. I love sewing and creating clothes, fashion...that sort of thing."

"You were to begin your N.E.W.T. levels...before..." He stopped abruptly.

"Yes, I worked on my wedding dress for the whole summer by hand...since I couldn't use magic. I was so eager to get going. Madam Malkin told me she would love for me to take an apprenticeship during my summers under her if I felt so inclined."

"Your wedding dress was very beautiful," he admitted softly.

"Thank you," I replied solemnly. "Honestly, I never thought of ever actually wearing it. It was so*suggestive*, but you only get married... once," I stopped talking slowly and sadly.

"I'm sorry I ruined it," he whispered.

We sat in the dark with the fire dying. Not once did he try to move closer to me or I to him. It was as if we were chained to our respective areas with a huge divide barring us from getting closer.

Later that night we lay in bed, and he whispered, "You had green thread in the design of the dress."

"Yes," I answered a little puzzled. "I wanted to wear your colors. Silver and green, I thought would be a nice touch."

"Green," he repeated. He turned over on his side and said, "*Lumos*". He was holding his black wand up towards my face. He studied my face, burning his eyes into mine. "Your eyes," he started.

"Yes?" I urged.

"Your eyes are not blue, nor are they green," he assessed.

"Correct," I breathed, "but to be exact, I have golden flecks in my blue eyes which gives them a blue-green hue."

"Nox," he said deeply.

Months later, after Dumbledore's death, we moved back to Spinner's End, and I decided to sort out his house. I came across a drawer in Severus' desk that had been charmed shut. I easily broke through, and to my shock, I saw a torn photo of a laughing woman with red hair and brilliant, almond-shaped, green eyes. Next to it was a partial letter signed, "Lots of Love, Lily". I scrunched the photo and letter in my hand and shut the drawer. I was furious and felt angrier than I ever had been in my life. There would be no way for me to confront Severus; he was gone doing his spy work for the Order...not that the Order knew it. As far as they were concerned we were persona non-grata. I sat on our bed. Our bed! Nothing but sleeping ever had happened in this bed. It was a lie...all lies!!! I cried bitter tears and the past came roaring back. Why, oh why, did I ever agree to marry such a lying man? And why was I still allowing myself to feel hurt by him?

I was a "pure-blood", all tosh as far as I cared, but ever since the return of the Dark Lord, havoc was being wreaked all over the country: disappearances, mysterious deaths, etc. My parents were not in the Order, they were so terrified for me, but they worked the Underground Resistance, housing members, passing information. But when some unknown person to us betrayed my parents to Voldemort, his wrath was severe.

Death Eaters came to our home during the summer after my fifth year. I had just celebrated my 16th birthday the day before, and my parents and I were still riding high from the celebration. It was evening; we were finishing dinner and presents were still on the floor. We were eating leftover cake when the door burst open and red lights flashed everywhere. My parents screamed as Bellatrix Lestrange dragged me into my bedroom. I was locked in without my wand.

I knew they were performing the Cruciatus Curse; the screaming was so awful. At first, I tried to bang on the door and force the handle, but after a while I realized it was hopeless. I crawled into the far corner of my room and curled into a ball. I wanted to cry, but couldn't. Then it was over.

The Death Eaters came into my room, and I lifted my head slightly from the floor. I gasped as I saw the dark figure of my Potions master stride in my room. I recognized the fathers of Crabbe and Goyle amongst the other Death Eaters. A strange look came over Crabbe's eyes as he slowly made his way towards me. Snape swooped between us and said darkly, "She is a pure-blood and a student a Hogwarts. She is not responsible for her parents' treachery. She is only a girl. Let her live."

"But the Dark Lord!" began Bellatrix.

Snape interrupted her. "The Dark Lord gave orders to kill Chandler and Samantha Whitfield. Nothing about Victoria was ever said!" He turned with pity on me. "Let us take this chance to restore this pure-blood to her rightful place!"

I remembered being in front of Lord Voldemort, repulsed and disgusted by his appearance and demeanor. He asked me many questions with penetrating eyes. He had been very curious about exactly what had occurred at my house, especially Snape's part in saving my life.

"Severus," he crooned, as if to a pet.

"My Lord," Snape replied deeply.

Voldemort looked upon Snape as if he were assessing his worth.

"I seem to recall a conversation many years ago about a certain Mudblood you desired." Several jeers emitted from the gallery. Snape looked like stone, his face set as granite. "I hope you have overcome your previous tastes. Look at her, Severus! A pure-blood!" He bored into my mind. "A virgin as well! You could have so much pleasure in your middle age with such a young flower, unless..."

"Unless, my Lord?" Severus asked with a twinge of dread in his voice.

"Unless... you are above bedding 16-year-old girls?" He smiled sadistically.

"My Lord, Victoria is my student. She has only just taken her O.W.L.'s...How could I possibly... She is not of age!"

"Very well, Severus, I'm sure McNair or Crabbe would love to have her for company. Poor Lucius, he won't be available for a while yet. Blonde, voluptuous, such his type!"

I cringed inwardly and thought I would die right where I stood. I didn't know what to do. I felt trapped. Voldemort sensed my fear and pulled me closer to him.

"What would you prefer? Would you like to be a wealthy mistress to my Death Eaters or the wife of a very sad and depressing dark arts master?"

I looked up at an incredulous Snape, watching for any sign of direction. When none came, I was left standing there with my mouth gaping open.

Voldemort's mouth curled wide into a malevolent smile. The silence was palpable.

