

Yet Everything Stays the Same

by astopperindeath

In spring 1980, Severus Snape hears a portion of a prophecy that will change the course of wizarding and Muggle history. The Dark Lord must choose a boy, but which? Snape is sent to discover the boy's identity, but the answers he seeks are not to be found in his world. Rated M for violence and eventual sexual situations. SS/HG.

The Fate of a Child

Chapter 1 of 17

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Chapter One The Fate of a Child

Spring 1980

He walked across the tiled entry room, boots clicking as he made his way towards the door. As he entered, he cast his eyes immediately downward...to gaze upon the Dark Lord without permission was to ensure immediate suffering, be it Cruciatus or something even more despicable. He had no wish to lose blood today. Scanning the floor for the Dark Lord's shadow, he made his way towards the windows at the end of the hall. Upon seeing his Lord's feet, he prostrated himself, knees bent, forehead touching the ground, palms flat to the floor.

He remained in this position for an interminable period of time. His back ached, his knees became stiff, and he had lost most of the circulation to his feet. He knew it would take everything in his power to stand without falling once his master gave him permission to rise.

The minutes dragged by; a grandfather clock in the corner mocked his pain, the second hand clicking for every two beats of his heart. He focused on slowing his heart, knowing he was doing his body no favors by allowing his blood pressure to remain this high. A few silent, deep breaths calmed his quaking heart, and he tried desperately to remember that this was just how the Dark Lord operated; fear was a powerful commander. He refused to be afraid.

Eventually, the sibilant voice of his master rang out. "Rise, Severus. Join me in appreciation of this marvelous view."

Snape arose slowly, willing his body not to cramp or spasm. He risked a quick glance to the clock. Twenty-nine minutes had passed since he entered the room. Only twenty-nine minutes. It had felt like hours.

He walked to his master's side, his knees protesting, his back screaming.

"You sent for me, My Lord?" Severus still did not look at him, but focused his eyes instead at the view. The full moon rose over the edge of the outbuildings in the distance, and he shivered slightly; the full moon still had the ability to instill him with a small amount of fear. Snape could feel the other man's eyes fixed on him, and it made him even more uncomfortable.

"Severus, are you happy?"

Snape blinked. He was caught so off guard by the question that he actually dared to look his master in the eyes. He breathed a sigh of relief when he realized that the Dark Lord merely looked back at him with amusement.

He had no idea how to answer the question. His first instinct was to sarcastically respond, "And just when have I ever been known as being happy?" but he quickly thought better of it. The other man's eyes went from looking amused to irritated.

"Of course, My Lord. You have provided me with an adequate laboratory and a steady income. What more could I ask for?"

The Dark Lord's face lit up; if there was anything the Dark Lord liked, it was being praised.

"How would you like to continue having the ability to brew and earn a respectable living, while also becoming an invaluable asset to me, Severus?"

That question surprised him even more than the last. He knew that he was important to the Dark Lord. Some of his potions had earned him great respect amongst his brothers. But invaluable? Malfoy was invaluable; Bella was invaluable. He was just Severus Snape, half-blood extraordinaire to be sure, but not invaluable. It was just the opportunity he had been hoping for.

"I will do whatever you command of me, My Lord, even without the luxury of brewing or an income. It is most gracious of you to offer both."

The Dark Lord bestowed a rare smile upon his servant. Snape's stomach clenched in both fear and joy; it was the first time he'd ever been shown such regard.

"I have received intelligence which implies that Horace Slughorn may be retiring from Hogwarts in the coming year. I wish for you to go to Dumbledore, Severus, and apply for this position."

Snape couldn't believe the request. He knew better than to voice his reservations to the Dark Lord, but he definitely had them. How could he teach at Hogwarts so soon after graduating? All of the professors were... old. Most of his former housemates were still there, and the new students enrolled since his graduation would certainly be the siblings of his peers. How would he gain their respect? How would he have any sort of authority as a professor?

"Furthermore, I wish for you become Head of Slytherin house."

Head of Slytherin house? He was sure his master had lost his mind. Had Bella slipped him something again? Only Bella could get away with something like that without getting blasted to Hades and beyond.

He finally managed to cough out a response. "Sir?"

It was the best he could muster.

The Dark Lord laughed, a harsh, grating noise that would frighten a small child. "Yes, Severus. You must do this for me. It is time for me to take the next steps in my plans, and I will need loyal followers. I need you to infiltrate the school, and you must groom appropriate children for my ranks. This will be most easily done from within your own house...but do not be so blind as to think that my servants shall only come from Slytherin."

"My Lord, not to question your judgment, which I know is sound, but how will I make Dumbledore trust me? As you know, I was never one of his... favorites. The man acts like "Slytherin" is synonymous with "evil," Slughorn excepted." Snape gave a wry sneer at this, remembering all of the times he had been given detention for defending himself while the perpetrators had gotten off scot-free. "And besides, Slughorn would never recommend me for the position; his ego is still bruised from my performance on the NEWTs." Snape thoroughly enjoyed remembering the look on Slughorn's face when his professor had realized Snape had achieved the only perfect score ever on a Potions NEWT.

"Slughorn's opinion of you is irrelevant. You will do what you must to ensure this happens, Severus. I need you in this position if my plans are to come to fruition. Do not fail me."

Severus swallowed hard. "I will not, My Lord. When do you wish for me to meet with Dumbledore?"

The Dark Lord crossed the few steps to stand directly in front of Snape. "Why, Severus, tonight of course. My plans cannot wait. You'll find him at Hogwarts."

Knowing better than to question any of this, Snape took a step back, then bowed deeply. Rising, he paused before departing. "Shall I report back to you tonight, My Lord, or shall I return tomorrow?"

"By all means, Severus, go home, and get some rest. It has already been a long day. However, please return for breakfast, my boy. Narcissa makes the most delectable croissants."

Snape inclined his head once more in acceptance of the invitation before turning on the spot and Disapparating to the edge of Hogsmeade.

He landed a little hard and stumbled before righting himself. "Sure," he snorted, *Narcissa* makes the most delectable croissants. More like the labor of five house-elves ensures a perfect breakfast, or else Lucius kills one."

Snape stamped up the path, enraged. He knew better than to Apparate directly to the castle. Without this walk, there was no way he would be able to get his emotions under control. Teach, indeed! If there was one thing he hated more than a child, it was an entire castle full of children. He had no idea how he was going to be able to pull this off, let alone get Dumbledore to acquiesce to the idea. But knowing his bodily well-being was on the line was an intense motivator, and he trudged up the hill to the castle with purpose.

While it had been a clear night at the Malfoys, it was dreary in Scotland...the sky was grey, and a cold, wet drizzle seeped into his clothing. The rain did absolutely nothing to improve his mood. He flipped up the collar of his cloak, protecting his ears from the howling wind. The anthropopathic quality of the rain was not lost on him, and he sneered at whatever games God was playing this ill-fated night.

It was only as he crested the last hill and saw Hogwarts looming in the moonlit night that he realized he had no way of entering the gates. Before he could figure out a solution, a voice boomed from the edge of the Forest.

"Severus Snape? Is that you?"

Snape grimaced; only one man cast a shadow that large. "Good evening, Mr. Hagrid. How are you tonight?"

Hagrid looked at him, confused, but not in a negative way. He had always shown great kindness to Hagrid; it never hurt to make friends with those in service positions. "Y'know, just keeping an eye on the dog while he does his business."

Almost on cue, King, Hagrid's old Great Dane, bounded out of the woods, raising his front paws to Snape's shoulders before placing wet, sloppy dog kisses on his face.

Snape tried not to scowl.

Hagrid let out a series of whole body guffaws before wiping his eyes with a large handkerchief. "He seems to remember yeh, Severus. I reckon he'd still love one of those sticks you used to conjure for him."

Snape rolled his eyes. Yes, those sticks. The only way he could keep that blasted dog from licking him to death had been to conjure large toys and throw them as far away as possible. He quickly conjured a rather large one, throwing it towards the groundskeeper's hut.

Hagrid smiled as he watched his dog bound away. "So, Severus. What brings you back?"

"I had heard there may be an opening on staff next year. I thought I might try to talk to the Headmaster about employment. Would you be willing to walk me to the castle?"

"Well, I'd love to, Severus, but 'e's not there. Gone ter the Hog's Head tonight."

Snape scowled, not looking forward to spending time in such a... hole. He quickly righted his features. "Would you like to come and share a pint, Mr. Hagrid?"

"I'm sorry, I can't go with yer, Severus. I need to tend to King, of course. And call me Hagrid; you're no longer a student, and I never much liked the 'mister' on any account."

"Thanks, Hagrid," Snape said, attempting to look as pleasant as possible.

Hagrid smiled one last time before turning and walking off, yelling after King.

Snape readjusted his collar and began the walk back to Hogsmeade, lost in thought. If he really were to be forced into working at Hogwarts, having Hagrid on his side would be invaluable. Everyone knew the Headmaster trusted Hagrid implicitly, and once Hagrid was loyal to someone, his regard never wavered. If Hagrid trusted him, that would mean something to Dumbledore.

He entered the Hog's Head soaked and surly. He immediately walked to the bar, slapping down a Sickle and demanding an Irish whiskey, straight. Aberforth looked annoyed, but complied. He used the opportunity to aurally take in his surroundings.

His collar was still up, and his hair came down over most of his face, shielding his identity from anyone seeing him from the back. It gave him some anonymity to sip his last drink as a relatively free man. Well, as free as any Death Eater could consider himself.

He began to take in the sounds and smells of the bar. The scents of unwashed bodies and stale beer were nothing to dwell on, so he began listening to snippets of conversation. Given Dumbledore wasn't at the bar, he could only assume he was at one of the many dark corners or tables in the dank room. He heard a young couple arguing over rent, an ugly man trying to convince a floozy to come home with him, and a curmudgeon giving a soliloquy about fighting in the Great War... the last of which made little sense to him. The Great War, really? They just let anyone into this bar these days, Mudbloods, too, apparently.

However, he did *not* hear the voice he was required to seek out this night.

"Aberforth, is there a room upstairs where I might go to freshen up decently? I don't need it for the night; I just want to clean up and dry my clothes."

Aberforth glared at him. Snape knew he needed to be nicer if he were to get any sort of response from the man. He threw another Sickle onto the bar. "Please, it wouldn't take more than a moment."

Aberforth, still scowling, growled slightly. "Fine. Up the stairs, second door on the left."

Snape attempted a smile. "Thank you... sir."

He rose from the bar, clutching his whiskey in his hand, and ascended to the second floor.

The upper hallway was dimly lit; wall sconces each held a single candle every few feet. He quickly moved to the room, casting a quick drying spell over himself before just as quickly leaving the room. He knew that if Dumbledore were not downstairs, he would probably be enjoying the privacy of an upper room. The first door on the hall was slightly ajar, and golden light poured from the room. Quietly, he approached the door, hoping to ascertain whether the Headmaster was present in the chambers.

A familiar voice wafted through the din, and Snape began to listen closely.

"So, other than your familial relations, in what way are you qualified as a Seer?"

Seer? Why in God's name would Dumbledore be interviewing a Seer?

"Well, my great-great-grandmother Cassandra taught me everything she knew about palmistry and scrying. I've even been known to dabble in augury when the mood

strikes me."

"I see," Dumbledore paused. "I'm sure this is an unnecessary question, but are you aware of any of your prophecies coming true, Miss Trelawney?"

"Of course my prophecies come true, Headmaster. I wouldn't be much of a Seer if nothing I foresaw came to fruition. Why, just this morning, I read in my tea leaves that I would have a rather fortuitous meeting with an important man tonight!"

Snape heard the Headmaster snort softly, almost in annoyance. "Miss Trelawney, we've had this meeting scheduled for over a week..."

"Yes, sir, but the tea leaves *told* me it would happen."

Snape rolled his eyes. *Great, another 'Seer.'* He wondered how long this blasted meeting would take; he *did* want to take his master's advice and get some sleep. And get dry.

"Well, Miss Trelawney, I believe we've conversed enough..."

"But, sir, we've barely spoken. Surely, there are more things I could tell you! Let me gaze upon your palm!"

"I'm sorry, Miss Trelawney, but I do not feel that you would be suitable for this position. I'm sorry for taking up this much of your time."

He heard a chair scrape across the floor...Dumbledore was leaving. As quickly and quietly as he could, he slipped down the hall to the second room before he could be caught eavesdropping.

The sound of glass breaking stilled his walking...was the woman pitching a fit? A strangled moan kept him frozen in place...it was not a pleasant sound. It was the woman's voice, but tilted on its side...deep, husky, and in pain.

The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies...

"Oi, Snape! What're ya loitering up there for? I charge by the hour for those rooms. Don't make me take two Galleons from you by force!"

Snape cursed. He'd missed the rest of what she had said. A prophecy? About the Dark Lord? The power to vanquish him? Surely the Dark Lord could not be vanquished.

He heard a sharp thud on the other side of the door. Sneaking a peek as he walked by, he saw her body convulsing on the floor. Dumbledore was crouched over her, checking her vitals, attempting to quell the shakes that wracked her body. He conjured a Patronus, sending it to Hogwarts for the Healer.

Dumbledore is buying this? Snape wouldn't have put it past the woman to fake it, but the quick glimpse at Dumbledore's face let him know that Dumbledore was taking whatever this prophecy meant *very* seriously.

Snape descended back into the bar to Aberforth glaring at him once again. *Is the man never happy?*

"I apologize, Aberforth. Here you go, for your troubles."

He tossed a Galleon onto the bar and walked out, marching down the street in anger and frustration. On the one hand, he had heard a potentially true prophecy, at least as far as Dumbledore was concerned. Prophecies had a way of coming true if the recipient put actions into motion based on the belief of its validity. Yet on the other hand, he had failed to even speak with the Headmaster, let alone procure the teaching position. He had two options: return now with at least some information as a consolation prize, or return home and hide from the situation. As he planted his foot to spin in Disapparition, he was having difficulty making the decision.

He landed on the front lawn of Malfoy Manor, brain swimming, body tingling alarmingly. He knew the penalty for approaching the Dark Lord without summons, and he was not looking forward to the punishment. However, how much worse would it be for him to keep this information from his master, even if it were just the next morning? He made his way up the walk, pausing to kick one of the peacocks in frustration.

The door swung open, and a house-elf met him, shaking and cowering.

"Yes? What is sir needing?"

"I need to speak with the Dark Lord, elf."

"But, sir, the Master's Master is sleeping now. I is being punished if I summons him."

"You 'is being punished' if you do not follow my orders, elf!" Snape bellowed.

Shaking even harder, the elf disappeared with a crack. Within a minute, he was back, his hand over a curse burn on his forehead.

"Sir is to be going to the drawing room now." The elf moved aside to allow Snape entrance.

As Snape walked by the elf, the creases and mud spatters left his bedraggled cloak. Snape cast a sharp look at the elf, an eyebrow raised in question.

