

Little White Lies

by bound_by_passion

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I don't see the face of a killer.

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He doesn't remember a thing.

Now, in a fight against time, Hermione must help him recover his memory before the Ministry proclaim him a lost cause.

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Prologue

Chapter 1 of 8

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Something wasn't quite right. Hermione could feel it like an itch between her shoulder blades, one she couldn't quite scratch. It crept up from the floorboards and in through

the cracks in the ceiling, winding through the rooms, filling the empty space with a sense of foreboding. The air was thick with it, making the house stuffy and uncomfortable; something that even the open window couldn't quite clear.

Hermione shook her head, willing away the sense of dread. She was alone here in the house. There were no monsters waiting under the bed or in the airing cupboard. No mad-axe man poised to smash her head in as she rounded the corner, and definitely no Death Eaters ready to blast her into oblivion. Just a chopping knife and a large head of lettuce calmly awaiting its fate. She sliced down, hearing a satisfying crunch as the lettuce split in two, before tearing off a few of the nicer-looking leaves and adding them to the salad bowl. It had been an unusually hot summer, and the cool mix of vegetables and fruit would be a welcome relief from the heat that had plagued her all day. She didn't think she could quite cope with anything cooked at the minute; it reminded her far too much of her own sun-cooked flesh, a penance for forgetting her sun-block. Besides, she could use the left-over cucumber slices to cool her skin.

Humming to herself, she grated the cheese over the bowl and added the dressing. A few hard-boiled eggs wouldn't go amiss either, she thought, raiding the blessedly cool fridge. She had the sneaking suspicion that she'd had to throw out the box of eggs last Tuesday when the power went out. Not that there would have been much wrong with the eggs since the fridge had only been down an hour or so before the back-up generator started up, but it didn't hurt to be careful; who knew what nasty bacteria lay dormant in eggs these days?

Just as she suspected, there were no eggs, but it didn't matter too much. She had bread, salad and cheese, which was a good enough meal, anyway. And at this late hour, perhaps eggs weren't such a good idea.

Flicking the kitchen light off, Hermione made her way down to the living room, dinner on a tray left by her mother on her last visit. Her bare feet slapped noisily against the wooden floor, highlighting the quiet that had descended on the house. She lived in a secluded area, out in the wilds of the English countryside, but usually the low hum of the distant motorway could be heard not to mention the screeching and chirping and hooting of the various birds that called the gardens of 29, The Grove, their home. Tonight, however, it seemed quieter than usual. All Hermione could hear was herself.

Setting the tray down on the coffee table, Hermione walked over to the stereo and tuned in to the local channel. Smooth rock music filtered through the speakers, the radio station's attempt at setting a peaceful mood. And it was working. Despite herself, Hermione felt a small, contented smile grace her lips.

Easing herself down into one of the armchairs, careful to avoid pressing on the sunburn across her shoulders and upper back, she finally set about relaxing. Dry martini in one hand, large hunk of buttered crusty bread in the other, she let the day's troubles float away to the cheering chords of the guitar. She took a long sip, closing her eyes and welcoming the burn of alcohol. The room seemed a little cooler than before, and Hermione shrugged her light-knit tighter around her shoulders. She winced a little as it chafed against the raw sunburn. But still it seemed colder, as though the room had been plunged into an industrial-sized fridge. Goosebumps rose upon her arms and back, making her skin irritably tight as she tried to burrow down deeper into the warmth of the chair. The sense of dread began to return, no matter how hard she tried to push it away. *I'm just coming down with a cold. That's it. Nothing else, just a cold,* she thought. Her hand came up to check her temperature, but her forehead felt fine.

Suddenly, Hermione tensed, her ears attuned to a different sound: a scratching against the house, like a wild animal trying to get in an animal with sharp claws.

She looked at the window, still slightly ajar. The last light of the evening was starting to fade, but she could still see outside. There was nothing there.

Cursing herself for being so skittish, Hermione rose and slammed the window shut. She locked it, too, just to be safe. Moving back towards her unfinished dinner, she halted mid-step. There it was again the sound of something clawing against the door of the house.

Hermione spun round, pressing her face against the glass, desperate to see the source of her discomfort in the fading light. The night was still, but she spied a flicker of something over by the gate. An animal, perhaps?

With shaking hands, she pulled the curtains shut, blocking the view into her living room. But, if there was something out there, it was too late. It had already seen her. It knew where she was. She turned off the radio and listened hard. The scratching was still there, though fainter. Coming from the front door.

Edging down the hallway, her back pressed close to the wall, she peered through the glass of the doorway.

Her heart nearly stopped.

There was a figure climbing the steps. A human shaped figure. She could not see the face, but the broad set of the shoulders told her it was a man. A tall man with long hair.

As though the intruder could sense her watching him, he pressed closer to the door. She backed towards the kitchen, her eyes fixed on the door. The doorbell rang, but she didn't answer. If she kept the hall lights off, perhaps he would think she'd gone to bed. Perhaps he would go away.

The doorbell rang again just as her back collided with the kitchen door. Her hands fumbled for the brass knob, sweaty fingers slipping across the polished metal. After a frantic twist of the knob, she shoved the door open and backed through just as a human-shaped fist punched through the glass.

Hermione slipped through the open door, closing it quickly. It creaked loudly as it met the frame. The intruder would have heard that. Fumbling in the darkness of the kitchen, she shuffled forward until she met the kitchen counter. Her ears pricked for any noise the intruder made. There was the tinkling of glass as more shards were forced from the front door. Hermione felt dizzy, unable to breathe as she listened for his next move. The latch squeaked as it was flicked open.

He's in the house. Time to call the police, the Aurors.

She felt her way across the wall, her fingers clasping round the plastic frame of the phone. She picked it up, dialling 999.

No dial tone.

Hermione dug deep into her pockets, looking for her mobile. She pulled out her purse, her keys, her wand, and a compact mirror, discarding each one down on the countertop. Her fingers scabbled deeper, searching. They came up empty, feeling only the rough cotton lining. Phone, where was the fucking phone?

In the office. I left it at work.

Footsteps, heavy and slow, sounded from the hall, moving up the stairs. They were careful, unrushed, not the hurried gate of an opportunist. This was planned. Terror stole over her like an icy wind. Her head snapped up as she heard him cough a loud, rattling sound, closer than she expected.

Eager to put as much space between herself and the intruder as possible, Hermione backed up and collided with the table. Something fell onto the floor, and she heard it shatter. A wine glass. The footsteps outside stopped. The intruder knew where she was.

Hermione ran, biting back a yelp of pain as she trod on the shattered glass. She dived for the door, the one that lead down to the garage, and slid through just as she heard the kitchen door open. The lights flickered on, sending a beam of yellow light underneath the garage door. Hermione cursed. He'd know she was in the garage. He'd see the bloody footprints leading him right here.

Hermione scrambled to her feet, limping slightly as the glass drove its way deeper into her skin. Her pockets felt light. Eyes wide with panic, she searched in vain for her keys, her wand. They were on the kitchen counter. And he was in the kitchen; she couldn't go back. Without her keys, she couldn't slide open the garage door. Without her wand, she couldn't defend herself. She couldn't run down the street to freedom. She had to hide.

Wedging herself between a pile of empty paint tins and a stack of old Potions' Weekly journals, she crouched low and waited. Her heartbeat pounded in her ears, so loud that she could have sworn the intruder could hear it too. She took deep breaths, forcing musty garage air into her lungs, but nothing calmed her racing heart. Not when her

mind kept telling her she was all alone. That nobody was coming to save her.

She felt rather than saw the intruder. The air turned icy. Droplets of cold sweat ran down the arch of her back and the sides of her face. She closed her eyes as the lights came on, unwilling to see the trail of her own blood that would surely lead him right to her hiding place.

"Come out, come out, wherever you are," came the taunting voice of the intruder. It was deep and tinged with a malicious glee.

Hermione crouched lower, curling into a ball. She heard the footsteps come closer and closer. She cracked open an eye, coming face to face with a shiny black boot. Above the boot was a black-clad leg and torso. The face was still in shadow, but it could have been the Devil himself for all she cared.

"Found you."

Something silvery flickered in the corner of her eye. Hermione shrieked as the world faded into darkness.

Chapter 1

Chapter 2 of 8

I know I am odd. I know there is something not quite right. Something missing. When I look in the mirror, I don't see myself. I see only a reflection of the man I ought to be.

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Hermione woke with a start, her heart banging against her chest. Her nightdress was soaked with a cold sweat, and the bedcovers she'd kicked off somewhere during the course of the night were tangled around her legs. Scared out of her wits, Hermione's eyes scanned the bedroom, searching for the night-time intruder. She saw nothing but phantoms conjured by an over-active imagination.

Still rattled by the nightmare, she rolled out of bed and pulled apart the curtains, desperate for the morning sunshine. Her skin was beginning to chill from the sweat, and she tore off the nightdress, throwing it into the dirty laundry basket with yesterday's underwear. Naked, she stood in the sun, letting it warm her sufficiently before she thought about dressing. The cold that went down to her bones was caused by far more than simple sweat.

This was the third time she'd had that dream, and Hermione was beginning to wonder if it meant something. Not that she believed in all that Divination mumbo-jumbo. It was a matter of logic and statistics: the dream must mean something if it occurred more than once. Though quite what, she wasn't sure. Perhaps it was a hint to lay off the cheese before bed?

She took a quick glance at the clock on her wall; it was seven fifty. She was running late.

Yanking open her wardrobe doors, Hermione pulled out the first clean blouse and skirt she could find and threw them on the bed. Slipping on a neutral bra and a pair of knickers from the 'clean' pile, she scrambled around for a pair of tights, finally managing to find a pair that didn't have a hole or a ladder in. After rolling the navy tights up her legs, no time for shaving, she zipped up the matching navy skirt and buttoned her white blouse. She gathered her curls back into a simple pony-tail and dusted her cheeks with bronzer. She hadn't time for much else in the way of make-up, but it wasn't like anyone would notice. There was no-one at work to impress.

Running down the hallway, Hermione gathered up her briefcase and case-notes before skidding to a halt at the front door. Post, both Muggle and Magical, lay on her doormat, but she hadn't the time to read it. If it was important, no doubt someone would tell her.

Glancing at her watch, she slipped on her court shoes and robes, also navy blue, and went clacking back down the hallway and into the living room. Removing her wand from its holder in her briefcase, she pointed it towards the empty fireplace and watched as large, yellow flames rose out of the grate. They turned green as she threw in a handful of Floo-powder from the pot on the mantelpiece.

Closing her eyes, Hermione stepped into the grate, enunciating clearly: "Novum Laboratories".

Novum Laboratories was a Ministry-run organisation. To say what they did would be a little difficult, for they experimented in many fields. There were entire hallways devoted to Genetic Manipulation, Magical Computing, Artificial Protein Synthesis, Astrology, and Arithmantic Offender Fingerprinting. Smaller departments were housed in randomly allocated rooms across the facility. Lazarus, Hermione's department, was housed in one such room.