"The time has come, Snape, for you to forget your old affliction and prove your word to me that there truly are... purer women for the taking," Voldemort sneered. "I believe it to be *imperative* for you to show your loyalty in this regard to ME, your Lord and Master! After all, you have displayed such *meditation* to my *exact* commands. Therefore, since you were so gallant in protecting one of our own, I think you should be the one to *care* for her."

Snape grabbed my arm forcefully and bent me down with him to kiss the foot of the Dark Lord. I kissed the foot as well.

"My Lord, I am most grateful for this chance to prove myself worthy." His arm squeezed mine so hard I squeaked out in pain, "Y-yes, my L-lord, I won't let you down. I am very grateful to become the wife of such a powerful servant of yours."

Snape led me out of the throne room, and once out of the lair we Disapparated back to the edge of the Hogwarts Boundary Line. I was in total shock. I could barely move. Snape was livid with rage and fear. He shook me so hard I could barely see, and his grip on my arms was so hard I thought they would snap off. I remember he was screaming obscenities that I couldn't register. Then I fainted either from fear or pain. Or both.

I woke in the infirmary. Madam Pomfrey was busily rushing around trying to help rouse me. She was arguing with Snape. I kept hearing, "My wife" and "my responsibility." Then, Pomfrey and McGonagall were talking at the same time back at Snape saying, "Ridiculous," "barely 16," "a student," and "you can not possibly!"

I opened my eyes, and a haze of faces hovered over me, pouring words of concern and sympathy. But all I wanted was to talk to Severus...I needed to know if my memories were true. After much prodding and discussion, mostly by Dumbledore and Severus, I found myself alone with my future husband.

We were quiet for so long. We didn't know what to say. I kept very still on my bed, trying to meet his eyes. I wanted to read his mind; I wanted to know how angry he really was with me. Snape finally jerked up his left sleeve to show a hideous black mark...the Dark Mark! I shivered at the look of it.

"Yes," he sneered, "this is what you agreed to marry! I will not be a loving husband. The day I had this branded onto my flesh, that sort of life was gone forever! There will be no children, no love; all I can give you is a respectful existence. I will never beat you or touch you in any way. I will protect you and give you my allegiance. I will never commit...*adultery*..." He said the word with disdain. He got up, seemingly unable to face me, and then swung around angry, his eyes glittering. "I can't love...I'm already dead. So, make your choice." And with that he swept out of the room.

After two days, I went to Dumbledore's office. I was still so weak and weary; I didn't know what to think! Dumbledore sensed my confusion and spoke tenderly to me.

"Miss Whitfield...Victoria," he began. "Severus is a difficult man. His life has had so much tragedy. Do you know how old he is?"

"No," I admitted.

"He's 36. Oh, I know that seems like old age to a 16 year old, but it really isn't."

"Yes, I understand." I choked up, unable to speak more.

"Ah, yes. Your father was 20 years older than your mother, correct?"

I nodded as the tears fell from my eyes.

"So, you see, age doesn't have to be a huge factor in a successful marriage. But, I digress. Severus, for such a young man, has endured far too many abuses in his life and unwittingly aided in the death of the only woman he ever loved."

His kind eyes became dark and serious as he leaned toward mine. "I trust this information will never leave this room."

"Of course," I murmured.

Dumbledore resumed, "Severus was a destroyed young man. He felt his life was over. At 21, that is a terrible thing to believe, that you are already dead..."

"That's what he said," I sobbed.

"He loved her so much. He still loves her, I fear. I know I'm asking for you to sacrifice so much. Severus still has the capacity for love, but I wonder, if the right woman ever came along, could he nourish that love and thus become nourished himself?"

"Why me?" I cried. "He is so...so bitter to me!"

"Lord Voldemort did the choosing, but he always had such an unfortunate habit of neglecting the true talents of people he deems as 'weak'. You see yourself as a little Hufflepuff, not much going for you, but I see you, Victoria, and your capacity for love, sacrifice, and loyalty is so strong. It runs in your veins. Could you find it in yourself to hand your allegiance to Severus and love him, even when he is at times, 'unlovable', or if he ever expresses a desire to put you away? Will you stay and love him?"

"Why is it so important? What about the murders of my parents?" I hurled at him.

"Well," he began as he rose from his desk to stand closer to where I was sitting, "there is the obvious reason that Severus is, for all intents and purposes, your savior. He saved you from a terrible fate...even death. Victoria, Severus did not kill your parents. He was there and for the Order had to keep his status as a Death Eater intact. Believe me, child; he is so very distraught over what happened to your family. But, that aside, what nobler purpose can there be in laying down one's life for a friend? And Severus Snape is your friend. I believe this because he took a great risk by not allowing the Death Eaters to kill you as well. Also, there is a personal reason that I hope you can forgive me in not divulging too much. Suffice it to say it concerns the death of the woman Severus once loved and grieves for to this very day."

"So, you want me to help him 'get over' this dead woman?" I asked impatiently.

Dumbledore's eyes were so very sad as I followed his gaze down to his deadened black hand that was resting on his leg. "My dear, Severus...very soon...is going to need a great deal of support and endurance to get through the task that has been laid before him. Love, perspective, and forgiveness are all crucial to his work. Dear child, will you be his companion, his helper? Endure with him, perhaps even cry with him? After all, you are both in the grips of deep mourning for those you love."