"I is not wanting you to be hurt too, sir. You is usually nice to us. I is wanting you to be safe."

Snape was surprised. House-elves never did anything without being asked, certainly nothing to protect those they weren't sworn to.

"Erm... thanks... um..."

"Dobby, sir. My name is being Dobby!"

"Thanks, Dobby."

He reached the drawing room, steeling himself for Cruciatus or worse. He opened the door and went through the same motions as before: eyes to the floor, scanning for the Dark Lord's shadow. Before he could take one step, his master interrupted the ritual.

"I was asleep, Severus."

A Slicing Hex slid through the air, striking his left thigh. Snape sank to the floor, stifling a scream. Blood poured from the gash.

"I believe you should be groveling, Severus." Before Snape could kowtow, the Dark Lord cast Imperio, forcing his head to strike the hardwood floor with a hollow thud.

His leg throbbed. He could feel his pulse in the open wound, and he was sure he was losing a great deal of blood. He felt his body bear-crawling towards his master and did not have the energy to care.

"Did you procure the position, Severus?"

He managed to grind out a breathy "No."

"*Crucio!*"

His body flopped over like a turtle stuck on its shell. His limbs curled inward, blood gushing in spurts in time with the waves of pain wracking his body.

"Oh, now, look what you've done Severus. You've bled on my favorite robes."

A Blasting Curse lifted his body, arcing it through the air before slamming it against the wall. He felt two of his ribs crack, and he was sure something was wrong with his

lower vertebrae.

As his body hit the floor, he prayed for unconsciousness. He was not afforded the luxury.

The Dark Lord stalked him like a tiger; he made his way slowly through the room, eyes trained for any movement from his kill.

Even if he could, Snape knew better than to move...any sudden movements would surely mean his death.

"Now, Severus, I'm sure you have a perfectly good reason for rousing me from such a lovely dream. I assume you knew waking me with news of your failure would not be met well; so please, enlighten me as to what could be so incredibly important."

Snape spat, ridding his mouth of spit and blood. He attempted to sit, but a flick of his master's wand kept him immobile. He managed a whisper. "I heard a prophecy concerning you, My Lord."

Snape's hair had fallen over his eyes, so even if he wanted to see his master's reaction, he could not. The quick escape of breath from the other man was all the confirmation he needed to know his master had heard him.

"A prophecy? Certainly you know I hold no store in prophecies. Explain."

"When I arrived, Cassandra Trelawney's great-great-granddaughter was meeting with the Headmaster and interviewing for the position of Seer." He spat again, trying to banish the bitter iron taste of blood from his mouth. At the angle his body laid, he was afraid of choking. "Dumbledore was not happy with what he heard, and he made to leave. Suddenly, her voice changed timbre, and she spoke of you. I watched and saw Dumbledore's reaction; he believed it. After the prophecy, My Lord, she fell, her body convulsing inhumanly. I know of no such potion or spell that could create this sort of response. I believe I witnessed a true prophecy." He had spoken too much and accidentally inhaled spit and blood. He began coughing hard, trying desperately not to vomit from the exertion and the pain.

With a flick of his wand, the Dark Lord lifted him, hanging him mid-air. He stared directly into Snape's eyes.

"Do not blink, Severus."

A force entered his mind, a knife-sharp, piercing presence. It was sinister, and it did not mean him good. Suddenly, it felt as if his brain were being split in two.

Mind rape. He's raping my mind.

I most certainly am, Severus. It felt as if the Dark Lord were putting his brain in a vice, slowly squeezing it until it threatened to explode.

The events of the night played out in his brain: his anger at being told he would teach at Hogwarts, his interlude with Hagrid, his night at the Hog's Head.

The prophecy.

As suddenly as he entered, the Dark Lord departed his mind, a sensation that left him feeling broken and emotionally drained. It was as if there were a hole in his head and something he needed to survive was leaking out. His master ended the spell, and his body hit the floor once more, his right tibia snapping. He felt the skin on his right shin tear as the bone punctured through skin and muscle. It was too much. He began to scream, baying like a kicked dog.

The Dark Lord began to laugh. It was an ugly laugh, full of malice and hate. The low, peeling laughter continued for eons, and Snape felt as if he could go crazy just from listening to it.

His master finally stopped, and the room became deathly quiet.

"I believe you have a child to kill, Severus."

Severus groaned. The only thing he was good for right now was dying. And bleeding. There was no way he could possibly kill anyone tonight.

"Yes, My Lord."

"Meet us for breakfast tomorrow, as requested. I will have your instructions ready by then."

The Dark Lord made to leave the room, pausing as he approached Snape's body. With a self-satisfied chuckle, he kicked his servant's prone form, landing his foot over his left kidney.

"Oh, and, Severus. Never again think that you have the right to be angered by *any* of my requests. You will become a professor at Hogwarts. And you *will* be happy."

The Dark Lord left the room, and Snape lay on the floor, limbs akimbo, sobbing. Every part of his body felt as if it had been ripped in half, and he was becoming lightheaded due to the blood that refused to stay in his body.

"Dobby," he croaked.

Dobby appeared by his side in an instant.

"Help... me."

Everything in the room shifted, spinning in a vortex of pain and misery. The last thing he remembered seeing was large green eyes looking into his, the immense orbs swimming with tears, before he finally lost consciousness.

Ridiculously lengthy author's notes: Special thanks for this entire fic go out to clairvoyant, tonksinger, dickgloucester, aurette, and dragonhideboot, without whom I would have never had the motivation, courage, or expertise to finish this story after over two years.

This story was inspired by a feed, G-d knows where at this point, involving lulabelle, redskyatnight, and a scad of other SSHGers talking about how certain tropes in fandom were getting overused. As you will see in my next chapter, I am attempting to turn one of those particular tropes on its head.

This story is complete and going through edits. It is about 16 chapters long, depending on how I decide to divide it.

This story will be canon compliant. I'm dead serious.

Bolded text is directly from canon.

Time Out of Mind

Chapter 2 of 17

Voldemort's task has Snape travel in a way never attempted before.

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Chapter Two Time Out of Mind

He awoke several hours later, the first rays of sunlight peeking through the greying curtains.

He quickly scanned the room with his eyes and realized he was home. Before moving, he took inventory of his body, hoping to ascertain how much it would hurt to move.

Naked. Definitely naked. He wiggled his toes and flexed his calf muscles, expecting his right leg to protest. The muscle felt stiff, as if he'd run a marathon the day before. The elf must have healed his broken bones and flesh. He flexed the muscles in his thigh, then bent his legs at the knee and rotated his ankles. Everything, though sore, was in working order. He went through the same motions with his arms and determined they were no worse for wear. He moved his head slightly, expecting the low, dull ache of a concussion to kick in, but nothing happened. He lifted the blanket to survey the damage to his torso, expecting to see dark, purpled bruising...he found some slight swelling, but nothing more.

Throwing aside the sheet, he slowly swung his legs to the side before sitting up. After waiting a few moments for dizziness to set in, he was surprised again when all he felt was a bit of nausea. He stood gingerly and walked to his full-length mirror. He turned to study his back in the mirror. There was some slight swelling along his spine from where the bone had been contused, and there was a bruise where his broken ribs had been and the faintest outline of a boot print, but honestly, he was surprised at how well he looked. He had to figure out a way to thank that elf.

Looking at his clock, he realized he had little over an hour before his presence was required back at the Manor. He entered the bathroom, turning on the shower and allowing the water to heat. While waiting, he took inventory of his mouth and tried not to gag at the sight of so much blood coating his teeth. Grimacing, he set about to cleaning them...his teeth may be crooked and yellow, but surely they didn't need to be blood caked. He brushed his teeth the Muggle way, the action soothing him as the room filled with steam. He swished with an antiseptic, which burned his abused mouth. Spitting out the last of the blood, he entered the shower.

The shower beat down on his head, massaging the bump he'd received from hitting the wall. Much of the tension left his body as the warm water ran down it, and he ached to sit down on the floor of the shower and rest... He quickly roused himself. It would not do to be distracted in the shower and be late to breakfast. Moving as fast as tight muscles would allow, he performed his ablutions and turned the water off, shaking the moisture from his hair. He reached out and grabbed a towel, slinging it about his hips before leaving the tub.

He dressed as quickly as he could, his body protesting the hurried movements, and then performed a drying charm on his lank hair and a depilatory charm on his face. Narcissa didn't approve of scruffy men and made her opinions on the subject piercingly clear. He kept the goatee just to spite her.

Turning off the lights, he Apparated back to Malfoy Manor for the third time in two days. He stumbled as he landed, a wave of nausea setting in and his head spinning slightly. It felt like the worst hangover he'd ever had. He wished he'd taken an analgesic potion before Disapparating. Too late now.

Before he could knock, the door swung open, Dobby looking up at him with fearful eyes.

"Oh, it is being you, sir! I is glad you is well! I has this for you!"

Dobby dug into a fold of his tea cosy before handing him a small vial of Pepperup. The small elf's fingers were bandaged, and he could tell that at least some of them were broken.

"Thank you, Dobby." He quickly quaffed the potion as he walked into the foyer. "What happened to your hands?"

Dobby's ears wilted and he cast his eyes downward. "... is being caught for removing the blood from Master's drawing room. Master forced Dobby to shut his hands in a bureau drawer." The elf began sniffing.

Snape growled. He was not particularly fond of elves, but the way Malfoy treated his rankled. "Does he know you helped me last night, Dobby?"

"No. He was not asking Dobby that, so Dobby did not tell him!" Dobby looked at him hopefully, his eyes begging him to be pleased.

Snape awkwardly patted the elf's head. "Well done, Dobby. I will not tell them. Now, please, go announce my presence."

Dobby grinned up at him, a strange, toothy grin that threatened to split his face in two. "Thank you, Master Snape! They is eating in the solarium this morning, sir!" He quickly vanished.

Snape walked away, surprised by his own actions. But the elf had twice put himself in danger for him, and he felt the need to protect him if he could.

He entered the sunroom and surveyed the inhabitants. The Dark Lord sat at one end of the table, Lucius at the other. Bellatrix and Rodolphus sat on one side of the length, her dark beauty outshining her husband's adequate looks, and Narcissa stood on the other side next to her husband, a hand resting upon her ever-swelling stomach. Even in pregnancy, Narcissa was just as lovely.

A chair remained for him between Narcissa and the Dark Lord.

"Do join us!" Narcissa announced. "You look famished!"

On cue, his stomach growled. Cursing his lack of self-control, he walked to his chair. A house-elf appeared, pulling the chair out for him. He sank into it gratefully. As well healed as he was, he still felt weak from the loss of blood. He kept his eyes trained on his plate, waiting to be addressed before daring to speak.

Narcissa crossed to his seat and piled fruit and a croissant onto his plate. "Eat up, Severus. You look positively peaked!"

Snape acknowledged her with a nod, then slowly rolled up his sleeves. He chewed carefully, savoring the flaky, buttery croissant. The juice from the fruit stung his gums a bit, but he was able to enjoy it.

Everyone else at the table conversed around him...Narcissa prattling on about Draco, Bellatrix feigning indifference, but looking secretly jealous. Lucius and Rodolphus discussed Quidditch as the Dark Lord watched over his followers with the look of a benign grandfather watching children play.

Snape continued eating, thankful for the short reprieve. He knew it would not last much longer.

"So, Severus, I have decided how you can repay me for your rudeness last night," the Dark Lord remarked, as if he were talking about something as mundane as the paper-delivery owl being late. The congregants at the table became eerily quiet.

"Whatever is necessary, of course, My Lord."

"Look at me, Severus."

Snape lifted his eyes, praying that his master would not enter his mind again.

His master studied him as a silver chain with a bauble at the end swung from his fingertips. Lucius sucked in a quick breath of air.

"Do you know what this is, Severus?"

Snape studied the object...he had no idea.

"No, My Lord."

"This, my son, is a Time-Turner." Snape's eyes widened; the Ministry heavily regulated Time-Turners. "One of my servants created it, and I have not yet had a reason for using it. Until now." He paused, giving Snape a look that dared him to speak. Snape kept quiet.

"It is a unique Time-Turner, Severus. The first of its kind. In fact, I'm not quite sure what it might do to you. You see, it can send you *forward* in time." Snape dropped his fork. "Yes, my dear boy. I assume you can figure out my plan."

Snape lost the ability to breathe; he struggled to comprehend what was happening. "You wish for me to go forward in time... to ascertain the identity of the child?"

"Exactly. Precisely! And, when you find his identity, assuming I have not already killed him, I wish for you to destroy him."

Snape's mind reeled. He was to kill an adult, not a child. In the future. What would happen to him? Would he age as he moved forward in time? What if he couldn't return? What if he failed?

He felt his master's eyes on him and knew he had to quickly formulate a response. "It would be my honor, My Lord."

Bellatrix looked irate, furious that she was not given this task. Lucius and Rodolphus looked relieved that they had not been chosen. Narcissa looked... pale, her normally pleasant features drawn and tight, her hand ghosting towards her stomach in a protective gesture.

The Dark Lord smiled as he tucked the necklace back in his pocket. "Tuck in, everyone! Severus has a big day ahead of him! And we all know just how scrumptious Narcissa's croissants are!" The Dark Lord began eating, acting as if he did not have a care in the world.

The rest of the meal rushed by in a blur of half-heard conversation and barely tasted food. Eventually, Narcissa called for an elf, who quickly cleared the table as Narcissa ushered everyone to the gardens. Snape rose to leave with the group.

"A moment, Severus?" His master's voice crept into his ear, twisting through his already damaged psyche. He paused, waiting for his master to approach him.

"I do not need to explain to you the absolute importance of this mission, Severus. You know how you were treated the last time you failed me. Do not disappoint me again."

Snape nodded, words failing him.

"I will give you one week to return. If you do not return by then, I will assume you have failed me, and your mother will be killed. Do you understand me?"

Snape swallowed hard, trying not to let his emotions crowd his face. "Absolutely, My Lord."

"Wonderful. I have taken the luxury of sending a house-elf to your residence to pack the sorts of things you will need to take with you. I have also given you a sizable amount of money. Let's hope our people are still using Galleons in the future!" His master pulled a small suitcase from behind an end table and handed it to him.

Snape attempted to smile at his master's levity but succeeded in merely clenching his teeth together in a forced grimace.

"Splendid!" Reaching into his robes, the Dark Lord took the Time-Turner from his pocket. "I have set this twenty years in the future. Apparate to a location you expect will be deserted even in the future and activate the device. By no means run into your future self. It may cause... problems."

"Yes, My Lord."

The Dark Lord walked away from him, heading towards the gardens. "Do not fail me, Severus."

Snape made to leave, his master's words ringing in his head.

Do not fail me.