"Good Morning, Elsa," said Hermione, walking past reception. Elsa, her personal assistant, smiled before returning to the large stack of paper that awaited her attention. Their relationship, whilst not particularly close, was affable. Hermione kept herself to herself, and Elsa seemed to respect that decision, keeping the conversation restricted to work matters rather than personal. Hermione had no idea whether Elsa had a husband or a lover, or if she had children or pets. But she always said hello as though she knew her.

As though she really knew anyone.

Hermione walked through the double doors that led to the Isolation Room, her high heels slipping slightly on the highly polished floor, her briefcase held close to her chest as though it were the most precious thing in the world. She passed through the identity checks: the Ministry computers scanning her height, her weight, her retinas, her DNA. You couldn't be too careful these days. Not in a place like this.

Although the Isolation Room was located in the older part of the building, its interior was filled to the brim with shiny, new technology. The walls, tiled white like the floor,

glimmered with anti-bacterial microgel, smeared there by the cleaners every morning. Screens, high definition, hung from the ceiling on retractable arms, the thick black wires trailing down to fully moveable cameras fixed to rotating ball-sockets. The floor was covered with weight-sensitive panels, scanning the molecular density of the room's occupants every six seconds. Silver tables and silver instruments made it look more like a Muggle Operating Theatre than anything else, which, for the purposes of the Ministry, was perfect.

Hermione placed her briefcase on one of the smaller side tables next to the sink. She washed her hands, enjoying the clean feeling as the violently purple suds flowed from her fingers. Next, she snapped on her gloves like latex, only different in a way she didn't quite understand and donned her lurid green gown. She walked over to the large silvery drawers that lined the west wall. She scanned the names on each of the drawers before coming to rest on drawer six. The drawer slid out easily on its rollers, and with a flick of her wand, Hermione transferred its cloth-covered contents onto the shiny Operating Table.

Today, Lazarus had a special assignment. It seemed the Ministry required a Potions master for another project. And, the Ministry being what it was, only the best would do. But the best was dead.

The Lazarus Department's job was to bring him back.

Hermione pulled back the white cloth, revealing a pale face with dark hair. Severus Snape. Dead six years, eight months and twelve days. Cause of death: exsanguination due to a tear in the carotid artery.

It was going to be tricky. The internal damage was great, and the longer the body was kept in suspension, the harder it was to bring them back. Blood, even under magical preservation, decayed into phosphorous and other unwanted compounds. And the DNA degeneration was no different: it would start to unwind and separate, meaning vital segments would be lost when the cells began to replicate again. Whilst not quite as woolly a science as Muggle Cryogenics, complications still arose with alarming frequency.

First, they would start with wound repair. A body had to be functional before life could be brought back. And Snape's wasn't.

Hermione, gloved up and sterilised, picked up a needle from the tool tray and threaded it with nylon fibre. The job didn't have to be neat, unlike Muggle stitching. It just had to hold long enough for the magic to penetrate the surrounding tissues and encourage re-growth. The fibre would disintegrate under the power of the magic.

She grasped the cold flesh of the wound, peeling back the shreds of skin until the muscle was exposed. Without the heart pumping blood around the body, the wound was relatively clear, and Hermione could see the hole in the carotid with startling clarity. Pinching the hole shut with her left hand, she began to stitch with her right, forcing the needle through the *tunica adventitia* and the *tunica media* to the lumen before looping back through in big, clumsy stitches.

Satisfied that it would hold, she placed the needle on the edge of the table and picked up her wand. Murmuring countless healing and growing charms under her breath, she nudged the stitched artery, watching carefully as the tissue began to knit back together again. Blue sparks issued from the end of her wand, dissolving the thread.

She repeated the process with the muscle and skin layers, making sure that the skin healed properly. The end result wasn't flawless; the skin would always be slightly different in texture, if not appearance. He would have a magical scar, but there was nothing she could do about that. Just like there was nothing she could do about the rest of the scars that littered his torso and upper thighs.

Next, Hermione connected up the monitors. She pressed fibre-gel receptors to his chest, spacing them evenly on either side of his sternum, and ran the wires back up to the old heart-rate monitor that had yet to be replaced. Black wires were placed at his temples, running up to a machine that monitored brainwaves. From the tip of each finger ran a green wire that led to a machine that monitored magical activity. She placed an oxygen mask over his mouth. Though they had a ventilation machine, it was hardly necessary for this procedure; they merely had to ensure an abundance of oxygen for the lungs upon regeneration. Abnormally large blood bags, filled with A+, hung from drip stands positioned at the four corners of the table, looming over the patient like bright red phantoms. Needles were pushed through the skin, ready to administer shots of adrenaline and various hormones at the correct times.

The tubes and wires created a spider's web of medical equipment around Snape's supine body. Hermione placed her hands on the bare areas of Snape's chest, spreading her fingers as wide as she could. At the head of the table, she saw her assistant, Stephens, charge the rod-shaped electrodes with his usual quiet efficiency. They had worked together for four years now, yet already they functioned like a single being, Stephens anticipating her moves before she could even demonstrate them by word or deed. He was exceptionally good at his job, but he kept to the sidelines for the most part. Repair was Hermione's domain, not his.

"Bracing for shock one," said Hermione, straightening her elbows, though not quite locking them.

Stephens placed the electrodes at either side of Snape's head, letting them just brush the skin to transfer the shock. Snape's body jumped, but Hermione forced the chest flat to avoid him tearing free from the wires, protected from receiving a shock herself by the gloves. Stephens placed the electrodes back in their holders before upping the oxygen content. There were several hisses as the pneumatic pistons set off the first round of injections, the carefully positioned hypodermic needles firing chemical messages into the body.

"Bracing for shock two."

Snape's body jumped again as the second wave of electricity passed through his body, muscle fibres contracting and relaxing spasmodically. Hermione closed her eyes and willed the magic out through her fingers, through Snape's skin barrier and deep down into the muscle. There was a beep as the heart gave a single, feeble contraction.

Hermione felt the third shock go through him and heard the hiss of the pistons. She focused harder, pushing as much magic as she could from her fingers, and the heart began to beat again as the SAN began to fire contraction signals independently. Raw magic was powerful, but unfocused, and she had to fight to keep her hands planted firmly on his chest as the body began to function again. Each muscle contracted and relaxed as the newly fired brain began to run its own diagnostic tests. The brain monitor spiked, the readings going off the chart. High brain activity usually began in the later stages of regeneration, but it was not unprecedented for it to begin now. Patients of a higher intelligence displayed signs of thought long before their dim-witted compatriots.

Five minutes later, Snape fell quiet; his body once again limp upon the table. The heart monitor beeped out a strong rhythm as the heart circulated the new blood about his body. His chest rose and fell in a smooth breathing pattern, oxygenating his brain once more. Hermione, satisfied with his output, began to unhook the blood bags and remove the needles. Slowly but surely, the complex web of tubing was dismantled, leaving Snape bare upon the silver table, connected only to the monitors.

Hermione removed her gloves and her gown, dumping them in the medical waste receptacle along with the other remnants of today's work. They would be taken to the incinerator later that day.

She walked back over to Snape.

"His brain activity seems regular as does the heart rhythm. I don't expect he'll wake up much before tomorrow."

"I'll arrange for updates to be put up on the live feed down here."

"Good," she said, nodding to Stephens, who had transferred him to a trolley and proceeded to roll him out to the specially created Intensive Care Unit up on floor four.

Just as he passed through the door, Snape opened his eyes.

Hermione could not tell if it was good news or bad.

Stephens leant over the computer, his face set in a mask of concentration. Lights flickered on and off at irregular intervals as each vital sign changed, the Ministry mainframe keeping a digital log of Snape's every breath, every blink. Every beat of his heart. Hermione watched as Stephens contemplated the machine before him. He had surgeon's hands, delicate with long fingers, and he guided them across the keypad with purpose and conviction.

"Mr Snape's no longer unconscious," he said, still completely focused on the computer.

It had only been six hours since she completed regeneration. It was rare for a patient to emerge from their original comatose state in under twenty-four hours. Hermione was more than pleased. Sometimes patients didn't wake up at all.

"His readings?" she asked, unable to keep the satisfaction out of her voice.

"All normal. Well, as normal as they get. His heart rate always will be slightly elevated due to the stress, but we can control that with the meds."

Hermione smiled, setting her pen down on top of the large pile of paperwork that lay on the table before her. Pulling on her lab robes, she rose and walked over to the door.

"I'm going to go and take a look," she said.

Stephens merely nodded in reply, waving her on through the doorway.

It was all Hermione could do to stop herself from sprinting down the hallway. She rode the lift to the fourth floor, her foot tapping impatiently against the floor, and almost knocked over a porter in her haste as she emerged. The entrance to ICU was draped with a large banner proclaiming the funds raised at the latest charity bash. Hermione gave it merely a glance as she strode through the hissing automatic glass doors and into the ward itself.

He was in bed three. And most definitely awake. She saw startlingly dark eyes. An expression of mild annoyance.

"Welcome back to the world, Professor Snape," she said, unable to bring herself to refer to him as anything else, even though it had been almost seven years since he'd been her teacher. It was a mark of respect.

He didn't reply. He merely sniffed in disdain. She didn't think he remembered who she was—he was still expecting her scrawny eighteen-year-old self, not a woman of twenty-five. Edging closer to the bed, she began to fold the crumpled covers that lay at his hips. She ignored the icy stare. The unit had dressed him in a light blue gown, and it did nothing for his colouring, making him seem more pale and fragile than she remembered. The lightweight fabric highlighted his angular frame, the bones more prominent than ever in the harsh fluorescent lighting.

Hermione sat down in the chair beside his bed, crossing her legs in a ladylike fashion. She leant closer, her eyes parallel with his.

"Do you know who you are?"

"Severus Snape," he said, his expression one of incredulity. "That is what it says on my chart. If, indeed, the chart at the end of the bed is mine."

Hermione was slightly taken aback at his answer. Whilst he clearly remembered very little, or perhaps even nothing at all, about himself, his personality was the same as ever. He was brusque; he was impatient. Full of half-presumed answers and ashamed to admit ignorance.

"And do you remember anything else? Anything about yourself?"

He gave her a dark look. "Since I can't remember my own name without prompting, I think not."

His tone was overly sarcastic, and Hermione resisted the urge to frown in distaste. Patients were highly susceptible to mood swings within the first seventy-two hours of regeneration, and she couldn't afford to expose him to negative stimulus—the human brain was a delicate thing, and it wouldn't do for it to pick up bad habits from another.

Instead, she picked at a loose thread on the lapel of her lab robes before asking in an overly bright voice: "Do you know why you're here?"

"Due to some sort of accident, I dare say. In which I seem to have acquired a mild form of amnesia."

"Of a sort."

"Of a sort? You either are, or you are not."

Hermione took a deep breath. This was the worst part of the job, telling someone they were dead. Telling them they only have three years left before they are sent back to the dead and all who lie with them. The magic caused mutations, unravelling and changing the DNA at whim. Three years was the maximum recorded life span, so far.

"I'm afraid you were in an accident," she glanced down at her clasped hands, gathering her confidence before bringing her gaze back up to meet his. "A rather serious one. And... er... that is to say, you were unable to be resuscitated. I'm afraid you passed on."