I felt overloaded. Yet, the answer was so simple. He had saved me and asked for nothing in return. On the other hand, Dumbledore sensed he needed comfort. I knew the art of gratitude and I was a Hufflepuff! I knew all about loyalty. So I could be loyal to the one saved me. Yes, I could do this. I would be his wife.

"Yes, Dumbledore," I said eagerly. "I will!"

Dumbledore smiled, but it was a tragic smile.

Wise Up

Chapter 3 of 5

Victoria continues to reminisce about her N.E.W.T. exam, the wedding and its aftermath, and the first confrontation over Lily.

A/N: Thanks again to my beta, Good_Witch!

It's not what you thought

When you first began it,

You got

What you want

Now you can hardly stand it though,

By now you know

It's not going to stop

It's not going to stop

It's not going to stop

'Til you wise up

Wise up- Aimee Mann

The day was a flurry of activity. The students were to arrive in one week, and the wedding was to take place the following day. I had already started work on my N.E.W.T. Charms Final during the summer; I had wanted to be ready to start my summer apprenticeship with Madam Malkin, but now that dream was over. Now, time was of the essence to get as many of my classes finalized so I could be finished with my education as much as possible before becoming Mrs. Severus Snape. It was agreed by the Heads of the Houses that I would continue Transfiguration with McGonagall and Severus would take my Defense against the Dark Arts and Potions classes under his wing. But this was all to be on an informal basis. My days of being a Hogwarts student were over.

The next day I took out my white silk dress that I had begun over the summer. I was so grateful that I had been careful to pack it away neatly after each time I had worked on it so that it had survived the destruction of my parents' house. I consulted Madam Malkin about the intricacies of the embroidery work, and once a pattern and color choice had been arranged, I was ready to begin my examination. I sat in the Great Hall surrounded by the Head of the Houses, Madam Malkin, and the special N.E.W.T. Examination Professors: Merrythought, Blambridge, and Turkin. I noticed Severus had taken a seat on the right against the wall, frowning, with his arms crossed rigidly. He would see my work very well from that angle, and I prayed hard to make him proud. I expressed my reluctance about his presence there, saying it was bad luck to see the

bride and her gown before the wedding, but in all honesty, I didn't want him around to wreak havoc on my nerves. Unfortunately for me, Severus snorted at such a sentimental and silly tradition.

"Besides, Miss Whitfield," he said softly, "I would like to know what kind of talents my future wife possesses, since it is obvious from your Potions work that it is not your area of expertise."

I let this go, since I knew who I was. I was a terrible Potions maker. But I was a whiz at Charms, and I was determined he would soon know it!

"I understand that this garment is going to be your wedding dress for this evening?" queried Professor Merrythought after the assembled took their seats.

"That is correct, sir," I answered confidently.

Professor Turkin addressed Professor Snape. "You must be so pleased to attend such an event, Snape! From what Madam Malkin has told me, Miss Whitfield is a natural at clothing charms!"

"That remains to be seen," Snape retorted sourly.

The professors were taken aback. But, I remained calm as I began my recitation.

"Professors, my N.E.W.T. Level Charms Examination for you will be a demonstration of a rather difficult Embroidering Charm. My base material is white charmeuse silk. The waist is in empire fashion, and from the straps to the encirclement of the bust line, I will weave a silver and green floss design. I have chosen these colors to show my respect for my future husband's house: Slytherin." I made a respectful bow in his direction. He curtly jerked his head in acknowledgement.

Smiles and murmurs of approval cascaded over the Hall. I started my Hover charm of the dress so it would stand on its own. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the professors eagerly taking notes. I then began the double fold work of the Embroidery Charm, weaving the silver and green floss down the edging of the gown's bodice. It was most delicate work. The silky material the charm worked on had to have the exact same pressure applied, otherwise the fabric would snag, and the experiment (and the final!) would be ruined.

As I focused on my task, I was unable to see the satisfied smile on my future husband's face. Dumbledore took notice for me and saw the pride swell in the man's breast. It was clear to him that Snape viewed me as an extremely dexterous and exacting witch. When the examination was over and the dress placed on display, I sank on my chair, famished, exhausted, and terrified. Snape was on my right side, and he took me by the hand, leading me to the High Table, and snapped his fingers. At once, a plate of delicious roast pork, mashed potatoes, carrots, and rolls with a flagon of pumpkin juice was set before me. He murmured in my ear, "You must eat, my dear. You have done a wonderful job."

The examination was a success and there were congratulations all around. Then all at once, the festivities ended, for the wedding was soon to take place. I went to the Hufflepuff common room to dress. Professors Sprout, McGonagall, Trelawney and Madam Hooch came to help me prepare. When I emerged, there was a collective gasp from the group. I knew what they were thinking, but I didn't care. It was my wedding day.

* * *

I looked into the full-length mirror for the last time. Already, Professor Sprout was whirling around, packing up my possessions to have them transported into the dungeons. McGonagall was trying hard to speak in low tones about the "wedding night." I didn't want to hear. There was not going to be a wedding night, per se. Severus and I would just go to sleep. But for now, it was my wedding DAY. And all my life I wanted to be beautiful and sensual on this day. So I looked at my hair in its low bun at the base of my head. The embroidered straps circled my shoulders delicately. The embroidery work around the bust line of the bodice was very dramatic. If one came close, the light silk would reveal the faint outline of my nipples, since the style had no need for me to wear underthings. The waist melted down effortlessly to accentuate my curves. I wore no necklace. My full breasts, bursting against the silk, were my adornment. I was a budding woman, and I wanted to show Severus how enticing and sensual I could be. I prayed one day I might fall in love with him. I hoped that one day he would see me as a woman that he could truly be a husband to, not just a child dressed up in women's clothes.