He Apparated to his attic...he rarely entered this room; pieces of his horrid childhood resided there, items he never wished to look upon but, for some reason, could not purge himself of either. After his mother had moved out and into her tiny apartment, he had taken over the house, but yet he felt guilty moving or changing anything. She had been able to flee the bad memories that remained there after his father had died, but he almost needed them to remind him of who he was and where he came from, to give him constant motivation to rise above his Muggle ancestry.

He went to the attic even less often. There just simply was no reason to. Nothing housed up there was of any value, and the ventilation was awful. There was no way he would ever run into himself up there upon reaching the future.

The Future. What in God's name was his master thinking? He kicked at a particularly large dust bunny, irate that it did not have enough mass to feel cathartic. He attacked a box instead, wincing when his toes hit something hard.

He began to curse, horrible words pouring forth like smoke from a furnace. His hands found objects and threw them about the room, carelessly breaking anything in his path. His body was still weak, and he quickly tired from the effort. He sank onto a chest and ripped open the bag. The Dark Lord was right. Everything he could possibly need was in this small suitcase. *Must have some sort of charm on it* Clothing, the aforementioned Galleons and, surprisingly, a great deal of Muggle money, potions, a potions *kit*, canned food, toiletries, a pack of fags and matches, a bottle of whiskey, prophylactics...*Christ, really?* Well over a week's worth of everything too.

The Dark Lord expects me to fail

"Fuck!" he roared. If he failed, his mother would die. His mother, who had been through so much while his father had lived, who finally was living a happy life, a life which would end if he failed. He could not say goodbye to her; she wouldn't let him leave. She would tell him to hide, and if he had learned anything from the death of Regulus Black, it was not to hide from his master. Snape had never seen the Dark Lord as livid as the day Regulus had died...

No, saying goodbye to his mother was not an option. Snapemight die attempting this harebrained scheme, but he would *definitely* die if he ran.

He studied the Time-Turner. There were notches on it for years, months, and days. So, in theory, he should easily be able to return within a week no matter how long it took.

So, why would his master say only a week? What if... what if the Time-Turner was faulty? What if it was created to self-destruct after one trip? What if it... broke? He would have to ensure that he had the device figured out by the time he needed to return.

He ran a hand through his hair. Taking a deep breath, he Summoned an all-purpose healing potion from his bathroom and quickly downed the contents, hoping that his remaining injuries would heal. It would not do to have split skin for this endeavor. Who knew what he was about to go through?

Snape laid down on the dusty floor, the travel bag laying across his stomach, his hand on the strap. If he were to be moving through time, he would not allow himself to fall at the end of the trip. Assuring himself that he would be fine...that he *had* to be fine...he pulled the pin that allowed the dials to begin spinning.

The room began to whirl around him, motes of dust flying over him and sunlight repeatedly flooding the room and receding into night. The pain was intense; it felt as if he was being hurtled through the air, even though he could feel the hard floor below him. It was almost like the sensation of being on a merry-go-round that an obnoxious older child was spinning too fast. The dust around him suddenly cleared, and furniture zoomed into the room. A woman walked in and out each morning and night, but so quickly that he couldn't make out her features.

He felt disassociated from himself. His body was being smashed into the floor...the boards were going to consume him...and yet his consciousness felt as if it were falling through space. He heard high-pitched wailing in the distance, and it was minutes before he realized it was emanating from himself.

Tears leaked down his face, wetting the hair at his temples. After an eternity of the falling sensation, he finally landed into his body again.

He heard shrieking again, this time louder and decidedly... feminine.

The world tilted sideways; bright lights exploded in his eyes. He lost consciousness a second time in as many days.

AN: Wheeeee, it's a Time-Turner fic. The aforementioned conversation in my last AN discussed how many of the Time-Turner fics of circa 2-3 years ago all had the same formula (with the main exception of the bloody brilliant "Somewhere I Have Never Traveled. . ." by Savageland). That conversation spawned a much larger one about SSHG tropes in general, and out of all of that talking, this lightning bolt of Snape going forward instead Hermione going backward struck. We'll see how y'all think it turned out.

And now, a note on my last AN. When I said canon compliant, I meant big picture. People are born, live, and die the way JKR intended. Some of the minor details may be fudged, because if I didn't, that would just be me copy/pasting JKR. And that would be silly. No fanfic is completely canon compliant. But generally, it follows the high points.

As always, thank you to everyone and anyone who had input on this chapter. I love you all.

A Very Dangerous Man

Chapter 3 of 17

Snape arrives in spring 2000, only to find himself trapped.

Disclaimer: I own nothing Harry Potter related. I'm making no money. Please, powers-that-be, leave me alone to play with my thoughts.

Chapter Three A Very Dangerous Man

Spring 2000

She moved through the house, turning off lights and closing blinds. She would have to wake up early and dust before the visitors arrived once again.

Can't have a dusty museum, now can we?

She always started from the basement and worked upward. The basement housed his potions lab and was always fully stocked with the sort of potions he would have brewed there, no matter what the cost. Only the best for our hero, she had been told. She was responsible for brewing the simpler potions...a brewer was sent once a month to deal the more complicated brews, a situation that again reminded her of her deplorable lack of seventh-year education.

Casting a few dust-repelling spells, she renewed the wards on the shelves. Only she and the brewer were able to access these potions; heaven knew what sort of trouble the guests of the museum would get into if they were able to play with these stores.

She came up the stairs and into the kitchen, surveying the state of the toaster. Sure enough, someone had yet again shoved a piece of buttered bread in it. Luckily, they had not figured out how to depress the lever. She had lost count of how many times she had rebuked a young witch or wizard (or Arthur Weasley) for setting the counter on fire.

The boxes and cans of foodstuffs in the pantry were a nightmare, and she set about straightening up the shelves. This batch of prop food would have to be donated to the local shelter soon, and new food would need to be purchased. She added it to her ever-expanding to-do list.

She grabbed a can of soup off the shelf and moved back to the kitchen. Standing over the sink, she removed the lid, heating the soup with her wand while it was still in the can, yet not heating the can itself. *Tada, magic.* She snorted, amused at her own sarcasm. Using a spoon from the drawer, she ate her meal slowly, trying to enjoy it. Mostly, she just felt saddened by the fact that she could not cook food worth eating...only Ron had managed to keep down half of the food she had cooked on their camping adventure. She cleaned the spoon and replaced it in the drawer, Vanishing the can to wherever it was that Vanished things went.

She left the kitchen and moved to the living room. This room was always the worst...visitors felt they had the right to look at everything but never bothered to put things back where they belonged. It was as if they had never been in a home before; books were strewn over the sofa, potted plants had been moved from the floor to rest on ottomans. This room had the least amount of Muggle technology, and yet it was as if they forgot everything about common decency.

Everyone wanted a piece of him, to touch the things he had touched, to read a part of the book he had read; one strange wizard had even tried on his boots. She simply *must* get the Ministry to approve assistants. The house should never be in this condition after only one day!

Two years. It had been nearly two years since their professor had died. The not-so-reluctant hero. The man who had made it possible for Harry to be the Boy Who Lived Yet Again. The man who loved for all of those years, even after his love's death.

The man they all had reviled in some way was now the biggest hero of the war.

She snorted at this thought, wondering what he would think of his father's working-class home being turned into a shrine. Probably would scream at the dunderheads to leave his ottoman bloody well alone. She smirked; her brain-Snape always made her smile.

She needed to get out more.

Finishing her evening duties, she walked up to the second floor before pulling the string that released the stairs to the attic. She ascended to her new home. Well, not so new now. She had lived here for well over a year at this point... long enough to consider the attic "home."

She walked through the attic of number nine, Spinner's End, straightening up as she walked. The attic originally had been one large, drafty room. She had hired carpenters to install a bathroom at the far end. The main portion of the room was split into a bedroom and living room area. It didn't afford much privacy when guests came, having no partition between the two, but she didn't mind much. Guests rarely visited, anyhow.

She continued moving through the attic, picking up a little here and there...books on the coffee table to be reshelved, socks to be put in the hamper. She did not know why she bothered; no one ever came to visit her here. For Ron and Harry, the house was connected with the guilt they still had for letting a man die; for others, it was a dreary, drafty attic that would never be more than a set of rooms.

To her, the attic was a *home*. The space was ample, the shelves full of books she never could have afforded on her own, books from his own library, the hearth warm in spite of the draftiness. It was a place to hide, to recover, to heal after the war.

No, no one ever visited of their own accord, certainly not Ronald. Their row eighteen months prior had been final. The boys dealt with their war guilt by fleeing it...she mastered hers by confronting it head-on. When she had announced to them that she intended to take the position of curator of the Severus Snape Museum, Ron had been livid. In his mind, in his perfect world, Hermione would move in with him in a small house adjacent to the Burrow, and then they would live happily ever after. Happily ever after did *not* happen in Severus Snape's attic; Ron had told her as much before asking her to leave his parents' house.

And certainly not her parents. She had never returned to Australia to find them. Until she could answer their questions about the war to her own satisfaction, she could not face them. She often wondered if they were okay...if she had made the right decision to send them away. Somehow, she thought that going back to them might actually be worse. How would they react to their only daughter doing something so horrible to them without their consent?

She had taken on the curatorship, expecting it to be a temporary job, while she studied for her NEWTs. The position had quickly taken over her life: books to archive, personal notes to bind and collate, musty boxes in the attic to delve through. Days spent sifting through the moldering pieces to determine Snape's favorite childhood toy or type of tea. Much of the work was mindless, exactly what she needed to deal with her post-war thoughts.

At this point, she probably knew more about Severus Snape than anyone who had actually known him. She knew that he had a small scar on his hand where Hagrid's puppy had bitten him when he was a fourth-year. Tears had poured down her face when Hagrid recounted that story; the idea of Severus Snape playing with a Great Dane puppy was just too endearing and out of character, and she had collapsed in a fit of giggles.

She knew that his father had not been a physically abusive drunk, which most people had assumed. No, Tobias Snape was much more subtle, much like his son. His barbs were sharp and they cut deep; even years later, Snape had written with vivid emotion about the slurs and insults cast on him as child, as if he still heard the words daily.

And yes, though he was loyal to Lily for all of those years, he had companionship...a woman named Barbara who lived on his street, another younger woman from Hogsmeade. No, Snape was not the promiscuous type. He found one woman and went to her faithfully. Kind of flew in the face of all those jokes...about Snape wasting Galleons on whores...that were whispered in the halls of Hogwarts

At this point, she knew more about him than she probably cared to, but the person responsible for his memory had to know and care. Lord knows Rita fucking Skeeter hadn't given him the respect he deserved. To be sure, she painted him as a hero, an Edward Rochester of a dark, brooding man. And naturally, there was some small room for comparison. But hell, she had basically used Snape's life as a vehicle to rewrite Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights *combined*, and no one had seemed to notice.

The sun had set, and Hermione readied herself for bed. Her routine was comforting. It gave her purpose in the evenings after the hubbub of the day had diminished and the visitors had left. She moved to the bathroom, setting the tub to fill with a flick of her wand. She clipped her hair atop her head; it was shorter these days, no longer than her shoulders, really. She wasn't sure it did much for her looks, but at least it wasn't as heavy.

Her evening bath was *her* time...no cataloguing Severus Snape's life, no annoying visitors, no one demanding she keep living in the memories of the war. She soaked in the tub for maybe twenty or thirty minutes every night, but it was what she needed to soothe her sore muscles and tense shoulders.

When the water got cold, she got out, wrapping herself in an oversized towelling robe. She continued her ritualistic preparations, applying moisturizer to her skin, brushing her teeth, preparing a bedside glass of water. Sliding off the bathrobe, she hung it over the back of a wooden chair before crossing to the bureau.

She always wore the same types of nightclothes, short, satiny nightgowns skimming the tops of her thighs, thin straps over her shoulders barely holding it on. It helped her to go to bed feeling pretty. She knew it was probably silly, but if she felt happy and pretty going into sleep, her nightmares didn't come.

And she did have nightmares, usually about *him*; as if she didn't get enough of his life during the day, visions of his death haunted her. And, of course, her guilt for leaving him to die. Once she had realized that trying to make herself happy every night actually helped keep the dreams away, she started doing small things...like her bath, her silly lingerie, and reading truly pointless fiction before sleeping. If nothing else, it kept her occupied on lonely nights such as... well, every night.

It was a warm night in Spinner's End, the first of the spring nights that give way to warmer summer days. She opened the window to allow a small breeze to course through the room before crawling into bed, luxuriating momentarily in the feeling of cool sheets on her skin. She reached for the book on her bedside table, the latest Muggle fantasy novel about witches and magic and a land far away. She had a fascination with Muggle fantasy novels and loved seeing how close to or far off the mark the authors were.

She was deeply immersed in her novel when a noise pulled her from the pages...a low, keening noise...almost like someone screaming from far away. The noise intensified in volume before a loud burst of energy rocked the house.

Though nothing noticeably fell, the sound of something landing in her room was deafening. She scrambled to the edge of the bed to look; whatever had "fallen" had "landed" beyond her line of sight.

On the floor was a man, curled in the fetal position, facing away from her, a silver chain with a glowing bauble about his neck and a small travel bag lying next to him. He was whimpering. He slowly rolled to his back, his hair moving away from his face.

The face was that of her nightmares, unlined and young, the body lying in the same position she had last seen in the Shrieking Shack. He opened his eyes and stared directly at her face.

The volume of her scream shocked even her as it left her body. The man's eyes rolled back into his head, and he went limp from loss of consciousness.

Hermione fled the room, grabbing her wand on the way to the bathroom. Once inside, she warded the doors heavily before violently retching into the toilet.

Hermione knelt over the toilet, her forehead resting on the cool porcelain. In any other state, she might have been horrified by her lapse in proper hygiene, but right now the cool sensation was grounding her.

Pull it together, Granger. Whatever just happened out there was the result of an overactive imagination. It's just a boggart or something. Just keep it together. Go out there, and take care of it like the witch you are!

She stood and looked at her face in the mirror, noting how pale she looked. Wiping her face with a damp flannel, she tied her hair up, washed out her mouth, and went back out into the room to deal with the intruder.

She went into the room, expecting to find whatever had frightened her to be gone. It was still there.

She walked towards him slowly, attempting to be as quiet as possible, which was difficult as most of the old attic floorboards groaned when walked on. She managed to make it across the room without rousing him and took a closer look.

It was definitely a young Professor Snape, or someone glamourised to look like a young version of him. *If this is a boggart, why does it look like this?* The Professor of her nightmares was always older and more... dead.

She squared her shoulders and conjured up her happiest memory. She had to go back a long time, now. All her memories of school were marred by the war, and her memories of Ron had stopped bringing her happiness. She thought of the day she received her Hogwarts letter and the subsequent visit from Headmistress McGonagall. She remembered how happy she was to find out that at least in someone's world she was "normal."

Hoping whatever was in her house would stay asleep, she quietly crossed the room, wand in hand. Raising a shaky hand, she cast the spell she hoped would solve her problems.

"*Ridikkulus!*"

This was no boggart. The man jerked awake, fiercely clawing for his wand.