To Snape's credit, he didn't even flinch. Some patients, when told of their demise, became hysterical, either denying the whole thing or lapsing into a fit of tears, and sometimes both. But no, Snape just sat there, his expression as impassive as before, his black gaze never wavering from hers.

"Then this is hell." His tone was one of finality, no trace of sarcasm this time. And, somehow, Hermione thought Snape knew he wouldn't have ended up in heaven. That he knew he wasn't sweetness and light, even if it was only deep in his subconscious. Though amnesia was a common side effect in these sorts of procedures, the patients often knew who they were—not by name, but by feeling. After all, one can only change what they become, not what they were to begin with.

"Not hell, no." Hermione smiled gently. She began to raise her hand to offer some kind of comfort, but stopped, watching with fascination as she saw Snape's gaze darken. Clearly a man who did not require comfort, no matter how freely it was given. She straightened her skirt before continuing.

"You were brought back. Given three extra years of allotted life. This is very much the earth you remember—or will, given time.

"You see, you are needed by the Ministry for one of their projects. A bill was passed two months ago that, in the later stages of the development plan, would require the assistance of a highly qualified Potions master. You are that Potions master. So, the Ministry commissioned your resurrection and clinical remodelling."

"Remodelling?" His eyes flashed a little with something Hermione thought akin to fear, though not quite.

"We repaired the wound at your neck. It's just the Ministry term for the repair you underwent to enable your body capable for life. Rest assured, aside from the slight scar at your neck, and the elevated heart rate, you are just the same as you were before." She looked at him imploringly, willing him to understand. "We are scientists, Professor, not monsters."

"Why do you keep calling me 'Professor'?" he asked, his expression one of puzzlement.

"That was your title before... well, before your employment was terminated."

"Before I bit the dust, so to speak."

"Quite." Hermione paused, considering her options. *What to tell him?* At this stage, she had to be careful; even the smallest word could initiate recall, and there were parts of him she thought he'd be better off without. "You were a teacher," she said, opting for vague, but accurate, "up at a boarding school in Scotland. You taught Potions."

His eyes narrowed a fraction. "Did I teach you?"

Hermione's eyes hardened. "No."

She was amazed at how easily the lie passed between her lips.

Snape seemed satisfied with the statement, his eyes widening back into deep pools of darkness. He seemed to stare straight through her and into her soul with those captivating black eyes of his, and Hermione found herself unable to look away, fearful that, should she turn, he'd take a piece of her soul with him.

"Then you are to call me 'Severus'."

He chuckled wryly to himself, a soft sound that seemed unnatural to Hermione. In all the years she'd known him, he'd never cracked the smallest of smiles, yet here he was, laughing. She wasn't quite sure what to make of it, so she smiled gently, courteously accepting his offer.

"It would seem inappropriate for a man unsure of even his own name, let alone his status, to demand formality."

"Perhaps, but I wouldn't begrudge you the right, Severus." The name felt a little weird upon her tongue. It was as though she were crossing some sort of forbidden boundary. But it was too late to turn back now. She could only throw herself headlong into whatever situation waited beyond. So she did. "And you must call me 'Hermione'. 'Dr. Granger' is a little too stuffy for my tastes."

"Hermione..." He said the word as though he were tasting it, savouring the syllables as he rolled it around his tongue. "Yes. That'll do."

He broke eye contact, and Hermione looked away, her gaze focusing on the jug of water on the bedside table. She leant over, grasping the china handle with trembling fingers and poured out two full glasses.

"Water?" she asked, taking one of the glasses from the nightstand and holding it before him. He nodded, and she lifted it to his mouth, tipping it slightly so that the water passed between his lips. So focused on her task, trying but failing not to spill water down his chin, she was startled as a pair of warm hands covered her own, guiding her movements. She hadn't thought him strong enough yet.

My, he's a fighter. One for the records, I think.

Slowly, the hands began to guide hers back, bringing the glass away from his mouth. When they left hers to flop back down on the bedside, she felt a strange sense of loss. The touch hadn't been anything to write home about, just simple warm skin to slightly cooler skin contact, but the loss... Hermione wasn't quite sure what to make of it. It felt as though her world had closed in, leaving her feeling oddly empty. Like she was missing something she didn't have before. It puzzled her. She took a large gulp from the other, full glass of water, trying to reassemble her thoughts.

Shaking her head, Hermione focused once again on Snape. *Severus*. She was going to have to get used to calling him that.

Hermione focused on Severus, watching as his eyelids began to droop. She rose from her place on the chair beside the bed, and she began to draw up his covers. It wouldn't do for him to get cold. Not after all the trouble she'd gone to bringing him back. It would be just her luck to lose him to something as preventable as hypothermia. And she didn't think the Ministry officials would take too kindly to that.

"Are you leaving so soon?" he asked, his words slightly slurred as he was overcome by another wave of drowsiness.

"You need to rest. I will be back later." She walked to the edge of the bed, her hand unconsciously caressing the rail. He looked about to protest, but she cut him off with a simple, "Rest."

Hermione watched as he complied, albeit grudgingly. Satisfied that he was sleepy enough to be left, she proceeded to walk to the door, her heels clicking noisily on the tiled floor. The automatic doors hissed as they opened, letting in the cool air from the corridor. Hermione was just about to step through when she heard a faint noise coming from cubicle three.

"Good night, Hermione."

Hermione left the ICU in a hurry, the echo of her own name ringing uncomfortably in her head. No longer Miss Granger, no longer a child. A woman. Hermione. And that thought scared her more than anything.

Chapter 2

Chapter 3 of 8

I know I am odd. I know there is something not quite right. Something missing. When I look in the mirror, I don't see myself. I see only a reflection of the man I ought to be.

I don't see the face of a killer.

The man appears to be just another standard regeneration. But when medical practitioner Hermione Granger takes a closer look, she finds that not all is as it seems. The resurrection has not gone to plan.

He doesn't remember a thing.

Now, in a fight against time, Hermione must help him recover his memory before the Ministry proclaim him a lost cause.

There is only one problem. The man is Severus Snape, her former professor. And there are some things she believes that are best left forgotten.

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I have seen an angel.

Not just any angel, but a real one, made of flesh and blood and beauty. So much of life is ordinary, monotonous, that it is the sweetest of feelings to see something so

wondrous. Until today, I had almost begun to believe they didn't exist, these miracles of nature. But there she was, standing above me, dressed in white, directing my future with little more than a sentence and a gesture.

She's not pretty, the angel. The true ones never are. But there's something about her that screams beauty. The flow of her hair, the pink flush of her cheeks, the red stain of her lips; it all calls for attention, demanding the mortal man to stop, look and admire. So few appreciate the glow she gives, lighting the way in the darkness of the world they are born into. Like sheep, they simply follow the blind Shepherd, never once taking a look at the landscape they so wearily tread: at the fox, and the bird and the bee that watch them from the sidelines. They never truly see life.

I know I have been ill. The chart on the end of my bed tells me as much. An elevated temperature, a hastily repaired wound. These are not the marks of a healthy man. If anything, they are signs acquainted and on friendly terms with the foul figure known as Death. And yet, I seem to be making progress. Life isn't leeching from my weary bones but pouring back in. As though the strip-lighting that shines down on me with cold fluorescence fills me with such energy. My blood thrums in my veins, making such a clatter that I fear I can hear nothing else save the regular pounding of my own heart. I am getting better, despite all evidence to the contrary.

Death is merely knocking on my door. It seems he has not yet found the key. And I am reluctant to let him in.

Perhaps that is why I've seen her, this angel.

I'm not a religious man. God, for myself, is nothing but a social reflex created by an overbearing conscience. And my conscience is oddly quiet, bound and gagged by my instincts. But I can't help but wonder if this is more than a coincidence. If there truly is something out there. If my future has been written into the fabric of history.

Angels are messengers of fate after all.

I lie back on the bed, thinking of angels and the demons that stalk them. The mattress is hard beneath my back, and it digs into my spine at just the wrong angle. Beside me, in cots much the same, lie the others. Men and women who time seems to have forgotten. Sick with disease and illness, they groan in their sleep, their bones clicking in all-too-fluid joints. Even the air around me is cloying with sickness, the tang of decay still perceptible under the heavy perfume of disinfectant and TCP.

I stare, with listless eyes, at the ceiling, thinking of my angel. Of her fiery eyes. Of her beautiful, illusionary wings. And I wonder if she bleeds golden blood.

Chapter 3

Chapter 4 of 8

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Hermione looked around the room with boredom. The meeting had gone on for over an hour, and still, there seemed little chance of it finishing any time soon. Not when they were deciding the fate of one newly awakened Severus Snape.

She watched as the man beside her, a fat man wearing a badly fitting toupee, began to lean forward, his eyelids drooping. She could see a bead of sweat run down the back of his neck and into the collar of his robes. It glistened in the fluorescent lighting, and she found herself fascinated by it for lack of anything better to observe. She gently fanned herself with the memo she held, the lurid green paper flicking back and forth fast enough to give her the beginnings of a migraine if she looked at it for too long.

Hermione felt a sharp nudge in her side and turned. The woman to her right looked at her sharply before turning her gaze, once again, to the head of the table. Hermione followed suit, resisting the urge to jump as she realised the Minister's eyes were focused solely upon her. He was waiting for something. An answer.

"I'm sorry, could you repeat the question?" Hermione asked, flushing.

The Minister scowled at her, his thin lips pursed.

"I asked, Doctor Granger, for your professional opinion on Severus Snape's condition." He placed his hands, bony and wrinkled with age, upon the top of the glass table. They were crossed in a gesture of authority, a gesture that said, 'obey me'. "Now, if you would be so kind as to answer. Time is money."

"I beg your pardon, Minister," she said, forcing the tremors from her voice. "Snape is doing well. Better than we expected after the damage he suffered. His neck wound has completely healed with no signs of re-opening, and his heart rate is down."

"His physical condition does not interest me, Doctor. I am concerned only with his mind."

"His mind is in perfect condition. No dip in IQ, as far as we have been able to ascertain. He is alert and responsive to stimulus. The amnesia, however, still plagues him." Hermione shrank back a little under the Minister's icy glare, but ploughed on. "Although his residual memories have not been wiped, they remain locked in his subconscious. So far, we've only managed to trigger a few. Though I am confident that, once he gets his hands on a cauldron and the relevant texts, he'll have total recall."

"I hope, for your sake, Doctor Granger, he does. Three weeks without change. That doesn't work in your favour. Not when the public pay for his incarceration in ICU." The Minister's smile was feral, showing far too many teeth and too little warmth to be anything but sinister. And Hermione knew what happened to those who displeased the Ministry.

"All evidence points towards that outcome," she said, wringing her fingers nervously in her lap.

"Is he well enough to be released from ICU?"

"Yes. He's beyond the danger of infection. His immune system is back up to par."

The Minister turned from her, addressing the assembly. His long, greying hair shone in the strip-lights, which, coupled by his hungry expression, gave him the look of a wolf. A wolf closing in for the kill. Hermione shivered at the thought.