As I walked up to Dumbledore's office, everyone gasped at the sight of me in my dress. Severus was so pale in his dress robes. He stood properly groomed and stoic. He could not stop his eyes from looking at my breasts, though, and the thought flashed in my mind that perhaps there might be a wedding night after all. His staring made me feel very nervous and almost naked, and after some time my nipples hardened against the light material. Severus must have noticed because at the same moment his hand, grasping mine, suddenly squeezed hard, and he drew in a sharp breath.

After the ceremony, there was the customary passing of the champagne and toasting the happy couple. Severus gulped his drink and announced abruptly we were leaving for the dungeons. The wedding party was aghast as Severus grabbed my wrist and dragged me out of the Headmaster's office. Once we arrived in his private rooms, he hurled me inside and rounded on me snarling, "What precisely did you think you were attempting to achieve?"

"Sorry?" I asked incredulously.

He didn't know what to say. He would start and stop as he paced up and down. Finally, he strode over close to me and grabbed the straps I had worked on so delicately hours beforehand and, in one swift, ripping motion, tore it down so I was naked from the waist up.

"What in the bloody hell is wrong with you?" I screamed as I tried to cover myself.

"Don't you dare!" he roared as he grabbed my arms in order to prohibit me from covering myself. "Wasn't this what you wanted; to expose yourself in front of the entire school?"

"N-no," I whispered.

"What?" he snapped, as if he couldn't hear me.

"I wanted to be beautiful for you!" I looked up at his angry black eyes, and I started to cry, "Please...let me go...you are hurting me!"

"What do I have to tell you to make you understand? I'm DEAD!"

I was sobbing now; embarrassment, fear, and humiliation were closing in on me.

"No," I croaked. "I saw how you looked at me. You desired me...I know you do."

Snape closed his eyes and shook his head as he released my arms. "My dear, seeing a woman's eager nipples will always have an effect if a man's heart is still beating, but I can not seem to get this through your thick skull: I am dead...DEAD...where it truly counts." He lowered his face to meet my eyes with his own. Then a sick smile spread across his lips. "Well, I suppose if all you care about is rutting, that part of me is certainly not dead!" He reached over, grabbed me, and placed a hand on my breast while wrapping his other hand around the back of my neck, pulling me within inches of his face. I screamed.

"Why, what's wrong?" he accused me sarcastically while tightening his grip. "Isn't a good screwing what you want?" His face came closer, barely an inch from my face. I felt so humiliated, terror rising up inside me, but I realized as I gazed into his black eyes that what he wanted me to feel was terror, revulsion, and disgust. I wouldn't give him the satisfaction of falling apart. Anger flashed inside me. So, I slapped his face as hard as I could.

"You get away from me, you sick bastard!"

"As you wish," he said silkily with a formal bow. He went to an adjoining room, and I was left with his bed presumably, as it had Slytherin trappings and colors. I looked down at my torn dress and bruised breast where he had clamped his hand on it. "How was I to show loyalty to this?" I moaned.

Eventually, Severus decided to return to his bed, and after a couple of months, a familiarity came over us. I would wake to find him wrapped around me or myself wrapped in him. He would always overreact upon waking by pushing himself away from me. It was terrible; those were the lowest points for my ego and me. I was sixteen and my hormones were raging! Those minutes of being wrapped in his body, feeling his warmth, would sate my soul and fill my senses with a deep longing for something I feared would never happen...

There were times when his mood became vindictive and angry after having been stuck day after day in the dungeons together. During these times, he would ask me if I wanted to "fuck," but my face would lift to his, and I would shake my head sadly when he said that. But I never showed shock, or blushed in shame to his requests. I wanted a real love, real affection! My face never lowered and would never register as he had hoped. I knew he only would say such things in order to revolt me, or make me think he was vile, to wince and shriek in horror, but if I stood firm with longing sadness in my eyes, it would only frustrate his cause. I knew he hated our marriage and resented my intrusion into his well-ordered life. It was difficult and irritating for him, a long-time bachelor, set in his ways, to have me around all the time. So, he was stuck with his unease over what to do about my presence, and he was, after all, a man.

Still, I carried on, cherishing the bright spots in my otherwise gloomy life. I found myself being drawn to him as I watched him teach. I would be working, grading papers, listening to his lectures, hanging on every word without his awareness. Now that the fear of being his student was gone, even though I was still being tutored, no grade was being affected and no homework required! I could actually *listen* critically without worrying over the material. I was enraptured by his knowledge. He was the most intelligent man I had ever known. As our evenings were so devoid of any other marital activities, I would ask him in-depth questions over some of the material he covered in his classes. At first, he seemed irritated over my "incessant prattle," as he called it, because he wanted his wife to *learn*, not interrupt his instructions. But, as the days went by, his temper abated, and he realized I was truly interested in whatever topic I brought up.

There was no way I could match wits with him, but I possessed my own brand of knowledge that complemented his own ideas, and there were times when he was forced to view aspects he might never have questioned before. Besides that, my resilient nature enabled me to endure his irascible one. As I began to tap into his intelligence, I found myself very attracted to him. His formidable presence was strangely seductive. Some women are attracted to the physical aspects of a man. I, on the other hand, was attracted to the intellect.