She quickly disarmed him, his wand flying into her other hand, and Summoned his bag. Thick ropes issued from her wand, and she used them to lift the man into a nearby armchair, binding him tightly to the chair, gagging his mouth. She placed the bag next to her. A second flick of her wand sent his medallion into her hand.

She had really hoped the creature was a boggart and that her first spell would solve her problem. As such, she would now have to deal with whatever this was.

Whatever it was, it was clearly outraged by her behavior. His eyes bulged, and his cheeks puffed in anger. He pulled against the ropes, trying to free any part of himself.

"Sir, my name is Hermione Granger. Given your unannounced, uninvited entrance to my home, I can only assume you mean me harm. I do not wish to injure you, but rest assured I will if you so much as attempt to hurt me. I am a war veteran, and you will *not* win any fight you enter into with me. Is this clear?"

His eyebrow arched, and he gave her a look that clearly meant he didn't believe her. She breathed in sharply, a response to a gesture she had not seen these past few years. While it was clear he did not find her threatening in the slightest, he did, however, calm his movements and began staring at her blankly.

"Sir, I will remove the gag on your mouth in a moment, but you must know that if you say anything remotely untrue to me, I will have an Auror here in less than a minute. Do you understand?"

He gave a small nod of acquiescence, one that she would not have recognized as such without years of classes with the man. She slowly crossed the room, hands in plain sight, trying not to startle him.

Her hands came around his head to untie the gag. She cursed inwardly as she realized one of the straps of her negligee was slipping from her shoulder. As she pulled back, she noticed he was ogling her breasts. As she removed the gag, she quickly righted the strap before Summoning her robe. More suitably dressed, she sat on the end of her bed and stared into his eyes.

"Who are you?" she asked, maintaining eye contact with him and probing slightly into his brain. One of the benefits of being an expert on all things Professor Snape was that she had read all of his journals multiple times, including the passages where he recounted how he had learned Legilimency. Hermione Granger had never read anything she could not master, and she had quickly learned the art.

She had expected some resistance and was surprised when she slid easily into his mind. And yet she felt fear...a memory of being Legilimized by the Dark Lord very recently. *Whoever this is, it isn't the Severus Snape of the war.*

"My name is Severus Tobias Snape. What the fucking hell have you done to my attic!"

Her eyes widened; she almost fell off the bed. Whoever he was, he wasn't lying to her. This man definitely thought he was Severus Snape. His eyes narrowed; he knew she was in his mind. She kept the connection open.

"And, Mr. Snape," she paused, "how old are you?"

"Twenty," he ground out.

Again, no trace of lying. She could feel his hesitance, though. "Do not consider closing your eyes, Mr. Snape; I have Veritaserum."

He flinched. She pushed farther, searching for the events of his last days before today.

"Mr. Snape, this is no longer your house. I have lived here nearly eighteen months. Why are you here?"

She could tell he was trying to come up with a lie...anything to keep a secret. But what was the secret? She broke the connection with his thoughts, fingering the medallion. The etchings seemed very familiar... but normally, these items were... gold?

She gasped. It was a Time-Turner. It had to be. *But why was it silver?*

She crossed back to him, grabbing his face between her hands and jerking upward to force him to look at her. He struggled but stopped when she roughly dug her fingernails into his cheeks. She stared into his eyes hard, searching for answers. Normally, she kept from using her Legilimency skills; she knew what it was like to have your mind open as such to someone, and she didn't like making anyone feel that vulnerable. But, in this instance, she was terrified of the idea of *not* finding the answers she sought more than she was concerned about causing him mental anguish.

She rifled through his memories, finding every single thing Harry told her he had witnessed in the Pensieve the day Professor Snape had died. She pushed in further, but the reason he was in her attic was eluding her like a child trying to evade punishment. He clearly was no Occlumens, but his survival instincts were in full gear.

She finally pinned the memory in a corner of his mind, witnessing everything from the night before. She watched his body being broken. The sight of Dobby caused her to actually gasp aloud as a sharp reminder of how much the elf sacrificed for those he cared about tore through her heart. She clutched her chest as she thought of it, unconsciously rubbing the spot where Dobby had been mortally wounded by Bellatrix's blade.

She pressed onward, watching the breakfast, the conversation with Voldemort, his willingness to go forward in time and murder a complete stranger, his thoughts in the attic; regardless of how he felt about saving his mother, this was definitely a fully committed Death Eater in her attic.

She witnessed the pain of the time travel itself.

The object definitely was a Time-Turner.

She reeled backwards, once again breaking the connection. She tripped over her feet and spilled to the floor. Hunched over, she sobbed in long body-wracking wails. She had not cried like this since the end of the war, and the tears came. It was him. It was *really* him, somehow, some way. Everything she and Harry and Ron felt so guilt-ridden about was currently sitting, tied up, in his... *her* home.

She went on like this for several minutes before an exasperated growl roused her.

"Woman, would you please desist. If you really are a 'war veteran' as you claim, nothing you saw should have surprised you."

She looked up, glaring at him. She rubbed her nose with the sleeve of her robe, trying to stave off the mucous pouring from it. Her other sleeve dried her tears.

"You have *no idea* what I know about what I just saw... how this factors into... now. Your future. Do not dare tell me to desist. *You have no idea what you've shown me*"

This seemed to remind Snape of why he was here. "So, I *have* arrived in my future, then, yes?"

She winced at his choice of phrasing. *My future.*

"Yes, Mr. Snape, in a manner of speaking."

"And when did I sell my house?"

"About eighteen months ago, sir." Old habits died hard. It was hard enough to drop the use of "Professor" when addressing him, but the "sir" snuck in like it had her entire childhood.

He looked at her strangely before continuing. "And where do I currently reside?"

Unbidden memories surfaced in her mind. She remembered the day they had all attended his funeral, standing around the mausoleum in the new veterans' cemetery. She remembered being sandwiched between Harry and Ron, the three of them holding each other and weeping.

"Just outside Hogsmeade, Mr. Snape."

Snape did not seem terribly surprised by this.

"And when do you plan on letting me leave, Miss Granger?"

Hermione had not thought that far ahead. What was she to do with him?

"Well, given what I now know, how could I possibly let you leave? As you can see from my arm," she thrust her pale unmarred forearm under his nose, "I do not espouse the same... beliefs as you. Why would I consent to assist you in going against everything I believe in?"

Snape spat. "Because, my darling *girl*, I'm a very dangerous man."

This was getting out of hand. If she didn't get a handle on her emotions, this man was going to get the better of her in her own home. And the last thing she needed was a confident follower of the Dark Lord controlling her. She had to turn the tables, catch him off guard in some way. In exactly the way he would have done to her as a child...

"Dangerous? Were you so very dangerous when you were being hung by your ankle with all and sundry staring at your graying y-fronts? Or how about when you let a *Gryffindor Mudblood* steal your heart? Or, for that matter, when you failed your master by not being able to even hear the entirety of a world-changing prophecy? No, you are not dangerous. Petty, sad, and angry, maybe. But you are not dangerous, and you do not scare me."

And he didn't, really. He had not yet become what had terrified her as a child...the imposing, vile man who had mocked her teeth and graded her harshly for no other reason than her house affiliation and her choice of friends. Now he was simply a man...merely a year younger than she...who had recently made a bad decision. A man who, judging from his response to his torture last night, might still yet be able to be turned.

Veins were sticking out on his forehead. She knew he must be livid. Her *Silencio* sliced through the air, effectively ending whatever vitriol he may have eventually come up with once he stopped sputtering.

"You will not be leaving this attic, Severus Snape. Not until I can send you back the way you came. You will *not* change everything we worked so hard and lost so much to achieve. I will not allow it."

He began thrashing, doing anything he could to try to loosen himself from her bindings. He nearly toppled the chair.

She hit him with the strongest Stunner in her arsenal. His head lolled to the side; he was completely unconscious. She sank to the floor in complete shock and without knowing what in God's name she was going to do.

It was nearly two o'clock in the morning when Hermione finally pulled herself together. Realizing that she only had a few hours, she began preparing for him to awake. She felt bad about leaving him tied up in the chair and levitated him to the sofa in her living room. Laying him on it gently, she pulled blankets over him., casting a Sticking Charm designed so he could move, but at least one portion of his body would be touching at all times. Finally, she put a bucket next to him in case he awoke and needed the facilities.

She snuck downstairs, wrapped in her dressing gown. She made her way to the gallery, an addition to the house created by an Extension Charm and cast by the best charmers money could buy. The gallery housed a copy of Snape's Headmaster portrait, wizarding photographs of Snape and the Prince clan, and framed copies of the newspaper articles about his death and heroics. She never came into this room... it was too difficult to face him. Once a week, Winky came down from Hogwarts and cleaned it for her, receiving a Galleon for her efforts (which Hermione knew for a fact Winky Vanished). Even now, Hermione hesitated, her hand on the doorknob, her forehead resting against the cool door. She had spoken to him just once, the day they hung the portrait.

"Hello, Headmaster."

He gave her an appraising look, judging her for every physical flaw: the frayed end of her sleeve, the scuff on her patent leather pump, the flyaway tendrils from her bun.

"I am not sure why you're calling me that, Miss Granger," he sneered.

"Pardon?"

"It is not as if you bothered to grace the school with your presence until the day I left office."

She sputtered, "B-but, sir, you know why we were gone..."

"I do. And frankly, it is a wonder you managed to find any of the Horcruxes, given how mismanaged and ill fated your mission was from the beginning."

"Well, it's not as if we could have asked you for any help, what with you giving every appearance of being a loyal Death Eater."

"And now, in hindsight, Miss Granger, I suppose you're feeling a bit foolish for trusting in appearances? You were always supposed to be the intelligent one..."

She glared up at him; the guilt and sorrow for her actions overwhelmed her.

He continued. "From what I've been told, you are now the curator of this ridiculous museum. Tsk tsk, I thought we were going on to big things, Miss Granger. I guess I would be disappointed by your complete lack of NEWTs, if I were actually surprised. Had to traipse off after the rest of your Trio. Had to go off and save the world, didn't you? Well, those worth saving, I suppose. Not obvious Death Eaters bleeding out from a snakebite..." He trailed off, using the silence to add more sting to his words.

She began to tear up; before he could actually see her cry, she fled the room.

She had not returned in over a year. Because, as unnecessarily nasty as he had been, he was right; they hadn't taken a moment to check for a femoral pulse or to Summon anything that might have helped him survive. She could have at least tried Dittany. That had worked in Godric's Hollow when Nagini had bitten a chunk out of Harry. But no, they had just collected his memories and fled. They had believed there wasn't enough time to spare...

Nor had there been enough time later to come find him, apparently. By the time they went back for him two days later, he... She couldn't even think about the state of rot they found him in. The autopsy indicated that he died seven hours after the bite. They *could* have saved him.

They hadn't saved him.

And now he was here, in her living room, alive and young again. She had to do something; she didn't know what, but she had to do something this time. Anything to make her feel like the hero everyone else thought she was, instead of the failure that she knew herself to be.

She stood up straight, reaching up to undo the tie from her hair. Shaking out her curls, she took a deep breath, opened the door, and walked into the room.

The room was always faintly lit...portraits did not like complete darkness for some reason. The Ever-Burning Candles in the sconces cast a warm glow upon the room, giving the room a cozy feeling that did not go at all with the heavy weight that had taken up residence in the pit of her stomach.

She made her way to the far end of the room, looking up, fully expecting to find him looking down at her with derision marring his features.

He was not there.

She withdrew her wand, touching it to the portrait frame. "Headmaster Snape, would you please come to the museum gallery?"

She paused, waiting for him to appear. He did not come.

Nothing about tonight was making any sense. She had read all of his personal writings backward and forward, and at no time had he alluded to anything even remotely connected to time travel or *herself*. How dare he keep these from whomever needed to know!

She could barely process what she had seen tonight. She had witnessed his torture at the hands of the Dark Lord, and trying to reconcile feeling bad for her professor, yet at the same time being horrified at the young Death Eater, had overwhelmed her brain. Seeing him had caused so many memories, dreamed about nightly, to surface. It was too much.

She screamed, a loud, angry screech that filled the entire house, which in all likelihood woke the prisoner in her living room. She knew she was overreacting; on any other night, she would like to think she would be in better control of her emotions. Her hands began seeking out items of their own free will, fragile items, breakable items.

The items flew across the room...a teacup, a paperweight, a vase...crashing into the portrait, shattering into bits of glass, some embedding in the canvas, others raining down to the floor.

"You were never there when we really needed you, were you? You couldn't face us...couldn't once find us in the woods and explain to us who you were. You sent your Patronus and tricked Harry into jumping into that frigid lake, but you didn't *come*. You didn't give us the luxury of knowing who you were before it was too late. And now, when I actually need you more than I ever have, you're not here, and you refuse to come help me."

"What am I supposed to do, Professor? You know what's going to happen now that your former self is here. You have the memories of this night. Why won't you help me?" She lowered her eyes, noticing the shards of glass for the first time, surprised at her own violence. Wincing, she stood before casting Reparo repeatedly. She began setting each of the items back where they belonged, delaying the moment she would have to walk upstairs to deal with her... hostage.

A loud thump from upstairs broke her reverie. She sprinted towards the attic...the gallery still in disarray...terrified that he had found some way to escape.

AN: And now we know what is going on in the attic. Thanks, as always, to the lovely team of women who beat this chapter mercilessly into shape.

Thank you so much for the reviews so far. After working on this story for over two years, it's so wonderful to know that people are enjoying this story.

Searching for Answers

Chapter 4 of 17

Both Severus Snape and Hermione Granger have questions. Only one will begin to find answers.

Chapter Four Searching for Answers

He awoke, staring at very familiar rafters...his attic. The light from the streetlamps illuminated the room enough to see objects. He sighed, relieved that he had ended up where he intended to go... but *when*? He started to take in his surroundings; he was on... a sofa? There was no such piece of furniture in his attic. Frantically, he arose, looking around the room. Furniture he did not recognize, a decided lack of cobwebs... oh. He remembered returning, remembered an angry young woman forcing her way into his mind and crying on his floor...*her* floor; this wasn't his house any longer.

He still did not know what year it was or where his wand was. Well, at least he could figure out one of those things relatively easily. He made to stand in search of a newspaper or a newly published book that would tell him the date. He swung his legs over, feet touching the floor.

He couldn't move.

Arse firmly stuck to the sofa, he flailed and wrenched his body, attempting to free himself.

He couldn't.

Irate, he lay back, feet still touching the floor. The woman was serious about keeping him here. *Well, lady, exactly what would you have me do if I, say, need to use the facilities? I would hate to soil your furniture.* He was annoyed, both by his situation and by the fact that his attic *did* look nice. He kicked his feet to the sides, preparing to sit up again, and his feet hit an object. He sat up...a bucket. *Of course she thought ahead to the loo issue.* He sighed. She was not trying to torture him... She was just trying to keep him here. Because of the war, she said. What war?