"A request for Snape's release from ICU will be brought forward to the Wizengamot and passed by the afternoon. From there, he will be transferred to one of the Safe Houses until his memory regains full functionality. Potions supplies, books and other material will be Portkeyed into the house the next morning." His eyes focused once again on Hermione. They narrowed, a malicious glee set deep within them. "Doctor Granger is to accompany him. It is her duty to initiate total recall, which is expected by the second Monday of the month at the very latest. Punishment for failing to comply will result in the termination of her duties and the allocation of another. The house will be guard-locked for security. Do you understand, Doctor?"

Hermione's eyes widened in horror. Guard-locked meant no way out, no escape. She would be stuck in there all alone with him. And what if she couldn't initiate recall? Termination did not refer to her employment. Limply, she nodded her head.

"Good. Transfer will be set in motion. Project duties will be sent after recall."

The Minister said nothing more. He swept from the room, his long cloak, the usual Ministry blue, snapping behind him. Everyone began to file out, their expressions grim. Hermione couldn't help but feel a weight descend on her shoulders. They were depending on her to get it right. If she failed, she wouldn't be the only one for the chop.

It didn't take Hermione long to assemble her things. Her house was poky and small with little in the way of furniture. No, all she had to do was stuff a few clothes in her bag: her toothbrush, her hair brush. The Ministry would provide everything else. And it wasn't like she had any treasured possessions, or any photos of her loved ones. They had been taken long ago.

Within the hour, Hermione was packed and back up at the ICU. With a grim set expression, she waited as the nurses and mediwitches fussed around Severus. Dressed in a heavy-weight cotton shirt, matching trousers and a loose-fitting robe, all Ministry blue, he stood by the bed, wincing slightly as they began to pull the monitor wires from his skin. His hair, marginally less greasy than it used to be, had been pulled back into a low pony-tail. Some of the shorter strands had come loose, and he kept pushing them back out of his eyes, irritated beyond belief. There was a small bag, leather and brown, beside his bed. Hermione assumed that held his possessions, or what was left of them. She watched as he picked it up, waving away the nurse who, having completed her torturous exercise of pulling the wires free, had begun to fuss with his robe, grumbling to herself as it refused to remain closed.

Forcing a smile onto her face, Hermione approached Severus, dragging her bag behind her.

"Good evening, Hermione," he said, his deep voice crisp with annoyance.

She resisted the urge to wince as he spoke her name. It still made her uncomfortable. *It's just a matter of getting used to it, she thought. See, it's not nearly as bad as before. You just need to give it time.*

"Evening, Severus." She glanced down at the bag by his feet. "I see you've packed."

"Not quite. That busy-body nurse did it for me. As if she didn't have anything better to be getting on with. Bloody woman," he said with a scowl. "I don't even know where we're going. She refuses to tell me."

"The Ministry are sending us off to a Safe House. They've deemed you well enough to leave ICU."

"What about my memories? I can't be well if they're still missing."

"That's why they're sending me with you. They're hoping I'll be able to trigger a few more recalls." *And set a heavy price if I can't.* She looked down at her hands, unwilling to let him see the fear in her eyes. "Your potions skills are still in there somewhere, and we need to coax them out."

"So I'm a bought man, I see."

"Isn't everyone, in one way or another?"

"Indeed." She saw him look round, his black eyes locking onto something. "It looks like we have a visitor."

She followed his line of sight. True enough, they did. A man in blue robes, the same as Severus' only of slightly better quality, was making his way towards them, a battered briefcase with a Ministry crest clutched in his hand. He was handsome enough, his stylishly long hair held back in a pony-tail, as was the fashion. But he had a haunted look in his eyes, one that she'd seen all too often.

He smiled as he approached them.

"Eddie Carmichael," he said, holding out a hand as he introduced himself. Hermione took it with little enthusiasm. "I take it you're Doctor Granger?"

"Yes. And this is Severus Snape, my patient." She released his hand, eager to be free of his overly tight grip.

"Excellent." He clapped his hands together, the sound echoing through the ICU. He opened his briefcase, removing a blue transfer disk from its depths. The old Portkeys had been done away with when Scrimgeour fell from power and replaced with Ministry issue disks. "All packed and ready for the off?"

Hermione nodded, as did Severus. Carmichael pressed his palm to the slightly lighter patch of blue in the centre of the disk, activating the Portkey. No need for wands anymore, not with the new Portkey network. Each disk was keyed specifically to the owner.

The disk began to glow. "Hands on," he said, and they complied, grasping onto the curved edge just in time. Hermione felt the familiar tug at her navel as the Portkey activated. She closed her eyes, the spinning motion making her slightly nauseous.

They grounded with a bump. Hermione just about managed to stay on her feet, but it was a close run thing. Severus was not so lucky. He lay sprawled on the floor about three feet away, his knees having buckled under the landing pressure. Blinking as she tried to regain her sense of equilibrium, she walked over to Severus and offered him her hand. He didn't take it; he was too proud to accept her assistance, no matter how much he needed it.

"Well, here we are," said Carmichael, slipping his fingers from the centre of the plate to the edge. "Home, sweet home." He lit his wand, the tip illuminating the room in which they'd just landed.

It was a hallway of some description. Overly plain was the first thing that struck her. The walls, a dull shade of off-white, were bare save for a single abstract painting about half way along. The floor, light laminated wood, curved up to bare stairs in front of them, the red runner beneath their feet slightly crumpled from their impact. Hermione

turned to where she presumed the door to be but found only darkness. It took a while for her eyes to adjust, but she came to realise that it was not darkness. It was a curtain. She walked towards it, taking the heavy black velvet between her fingers and pulling it back. Light flooded the space, rendering the *Lumos* spell quite unnecessary. The door was as grim as the rest of the room off-white with two long windows running down either side.

"The door's locked," said Carmichael. "As are the windows. You need the authorisation code to get out."

Hermione grimaced. The Ministry had pulled out all the stops on this one. Windows too. *And to think, the purpose of safe houses was once to stop another getting in.*

She turned to face Carmichael again, the tightening hand grasping the handle of her luggage the only outward sign of her frustration.

"When will the Ministry be arriving with the equipment?" she asked.

"Tomorrow morning. There is food in the cupboard and more personal items in the various rooms. Shopping will arrive every Saturday night. The Ministry are fronting the weekly expenditure."

"How kind of them." Hermione couldn't quite manage to keep the sarcasm from the voice. It earned her a stern look from Carmichael. "And if we need to contact anyone?"

"There is a direct line to the Ministry offices in the kitchen. Emergency calls can also be taken there. Personal calls must be done on the occupant's, your, mobile phone. The Ministry will not be paying the top-up fees, so the money will be wired from your account to cover it."

"And wand use?"

"There are no specific limits. The Ministry's placed a spell logging system throughout the house. Transfiguration spells have been blocked under the departmental safety act: decree number twelve, section eleven, paragraph six. But all other spells should be fine." His eyes darkened a fraction, and he lowered his voice. "Though I would advise against overuse. Snape has not been provided with a wand for legal reasons. We do not wish to give him cause for complaint, or the opportunity to get his hands on your wand before he experiences recall. It would be dangerous. Who knows what spells he would remember."

The Unforgivables.

A small shudder ran through her at the thought. Trapped in the house, alone, with a man who probably knew more Dark curses than any other wizard alive, did not sound appealing. Even if he couldn't remember them.

She glanced over at Severus. He was stood a little further down the hall, contemplating the painting. His expression was one of fierce concentration, his stunningly dark eyes focused solely on the painted canvas. She slipped her hand into her pocket, forcing her wand deeper. Out of sight, out of mind. Out of his mind.

"Anything else I should know?"

"Not that I can think of. The Ministry will be sending bi-weekly updates through the one-way Floo system." Carmichael gathered his briefcase closer and pressed his hand to the centre of the disk. "I've got to be going. Good luck."

Hermione watched as he began to fade, whisked away by the Portkey. When his shadow had finally disappeared, she turned to Severus, tapping him on the shoulder. He started, so absorbed in the painting that he seemed to have forgotten everything around him.

"Come on. We've got the rest of the house to explore."

Severus grasped his bag and followed her up the stairs. Their footsteps were loud upon the stairs, every creak magnified by the quiet that surrounded them. Hermione ran her hand up the balustrade, only to pull it back covered in a thin sheen of dust. Clearly, the Ministry didn't believe in dusting.

At the top of the stairs lay the landing. It was much the same as the hallway, only with five doors aligning its bare walls. Two on either side and one at the very end. Severus twisted the golden knob on the first one and pushed open the door.

It was the sitting room. Thankfully, this room seemed to have been decorated. The light walls had a slight flowery pattern to them and were adorned with shelves full of interesting ornaments and artefacts. A great window took up the far wall, the gauzy curtains turning the view of the surrounding countryside into a striking silhouette. In the centre of the room sat a slightly battered sofa. It faced towards the fireplace, and two matching chairs created a small semi-circle around the tiny coffee table.

They tried the door opposite and found it to be a serviceable, if sparse, kitchen. Everything was an unsettling shade of chrome, and Hermione backed out before she began to get dizzy from the sheer number of reflections the furniture created.

The second door down was the bathroom, complete with both bath and shower. In there they found several bottles of shampoo, deodorant, toothpaste and other toiletries. There was a small first aid box in there, too, which made the room smell of TCP when opened.

Hermione was starting to feel a little uneasy. There were only two rooms left, and she had the sneaking suspicion that only one of them was a bedroom.

The fourth door confirmed her suspicions. It was an office. In the centre of the room sat a large oak desk, complete with lamp, quill and chair. Shelves covered the walls, filled with book after book on every subject imaginable. There were both magical and Muggle works. Fiction and non-fiction. A whole wealth of ideas and concepts just waiting to be explored. Hermione's fingers itched at the thought, as did Severus', both eager to learn something new.

Resisting the urge to explore the shelves further, Hermione tore herself away from the room. She stared ominously at the door left unopened. It was just the same as all the other doors; the same size, made of the same dark wood, yet it seemed so much more imposing than the rest. It dared her to open it, to face whatever horrendous things lay beyond.

Hermione steeled herself, carefully avoiding Severus' gaze. She could feel it on the back of her head, boring a hole in her skull. He had to have come to the same conclusion as her, and she didn't want to see how he'd taken it. If the last three weeks had taught her anything, it was that he still had his formidable temper. She remembered walking in on him one day when he was bellowing at one of the poor mediwitches, telling her to remove herself from his presence before he did something he'd regret. Even without a wand, he was terrifying. Drawn up to full height, he'd loomed over the woman, bringing her almost to the brink of tears before she admitted defeat and scurried away. Of course, he'd calmed down by the time Hermione had plucked up the courage to see him, but there was still something of his rage there. She had seen it flickering in those dark eyes of his.

Taking a deep breath, Hermione placed her hand on the gold knob and twisted. The door clicked and swung open without a sound.

The room was a light crème colour with royal blue decoration. Great blue curtains hung either side of a large bay window that looked out onto the moors beyond. A lamp stood in the corner by the bed-side table, its clouded glass lampshade casting softly diffused light over the surrounding area. A dresser sat against one wall and a mirror hung from another, reflecting the bed. The large, four-poster bed was clearly meant for more than one occupant.

Hermione heard Severus cough slightly beside her, and she forced her gaze up to meet his. She was surprised to note that a slight blush coloured his cheeks.

"I... er, I'll take the sofa, if you would prefer it," he said, sounding a little unsure of himself.