Being with him, isolated in the dungeons as we were, I was privy to a peculiar side of him that was..., well, basically funny! On one such occasion, we were up very late working on a difficult potion for my studies. We were so tired and sleepy, we started getting silly. I mispronounced the name of an ingredient. He started to laugh, not derisively, but in a lighthearted way. I was pleasantly surprised to hear such a rich and deep laugh emanating from somewhere inside him. Suddenly, I was overcome with a fit of giggles. I doubled over laughing, and I caught his arm to help me from falling over. My laughter seemed to make him laugh harder. There were laughing tears coming out of the corners of his eyes. Finally, I controlled myself and became emboldened to correct him on a critical step in the potion recipe.

"Okay, okay, let's get serious!" I said, trying to become sedate.

I looked over at the potion as he started adding ingredients while stirring clockwise. "Mmm... I think you would have more success if you stirred it counter-clockwise," I offered.

"And what precisely do you know about potion-making?" he teased, still with laughter in his voice.

"I agree, not a lot, but I'm telling you to try on the third stir, add a counter motion...I've a hunch!"

He looked at me with suspicion, but a sly smile crept over his face. "Oh, just try the damn trick!" I smiled with exasperation and a hint of flirtation in my voice.

He complied, and the recipe was a complete success. He was surprised, impressed even. I leaned in with my face close to his to peer over the cauldron and then shifted my eyes to watch his evaluation. He turned his face to mine and found himself just an inch away. He looked down with half-closed eyes. I could feel the pupils of my eyes dilate with desire. I wanted him to read my mind. Images swarmed in my head of all the things I wanted him to do to me. Our breath mingled, and I felt the steam from the cauldron on my arm. A drop of sweat wound its way down my waist inside my wool, black bodice. When would this silence end?

"That was... interesting," he whispered. We were so close; he took my face in his hands, leaned in slowly, and kissed me. It was our first kiss since our wedding ceremony and much more passionate. We grabbed onto one another, fistfuls of hair and robes, kissing so fiercely I didn't know where I ended and he began. I arched my back to force my breasts against his chest. He responded by roughly wrapping his hands around the material of the back of my bodice and crushing me to him. Finally, we broke apart to breathe, but still holding onto each other. I was so happy. Then he whispered in my ear,

"Oh, Lily, Lily...I love you!"

I wrenched from him and looked at him full in the face, destroyed, distraught, betrayed *How could he? Who the hell was Lily?* The realization of what he had done swept over his face.

"Please, Victoria," he began, as he held on tight to me.

"I'm leaving!" I moaned loudly as I fought to escape his grasp. I felt my heart was going to explode from shock and grief.

I extracted myself from his grasp and ran to our bedroom. I whirled around *Damn! I have nowhere to hide!* I thought. He followed slowly and slumped onto a chair. He was pale and sickly.

"I suppose you want to be alone?"

I paced in circles in front of the fireplace and finally stopped, bracing the mantle with one hand and my other hand shoved up in his direction, as if I needed to keep him at a distance. I needn't have bothered. He wasn't about to come near me again any time soon. "No, I changed my mind! Actually, I want to know what the hell are you playing at?" I seethed. I couldn't look at him. I was scared to betray my anger, to let him know how much pain I was feeling.

"Not playing. I'm not," he whispered.

"Who is she, Severus?"

"I can't talk about it, please."

"Why did you kiss me? Why did you marry me?" I started pacing around the room like a caged animal. "I hate this!" I spat at him. "I hate this whole fucking life!" I was raging now. Months of pent-up frustration finally broke through. I picked up a vase and hurled it at him.

Severus shielded himself from the flying vase with a flick of his wand. It crashed into the opposite wall. He jumped up and strode over to me. "I told you: I'm DEAD."

I grabbed his robes and pulled him to me. "A dead man did not just kiss me! I know that you can love me if you just would let it...or her...go!"

"I can't!" he groaned.

"Then it's not going to stop! The pain, the anger, the bitterness, just let it go...let me love you. LET ME IN!!" I half screamed, half sobbed, choking on the words as I slid to

the floor, my hands covering my face. It was over. I could no more hold in my despair. I was a fool, lying like a heap on the floor.

Severus backed away and closed his eyes, shaking his head. "It is too late. Everything is set in motion. I'm just a ghost, a shell of what I once was, or could have been. It can't be for you and me. But one day, you'll be free to love and forget all this pain."

I looked up at him. He was a statue, unyielding and, apparently, unfeeling. "W-what has happened to you?" I cried, my eyes awash with tears.

He looked down at me and unknowingly grabbed his left forearm...where I knew the Dark Mark was. He jerked his head and his fury grew as he prowled the room "Life! Life conspires; life leads you to places you never thought you'd go." He turned to me and pointed a finger as if he were accusing me of a horrific crime. "You think you have all the answers, and then it all falls apart."

Severus then calmed down, lowered his hand and frowned. He strode over to me, picking me up from the floor and sat me on the bed. Then he took me by the hands and said softly with pity, "One day soon, you will understand, and it will all become plain. You are a good girl. If there were another place, another time, we could have been happy..."

His words were lost on me now. I knew it was hopeless to continue. It was all over. I had to stop this, kill this desire. Our roads were diverging...

A Long, Long Time

Chapter 4 of 5

The confrontation over Lily brings Victoria's and Severus' relationship to a head. Then, a sudden capitulation brings husband and wife together, but will it be in time? Please hold on—the epilogue is coming! Please review!