He heard yelling from downstairs, muffled through walls and floors, and then more screaming.

He began to grow concerned. What if this woman really was who she said she was: a veteran of the war on the side of Light? The Dark Lord lost? But how? Had he truly failed in his mission? If his master lost, then why was his future self living in Hogsmeade rather than rotting in Azkaban? Was he under house arrest there?

Or what if his current mission *had been* successful, but something else had kept them from winning? What if this entire bloody trip was for nothing?

Or what if they *had* won... What if she was lying about being a war hero? But then, why would a person from the other side be living in his house?

No, they had lost somehow. But when? *When is now?*

Without warning, blood began pouring from his nose. Not the trickle of an impending nosebleed, but actual hemorrhaging.

And he could not move.

Roaring, he began grabbing anything he could reach, hoping to make enough noise to bring her back. He seized the bucket, throwing it against the portion of the floor that housed the attic stairs. Finding the pillow, he ripped the case from it and held the sham to his nose, trying to calm his breathing and blood pressure in hopes of slowing the bleeding. The white cloth quickly turned crimson.

He looked for more projectiles: books and a lamp. He snatched the lamp from the table and heaved it at the floor, enjoying watching it shatter into pieces.

He heard thumping from below him. She must be running full tilt towards the attic stairs. He watched the stairs lower and groaned at the sound of metal squeaking on metal. He heard her curse as the bucket and shards of lamp rained down on her head. He grinned.

She appeared at the top of the stairs, hair floating wildly, bathrobe sliding off one shoulder, wand at the ready. He must have looked pretty bad, for upon seeing his face, her wand hand began shaking uncontrollably, and her face went as pale as the pillowcase he held to his face.

"Damn it, woman, I'm bleeding out here. I could really use some help before I die."

She flinched hard at his words but took charge of the situation, rushing to his side.

"Attempt to harm me in any way, Snape, and I swear I'll cast one of your own curses on you so fast you'll think this bloody nose is just a skinned knee."

Sectumsempra...*How the hell does she know about that?*

She cast a quick diagnostic spell on him. He felt a warm sensation in his cheek.

"You have a ruptured blood vessel deep within your sinus cavity, Snape. I'm sorry, but this going to sting pretty badly."

He nodded and held the cloth to his face even tighter, just in case. She pressed her wand into his cheek and murmured a Cauterizing Spell. He clenched his jaw, the tendons of his neck becoming even more prominent. After five seconds, she pulled her wand away and quickly retreated from the bed.

"I'm not going to hurt you! Why are you so skittish around me?" He dabbed at his nose with his fingers, assuring himself the bleeding had stopped. She flicked her wand and banished the gory pillowcase to the bathroom sink.

"Because, sir, I know exactly who you are at this very moment in your life, and you *would* hurt me if it served your purposes."

He glared at her. She was right.

"Miss Granger, at this very moment, I have lost at least a pint of blood in a freak nosebleed, something I never get. I am weak, I am concerned about my own well-being, and I am certainly not going to harm you...unless you give me damned good reason to. I have already destroyed any of the projectiles I could have thrown at you, and as of right now, I cannot even leave this bloody, pardon the pun, sofa. So, no, Miss Granger, at this very moment, I am simply a weak man, the first man ever to go through forward time travel, and all I want is a pillowcase not covered in blood that I can put back on this pillow so I can sleep until my head no longer hurts."

She hesitated. "What do you mean, you're the first? Voldemort..."

He flinched at her use of the name.

"...sent you forward without any regard for what this might do to you?"

"Yes. He has a need, and I am fulfilling it. And now, as you have not answered any of my pertinent questions, I am going to sleep."

"What in the world are you talking about, Snape? You asked when you moved from here; I told you. You asked where you reside now; I told you. What haven't I answered?"

He growled, "What *year* is it?"

"I can't tell you that..."

"Then, my dear woman, I must bid you goodnight." He lay back and rolled to his side, facing away from her.

"You're worried that this nosebleed is a sign that your trip harmed you, aren't you?"

He ignored her; he was too tired to berate her.

He heard her moving around the room, and out of nowhere, a pillowcase landed on the bed and wrapped itself around the pillow. He seized the pillow, punching it a few times before petulantly throwing his head onto it. Moving to the staircase, she Summoned a Blood-Replenishing Potion and a Headache Potion and then approached him. She knelt, holding them out to him.

"Before you ask if I am trying to poison you, tell me why in the world would I keep fake potions in my home? Please just take them."

Opening his eyes, he ascertained that the potions she proffered looked appropriate. He took them from her, drinking them quickly. He gagged at the taste of the Blood-Replenishing Potion.

"I know this is probably a lot for a hostage to ask, but might I have a glass of water? The taste of copper in my mouth is not terribly pleasant."

"Of course, Mr. Snape." She Summoned the glass of water from her bedside table. Placing it in his hand, she rose slowly, Summoning the bucket. She placed it by his bedside before retiring to her bed.

He attempted to stay awake, hoping to make some sense of everything that had happened that night. He only managed a few moments before his body took over, and he fell into a deep sleep.

She watched him as he slowly awoke, sitting up and rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

"I am sorry for any unkind words we had last night, Mr. Snape," she began abruptly. "I have to go to work now; I should be back in the early evening. I have made you breakfast; I hope it is to your satisfaction. I have lifted the spell from the sofa, so you are free to move about the attic...the attic *only*. I have removed any implements you may use to leave; do not search for Floo powder, your wand, or your Time-Turner because they are not here.

"I have cast my strongest wards on every exit from this level; you will not be able to leave. Do not try. I *will* know. Please feel free to use any of the amenities and to peruse any book you wish...they all are from your time, and after all," she said, smiling, "most of them *are* yours.

"I have removed any object that would tell you what year this is, so please do not ransack my house. You will find nothing of use to you. Furthermore, I have removed anything that may be used as a weapon. Do not try to ambush me when I return home. I have left you towels in the bathroom and clothing on the sofa; please make yourself as comfortable as possible. You will find sandwiches prepared in the basket on the coffee table. I cast a stasis charm over them, so they should remain fresh. Do you have any questions?"

He glared at her, annoyed by her obviously rehearsed speech. "Just one. When will you let me go?"

She smiled. "As soon as I figure out what caused that nosebleed. I need to ensure that your return trip doesn't cause a brain hemorrhage so bad that it kills you. We couldn't have that, now, could we?"

She placed the tray in his lap and turned to leave. At the entrance to the attic, she turned around. "Oh, I almost forgot. *Muffliato! Silencio!*" She descended the stairs.

At the bottom of the stairs, she lifted the door back into place, casting every ward she knew on the entrance, finally casting an Imperturbable Charm. If it worked for Molly Weasley during all of those Order meetings, then hopefully it would work for her.

She made her way to the foyer, preparing to open the museum for the day. She hoped that she would find her home, and its occupant, in the same condition that she left it.

The lunch hour quickly approached, and she shoed the guests out of the museum. Hopefully, her two-hour break would give her enough time to try to find answers to her questions.

She stepped outside, casting wards on the entire house to keep him from leaving in the event that he actually managed to make it out of the attic. Walking to the alley, she looked around to ensure no one was there and Apparated to the gates of Hogwarts.

The castle was looking better than it had in months. Most of the damage had been fixed, and the grass was actually growing back properly on the grounds. Professor Sprout should be proud.

She walked through the gates and up the path to the main doors. They opened for her, and she entered hesitantly. She had not returned since the Final Battle.

She reached the Headmistress' office and whispered the master password for the gargoyle, known to few and one of the many "perks" of being a member of the Golden Trio. She rolled her eyes. Sometimes it was nice to be able to cut through the red tape of bureaucratic nonsense, but how did no one else see how huge of a security problem giving out such information was?

She reached the top of the stairs and knocked on the main door to the office. She heard the Headmistress beckon her to enter, and she, as calmly as possible, opened the door.

"Hermione Granger! What are you doing here? Is something the matter?"

Hermione sighed. She needed to make a point of visiting more often if Headmistress McGonagall automatically assumed something was wrong just because she showed up.

"No, nothing at all. I just wanted to visit!"

The headmistress looked at her, shocked, but quickly recovered. "Do come in. You've been away far too long."

"I know, Headmistress. I am sorry about that..."

Hermione sat, fidgeting. Snape was there in his portrait, staring at her; his dark eyes felt as if they were boring holes into her skull. She opened her mouth to speak to him but quickly closed it. He gave her a long-suffering look before disappearing to one of his other portraits.

The Headmistress summoned a house-elf, who came with a tray of tea items and placed it on a low table between the two of them before serving Hermione a cup.

"So, my dear, how has everything been at the museum?" The Headmistress' tone implied she was not happy with Hermione's career position, but she did not elaborate.

"Wonderful, actually. I have been able to do a lot of research and readings from Headmaster Snape's collection, and I am learning much that would have been hard to achieve in any academic setting. That is, when the books don't bite or try to maim me."

The Headmistress chuckled. "Leave it to Severus to leave behind a library of books that could protect themselves! And how is Ronald doing?"

Hermione groaned. "I'm not sure. I haven't seen Ron in about a year. Ever since we broke things off, it's been... difficult for him to see me."

The older woman tsked. "Come now, surely this curatorship, though admirable, was not worth your relationship with Ron. How has it affected your friendship with Harry?"

"Well, I see Harry every now and again. We have met in Diagon Alley a few times... without Ron or Ginny. I... I never expected any of this."

"Then why in the gods' names did you ever take on that job? Surely, finishing your NEWTs would have been the wisest course of action. I cannot believe you of all people let your education go."

Hermione fought to keep her dismay from showing on her face... This conversation was not going at all as she had planned.

"I had to. We just left him there... I owe him this, at least."

Hermione could have sworn she heard a snort emanate from the portrait wall, but she did not see a slip of Snape in his frame.

"This guilt is not good, Hermione. It is going to end up destroying you. Trust me, I have watched so many make this mistake, Severus included. Do you truly think he was always the way he was? Yes, he was surly at his best and a downright menace at his worst during school, but he did have a sense of humor and even had friends. His guilt over Lily's death ate him alive." She paused, sipping her tea. "As much as it pains me to say this, it is quite possibly a good thing that Severus died the way he did...I don't know what he would have done with himself after the war."

Hermione had not considered this before. What *would* Snape have done after the war? It certainly would have been difficult for him to stay at Hogwarts after his perceived reign of terror, and from everything she'd gathered from studying his life, she was fairly confident that the last place he would have wanted to return to was Spinner's End. What *would* he have done?

They both sat in silence, sipping their tea, lost in their thoughts. Hermione finally broke the silence.

"Actually, I did want to ask you about something I read in one of the Headmaster's books. About Time-Turners."

"I didn't know you were still interested in Time-Turners?"

"Well, you know, with all of my experience using one third year, it's always interested me..." She trailed off, hoping the Headmistress would take the bait.

"Well, dear, what have you read?"

"Have you ever heard of a Time-Turner that could take one to the future?"

The Headmistress looked stunned...apparently, this was as shocking a question as she thought.

"Actually, I have... There was a rumor that Voldemort was working on one during the First War, but no one ever saw one. There certainly wasn't one in the Department of Mysteries even before the Time-Turners were destroyed..." She gave Hermione a pointed look, and Hermione blushed slightly, remembering her involvement in that day. "But no, none has ever been made; it's merely theoretical. What book did you find it in?"

"Oh... Well, I really don't remember... I mean," Hermione dissembled, hearing another snort come from the empty frame. The Headmistress gave her a look that clearly meant she did not believe what Hermione was saying at all.

"Well, you'll have to share it with me if you do ever remember. I would love to see it."

"Of course," Hermione desperately needed to change the subject. "So, how does the coming school year look to be shaping up?"

The Headmistress began to go on about repair schedules and patching up the Sorting Hat, and Hermione used the opportunity to get lost in her thoughts, smiling and nodding whenever the Headmistress paused. She went on to discuss the possibility of starting a lower school for younger students, and Hermione felt bad about interrupting, but it was almost time to reopen the museum.

"Headmistress, I'm sorry to interrupt, but I really must be going. The museum reopens in fifteen minutes."

The Headmistress walked her to the door, pulling her into a close hug before allowing her to leave.

"Hermione, please don't be so much of a stranger. We miss having you around the castle." The Headmistress' smile counteracted the gruffness of her tone.

"I promise."

And with a final squeeze, she left the office, walking down the stairs, lost in her thoughts. There were so many things she didn't know; so many questions still unanswered. She began making a mental list of questions she needed answers to. First, whether hemorrhaging was a normal side effect of long-term time travel. They had been lucky that it was simply a horrifically bad nosebleed and nothing more serious. Next, she needed to study the Time-Turner and find out if it even *could* go backwards in time, or if she was somehow going to have to find a new one. She was sure there was some reason it was silver instead of gold; she hoped that Snape's books would help.

As she made her way across the lawns of Hogwarts, she tried to center herself. If Snape actually had managed to break out of her attic, there was no way to know what sort of damage he had done to the house. At least she had thought ahead and made him those sandwiches...lord knew how mad he would be if caged *and* hungry.

She Apparated back to Spinner's End, this time appearing within the house. She could remove the wards from the inside that had served to lock him in.

She walked through the house carefully. Nothing looked amiss. She cast Homenum Revelio; he was still in the attic. Happy that her spells had not failed her, she set about reopening the museum.

AN: As always, thanks to my awesome beta team. Y'all rock!

Don't Raise Your Eye

Chapter 5 of 17

Severus is alone with his thoughts... and childhood possessions.

Chapter Five Don't Raise Your Eye

He snarled as she descended from the attic. How dare she use one of his spells against him? If this infernal buzzing truly lasted all day, she would not have to worry about him harming her...he would be completely mad well before she returned.

He sat up straighter and scowled at his meal. All of his favorite foods were there. How could she possibly know what he preferred? The toast was burnt, the bacon chewy, the tea laced with milk and sugar. Beans, sausage, black pudding, and tomatoes, all there. Were his future self and the girl close? He did not know her now, nor did he know of any wizarding families by the name of Granger. *Probably a Mudblood, then.* The universe was certainly odd, sending multiple Mudblood women into his life to torture him.

Not that how he had been treated thus far could honestly be considered torture; she had provided him breakfast and supposedly lunch. She had also left him means of entertainment. Other than the strong Muffliato she had cast, it was shaping up to be a rather pleasant day, this hostage situation and the buzzing notwithstanding.

He sniffed his food and ascertained that there was nothing amiss. He would be out of luck if it was poisoned with anything odorless, but at this point, his options were either death by starvation, death by poisoning, or death by failing to fulfill his master's assignment. At the very least, he could choose which death while enjoying a full stomach.

The food was surprisingly good, but that might have been clouded by the fact that he hadn't eaten in a day. The teacup had a self-filling charm on it, and he was glad to realize he would be able to enjoy hot tea all day. He finished breakfast and set about trying to find a hole in her preparations. She must have lefted *something* with a date on it. She had mentioned books specifically, so he planned to leave those till the end of his search.