Hermione shook her head. She was a grown woman, for God's sake. She could handle this like an adult.

"Don't be silly. The bed is plenty big enough for the both of us." She swallowed a little, her throat dry. The air crackled with tension, and she felt the supreme urge to diffuse

it. "That is, as long as you don't snore."

Severus cracked a small smile at that. "I have no idea whether I snore or not, Hermione, considering I am asleep when I do it. You can't document things in your sleep." He gave her a sly look. "And I must warn you, if you have cold feet, then I may be forced to take drastic action."

Hermione was a little stunned. Severus was joking with her. Whatever she had expected him to say, it certainly wasn't that. And, the strange thing was, she found she quite liked it. It made him seemed more human, less like a caricature of a man.

"So, er, I might take a shower first, if you don't mind," she said, placing her bag on the floor by the wardrobe that stood in the corner. She would unpack later. When Severus wasn't around. "I'm sure you can find plenty here to amuse yourself."

"Be my guest."

"Thank you." She smiled at Severus as she left the bedroom, but it fell from her face the moment she stepped out of his line of sight.

Hermione stood under the stream of hot water, trying her best not to think. She let the suds flow from her hair, untangling the knots with her fingers whilst the hair was slick enough. The air smelt faintly of mint, and her scalp tingled as the shampoo worked its magic. She sighed gently, breathing in the hot steam. It eased her lungs and worked out the lump that seemed to have taken up residence in her throat.

Slowly, she took the soap from the stand by the shower and began to scrub at her arms. The rather sparse lather smelt faintly of lemons, and she rubbed it across her shoulders and down between her breasts. Her skin, red with the heat, protested slightly as the soap made it feel dry and tight. But Hermione kept on with her task, taking the view that, if she had to spend the night with someone else, she might as well be clean.

Someone else. It had been quite a while since she'd done that. She felt a little thrill go through her *Am I really that starved for company?* she thought, scrubbing over her stomach in large, smooth circles. The man scared her. And she wasn't quite sure why. Perhaps it was just the unfamiliarity of the situation; he'd been her teacher for so long, she'd forgotten he was a person, that he had a life outside the classroom, too.

But she couldn't quite convince herself of it. She'd seen something in his eyes that told her otherwise. Something that she didn't think belonged there. Not darkness in itself, she was sure of that. No, there was an openness there that was so unnatural. When she looked into his eyes, she felt as though she could see into his soul, and it chilled her.

But it excited her too. And maybe that, more than the man himself, was the cause of her unease. When she looked at him, at those dark eyes of his, she felt a perverse sort of thrill run through her. He was her creation, her masterpiece. She'd brought him back to the living, and if that wasn't a power trip, she didn't know what was. She had infused those bones of his with that feline grace. She had given him that flicker of intelligence. That hint of darkness, of danger, was caused by her.

The thought made her tense, like a tightly wound spring. She imagined those dark eyes, those beautiful dark eyes, watching her, concentrating solely on the curves of her hips, the sleekness of her stomach.

Her body felt as though it were on fire, each drop of water another caress on her fevered skin. She could see him standing before her in her mind, clad in black, his hair long and loose about his shoulders. The expression on his face was almost feral. It should have frightened her, but it only served to send her higher. He leant closer, and she could almost feel his hands clamp down on her shoulders. It sent a shiver down her spine. She could see his eyes now: hot, dark, and so piercing.

The soap clattered to the floor and was forgotten.

Hermione emerged from the bathroom only to find the bedroom empty. It was getting late. She'd assumed he'd be here. But she was thankful he wasn't.

She rummaged through her bag, pulling out a pair of pyjamas. They were decent enough for tonight, being neither too revealing, nor too embarrassing. She slipped into them, enjoying the feel of the cotton against her shower-warmed skin.

She would unpack tomorrow, she decided. It was too late to do it now, and Severus would probably want some say in the wardrobe space. Instead of unpacking, she clambered into bed, choosing the left side. The covers were soft, if a little cold. She thought about casting a warming spell, but with the two of them in here, it would warm up soon enough.

There was a slight click as the door opened, and Severus emerged. Hermione instinctively drew the covers up around herself, though her dignity was protected well enough by her pyjamas.

"I took the left side. I hope you don't mind."

He shook his head, choosing to remain silent.

Hermione rolled over onto her side, facing away from Severus. She heard the rustle of clothes being removed and felt the bed dip down slightly as he climbed in. His breathing was unusually loud to her ears, and she fought the instinct to turn back over. There was a soft click as the lights went out.

Hermione tensed. She was alone. Alone in the dark. With him. Taking a deep breath, she rolled back onto her back. Her hand brushed against his arm, and she jerked it away as fast as she could. He was so close. She swore she could feel the covers move as he took a breath.

It was going to be long night.

Chapter 4

Chapter 5 of 8

Another dream, and a visit from the Minister.

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Hermione dreamed of *him*.

She was crouched in shadow, watching as his feet made their way slowly across the floor, watching as her stalker's shadow flickered against the office wall. From her space behind the stack of books, she could see his swirling cloak, the lining snapping back and forth in the wake of some invisible wind. A red lining, the colour of blood: her blood. A shiver shot through her. Her wand felt heavy in her hand, as though it were made of lead rather than wood. It slipped through her sweat-greased fingers and clattered to the floor, rolling out from behind the bookshelf.

The footsteps stopped.

"Run, little love. I know where you hide."

Hermione drew further back into the shadow, her shaking fingers pressed against the cold wall for support. Panic overtook her, the sound of her own breathing drowning out everything else. She dry swallowed, the lump in her throat sticking as a gloved hand reached into her hiding place.

He had her wand. Twirling the wood between his slender fingers, sparks of red flew from either end. They fell onto her skin, burning it. Hermione bit back a scream as she felt the pinpricks of pure heat on her face. Tears coursed down her cheeks, the salty solution making the wounds sting.

"All alone now, my love. And no wand to save you."

She ran. Passed the shadow of a man and hurtled down the corridor, her bare feet slapping painfully against the hardwood floor. In the dim light, she tripped over a bag, stubbing her toes as she fell. Bleeding and sore, she scrambled to her feet, knowing that, should she hesitate, he'd be on her in a second.

But where to go?

The doors were locked. No escape. She tried the end one, grasping hold of the burnished gold handle and pulling with all her might. It didn't move. She tried again, ramming her body fully into the dark wood. Her shoulder jarred with the force of her impact, but still the door would not budge.

Eyes wide with terror, she turned. He was walking towards her, his cloak swirling around his ankles. His hand still held her wand, but it was limp against his side, light issuing from the tip. It illuminated his slender figure, the way his body moved. Cat-like in his grace, he stalked down the corridor. A shadow, a night terror, dressed in black.

Dressed to kill.

"Please," Hermione gasped, falling back against the door.

His cloak brushed the edges of her bare legs as he leant closer. Red lips drew back to reveal white teeth in a grotesque approximation of a smile.

"No, no, my dear. The guilty must be punished."

She came awake in an instant, her heart beating so loudly it ought to have woken Severus. But he was still asleep beside her, his gentle snores filling the otherwise silent house. The room was dark, the luminous fingers of the clock proclaiming it to be four-thirty. She felt as though she couldn't breathe, her chest heavier than normal. Something slithered across her ribs. She stilled her breathing, cautiously picking up the edge of the blanket to peer underneath.

It was Severus' hand. Hermione felt foolish and cursed herself for letting her imagination run away with her *Only a nightmare. Nothing to be afraid of, old girl. You're safe here.* But she didn't quite believe it.

She took a deep, calming breath. Not quite willing to get up yet, the aftershocks of her murderous nightmare still strong. She stretched. Satisfying cracks filled the air as her spine re-aligned itself after a night of tossing and turning. The fingers on her torso flexed, and she shivered. But not from fear.

Images from the night before came flooding into her mind. Cheeks flushed at the thought of what she'd done, she stared guiltily at the man beside her. But he was still once more, looking for all the world like a corpse. His painfully pale skin seemed almost luminescent in the moonlight, stretching over a large nose and prominent cheekbones. Dark blotches, bruise-like in appearance, circled his eyes in a testament to the hours he'd spent sleep deprived and alone up in his hospital bed. He was too thin by far, and Hermione had no doubt that, should she lift the covers and look, she'd be able to count his ribs. He wasn't beautiful, not in the least. But there was something definitely arresting about him. The same something that made her uncomfortable.

The fingers flexed again. Hermione's skin tingled where his nails dug into her flesh. It was only a moment's worth of pain, but it seemed like an eternity, the shockwaves resonating through her body, turning into an almost unbearable heat as they progressed deeper. She squeezed her eyes shut, trying to block out the sensation. Trying to seek sleep once more. But her mind, buzzing with images of the man beside her, remained woefully uncooperative, refusing to return to off-mode. She sighed with defeat, her body winning the war.

Careful not to wake him, she began to slide from underneath the blanket. As his hand fell away, back onto the bed, she felt cold. There was that feeling of loss again. The one that she couldn't quite shake.

It was still there as she began to dress, as she pulled her work robes over her pyjamas to protect her dignity. She ignored it, tiptoeing out of the bedroom and into the darkened hallway beyond.

Breakfast was a pitiful affair, consisting of the remnants of what appeared to be bread and a tin of baked beans scrounged from the cupboard. It seemed the Ministry had yet to furnish the house with something edible.

She ate in silence, contemplating her next move. The deadline for recall was three weeks away, which, she thought, should give her enough time to at least run through the basics of potion making. There had to be something within that curriculum that would trigger recall; he'd taught first-year Potions for over a decade. Something in there would click. It had to.

Hermione didn't like to think of what the Ministry would do to her should she fail, but here, alone under the fluorescent lights of the kitchen, she couldn't help it. It crept into her mind, banishing the dream and filled it with far more unwholesome thoughts.

First, she'd be bagged. They always were as though the faces of those damned by their own government were somehow offensive. As though the very sight of them would incur the disobedience of others. She could almost feel the scratchy material of the hood pressed over her face until she could barely breathe. The hands would be cuffed too, to stop any unwanted movement. Though a wand would be just as effective, she thought. But the wands came later.

Next, she'd be taken to a Detention Centre. Unlike the Azkaban of old, there would be no Dementors there. No, there would only be steel bars and tiled floors. There would be windowless rooms that stretched for miles and miles, the newest of the inmates hooked to the chains suspended from the wall, and the oldest, the dying, draped across the floors, waiting for the sweet arms of Morpheus. It would be a world of rags and shaved heads where even the smallest of wounds gaped for attention. Eyes would stare listlessly into the beyond, becoming glassy as their owners forgot to blink. There would be no talking, not with their mouths and tongues bound by both magical and physical means, the silence driving the weakest to insanity and the strongest to homicide. Brothers killed brothers in there.

And, though she tried to ignore it, Hermione knew where the bodies for her experiments had come from. The Ministry always took special care of the useful ones.

She wouldn't be kept at the centre for long. She'd be moved to a lab before the starvation set in. Torture was not the word the Ministry used, but she could think of only one other way to describe it. *Experimentation.* How else did the Ministry test new spells? Test the effectiveness of the new wonder drug? Under the new jurisdiction, set in place after the Dark Lord fell, criminals were no longer classified as human. They were Nothings.