A/N: Thanks to my beta, Good_Witch!

Wait for the day

You'll go away

Knowing that you warned me of the price I'd have to pay

And life's full of flaws

Who knows the cause?

Living in the memory of a love that never was

Cause I've done everything I know to try and change your mind

and I think I'm gonna miss you for a long, long time

Cause I've done everything I know to try and make you mine

And I think I'm gonna love you for a long, long time.

"Long, Long Time" by Linda Ronstadt

I stood there, exhausted from my memories, still clenching the letter and photo in my hand. Lily. The woman he loved, who was dead, but for how long though? Dumbledore had refused to speak more about it, and now that he was dead, there was no one else to ask. Our life at Spinner's End that summer went along without too much incident after I had slipped out of the castle, rather than face the alternative of being unceremoniously thrown out. Severus had left me instructions as to where our new residence would be in case he had to leave abruptly. I was forbidden to come out of my room when the Death Eaters came to call. I spent lonely days trying to clean the dilapidated old hovel while Severus spent more and more time away with the Death Eaters. Then there were times our presence was requested before the Dark Lord. Not that we needed our privacy.

Married for a year and still a virgin. Oh, we had moments when Severus was asleep and would wander his hands over me and I would hear that damn name, "Lily, oh Lily!" I would lie there, letting him touch me, willing my mind to shut down. I hated Lily, I decided. Then there was that day Severus found out I had taken the letter and picture and he had hit the ceiling.

He strode into the bedroom where I had been resting from a headache. He snatched the cloth over my head and bored his eyes into mine.

"You do realize there are perfectly capable potions to rid yourself of that malady," he sneered.

"Well, I seem to be having them every other day, Severus," I snipped back.

"Alright," he began in his most menacing teacher's voice. "I'm going to ask you only once. If you lie to me, you WILL regret it," he ended dangerously.

I lifted myself up from the bed and stood to face him. "Fine," I answered coldly. "Ask."

He was livid. His eyes flashed with such anger as he bared his teeth and ground out, "Where are my belongings?"

I knew exactly what he meant, and I was in the perfect mood to fight. I sauntered over to him with my arms spread and said sarcastically, "Why, I'm right here!"

"Don't!" he warned, raising a finger menacingly.

I slapped his hand away. I wasn't afraid of him. "Please...don't insult me. Just name it plain, Severus. Ask about your secret. *Lily*." I added silkily, "Maybe if I dyed my hair

red and changed my eyes green, you'd fancy me!"

I had overplayed my hand. He approached me from another avenue. Calm and serene, he smiled maliciously and said, "Jealousy isn't pretty on you, Victoria."

I had half a mind to hex him into oblivion. Instead, I turned from him in order to compose myself and decided to throw caution to wind and go right for the jugular. I swung around on him and with all the naked honesty I could muster, solemnly said to him, "You're right, Severus. It isn't. But, you know what, neither is sating yourself in your own self-pity. No wonder everyone distances themselves from you...eventually. You like being the wounded soul. You gain life from it; it nurtures you. And I'm sick of it. So, to answer your question, Severus, I found your pathetic secret shrine."

I whipped over to my bed table and threw the letter and picture to the floor at his feet. "There, take it back!" I shouted, "That's all you'll ever love, and that's all that will ever love you back."

I snatched my cloth back from his hand. Suddenly I didn't need it anymore. I knew I looked like the very devil, but my head felt much better after shouting. Besides, I wasn't going to let him disturb my peace. I lay back down on the bed and covered my face again, waiting for him to explode.

Instead, he left me softly and in peace. Once he was gone, I peeked out from under the cloth and saw the letter and picture were gone.

"Dumbledore the Fool!" I thought. His great plan of "loving Severus out of his pain" had not made one iota of difference in him. And his attitude was rubbing off on me! I could feel myself sinking deeper into the depression that comes from self-pity. I was becoming numb and I just didn't seem to care anymore. The rest of the summer went by, including my 17th birthday and our wedding anniversary, with very little said between us. There seemed nothing more that *could* be said. I had spoken the truth, and we both knew it perfectly well. The polite and civil cohabitation from our first months came back, and I started missing our times in the dungeons, just the two of us, sometimes laughing, sometimes silent, but content. Maybe, what I truly was missing was *hope*. The hope I had a long time ago when I was a bride, looking at that mirror, dreaming that one day Severus would look at me and see me as a woman he could love.

It was a great relief to get back to Hogwarts, although times had changed. The Anti-Voldemort Movement was wracking havoc among the new Ministry of Magic. Harry Potter and his lot were all over the countryside doing God knows what while Severus and I languished at Hogwarts as spies. I hated the detestable practices the Carrows inflicted on the students. At least Severus and I had a common mission: to try and protect the students as best we could. I knew whose he was, how much he had respected Dumbledore and how he hated serving the Dark Lord, but I never pressed for any of the particulars of his sabotage. I was changing. I smiled less. I had given up my childish fantasies that I would ever be anything more than a needful thing.

Severus was downright beastly at times to the staff now that he was the new Headmaster. But suddenly, around the turn of the year, pleasant changes of events were occurring in our marriage. We started spending more and more time talking again, and I realized how deeply he needed reassurance. There was much more than just self-pity underneath him. I realized I was married to a truly insecure man who felt no one could accept him or love him for himself. Being Headmaster did not help his anxiety. He was used to being hated, but the downright mutinous behavior of the students wore his resolve thin. There was so much he couldn't tell me, and I knew he was aching to. There was nothing I could do to exorcise such deep-seated demons. All I could do was accept him with all his many flaws.