He started in the bathroom, inspecting the labels on the many potions and bottles there for dates. Everything had been spelled nearly blank. The bottles gave away no brand names and merely said things like "SHAMPOO," "CONDITIONER," and "PEPPERUP POTION" on them. He was familiar with every potion in the room, so nothing new surprised him. In frustration, he began ransacking a bit, ripping open drawers and rifling through the contents, hoping for anything that might tell him if the Time-Turner had actually worked properly.

The bathroom yielded no secrets, and he quickly moved on to the linen closet, looking for clothing tags or anything that might tell him something. Of course, all of the tags were missing. This woman was good.

He moved back to the bedroom, going through furniture. Stickers had been removed from the lamps, tags from the mattresses. He moved to her bedside table, rummaging through the drawers. In them, he found a bottle labeled "LOTION," a tube labeled "LUBRICANT," and a vibrator. He grinned...he might not have been finding the answers to his questions, but he certainly was learning more and more about this woman. One toothbrush, one hairbrush, a vibrator...Hermione Granger was clearly single.

The books on the bedside table made him chuckle: Muggle fantasy and Harlequin novels. For someone who seemed to be intelligent (her spells masking the year on

everything in the house indicated a certain level of brilliance), her choice of reading material was deplorable. He wondered if the Harlequins were read in conjunction with the vibrator...

On to the living room. Judging from the state of the bathroom and bedroom, he doubted very much he would find anything there that would help him. Learning about his captor, however, would prove helpful at some point. Maybe he would even find that chink in her armor that would force her to release him.

The living room was comfortable. As was promised, he found towels and sandwiches waiting for him. He munched on one of them as he perused the room. She was right; most of these books *were* his and were still in pristine condition. Whoever this woman was, she was at least respectful of his things. But why were so many of his books here and not with him in Hogsmeade? Had he replaced them with newer editions? That did not sound like him; the notes in the margins of his books were invaluable. Were they even closer than he had imagined? Dating perhaps? If he truly were twenty years into his future, she would be nearly twenty years younger than he. *Well done, Severus. Well done indeed!*

He didn't know what his future self saw in her. Judging from their conversation this morning, she was a bossy little thing, something he did not normally find attractive in women.

But why would they be in a relationship? She made it very clear their views on the war were different. And he was very sure she was, in fact, a Mudblood. Would he switch sides? He couldn't imagine a scenario where this was possible. Why on earth would he ever change sides? No, they probably were not in a relationship... But why did she have his books?

It was approaching two o'clock, and she had not yet returned. He realized that she had not said when she would actually return, other than a vague indication of "early evening," and he wondered how long he would be alone. The buzzing in his ears was driving him mad.

He moved to the corner of the living room and found a turntable...it was a good set and had only come out last year... last year in his time. Blast! Even her electronics were all "vintage." He flicked through her vinyls...Black Sabbath, The Beatles, the Stones... Damn, the woman had good taste. He selected The Who's *Who's Next* and queued it up, settling down on the sofa, album cover in hand. The only thing his father and he had ever been able to bond over was this damned album. He flipped the cover over, looking at the back. Scrawled in the bottom corner was his eleven-year-old self's handwriting, in blue ballpoint ink: Property of the Half-Blood Prince.

He growled. *Why does she have these things?* Books were books and, while unfortunate to say, could be replaced, but something was definitely amiss if he had let this album out of his possession.

"Baba O'Riley" crescendoed around him...Pete Townshend's voice haunting him the same way it always had. The song moved through to its inevitable end, and he crossed back to the player...his two minutes of enjoyment quickly dashed by the gut feeling that something was *wrong*. Hermione Granger should *not* have this album. It was just too... personal.

He was terrified. Had he died? Had something really gone *that* wrong? Had he perished in a battle, or had his master killed him, ripping him to bits like poor Black? Regulus, the only pureblood in the group who had never treated him differently because of his half-blood status. Say what you would about the Black family...Regulus had been a pretty decent bloke.

He would never forget the day that Regulus had died... his barely recognizable body... his face so swollen and beaten. The length of his hair and the Black family ring on his hand had been the only indication of his identity. The Dark Lord had made it quite clear what would happen to those who left the fold. His face had been blank as his wand had slashed through the air, magic pummeling the poor man's body and causing blood to arc through the room, spattering on the assembled group's shoes. Snape would later burn those shoes...

Was this girl responsible for his death? Would he fall yet again for another Mudblood? Would *she* end up causing his death in some way?

He wanted to damage things, destroy things, to explode anything by using his wand. Which he did not have, of course. He felt as if his left hand had been cut off; it was useless without that magical appendage.

He paced about the attic, looking for something innocuous he could break. He was hesitant to break anything of his but didn't know what she would do to him if he broke something of hers. She *did* seem powerful.

His frustration was mounting. He started throwing unbreakable things: the towels for his shower, his pillow from the night before, shoes... It didn't help.

He screamed, a howling angry sound that resonated through the room. He stormed through the attic, attempting to open the windows. Each window had a Sticking and Stinging Hex on it; none would budge, and they left temporary welts on his hands. He moved to the staircase, throwing his entire body weight onto it...the stairs did not unfold. He moved to the fireplace, seeing if he could climb out. Charmed soot rained down on his face, blinding him, causing tears to well up in his eyes.

He sunk onto the sofa, head cradled in his hands. What was he going to do? He couldn't leave; that was clear. He was going to fail in his assignment, causing his own mother's death, and he was going to die or be killed. He was bored, his ears were buzzing, and if he didn't do *something* he would scream. Again.

Procuring a towel, he moved to the bathroom. He got a good look at his face...covered in soot and residual blood from his nosebleed, tear trails leaving paths of white through the darkness, looking like a demented blackface minstrel. He sneered at his reflection, morphing his face into a visage of pain.

He moved into the shower and turned on the hot water full blast. Stepping under the steaming stream, he allowed the water to wash the soot from his face. Bits of particulate made their way into his eyes and stung, but eventually, the water refreshed him.

The hot water burned slightly as it washed over the bruises from his master's torture, but the tingling sensation quickly abated. There were two bottles of "SHAMPOO" on the shelf, one a pinkish color, the other clear. He grasped for the clear bottle and smiled...the witch was good, she was very good. She had not left him a goddamned thing that would tell him what year it was. But she had left him just enough personal touches of herself that he could easily unsettle her when she came home.

He squeezed the shampoo into his palm and began to lather his hair. The shampoo was soothing...it had an almost menthol smell to it, and it tingled slightly. At least it wasn't fruity... He grabbed the soap...it was green and had the word "SOAP" carved into the top. He brought it to his nose, sniffing...Palmolive. Well, that hadn't changed in years, apparently. He passed the bar directly over his body, scrubbing away the last bits of soot that clung to his chest.

When he skimmed over his Dark Mark, he paused and really studied it... It seemed... dimmer than normal. Not the dark black it normally was but more of a charcoal gray. He held the Mark under the stream to clear it of soap and rinsed his right hand as well. Pressing his index and middle fingers to the Mark, he attempted to make a connection with his lord. Certainly, if his mission was successful, the Dark Lord would be *expecting* him to contact him.

Nothing. The presence he could nearly always feel...that slight itching of his skin, like when you knew you were being malevolently stared at from across a room...was gone. His connection with his master had been severed. Something was wrong. Had the time travel somehow affected his Dark Mark so he could no longer contact his master? Had his *master* died?

Snape slumped against the wall of the shower, his world slowly crashing down around him. One thing was certain... Hermione Granger had many questions to answer when she finally did return.

The buzzing in his ears crowded his thoughts, sounding like interference over a ham radio. His father had kept one in the attic when he was a child, and he wondered if she had left it somewhere up there. If she removed the years on everything, it was doubtful that she had left any means of communication with the outside world as well.

The water went from being piping hot to icy cold in seconds. *Apparently, she hasn't fixed the water heater.* Not having his wand, he could not reheat the water. He turned off the showerhead and stood in the bathtub, letting the water slowly drip from his hair and body. Eventually, he reached out and grabbed the towel she had left him, buffing his hair until it no longer dripped. Slinging the towel about his hips, he returned to the bedroom.

He approached the full-length mirror and really took stock of himself. The bruising and swelling was no longer that noticeable. He turned and surveyed his back as much as he could...he looked much better than he had even the morning before. Dobby truly was a wondrous little bugger.

He glanced at the clock...three o'clock. She could be back at any moment, or in several hours.

"'Early evening,' she said. What the *hell* does 'early evening' mean?"

He threw the towel back into the bathroom, enjoying the way it splatted as it hit the tile floor. "She's a woman; let her enjoy living with a man...wadded up towels and all."

He entered the living room and found the robes she had set out for him along with a tee shirt and a pair of drawstring cotton pajama pants.

"I suppose she wants me to be comfortable in my captivity. Fine, then." Jerking the pants on, he roughly tied the drawstring. The shirt and robes were balled up and thrown across the room.

"Yes, I'll be comfortable. Shirtless, sockless, y-front... less... Christ, how the hell does she know I prefer not to wear pants?" He knew that one of the first signs of insanity was talking to oneself, but he did not much care. At least it distracted him from the buzzing... and the silence. Amazing how both could exist at the same time.

He was grumpy, definitely grumpy. He flopped down once again on the sofa and noticed his bag lying on a chair opposite him. He grabbed it, hoping she had missed something in its contents.

The clothes, money, and potions supplies were gone. He understood why she had taken the potions supplies and money; she would not want him creating something to harm himself or her, and she clearly did not want him getting far if he managed to escape. She had left the food, toiletries (minus his razor, of course). The fags, whiskey, and condoms remained.

"Really, Granger, hoping for a midnight fuck, are we?" He laughed at his own perversion; hell, at least sex would keep him from going completely out of his mind.

"It was really a mistake to leave me the whiskey, Granger. A big mistake."

He opened the bottle and took a healthy swig from it. Placing the bottle on the coffee table, he brought a cigarette to his mouth, surprised when the snapping of his fingers actually procured enough magic to light it. He slowly inhaled the smoke and held it in his mouth and lungs before letting the smoke ooze out of his nose and mouth.

"God, this feels good. I wonder how angry she'll be when she finds ashes and cigarette butts all over her house?"

He continued to take long drags on the cigarette, pausing every few drags to take a healthy swig from the bottle. At some point in the process, he chose a book from the shelves...some Muggle novel. He hated to admit it, but there were certain things about his father's world that he loved, and mindless novels were among them. He did not really even comprehend what he was reading, but the simple act of scanning his eyes over the page combined with smoking and drinking helped to pass the time.

As soon as he finished a cigarette, he lit a new one with the end of the last before crushing the butt into her coffee table. He loved the sound of the wood sizzling slightly...it blended well with the ringing in his ears. He became progressively drunk, to the point where the buzzing almost disappeared entirely. Eventually, he heard a stir across the room and watched the stairs descend.

A slightly disheveled Hermione Granger emerged from the second floor, her wand drawn in one hand and bags of food held in the other. Snape was pretty well pissed by this point, and his face split into a broad grin at her appearance.

"Miss Granger! Finally back, are we?" He lounged on the sofa, shirtless, his arms resting on the back of the sofa. He gestured at her with a cigarette. "Please, do sit. *My* attic has been so lonely without you!"

She pulled the cord for the stairs and quickly warded the exit. She crossed in front of him, wand still drawn, and sat stiffly on the chair opposite him. He watched her eyes flick repeatedly towards his left arm.

"Oh, do please calm down, Miss Granger. I shan't harm you! I am a gentleman! And 'sides, you are the bringer of food! How could I possibly harm the woman who is keeping me alive?"

He thrust out his hand, startling her, and grabbed at the bags of food. "So, what have you brought me?" He rifled through the bags, ripping through the fake newspaper and tin foil.

"Fish and chips? From The Cottage? How did you know that Mum and I would go there while Dad was at work?" He began to dig into the meal like a child ripping apart wrapping paper on Christmas. "I haven't had this in years!"

"Fag?" he asked, holding the soft pack of cigarettes towards her, raising one up from the bunch with a flick of his wrist.

"No, thank you, Snape. I don't smoke." She then noticed the fair pile of butts on her coffee table...along with their accompanying scorch marks...and winced. He grinned.

"s fair. Did you bring any beer, luv?" She shook her head. "No? Well, I guess whiskey will continue to serve me fine." He stuffed a few chips in his mouth, rubbing the excess oil onto his pajama bottoms.

"So, how was your day?"

He raised his eyebrows. *What an incredibly inane question. She must be more nervous than she's letting on.* "My day? Well, let's see. I ate your breakfast, which was lovely, by the way...the toast was burnt just exactly to the right level of burntiness." He paused, procured another cigarette, and began smoking as he recounted the day's events.

"Then, I began going through our belongings. I say 'our' because you have things you ought not have, Miss Granger. But, we'll get to that later. First, I went through your bathroom...it is wonderful to know that Palmolive hasn't changed in years, apparently. And you were right...nothing there allowed me to figure out what year it is. Someday, you *will* have to explain to me what spell you used to make that happen.

"I then moved to your linen closet, and sure enough, no dates there. You told me not look; I should have listened to you. But I was bored, and what else did I have to do? I did enjoy your collection of negligees, my dear. You must model them for me later.

"I then moved to your bedroom and went through it *thoroughly*."

She flinched.

"Yes, you do well to twitch, Miss Granger. And guess what I found: lubricant and a vibrator! You must tell me what those are for when I finish speaking, madam. Or, perhaps, you might show me?" He wagged his eyebrows lasciviously.

She glared.

"I then slowed my efforts, moving to the living room to try to find something to distract me from the infernal buzzing you left me with. Speaking of which, could you please lift my spell?" With a wave of her wand, the buzzing stopped.

"Ta, dear. Where was I? Ah, yes, I was trying to stop the buzzing. Well, guess what I found to do that? Music. And not just any music..." He rose and climbed over the back of the sofa, reaching for the Who album.

"... but *my* music. See, right here." He climbed back over the sofa, leaning across the coffee table to thrust the album cover under her nose. "'Property of the Half. Blood. Prince.'" He punctuated each word with a jab of his index finger against the album. "And guess what? That's *me*." He pulled the album away from her, cradling it against his chest, flopping back against the sofa.

"So, I asked myself, why does Miss Granger have my most precious possessions? I can only assume my Time-Turner had, in fact, sent me to when I wished to appear, or else you would have been more forthright in answering my questions about when *now* is. Then I asked myself, what kind of relationship does my present self have with you? Certainly, we would not be dating... In this time, assuming I am right and this is on or about the year 2000, I would be around twenty years your senior, yes? So, what kind of relationship could I possibly have with you? My other idea is that you may very well be my child, but as I see absolutely none of myself in your face, thankfully, I quickly discounted that possibility.