And the Ministry could do what they liked with the Nothings.

Hermione shivered, clutching her lukewarm cup of tasteless coffee tightly. No, she didn't want to become a Nothing. She had to make him remember.

"Hermione?"

She turned. Severus was stood at the doorway, dressed once again in the crumpled blue outfit from the night before. Hermione wondered briefly if they'd given him another set of clothes, or if they were being delivered today. Blue was most assuredly not his colour; it gave his skin a yellowish cast as though he had not seen sunlight in days. Which, thinking about it, he probably hadn't. His robes hung open, revealing the shirt and trousers underneath, both of which were far too large for a man of his build. His hair was obviously unwashed, the lank strands hanging over his forehead in thick, greasy clumps. He moved to push it out of his eyes, his shirt riding up, giving her the briefest glimpse of jutting hipbones. Too thin. He was far too thin.

"Did you sleep well?" she asked, rising from her place at the glass-topped table and making her way over to the kettle. Instant coffee was all they had, so it would have to do. She spooned out the strong-smelling granules, stirring them into a cup of hot water.

"No. It's too quiet in the house. I assume you didn't sleep well either since you seemed to spend most of the night fidgeting." He moved towards her, stopping her hand just as she was about to add the milk. "I take my coffee black, thank you."

Hermione handed him the gently steaming cup. "Sorry. I hope I didn't disturb you."

Severus said nothing. He simply raised the cup to his lips, his dark eyes staring at her accusingly. Hermione tore her gaze away, busying herself with the pan of baked beans that lay simmering on the hob.

"Hungry?" It was more of a rhetorical question than anything else. Hermione had no intention of letting him leave the kitchen without a relatively large, if not decent, meal inside him.

Severus shook his head. "Not for beans." He fingered the handle of his cup absentmindedly, his mind too focused on other things to think about the movements of his hands. "I can wait until lunch."

Hermione ignored him, spooning out a generous helping on to a waiting plate. "I'm not going to have you suffering from malnutrition. You are far too skinny, Severus Snape. Now, eat."

She guided him, somewhat forcefully, down into a chair and set the plate in front of him. He glared at her, but did not protest further, stabbing each bean as though it had done him some awful wrong.

"When is the Ministry arriving?" he asked through a mouthful of the sickly-sweet tomato sauce.

"In about two hours." She regarded him carefully, taking in his dishevelled appearance. "It should give you time for a shower. I'll see what I can do about your clothes. I take it they're the only set?"

"Obviously," he said scornfully, his frown etched yet deeper onto his forehead. "Do you really think I would wear something this dirty unless I had no other option?"

"Well, I don't know that, do I?" she said, her tone a perfect match to his. "Your personal hygiene is your own business. What do I care if you wear the same clothes for days at a time? I'm only trying to help."

"And do what? Wash them for me?" He dropped his fork, the metal hitting the plate with a loud clatter. "As brilliant as you are, Hermione, I very much doubt that you are able to clean *and* dry my clothes in the time it takes me to shower. And, call me old fashioned if you like, but I don't think that facing the Ministry in just a towel is entirely appropriate," he bit back.

Hermione watched as he rose from his chair and stalked out of the room. There was a faint slam as he shut what she thought was the bathroom door. She drained her cup of now stone cold coffee, grimacing as the bitter taste worked its way down the back of her throat.

Christ, he's cranky in the mornings. I'm sure he never used to be this bad. Dumbledore would never have invited him to breakfast, otherwise.

Placing her empty mug in the sink, she left the kitchen to ready herself for the visit. As she passed the bathroom door, she saw a set of neatly folded blue robes and heard the patter of running water.

It was almost ten o'clock before the Ministry arrived.

Hermione had spent most of the morning washing Severus' clothes, aided by magic, and changing them to a more fitting colour. She thought he'd possibly feel more comfortable in black than in blue, if his past life was anything to go by. As far as she could remember, she'd never seen him in anything other than black whilst she was at school. Well, that wasn't entirely accurate. She had seen him in a dress and a hat with a stuffed vulture on top, but she highly doubted he'd prefer that to the plain robes of the Ministry.

She'd altered the fit, too, making them more like traditional robes than hospital ones. Without exact measurements, she couldn't make them the perfect fit, but she felt they were a reasonably good estimate. Not too tall, but not short either, with slightly longer sleeves than before.

She had left them on the bed, neatly folded, before beginning on that morning's washing up.

Severus had come out of the bathroom looking rather pink and well-scrubbed. Hermione felt slightly guilty as she saw him, his skin almost red raw. It seemed her earlier comment on his personal hygiene had hit a nerve, his effort upon improving it almost becoming an act of self-mutilation rather than cleaning. But his hair was still as greasy as ever, no matter the amount of scrubbing done, the black locks looking just as limp dry as they did when they were wet. He'd tied it back for the meeting, though, looking oddly presentable, if a little rough around the edges.

The equipment had been the first thing to arrive that morning, dot on ten, hulked in through one of the Open Access Ministry Portways by the wizarding equivalent of removal men. Six or seven burly wizards, their long hair and beards plaited, had brought armfuls of clothing, food and equipment, arranging it by use on the floor.

Hermione stood silently in the corner, watching as each piece of potions equipment was ferried through the silvery-edged Portway. It was all old, verging on ancient, with rusting panels and cloudy glass. Long tubes stretched and spiralled across stacks of pots and phials. Cauldrons of all shapes and sizes littered the space, some slightly more worn than others, but all relatively serviceable.

Next came the Officials with their impeccably pressed robes and their blue clipboards. Two of them, flanking the Minister himself, marched through the Portway, looking mildly disgusted as they began to tramp through the piles of stuff. One cursed as he trod on a trifle, the whipped cream and custard bursting from its plastic packaging and coating his robes.

"Doctor Granger," said the Minister, his tone all business. "I trust you had a pleasant night?"

Hermione sniffed, fighting the urge to scratch her nose; it was a gesture born out of nervousness rather than actual need.

"I've had worse, Minister."

"Of that I have no doubt." His grey eyes bored into hers, alight with something unpleasant, but his tone remained conversational, unthreatening. Which made it all the more frightening. "The war was exceptionally hard on some of us, wasn't it?"

Hermione didn't reply. It was an old wound now, though too painful to forget entirely. Like a scab that just longed to be picked at. And it didn't help that the cause was here in the room, right now, staring at her with narrowed eyes.

The Minister knew what he was doing.

"However, I think it would be best to move on. Things to do, places to go, people to see. I can't afford to stand about reminiscing. *Time is money. Money is power.*

"Quite." Hermione dropped her gaze to the potions equipment meaningfully. "Where is this to go? All the rooms have been occupied."

"My men will transfer the food and clothes to their correct locations. The equipment will be coming with me."

The Minister spun on his heel so that he faced the door. But he wasn't looking towards the exit. He was looking up at the ceiling.

Chapter 5

Chapter 6 of 8

False perspective.

Disclaimer: I do not own these characters. They belong to JKR. I make no money from this piece of fiction. No copyright infringement is intended.

We spend the afternoon setting up the equipment, my angel and I. She passes me the tubes and the stands, the metallic framework to hold the most delicate of instruments, the heavy cauldrons with the silver-lined bottoms, and I find them somewhat familiar to the touch. It is almost as if they belong in my hands. As if I am intimately familiar with such objects of arcane mystery.

She tells me I used to be a master of this particular art. One of eight. The highest of academic achievers. However, I am disinclined to believe her, though why she would lie is beyond my comprehension. Angels do not lie. But they do have their tells.

And her nose twitches when she tells me of my life.

Sunshine warms the floorboards beneath my feet, falling from the open window in a curtain of translucent yellow. It is a winter's sunshine. Inviting in its appearance, it masks the cold that waits for those foolish enough to leave their warm homes without precaution. For those who do not look for the telling sign of dragon's breath, curling from the lips of the outsiders.

A cloud of dust rises as I place yet another large box of ingredients down in the musty cupboard. I watch as it swirls around me, the mix of dead skin, mites and dirt sparkling as though they were precious diamonds. People forget that there is beauty to be found in everything, if one only chooses to look hard enough. Even in myself.

I know I am odd. I know there is something not quite right. Something missing. When I look in the mirror, I don't see myself. I see only a reflection of the man I ought to be.

I don't see the face of a killer.

Perhaps it's overstatement to refer to myself in such a way. I haven't harmed my angel. She still stands in one piece by the desk, rifling through the papers the Minister left. But I have thought about it, as a means to rid me of my current affliction.

She is perfect. Like nothing I have ever seen before. And the basest part of me wants her in the most human of ways. It's a little sickening to know that I crave to taint something so pure. That the spread of her hair across my pillow would be the ultimate sin and, yet, the ultimate fantasy.

Last night she slept with me, sharing the same bed, the same air. I could feel her body pressing against the mattress, hear the tell-tale rhythm of her breathing. I watched as she became wrapped in a nightmare, fear etched upon her delicate features as she tossed and turned. It pained me, and I regretted my earlier thoughts of homicide.

To destroy such a being would be a crime against nature. I may not know who I am, but I know the difference between right and wrong. I know that there is a fine line between lust and hate.

I know that I love my angel.

Chapter 6

Chapter 7 of 8

I know I am odd. I know there is something not quite right. Something missing. When I look in the mirror, I don't see myself. I see only a reflection of the man I ought to be.

I don't see the face of a killer.

The man appears to be just another standard regeneration. But when medical practitioner Hermione Granger takes a closer look, she finds that not all is as it seems. The resurrection has not gone to plan.

He doesn't remember a thing.

Now, in a fight against time, Hermione must help him recover his memory before the Ministry proclaim him a lost cause.

There is only one problem. The man is Severus Snape, her former professor. And there are some things she believes that are best left forgotten.

Disclaimer: See chapter one.

"Stop."

Hermione ran her fingers through her hair, her head bowed in frustration. She clenched her teeth, making her gums ache. It really wasn't working. Over the last two weeks, they'd worked through the entire first-year syllabus, each potion a spectacular failure in its own right. Severus just couldn't do it. His natural ability, for she supposed he had some, seemed to be blocked along with his memory. Currently, he was working at a level even poor old Neville could have surpassed. And it worried her. The deadline was drawing ever closer, yet they seemed no nearer to cracking the code.

There was a loud hiss as Severus began to neutralise his current potion. Hermione wasn't quite sure what he'd made, only that it was acidic, judging from the colour and the fumes, and shouldn't really be poured down the drain. She sighed gently, rising from her place at the desk and walking over to the open window.

It was dark outside, night having fallen hours ago. The moon, full and bright, shone down on the wilderness below, turning the tall trees a haunting shade of silver. In the distance, she could hear the screeching of an owl, its cry one of jubilation as it caught its midnight snack. Frost clung to the grass, stretching across the ground like a large spidery hand, its creeping fingers digging ever deeper into the sodden earth. A winter wonderland.