Once, I went into his office and he was standing at the portrait of Dumbledore, crying. I was completely shocked. Out of pure instinct I reached my hands up and around his shoulders and hugged him. He turned around and took me into a crushing hug, then slipped down, grasping my legs, sobbing, gasping for breath. "Please," he whispered, "please tell me I'm not lost."

My voice choked up, and I gazed up at Dumbledore and saw the tragic smile I had seen the day I accepted my marriage proposal. I reached down and held the man in my arms, stroking his hair.

"I love you," I whispered softly, "and please don't feel you need to tell me you love me too. I just want you to know after all this time, after everything, that I just love you."

"What if I can't believe?" he whispered back.

"Then it's not going to stop," I breathed.

As the school year wore on, I spent more time at night trying to reassure him of his mission. Every night, I silently told him how proud I was of him and would never leave him. Every night, I kept my promise to be a source of support, just by sitting close to his side and holding his hand silently. There was nothing for me to say; I had told him I loved him. I stopped expecting anything from him. I just accepted him as he was. I was starting to learn the art of listening to my husband's silence.

And then one night, to my shock, he finally gave up the fight and looked into my eyes. I had been talking to him in bed about nothing of consequence and became uncomfortably aware of his eyes. I tried to avoid his penetrating stare, but he would not let me be. Then he took me in his arms.

He pulled my arms down on the mattress, and I slid down on my back as he rose over me. I was frozen in the unknown. He undid the buttons on my nightgown and slipped it over my head. I was still frozen in disbelief. He kissed me and enveloped me with his breath, hands, and desire. He fumbled away his nightshirt, and I felt my knickers slide down my legs. He urged my legs apart, and the pain I felt with his penetration was nearly eclipsed by the force of his need. It was tender and full of emotion. All of his pushing away and rejecting of love came crashing down. He couldn't touch my skin enough. I felt his lips all over every inch of me. Then, as he rocked inside me, he cried, saying, "Thank you," to me over and over. When he gave in to his passion, he climaxed, screaming the most precious name I could ever hope to hear, for the name he cried out was *Victoria*. Then it was my turn to break down. I cried and cried and he held me.

After I calmed down, he finally told me about Lily: how much he loved her, how much he hated himself for hurting her when she had been his best friend, for being a part in her death, and how he wished that he could have married her. His regret was that he could never allow himself forget, never forgive himself; it was as if in forgiving himself, her death would be lost and meaningless.

"Then it's not going to stop," I said.

He was silent for a while and then spoke, unable to look me in the face. "Victoria, what has happened...I have never been with a woman. I have never..." His voice broke. "Can you forgive me for doing this to you? I never wanted to take this from you. You deserve a whole man, a man who will be true and devoted to you and only you."

"Shhh," I whispered, looking into his eyes. "You said my name when you were inside me. Was that real?" My heart throbbed with fear at the possible rejection.

He looked at me with such sorrow. "Yes." He breathed deeply and lifted a hand to my hair. "You have been my friend, my companion, the dearest..." He stopped speaking, apparently too overwhelmed to speak.

"Really?" I squeaked, my voice barely audible.

"Yes," he said resolutely. He then lowered me on the bed and began to touch me in all the places I had yearned for so long. Being a novice, I guided him to the most imitate area I ached for him to touch. I shook violently at his first caress of my swollen womanhood and saw his eyes linger as he slowly gazed up and down the length of my naked body. After so much longing, I came fast and violently, responding to the deftness of his fingers, saturated with my wetness. As I moaned and shuddered, he leaned over me and whispered into my mouth, "I do love you," and took my moans into his mouth.

Afterwards we lay on the bed and I slipped my hand in his. I had never felt so happy, so satisfied, in all my life. After a long time, I finally spoke.

"Severus, you know Potter is coming soon. You need to do...to finish what you started. I can't be there at the end, but I'll help in any way I can, and I will stay and fight. I'll help you keep your promise...for Lily. But I need you to know that Lily forgives you."

He sat up and looked at me angrily. "What do you know of it?" he snapped.

"Look what you did for her son! All these years...you did what you could, and you will see it to the end. She knows. She forgives."

"I don't know if I can believe."

"Then it's not going to stop."

"I love you, but I still love her, and it hurts still...so much."

He looked away, and I reached up and drew his face back to mine. "I know. But you have to decide for yourself. Lily's gone. Only you can truly save yourself from this pain because if you don't, it's not going to stop."

Suddenly, there were deafening sounds and scurrying. He then hissed and clamped his hand over the Dark Mark. We looked at each other, understanding immediately without words. The Battle had begun. Severus leapt out of bed and was dressed in a flash. He grabbed his wand and turned to me, wanting to say something. I motioned for him to go on. "I'll find you," I promised. "Go, and hurry!"

He gazed at me naked and kneeling on our bed one last time with longing in his eyes and then swiftly turned and was gone.