"I ran into other problems. Such as *this*." He threw aside the album cover and exposed his left arm. "Look at it. All grey and faded. And guess what? It doesn't work to contact *him* anymore."

Her body jerked, and she averted her eyes. He reveled in making her cringe.

"So, I cannot contact my master, my mark has dimmed, and you have all of my most personal belongings. I can only come to one conclusion, *Hermione*...

"How long have I been dead?"

AN: Cliffhanger! And I'm leaving the country until July 3! I'm a horrible author! I will update as soon as I can after returning, though. I hope no later than July 6!

As always, thanks to everyone whose eyes, thoughts, and words made this chapter shiny!

Tea?

Chapter 6 of 17

Hermione continues to be evasive, and Snape loses his clothes temporarily.

Chapter 6 Tea?

He was brilliant, *far* too brilliant. She should have known he would reach the most logical conclusion in just one day. She should have known he would not just spend the entire day pouting. She hadn't even thought to hide some of his more personal items; she had been so fixated on hiding his future that she had forgotten to take care of his past.

She could see that he was completely aware that she was stalling. She needed to come up with an answer, any answer that would appease this curious and drunken man.

"Dead? Severus Snape, dead? How could you possibly be dead? You are more brilliant with Potions than anyone I've ever met! I bet you could even *stopper death* if you wanted!" She tried not to giggle, aware that he would have no idea why her statement was even remotely funny. It was a problem of hers, making jokes at inappropriate times out of nervousness. It did not help when the other person had no idea why a situation was funny.

She could see his alcohol-soaked brain trying to process her words, not quite believing her logic. "Well fine, then, woman. Explain how you have all of my things, then, eh?"

She was grasping at straws. She took a bite of her fish to buy more thinking time. "Financial troubles." When he didn't seem to flinch, she continued. "Yes, you fell into some financial troubles and sold the house. I purchased the house as-is, including all of your belongings save clothing, and you moved to Hogsmeade." By the end of it, she couldn't even maintain eye contact with him, but he seemed not to notice.

He looked confused. "And how, with my salary, would I ever fall into such a situation?"

"You never elaborated. I took you at face value. You needed money; I needed a house."

"And why do you live in the attic? This is hardly the least drafty area of the house. I avoided it like the plague."

"I've rented the lower rooms to other persons. We share the kitchen." Another lie. She sighed, and he looked at her sharply.

"If you had enough money to buy my house, why would you need to take on tenants?"

She was quickly running out of falsehoods, and her heart threatened to beat out of her chest. "How does your head feel? Any side effects from your nosebleed?" She prayed he would take the bait of a changed subject.

"Head feels fine." He took another drink, then set the bottle on the floor next to the sofa. Some of the amber liquid clung to the corner of his mouth, and he swiped at it with the back of his hand. "You think you're smart, trying to get me off topic. Why do you need tenants?"

"It's a large house, and it was just me living here. It made sense..."

"You forget I grew up here. 'S'not a big house. 'S'crap house. How come you didn't fix the water heater? You're a bad landlady, you is."

She smiled inwardly, amused that his accent seemed to thicken the more he drank. "Erm, everybody who lives here knows magic. It hasn't been an issue before today."

He crossed his arms in a pouting pose reminiscent of a surly four-year-old. The motion accentuated the lean muscles of his arms and chest.

"If you wouldn't mind, Mr. Snape, would you please put on a shirt?"

"Not bloody likely. My attic, no shirt. And stop calling me 'Mr. Snape.' That's my father's name." He stuffed a handful of chips in his mouth.

She smiled...her father used to always say the same thing about her grandfather. "Do you find the food to be satisfactory, Severus?" It felt strange to just refer to him as Severus. She referred to him as such in her mind but had never done so while he was living. Then again, this Severus was not her Professor Snape...not yet, at least. It was hard to reconcile.

He scooped up the last bits of fried batter and potato from the paper and popped them into his mouth, then wiped his greasy hands on her sofa, an impish grin his face. "Told you already. Mum and me used to eat it all the time. Why would we eat something we didn't like? You need to pay attention."

He turned and lay down on the sofa, one arm thrown over his head, the other flung off the sofa and clutching for his whiskey bottle. Upon finding it, he lifted it to his mouth, drinking most of what was left. Only about two fingers remained in the 750 ml bottle. She did not know whether to be impressed or horrified. She hoped it meant he would fall asleep of his own accord soon, so she could have her bath.

"Where are my manners, Granger? You bring me dinner, and I don't even offer you a drink. Drink?" He held the bottle towards her.

Hoping that taking his proffered drink would gain her some level of trust with the man, she took the bottle from him and drank as large a swig as she could manage. She barely drank a shot but could feel the warmth already spreading down her throat into her belly.

"Not bad for a little girl! You should be proud."

"I'll have you know, I'm the same age as you. So if I'm little, then so are you."

He rolled towards her, opening his eyes sleepily. "Nothing little over here, luv." And then he sniggered like a schoolboy.

She had to remind herself that he was barely older than a schoolboy. And so was she.

He began to snore. She dug around on the coffee table before finding the stopper for the whiskey bottle. Capping the bottle, she placed it on the table. She Summoned a glass and, casting Aguamenti, placed the tumbler on the table. He was definitely going to need it. She Summoned last night's bucket and placed it next to the sofa.

She softly padded across the room to the bathroom, stopping to grab clean nightclothes. She made sure they were much more demure than the ones she normally wore...judging from the looks Snape had been giving her, her body wasn't a temptation she needed to flaunt. She snorted...Hermione Granger, a temptation to Severus Snape? Laughable.

She entered the bathroom and began her nightly ablutions. She sunk into her bath, the warm, scented water soothing her tense muscles. It had been one hell of a day, and given she was running on about an hour's worth of sleep, she was grateful that Snape had drunk himself into a stupor.

She wrestled between feelings of pity and smugness. It was hard to reconcile the hero whose memory she kept alive with the baby Death Eater currently snoring his way towards a hangover. She couldn't blame him, either. If she were sent to the future with an experimental Time-Turner that could do God knows what to her, then imprisoned by the "bad guys," she would probably try to drink herself into oblivion as well.

But at the same time, part of her was slightly happy that a Death Eater was getting his comeuppance... At least, that was until she remembered this was *Snape* and not just any Death Eater. It honestly was a lot to process.

A very small bit of her, in the back of her head, wished she could just set the Time-Turner back to whenever he came from and send him on his merry way. That bit was quickly crushed by overwhelming feelings of guilt and shame. How dare she even consider not doing her best by him... *again*? She hadn't saved him last time, and she'd be damned if she wouldn't now.

Except she already had saved him this time, hadn't she? He clearly lived out his life in the past... so she must have figured out what to do.

But how? What would I do in a situation like this?

She pressed the heel of her hand into her forehead, willing her brain to slow itself down. She really did not have many ideas, save to do some research. She figured her "Golden Trio" reputation would only get her so far. *Nobody* could just march into the Department of Mysteries and demand all the documentation on Time-Turners.

And how to deal with him in the interim? He had hated her as a student, so what would make it even remotely possible that he would get along with her now, in the height of his Mudblood-hating glory?

Sir, my name is Hermione Granger. Given your unannounced, uninvited entrance to my home, I can only assume you mean me harm. I do not wish to injure you, but rest assured I will if you so much as attempt to hurt me. You will not win any fight you enter into with me. Is this clear?

Oh God... This young Snape knows my name. Young Snape would grow up to be *Professor* Snape... And when had Professor Snape ever forgotten a perceived injustice?

Was this why he had treated her and her friends so terribly? Maybe it wasn't Harry and his connection to James...maybe it was *her*. Maybe he treated them so badly for something she didn't even know she had done. Or would do... She hadn't done it *yet*...

This thinking was getting out of hand... She was jumping to conclusions that didn't even make sense. She wasn't going to do anything. Snape hated them because of James. She was being ridiculous! She really needed some sleep...

Following her bath, she finished her nightly preparations and got dressed. Her clothing choices were much more subdued than the night before: a T-shirt and a pair of soft jersey-knit pajama bottoms. Grabbing her wand, she opened the bathroom and stifled a shriek as she saw him standing there, still shirtless, staring at her.

She had forgotten the Sticking Charm.

He looked her up and down with a lascivious gaze. "What, no dressing up for me? You looked lovely last night, but tonight? Pajama pants and a T-shirt? What's a guy gotta do? Were you expecting someone last night? Is that why you were all dressed up...? Are you really not single? Is that vibrator a ruse...?"

Drunk. Definitely still drunk. And weirdly fixated on my sex life...

"Snape, I think it's time to go back to bed..." She walked towards him slowly, not knowing what he might have hidden on his person, though where he might have it hidden... She had no idea on that subject, either.

"You're gonna put me to bed? Tuck me in? Keep me warm..."

She grimaced at the emphasis placed on his last sentence. *God, the man is horny.*

He continued with a grandiose hand gesture. "Okay, fine, I accept. But only if you take your shirt off. No shirts allowed on the sofa!"

Taking his elbow, she led him back to the living room. "Absolutely, Severus, but you have to lie down and close your eyes so it's more of a surprise!" She rolled her eyes at how ridiculous she sounded, hoping he wouldn't call her bluff.

"They're tits, madam. Tits I've seen relatively up close. I doubt they'll be much of a surprise. But you are a lady, and what the lady asks for, the lady shall receive." He fell to the couch, face into the pillow. "See? Not looking," she heard, his voice muffled by the pillow.

She pulled her wand from her pajama pocket and whispered the Sticking Charm under her breath, followed by a mild Stunner. Let him think he passed out...

~~&~~

The pounding in his head was only slightly quieter than the sounds of birds chirping outside. He opened his eyes and observed a large puddle of drool on the pillow next to his head. He swallowed, cringing at how dry his mouth was. His stomach rolled...*great, one of those hangovers.*

He attempted to stand and found he was stuck to the couch again. He eyed the bucket next to him, not sure if he should use it to piss or puke. There were pros and cons to both options.

He looked up at the mantle clock; it was six in the morning...more than enough time for her to have slept. He buried his face back into the pillow, not caring about the spit.

"Granger!"

He heard a groan from the other room and cracked open one eye. He watched her feet as she walked towards him. He did not even bother lifting his head.

"Yes?"

"I need to piss." He lifted his head just enough to look at her. She didn't seem to be too thrilled to be awake. Still, even in her casual clothes, she looked attractive...her shirt was bunched up slightly, and he could see that her navel was pierced. *Interesting.*

"Come on, then." A flick of her wand removed the Sticking Charm. He watched her carefully...she had her wand in one hand, fixed on him, while the other hand rubbed sleep from her eyes.

He stood carefully, but it did not matter; his head was swimming in a figurative vat of pea soup. He reached out to balance himself, placing his hand on her shoulder. She growled and slipped his arm around her shoulders, letting him lean on her, her arm sliding around his waist.

"I swear to God, I won't be as nice next time, Snape."

Snape, is it? Last night I was "Severus."

She got him to the bathroom just in time for his stomach to betray him. His knees hit the floor, and he began vomiting before he could even register the pain of his kneecaps smacking into the linoleum. He felt a cool, damp washcloth pressing into the back of his neck and jerked...*why was she being so nice?*

His stomach did not seem to understand it was empty and settled into spasm, wracking his body and pulling at his abdominal muscles but not producing anything. He sat up, his back against the bathtub, and wiped at his mouth with the back of his hand. He closed his eyes, the lights causing so much misery. He heard the toilet flush.

"Please, drink this."

He opened his eyes and saw a blue potion in a vial. "Hangover Potion?"

She nodded. "I understand why you needed to drink last night. You don't need to suffer today, so drink it. Just promise me you will not do this again. I have enough stress with you being here without having to worry about what might happen if I have to take you to get your stomach pumped."

He took the vial, grateful that whoever she was, she had some skill with brewing or knew someone reputable.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

Are you fucking kidding me?"What?"

"Well... You've been through so much the last couple days... I just thought you might like a sympathetic ear. I mean, in a way, I *do* know you... well, who you are in my life. It's hard to reconcile the two."

Reconcile? How different am I in the future? "Are we friends or something?"

She paused, as if searching for the right words. "We haven't been in a position to be particularly close... but you were a part of my daily life for years, and I have always respected you."

He grimaced. No one respected him. That was mostly why he had gotten Marked, in the hope of finally finding some respect.

"If I have the need to talk, I will let you know."

He watched her face, hoping for some sort of sign of... well... anything. She looked sad and depressed.

"Well, I need to go make you some breakfast and get ready for work. If you're going to be OK...?"

"I'm fine. However, if the prisoner is allowed to make requests... tea and toast? I'm not sure if I can handle more than that..."

"I think I can manage that." She smiled at him as she backed out of the room.

What was he thinking, drinking that much yesterday? If he had any hope of escaping and finishing this project for the Dark Lord, he had to be sober... and not hungover.

One day's captivity, and he'd already done something wholly idiotic. He needed to get it together.

He was not sure what smelled worse, the residual smell of sick in the air or the latent alcohol seeping from his pores. Hoping it took her a few more minutes to make his breakfast, he stripped down and stepped into the shower.

He was rinsing the last of the "SOAP" from his body when he heard some clanging in the living room. He turned the spigot off and slid open the shower curtain, stepping out onto the rug.

The steam from the shower wisped through the air, obscuring his vision. As it cleared, he saw her standing in the bathroom door and holding a steaming mug of something that smelled akin to licorice and mint...probably for his stomach.

Her eyes were wide; she clearly had not expected him to be in the shower or to be standing here completely naked. Not one to be made to feel uncomfortable in his own attic, he stretched his arms out before slowly turning in a circle.

"Like what you see, Granger?"

"Squeak" would be the best word to describe the noise she made. "Ibroughtyousometea," she sputtered. He watched her place the mug carefully on the edge of the sink before she scurried from the room and slammed the door behind her.

He could not help but laugh. He was never that confident while naked, certainly not in front of women. But it was fun to make her twitchy. He was always up for embarrassing someone.

He procured a towel from the shelf and buffed the excess water from his hair. Wrapping the towel around his waist, he paused to lift the mug to his nose. It was exactly what he had thought: licorice, peppermint, a pinch of sugar to bring out the flavor... Everything he needed to push his wonky stomach back into submission.

He left the bathroom, mug in hand, in search of some clothes. He opened the door to find her standing just a few paces away from him, eyes downcast, a pair of denims and a jumper in her arms.

"I'm sorry for interrupting your shower. I didn't hear the water running." She held the clothes out to him, still not making eye contact.

He reached out to take the clothes and hesitated, wanting her to look up at him.

She did.

"What? What is it?" she asked.

This is too easy..."You didn't answer my question, madam."

She looked confused. "Oh? Sorry. What was your question?"

He leaned towards her, looming over her. He kind of hoped he would drip on her. "Whether or not you liked what you saw. You didn't seem in all that much of a rush to leave."