Fields and forest playing out below her, Hermione leant out, enjoying the cool breeze on her face. Though her breath froze when it hit the night air, the great white plumes clouding her vision, she felt hot and sweaty. With the room in use all day, it had taken on the role of a sauna, rendering her warm winter layers quite unnecessary. Taking a deep breath, her lungs stinging under the onslaught, she looked down. It was dizzying, after being cooped up for so long, to see the ground, unbarred yet unreachable. There were no locks on these windows. There was no fear of escape: the drop was too far for anyone without a certain death wish.

"Hermione?"

She didn't respond, lost in her own little world. Warmth radiated against her back as he stepped closer. They didn't touch, but they were close. She could hear him breathing, feel the soft tingle of his breath against her neck. Shivering, not from the cold but from the heat both inside and out, she stared resolutely out of the window, forcing her focus on something, anything, other than the man behind her.

A wolf, or a dog, howled in the distance. Not to the moon but to something else. Prey, probably. There were no werewolves anymore, all had been sacrificed for the Ministry cause. No Remus, or Fenrir, or any of the others. No call for medics, or potions, like there was in the old days.

Potions. Wolfsbane.

Hermione spun on her heel, striding past a rather startled-looking Severus and over to the bookcase in the corner. Her fingers skimmed over one canvas-bound tome after another, tracing the golden lettering on each one, looking for answers. Pulling the second one from the right, a thick green book, from its place on the shelf, she hulked it over to the table and set it down with a bang.

"I've got it," she said, skimming across the pages until she found the one she wanted. "Wolfsbane. You used to brew it for a man named Remus Lupin to help with his lycanthropy. He was a fellow professor. Perhaps this will jog your memory."

Severus looked down at the list of ingredients, his brow furrowed.

"It's complicated. Perhaps too complicated."

"It's a difficult potion to brew, and you used to be one of the few who could do it. Something this complex is sure to send a few signals through your synapses. In fact, I'm counting on it."

With haste, she began to set up the cauldron and the distillation apparatus. Precision was the name of the game, and she spent extra time preparing the glass reflux flask until it matched the one in the diagram. She wasn't sure whether the Ministry had provided them with the correct ingredients for the potion, but if all went well, she was sure they wouldn't need them. As long as they had enough for the first couple of stages, they'd be fine. She had to jog his memory, not make a usable potion.

"Follow the instructions to the letter," she commanded, setting a large jar of wolfsbane on the table. With the cap unscrewed, the room smelt strongly of something akin to peppermint, though far more woody in texture. She coughed slightly before continuing. "And remember to chop the ingredients finely. They have to mix for the potion to work."

Severus took up the knife from the sideboard, setting to work on a large beetle husk. Hermione watched him work, hope fluttering uneasily in her stomach. This was their last chance. After this, she was all out of ideas and probably out of a job too. She shuddered to think what would happen then.

With all the ingredients for stage one chopped and shredded to perfection, Severus began to add them into the cauldron, stirring clockwise with the birch rod the book specified. His dark eyes were focused solely on the potion before him, so intense Hermione thought they'd burn a hole in the bottom of the cauldron. He looked very much the Potions master she remembered, only older and more worn. His hands, as skilful as ever, sprinkled in pepper and lacewings, his long fingers grasping each ingredient just firmly enough to manoeuvre them without causing any damage.

He muttered the steps under his breath as he went, the list becoming his mantra. With each new step completed, his voice got louder and louder. His eyes drifted to the book less frequently until they stopped altogether. It was coming from memory.

Hermione cried out, a sweet sense of success filling her as she watched him move through the required motions with no hesitation. His eyes drifted up to meet hers. They were alight with the pure pleasure of potion making, something he hadn't felt in the longest of times. A small smile even curved the edge of his thin lips.

The potion bubbled and spat, belching out lurid green smoke. Severus wafted away the fumes, adding in an extra pinch of monkshood. The smoke turned purple and drifted lazily from the surface of the gently simmering potion. Stage one finished, he stepped away from the cauldron, frowning as he saw the absence of ingredients required for the next stage.

"You didn't intend for me to continue, did you?"

Hermione smiled, shaking her head lightly.

"No. I was rather hoping you'd remember by the end of the first stage."

"Well, I believe fortune favours us tonight," he said, tapping his fingers gently against the table top. "Do you want me to clear up?"

He looked tired, dark circles shadowing the tender skin beneath his eyes. Recall seemed to have been an exhausting experience.

"No. I'll do it. You look like you're about to collapse."

"When are you going to phone the Ministry?"

"Tomorrow evening. You could do with a day to rest before the project begins."

Severus hesitated, his eyes narrowing slightly. "This hasn't changed anything, you know. I still can't remember who I am, only what I can do."

"I'm sure it will come back. But this is a start, isn't it? I mean, if you can remember this, then the other things will be sure to follow. The dam has been broken, Severus."

Severus said nothing. His gaze was cynical.

"Go. Rest." Hermione ushered him from the room, a smile still upon her lips.

Severus wasn't in the bedroom when Hermione went to check. The lights were out, but the bed was still made, the sheets still in pristine condition. She'd sent him down over two hours ago. His absence was puzzling.

Backing out of the room, Hermione made her way down the darkened hall, her eyes wide, trying to catch any glimpse of light.

A faint shaft of yellow shone from under the door of the office. Had she not been looking for it, she would have missed it, thinking the room unoccupied. Palms flat against the wooden panelling, she gently pushed open the door. It creaked, but the figure inside seemed not to notice.

In the dim light, she could just about make out Severus. He sat on the floor, cross-legged, his greasy hair pulled from its bindings. Books of all shapes and sizes lay before him, opened at random. The sleeves of his robes were bunched up around his elbows, baring his forearms. Even in the gloom, Hermione could make out the dark scar on his pale flesh. The Dark Mark.

"Severus?" she said, his name barely a whisper.

He didn't look up. His thin fingers traced the mark on his arm with a morbid fascination.

Hermione moved closer, her footsteps light upon the floorboards. She repeated his name. Again, he remained silent and unmoving. In the silence, she could hear the sound of his breathing, the raspy gasps as his slowly dying lungs filled with air. She fancied she could hear his heart, too, beating in time with her own. That she could hear the rush of blood through his veins and arteries, each cycle struck from the tally that showed how many he had left. Death comes upon all, but others too soon.

She was so caught up in the sound of his body, she started when he spoke.

"Do you think me wicked, Hermione?"

The words were soft, but they echoed through the room as though magnified by the darkness. His eyes remained fixed upon the mark, his face showing no trace of emotion.

Edging closer, she saw the tears that glistened upon his cheeks. Tiny rivers of crystal that marked his skin, marked his sorrow. Panic sliced through her. What had he discovered? There were so many secrets, and she'd told him so many white lies.

"Why do you ask?"

He didn't say anything. Instead, he pushed a book towards her, its greying dust jacket hissing as it slid across the floor.

Hermione bent down, squinting in the darkness as she struggled to read the fine type.

Hogwarts: A History.

She stepped back in horror, unable to smother the gasp that escaped her throat. He knew.

"Severus, please. It's not what it looks like."

He lifted his head, his eyes meeting hers. They swirled with anger and unshed tears.

"What isn't? The fact that I'm a murderer? Or the fact that I have evil carved into my arm?"

Hermione flinched at the venom in his voice. She felt twelve years old again, fearful as if she were sitting, once more, in his classroom for the day's lesson.

"It's not like that. You switched sides. You fought for us."

His eyes narrowed. "Us? And I bet you were a precious Order Member. Tell me, is it just a matter of circumstance, or did you always intend to keep from me the fact that I killed your leader? Do you revel in knowing you're my better?"

"It was for your own good. Would you have really wanted to know that, if you had the choice? Everyone deserves a second chance, Severus."

"Did you ever give me one? You told me yourself you hated me. That you loathed me."

"I hated you once when the wound was still fresh," she lied. "But everything changed. After the war, Harry showed me your memories. I knew then that you did it for a reason. You're not a cold-blooded monster, Severus. Dumbledore was dying, and Draco didn't deserve to be damned. You saved two lives that night, even though you might not think it."

"And this?" He pointed to his arm. The mark was scratched and bleeding, as though he had tried to tear it from his skin. "Can you forgive me for this?"

"It was a mistake. You were young and foolish."

"How do you know that? It could have been just what I wanted, all that blood and destruction. You know, even sitting here thinking about it, that offer of power appeals to me. Power is a most potent drug, and with this, I could have had it all. No doubt I would have done anything to get it: steal, rape, murder."

Hermione shuddered as his eyes bored into hers, something nasty lurking in their dark depths. For the first time, she got a glimpse of him, the real him. The him from long ago. It made her want to bolt for the door.

But then he blinked, and it was gone. Replaced by a sadness she couldn't imagine.

"Perhaps I am a monster, Hermione," he said, his voice raspy. "Perhaps I deserved to die."

"No."

"Then why do you back away, like a frightened animal in a cage?"

Hermione flushed. She made a conscious effort to halt her retreat, holding her ground.

"I'm not scared of you."

Another lie, but this time they both knew it.

"You're terrified. I can see it in your eyes, your posture. But I suppose I have no right to blame you. Murderers can't make for the easiest of company."

She shuffled forward, sinking down onto her knees so that their heads were level. Not a gesture of submission, but one of equality.

"Severus," she said, cupping his cheek. "Don't. You're human. Humans commit sins. But you repented, and that's what matters. That's what counts. You tried to make things right again, which has all the marks of an angel, if you ask me."

"You are the angel," he said, his eyes wide.

Hermione gave a humourless laugh. "You wouldn't say that if you knew me. My wings broke long ago."

"It doesn't matter."

All conversation halted as Severus moved closer, pressing his lips to hers.

His lips felt almost unbearably hot. They hovered over her own, unmoving, simply touching. Soft and human, they pressed against her so lightly she could barely feel it. It was almost as if he were afraid, like a little boy taking something he knew he couldn't have.

Hermione's eyes fluttered shut, but he pulled away. Her cheek felt cold as his hand dropped and loss coursed through her. The same as before, as every time he touched her, only stronger.

"You feel like an angel, Hermione," he said, his breath whispering across her face. "Like you'll disappear if I so much as blink."

Hermione could hear the tremor in his voice, no matter how hard he tried to hide it. And it gave her a perverse sort of pleasure, knowing she'd managed to shake him. To make the great black bat of a man feel something other than hate or regret. To make him feel his own fear.

She didn't open her eyes but meshed back into the kiss, pressing her lips against his hard. With a trembling hand, she drew him close. Close enough to feel the tracks of his tears, wet and cold, upon her face. Their touch remained chaste, little more than the press of sensitive skin against sensitive skin, both barely breathing.

"Are you afraid?" she whispered against his lips.

A hand slid across her breast, its fingers trembling. She leant into the touch, heat infusing her skin through the flimsy robe. His thumb brushed over her nipple, the palm of his hand gently cupping the sensitive underside.

"Yes," he breathed.

Hermione met him in an open-mouthed kiss, her tongue tracing the delicate seam of his lips until they opened. They were chapped, but it didn't matter. It was just another sign of a body falling to waste, something she couldn't heal.

She shivered as Severus increased the pressure on her breast, his palm rubbing across the swell with the rhythm of their tongues. He tasted faintly of mint and something... else. She couldn't quite identify it, but it was bitter, almost metallic, and it slid down her throat with an uncomfortable ease. Something addictive, certainly, for she felt as though she couldn't live without it now. As though the world would crumble the moment her lips left his.