I was there at the second Battle of Hogwarts. I saw Remus and Tonks fall. I walked along the war-torn corridors that were so eerily silent and hollow. Earlier, in my desperate flight from an unknown Death Eater, I stumbled upon the dead body of Fred Weasley propped up against the wall and had been unable to scream, only to get up on my feet and continue my mad dash. Once I had found myself momentarily safe, I realized the battle was now concentrated in one area. The great shouts and echoes coming from the Great Hall mesmerized me. Half conscious and exhausted, I did not expect to see what I was to find. I witnessed the spectacular defeat of the Dark Lord by the hand of Harry Potter. I swelled with pride as Harry vindicated my husband's memory and told the truth of his bravery and the true love of his life: Lily Evans Potter.

After it was over, I walked aimlessly, my hair tumbling halfway down from the bun from which it had escaped. My black, silk dress was ripped in several places from various injuries, and I was covered in bruises and blood. My wand hung limply from my hand. I was so numb. During the battle, I had not been able to find Severus. Then when the Dark Lord fought Harry, I learned the fate of the only man I ever loved.

I walked among the dead and wounded half hoping to find Severus' body and half hoping I wouldn't. I just didn't want it to be real. Faces and faint smiles reached my sight, but I could only half-heartedly respond. I heard whispers as I weakly limped by. Finally, I stumbled upon Harry Potter and we looked into each other's eyes. I saw the eyes of the woman in that photograph staring back at me...the eyes of Lily. Without a word, he strode to my side and wrapped a firm arm around me, supporting me, and took me to the Shrieking Shack where Severus' body lay bloody and lifeless. I stood numb and then finally crashed to my knees with my hands covering my face. I started to wail, like my very soul was leaving me. Harry knelt beside me and held me with one arm across my chest and arms and his head on my back as I cried, wailed, and screamed. I cried over what had been and what should have been and what never could be. It seemed like days passed as I released all the emotion over the past two years. When I finally fell silent, Harry rose to leave me to mourn and talk to Severus in private. I grabbed his sleeve, and without looking at him I said, "He never stopped loving your mother... I was a fool."

"No," Harry replied, "I think you helped to give him the courage he needed to complete the promise he made so long ago. Besides, how can loving make you a fool? I'll be back with Ron later to reunite him with the... others." He gave my hand a squeeze as he walked away.

I nodded as the tears streamed down my face. It was time now for goodbyes, to face the truth of everything that had happened. I lay down on the floor next to him and placed my warm hand into his cold one.

It's not

What you thought

When you first began it

You got what you want

Now you can hardly stand it though,

By now you know

It's not going to stop

It's not going to stop

It's not going to stop

'Til you wise up

No, it's not going to stop

'Til you wise up

No it's not going to stop

So just...give up

"Wise Up" by Aimee Mann

Epilogue - Give Up

Chapter 5 of 5

Harry and Ginny have a baby. Victoria is summoned to The Burrow.

A/N: Thanks for sticking with me thus far! A great big hug to my beta, Good_Witch, who helped me out every step of the way. You are awesome!

I paced up and down the kitchen floor of The Burrow. I came as soon as Hermione had summoned me. She had arrived unannounced in my tiny sitting room, bursting with news.

"Harry and Ginny want you at The Burrow now. They just had another boy!" she squealed.

I was thrilled, of course, but why would they want me? I had never been a part of their intimate crowd. I grabbed my robe and Flooed with Hermione back to The Burrow.

There were grinning faces all around, staring at me: Bill, Fleur, George, Ron, Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, Percy and Charlie. The Burrow was crammed full of well-wishers. Hermione rushed up the stairs back to Ginny and Harry, I presumed, while I escaped into the kitchen to await my requested presence. Finally, Hermione came down and called for me.

"Victoria!" She beamed.

I followed her up the rickety staircase to a small bedroom. There was Ginny on the bed, flushed and glowing from the recent birth, while Harry was standing over her, holding a small bundle. His green eyes were full of tears, and his face had never been so full of joy.

"Victoria, I want you to meet my son."

I smiled faintly. Babies and happy couples were very bittersweet for me. Ever since I found out I had not conceived during my one coupling with Severus, I knew I would never know this particular brand of joy. Yet, I could not begrudge Harry and Ginny their due. I walked over and peered into the face of their son. I gasped as I looked into Lily's green eyes. Those eyes my Severus had loved so much! My eyes welled, and I fumbled in my robe for a handkerchief. I dabbed at my eyes and started to laugh.

"Congratulations!" I cried to Harry and Ginny. Then, overcome with emotion, I went to leave them in peace.

"Please," Ginny called as I turned to walk out of the room. "Stay. We want you to hold him."

I was shocked. "S-sure, I would love to!" I exclaimed.

I took the little one in my arms and sat down in a nearby chair. "What is his name?" I asked.

"Albus Severus." Harry leaned down close to my face and whispered, "Would you do us the honor of being his godmother?"

I sat frozen, staring into the sweet face of a baby that would forever bear the name of my love. I couldn't speak. Hermione rushed over and took Albus Severus from me, and I broke down, crying, like I had that day eight years past in that dodgy old shack. Except this time my cries were not the wailing cries of a widow, or of unspeakable loss. Now, I found my soul again. Then, in my crying, I started to laugh through the tears. Harry, Ginny, and Hermione looked upon me with compassion and felt with me silently and patiently until I could compose myself and heartily accept their offer.

We sat cramped in that little birthing room while the sun started to set as I held my godson. I laughed and smiled truly for the first time in years, getting to know these dear people I would be a part of now for the rest of my life. All the while, I was stealing glances at the sweet babe in my arms as if to reassure myself he was real. As I drank in his tiny, mewling face, I released the tension in my arms and allowed the love to wash over me. It was finally over; the pain could now stop.