His tongue flicked over her teeth and up to the roof of her mouth. Slick with spit and the taste that screamed 'Severus', it explored every ridge and hollow, as though he were committing the contours of her mouth to memory. She moaned as he hit a sensitive spot, the sound swelling up from her lungs before she could stop it.

They broke away, gasping. The sound of his breathing was harsh in her ears, raspy from excitement. She opened her eyes, meeting his dark gaze. His eyes were almost black, their depths as fiery as ever.

The hand on her breast stopped moving, tightening slightly. She lifted it gently, threading her fingers through his and pulling them close. Pressing her lips to his knuckles, she flicked her tongue over the light webbing of flesh between his fingers, watching as he shuddered.

She smiled, rising to her feet, pulling his hand up with her. He followed suit, standing so close she could feel the heat radiating off his body. His hair had fallen across his face in a curtain of inky black, obscuring his sharp features, the tiredness that lurked in the skin around his eyes. Hermione was almost afraid to brush it back, as though doing so would change the man beneath.

"Come on," she said, leading him towards the bedroom with quiet, confident steps. Her hand let go of his as she opened the door, falling alone and cold to her side.

The bedroom was dark, only the tiniest shaft of moonlight slicing through the curtains. It painted the world silvery grey, making it seem beautifully austere. As though to do anything but admire would be sinful. But Hermione cared little for virtue.

She felt him press close to her, the warmth of his body enveloping her back. His arms wrapped around her front, pulling her into his embrace. She could feel the slight movement of his hips as he drew her close. It was tempting to turn and take him there, but she found she couldn't move, as she was trapped in his tight hold.

His lips lavished the skin of her neck with kisses, the sharp nick of teeth providing a painful contrast to the soft sensations his mouth created. Tipping her head back to expose more of her throat, she looked up at the ceiling, tracing the swirling lines of silver-tinted plaster. His hand slid between the opening of her robe and under her shirt, caressing the curve of her stomach. She shivered, feeling it slide just underneath her navel, the edge of it tracing the waistline of her trousers. He was teasing her, his fingers occasionally dipping beneath the heavy layer of cotton to stroke the soft skin below. Heat flooded her lower abdomen.

"Severus..."

He brushed his mouth over her jaw bone.

"Hush," he whispered. "Just let me touch you."

Hermione arched her back as his hands slid up her front, over her breasts and to her collarbone. Tracing his fingers across the bones of her chest, he pushed off her robes, watching through dark eyes as they pooled upon the floor in a lake of red. The shirt beneath was rough and worn. Just like her.

With a surgeon's precision, Severus began to open her shirt, slipping the buttons from their holes in a single, skilful movement. His fingertips brushed against her bare skin, leaving trails of white-hot fire in their wake. Her back arched, pushing her breasts forward into the cold air, her nipples tightening. He didn't touch them but went for the clasps on her trousers, unhooking them and letting them slide off her hips. Clad in nothing but a pair of red knickers, she stood before him, shivering.

Severus smoothed his hands up her thighs and over her stomach, rubbing her skin gently. Hermione groaned, his touch too light to do anything but tease. She felt as if her skin were on fire, burning away where he touched her, leaving her aching. Her hair, pressed against her back by his chest, was stuck to her skin with sweat, the moisture

making the curls even more untameable. When Severus turned her head, she could feel it slithering across her flesh.

His face was flushed, his eyes dark. Hermione felt a little thrill go through her at the sight. He was alive.

"Kiss me," she breathed, her mouth dry. She swallowed, watching emotions play over his face. Lust, passion, anger, bewilderment. He hesitated, and it was telling. "Don't you want this?"

"I want to feel. I want to know what it's like to be alive." The words seemed difficult, as though he'd forced them from his tongue.

"But this? Do you want this?"

"I want you."

Hermione turned in his arms, pressing him close. Chest to chest, hip to hip, lips to lips. Her hands worked on the front of his robes, pulling them apart as she sought the skin underneath. The black material fell to the floor like dripping ink, running from his shoulders in a liquid-like flow. His shirt followed, leaving him bare save for a pair of black trousers.

He was pale. Not unlike the corpse he'd been not so long ago, lying upon her table with cold limbs and dead eyes. Only his skin was hot, burning her, and his eyes flickered. Her hand came to rest upon his sternum, feeling each beat of his fragile heart, the rush of blood through his arteries and veins. Alive. Barely.

His ribs, clearly defined, created moonlit shadows across his torso. He was too thin, and Hermione felt a shred of pity as she traced the bones of his hips. Jutting out at a sharp angle, they seemed to stretch the greying skin far more than they should. A skeleton made of matchsticks and old leather and so very fragile. She was afraid that her touch would send him crumbling into dust.

She watched as the muscles in his face contorted, as his eyes fluttered shut, his lashes becoming inky stains upon his cheeks. It wasn't beautiful, but it was enough. And Hermione felt a sharp twist in her abdomen, her body mimicking the pleasure she could see in his.

Hermione pressed her mouth to his chest. Familiar tastes, familiar smells. Only not quite. The skin, the sweat; it was just like the other men she'd taken, used, and yet like no other. Her lips tingled as they touched him, telling her body he was something new. Something alien.

Her fingers fumbled upon the buttons as she struggled to remove his trousers. Severus pushed his hips forward, his hands coming down to help. Together they created just enough slack, and her hands slid over his arse, over the soft skin, pushing the dark material to the floor. He was bare beneath.

Seconds, minutes after, she felt his hand clasp around hers. His skin felt searing. A thrill ran through her. She looked up, her eyes meeting his.

"I love you, Hermione."

Her stomach lurched. She didn't pull back but rested her head against his chest, blocking his view of her face.

Please don't do this to me. Please don't make me hurt you.

Want, she could deal with. But love? She'd given up on that long ago, and it had been washed from her life like the dirt on her skin, flowing down the drain with the bloody bathwater. Love brought images of horror and guilt. *Of him*, lying broken upon the tiles.

"Shhhh," she whispered, pushing him back against the bed.

She avoided his dark eyes, scared he'd see the truth. He kissed her, his tongue delving deep into her mouth, searching for answers she wouldn't give him. His face held a pinched, pained sort of expression as he tried to hold back. But his eyes were dark, shining with something other than lust. Their skin was slick with sweat, and the heat was almost unbearable. Hermione felt as though she was about to fall apart. To shatter into a million pieces.

She felt no guilt as she welcomed him into her arms, though she would later. Even this was another lie. His love had red hair, not brown, and was long dead. *Tonight, Lily, he is mine*, she thought, revelling in her sense of power as her legs wrapped around his narrow waist.

Their mouths never broke contact.

Tired and sated, they collapsed. Severus' eyes were closed, and his face flushed with colour. Hermione crawled closer to him resting her head upon his rapidly moving chest. She was asleep within moments. She didn't hear his whispered reply.

"Sweet dreams, Miss Granger."

Chapter 7

Chapter 8 of 8

SS/HG Awards Round 3, Runner Up: Instant Darkness Powder- Best Dark!fic.

I know I am odd. I know there is something not quite right. Something missing. When I look in the mirror, I don't see myself. I see only a reflection of the man I ought to be.

I don't see the face of a killer.

The man appears to be just another standard regeneration. But when medical practitioner Hermione Granger takes a closer look, she finds that not all is as it seems. The resurrection has not gone to plan.

He doesn't remember a thing.

Now, in a fight against time, Hermione must help him recover his memory before the Ministry proclaim him a lost cause.

There is only one problem. The man is Severus Snape, her former professor. And there are some things she believes that are best left forgotten.

Disclaimer: Please see chapter one.

A/N: Apologies for the very long hiatus and for leaving reviews unanswered. I beg for forgiveness.

The room is cold. The fire died out long ago, and I have neither the strength nor the inclination to light it once more. I cope well enough with the cold and the darkness. Death has a way of hardening one to mortal frivolities such as light and heat. Besides, the life that runs through my veins is of rather a different nature, born of magic, not a mother. And with murder in mind, I fear no monsters. I am the most dangerous thing that lurks here.

No. Lighting the fire would only be for her sake. The little whore with her soft curls and pale cheeks. Even from my place at the end of the bed, I can see the rise and fall of the covers, hear the rustle of fabric as her bare chest presses rhythmically against the sheets. Every breath she takes screams out into the silence of the night, disturbing the peace with her treachery.

My angel is a liar.

Only, she is not an angel. She is merely a girl I used to know, a lifetime ago, in the most literal of senses. True, she's grown and loved since I laid eyes upon her last, but the foundations I remember are still there, waiting beneath that golden surface of hers. Inside, she's still that damned know-it-all, cloying for undeserved attention. Her wings are nothing more than paper and kisses, barely able to withstand the winds of life. And her halo, her glimmering halo, is but the glass from a broken bottle. She is nothing more than a cheap substitute for a woman, no longer feeling, just being.

But I suppose I must thank her for bringing me back. For giving me one more breath, another beat of the heart. It hurts, living. Like a knife driving deep in my chest, it pains me to keep breathing, telling me I'm wrong with every twist of the blade. That I shouldn't be here. But I am, which is the beauty of it all. She gave me a second chance, and I am reluctant to waste it.

Life is so precious to me, now that I have seen death and all that is held in its watery depths. True monsters lurk there, beneath its grey surface, feasting on the spirits of the lost, with their red eyes and sharp teeth. The water is so cold, the swirling undercurrents grabbing at limbs and torsos with icy fingers. And there is no sun. No ray of morning light, simply the darkness cast out by the ever-expanding universe. Even now, after so many weeks of living, the sun still hurts my eyes, burns my retinas.

Perhaps it is my imagination, but now it seems easier to take, this pain. You see, I know who I am. I'm no longer striving to reach something that hovers, unseen, in my mind. My memories are far more than remnants of a dream I may, or may not, have experienced. They are solid to the touch and fluid to the senses. It's like a pressure that I knew not existed has been released inside my head, leaving me free to think for the first time. To remember.

And I remember her. Minerva's precious student, the one who could do no wrong. It seems less than a moment since she last sat in my class, her hand waving in the air as she offers a reply to a question no-one thought to ask. In another student, it would have been a promising attribute. But in her, it became little more than an annoyance. A curly-haired problem that had to be dealt with.

It's difficult to comprehend why she lied to me. Guilt, perhaps. If I had a conscience, I'm sure it would buckle under the same amount of pressure. Hate is such a harsh emotion. It blinds even the best of us to the most obvious of truths. And she surely hated me for what I'd done. Though why she told me she was never my student, I may never understand. It sickens me to know that I slept with a student.

But worst of all, I know that I still love her. I still want her, in both mind and body. On the surface, she's still perfect, however decayed she's become beneath. She still looks like the angel I thought I knew.

Maybe I was too hasty in my denouncement. After all, why would an angel come to earth if not cast out of the heavens? And I have no doubt that despair was her vice and deception was her sin.

I will help my angel. I will free her from her mortal bindings of blood and tears. Release her from the prison of her skin: give her wings of golden feathers.

You see, she deserves far better than this cold, unforgiving earth. And I happen to be a dab hand at giving people what they deserve.