She huffed and spluttered and tried to speak. He tried not to smirk when all she came up with was a muttered "Bugger off, Snape" before pushing past him and going into the bathroom.

He went into the living room area to change into the denims and soft woolen jumper. He set his mug on the table, noting the plate of toast she had left for him. As he unfolded the trousers, a pair of knitted socks fell to the floor. He bent down to retrieve them and recognized the pattern... His Grandmother Snape had made these for him right before she had passed away.

Why did this curly-headed woman have all of these important things? He would ask her, but she might continue to be evasive. He thought back to last night's conversation. He had not been so far gone that he did not remember discussing the loss of his "estate," if you could even call this house that. What could possibly go so wrong that he would be forced to sell this place as-is with all his things left in it?

No, she was clearly hiding something, something huge. And he wouldn't be a good Death Eater if he couldn't figure it out.

The water in the shower turned on, so clearly she wasn't returning for a while. He finished dressing and sat on the sofa, reaching for a piece of toast, losing himself in plans of escape.

He had not noticed the water turning off and was surprised when she emerged from the bathroom in last night's clothes.

She did not speak to him, did not even look at him. She just moved to her clothes closet and removed something more suitable for work than pajamas before walking back to the bathroom.

Still not feeling completely well, he took a sip of his tea before lying back down on the sofa and closing his eyes.

A soft-spoken voice broke through his light napping. He opened his eyes to Granger standing over him and looking concerned.

"Are you alright? Do you need another dose of the potion?"

He assessed the damage from last night before deeming himself well enough to deal. "I'm fine."

"I've left you a bowl, charmed to stay full of warm soup, and a plate that will continually replenish its supply of sandwiches. I will see you later this evening. At that time, I will hopefully have a better idea of what to do with you."

He made to respond, but she turned and lowered the stairs, her wand fixed on him the entire time.

As she descended, he realized she had not cast Muffliato. He rolled over to sleep off the rest of his hangover.

AN: Well, I'm back in the States. Thank y'all so much for the wait. From here on out, it should (G-d willing) only be a week between updates. Thanks so much to my beta team for their hard work and for holding my hand through the wibbles!

Stockholm

Chapter 7 of 17

In attempting to send Severus back, Hermione has to deal with her own past. Snape, in turn, encounters his future.

Hermione was allotted holiday time yearly, time she never took. She held the likely deluded belief that keeping Snape's memory alive was more important than giving herself time off every now and again. Yet for the first time, she had no issues closing down the museum. Alive-Snape seemed a much higher priority than Dead-Snape.

She entered his study and began pulling books off the shelves, any volume that might give her any clue as to what to do with him. That nasal hemorrhage had disturbed her more than anything else in the last two days; she had already seen enough blood pouring out of Snape in her life and really hadn't needed to see it again. This time, at least, it had been red, healthy blood, lacking swirls of glittering memories and venom.

Seeing something so like what she had witnessed that night in the Shrieking Shack had understandably upset her. All that blood... It just seemed too close to his brain. What if next time it was not limited to his nose? What if he were to have an aneurysm on the way back?

Pay attention, Granger... Clearly, he isn't going to have a deadly aneurysm because you have figured it out...

Thinking about the intricacies of cyclical and linear time was beginning to give her a headache. She took her books to the kitchen table, and procuring herself a mug of tea, she began researching and taking notes.

By dinner, she had not gotten much further in her studies, nor had she eaten. She had not heard a peep from her prisoner all day, and if nothing else, she was proud of her charm work. At most, she had gleaned that the academy had been doing research in theories of forward time travel since the first rise of Voldemort, but no one had really gotten beyond theory. Theory that anyone who had ever used a Time-Turner probably could have come up with on their own.

She was incredibly frustrated.

She made her way to the front door to go in search of food. If Snape were to be in her attic for any length of time, she would have to learn to cook. She passed by a mirror and laughed at herself. There was a large smear of black ink on her cheek, and several nibbled-on quills currently held up her hair. At least she hadn't used her wand.

Her stomach gurgled loudly, and she smiled, realizing that some study habits never change. For tonight, at least, Snape would have to be happy with takeaway curry.

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The next day was much the same. She was back at the table with no idea as to what she would do. She had spent the morning skimming through his diaries, hoping for some insight into this situation. Snape could often be rather cryptic in his own writings, and it was possible that she had skimmed over any mention of this event and had not understood what he was actually referring to. But as far as she could tell, there was no mention of his experiences in the future or of her. Not a one.

She knew that the Hogwarts library would give her no answers. Books of any real depth were usually hidden, checked out, or missing, and unlike her stolen books on Horcruxes, she didn't figure Accio would work from this far away.

As much as she hated to admit it, a trip to Grimmauld Place was in order.

She Apparated directly to the library, assuming that no one would be in there during the middle of the day. As her luck lately would have it, she was wrong. A figure on the sofa rolled over and opened his eyes.

"Hermione!" Ron looked shocked, but his jaw quickly tightened, and his face looked suspicious. "What are you doing here...?" He sat up, flustered, and ran a hand through his sleep-mussed hair.

Hermione winced...of all the people to run into at number twelve, she had hoped it wouldn't be him.

"Oh, nothing... Just thought I'd come borrow some books."

Ron sneered. "Books, eh? The Greasy Git's old books weren't good enough for you? Though, I suppose you never really did like anything more than you did books."

She sighed. He was making this so much more difficult than it needed to be. Her Ron never used to grimace at her like that. Besides, he was not supposed to be here. She was becoming increasingly anxious.

"Why are you home from work, Ron? Are you ill?"

"You seem to have forgotten that I don't answer to you anymore."

Her shoulders slumped. "Yes, I suppose that's true. But I do need to look through Harry's books. He may be the only person that has what I need."

She was surprised when Ron's facial features softened for a second, a look of concern crossing his features. "Nearly all of Harry's books are Dark on some level, 'Mione. What could you possibly be doing that would require reading what's written in these books? Hell, Sirius didn't even like coming in this room. Said the books gave off a 'bad vibe.'"

She really did not want to talk to Ron about this. If she were to mention Snape, his books, or the fact that his younger self was currently being held captive in her attic, Ron would go ballistic. It would be better to just blow him off.

"I can't tell you, Ron. But it is important. Please, could you just let me get what I need?"

Ron's face turned purple. "You know what, Hermione? Fine. Leave me out of your plans. I was *trying* to be nice. Y'know, there's no reason we can't be friends. Well, that's not true. If you're going to keep things from me, I just... I can't handle that."

"Keep things from you? All I wanted was to talk to you, and you shut me out. The end of the war was hard for all of us, and you wouldn't help me heal. All I wanted was for you to listen. And you pushed me away. So now you expect me to open up to you? You can't have it both ways, Ron!"

"All you wanted to talk about was Snape! He's all that you ever cared about! I'm sorry if I didn't want to have to play second fiddle to a dead man!"

Before she could respond to his completely unfair accusations, Ron left the room the room, slamming the door loudly behind him.

She collapsed on a loveseat, appalled at what had just happened. How had Ron turned the conversation around on her so easily? Taking care of Snape really must have her depleted emotionally.

She cast a charm of her own making over the books. It caused the spines of any books referencing time travel to glow red, making her job much quicker. She had not figured out yet how to use the charm to mark the pages, but at least it was a start.

She shrank the books and stowed them in her jacket pocket. Hoping to find Ron and try to patch things up a little, she left the room in search of him. When she couldn't find him, she cast *Homenum Revello*.

He was gone.

Tears welled in her eyes as she thought of home and spun.

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He could not stand being locked in this attic much longer. The girl was no help. Last night over curry, he had tried questioning her. Asking her about the Dark Lord, about the war, about how it ended, about her role in everything. She refused to answer any questions and finally had cast a Silencing Charm on him before rushing to the bathroom and turning all the taps on. Through the sound of running water, he was pretty sure he heard her banging things about and emitting rather angry sounds. Whatever the answers to his questions were, they seemed to very much make her uncomfortable.

Today, she arrived later than usual with dinner, which appeared to be canned soup and homemade sandwiches on a tray, a far cry from the takeaway he'd been treated with thus far. He looked at her face and noticed red rimming her eyes. Someone had made her cry, and for some reason, he didn't like that. Since Lily, he had tried so desperately to distance himself from Mudblood women, both for his own sake in the Death Eaters and to get away from the memories, and yet he felt his heart tugging in the same old way. Fool.

"So, is being holed up with me so bad that I'm now making you cry?"

She looked at him, shocked, and then burst into slightly hysterical, seemingly cathartic laughter. He twitched uncomfortably.

"Heavens no! For once, the reason I'm crying has nothing to do with you." She dissolved into giggles.

He didn't know which was worse: not being the cause of her crying, or knowing that he'd been the cause in the past on more than one occasion.

Putting down their dinner, she dried her eyes with her sleeve, stuck somewhere between tearing up again and giggling. "You know, you did make me cry the first night you were here."

He crossed his arms and glared at her. She began to laugh harder.

"What's so funny?"

She took a deep breath, trying to quell her mirth. "You have no idea how many times you've crossed your arms and glared at me just so. Some things never change, I suppose."

He wondered why she had apparently irritated him so many times. *Not knowing* was beginning to get old.

"You know, Snape? You're the most entertaining prisoner I've ever had."

His eyes narrowed. "You've held other prisoners?"

"Yes. For about ten minutes. A man by the name of Mundungus Fletcher."

Snape grimaced. He knew Fletcher, a smelly, sneaky thief who resided near his favorite apothecary in Knockturn Alley. He couldn't count the number of times he'd tripped over Dung sleeping one off on the sidewalk in the rags he called clothes. Still, he was sure that to many, the thief would be considered an improvement over himself.

"I am aware of Fletcher, Granger. I am thankful you prefer me to him."

She smiled radiantly, and he felt it like a punch to the stomach. Maybe it was the forced proximity, maybe it was the fact that she seemed incredibly intelligent, or maybe it was that she was trying to help him regardless of her misgivings about his allegiances, but he was finding himself drawn to her. He had seen how the Dark Lord's prisoners were held, and daily he was thankful that she offered him a couch, a bed, warm food, a shower. Had he his wand, he would have been able to break out of here in an instant. Without it, he still might, but how far would he get without being able to Apparate or defend himself?

She still refused to tell him about the Dark Lord or the war. The complete lack of information was making his task more difficult, and he had to admit that was making him a little batty. So what if he did escape? Would he be killed on sight for his Mark? If the Light had won, was he now *persona non grata*? Was he keeping his fellow men company in Azkaban?

Was he even alive?

Something was nudging against his hand. He looked and saw that she was attempting to get his attention with a plate of sandwiches.

"What, no curry? No fish and chips?"

"Shut up. You're expensive. Sandwiches and soup are cheap."

Against his will, he felt the corners of his mouth moving upward.

They ate their meal in companionable silence. Far too companionable for his liking.

~~&~~

He watched her as she prepared for bed, picking up items, her wand ever present at her hip. There was no way he could wrestle it from her; she did not let him get close enough. She always stuck him to that damnable couch at night, so there was no way to get it from her then.

"Are you ready for the charm, Snape?" Her voice broke his reverie.

"No, but I suppose that doesn't matter. I am a prisoner after all."

She did not seem too happy that he pointed that out. She cast the charm on him, and he did not feel a bit different. She was definitely good with her wand. Had he cast that sort of charm, she would have felt herself being suctioned into the sofa. But no matter. Who needed proficiency at *Charms*?

She dimmed the lights and crawled into her own bed. "Good night. Sleep well. I'll most likely figure out how to send you home tomorrow."

He rolled his eyes. She had been saying that for days now. He was starting to lose hope that he would be able to leave here... or complete his mission.

Rolling over, he fell into a fitful sleep.

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He was dreaming. Dreaming of himself in long black robes, buttoned from neck to foot. They looked terribly uncomfortable. In the dream, he was running down a long hallway near Ravenclaw Tower; from what he was unsure. He looked at his hands as he ran and nearly yelped in fright. His hands, yes, but older, more lined, veins protruding across the back.

His father's hands.

He looked over his shoulder to get a glimpse of his pursuers. Their faces caused him to stumble. Professors McGonagall, Sprout, Slughorn, and Flitwick, looking so tired, so very old, glaring at him with such hate as he had never before seen. And next to them, James Potter, his hair long and disheveled, a mangy beard covering his face... a

pair of ridiculous glasses perched on his nose, the glare on the lenses nearly occluding his eyes.

Green eyes.

Lily Evans' eyes. Good God, were Lily and Potter going to have a son? A son who looked like that? And if he had to teach this boy, would it be as unnerving as he thought to look into James Potter's face day after day but see her eyes?

Beside green-eyed Potter was a girl he did not recognize. Both of their bodies shimmered, as if something was draped over them obscuring them partially. Except those eyes.

He turned back and fished his wand from his sleeve, blasting holes in the glass before him. Without even being sure of what he was doing, he jumped from the window, expecting to fall to his doom, when...

The wind caught him, billowing out his robes, making him look like the largest bat known to man. From the broken window, he heard McGonagall's voice pierce through the night.

"Coward! COWARD!"

That word, one he had hid from his entire life, caused him to doubt his dream abilities. He began falling. His wand flew from his hand, and he plummeted towards the earth. The last sound he heard was his own screaming when...

His body hitting the floor suddenly roused him. He awoke to realize he had rolled off the sofa. Rolled off the...

That's why he hadn't felt even a whisper of that Sticking Charm. She had fooled him into thinking she had cast it. The witch was a horrible captor and too *nice* for her own good.

This was his opportunity to escape, to find the answers his Lord sought.

His eyes searched for the clock...10:30 p.m. He had not even been asleep that long.

He crept over to her bed, hoping that her wand would be easily visible on her nightstand. It wasn't. He looked down at her lying flat on her stomach, her arms clutching at a pillow. Her wand was nowhere to be seen.

Bugger!

He had no idea what he was going to do. She probably had her wand somewhere on her person, and there was no way to find out without rousing her. Miserably, he went to the stairs and lay down on the entrance, willing it to open. He poured all of his magical energy into making the wards disappear, hoping for one last burst of childhood spontaneous magic to get him out.

The latches clicked, and the usually creaky gears of the stairs turned silently, the passage to downstairs opening under him.

Finally, the answers he sought would be revealed. And he had no idea what to expect.

He walked through the house, expecting it to have been renovated in some way. Nothing looked as if it had been changed. All of the photos and paintings were the same. The putrid green shag carpet still lined the hallways.

The doors to the bedrooms were opened.

If there are tenants, why are the doors open?

He entered his childhood bedroom and clicked on the lamp. It was *his room*. Just as it had appeared only yesterday. His small twin bed. Football pennants and his OWL results tacked to the wall. A picture of Lily... It was here, all here. Like a shrine.

What kind of sick fuck is this Granger girl?

As his hand approached a shelf full of childhood objects, he felt a jolt of magic. Wards. *Why would there be wards?* He took a small wooden box from the shelf, and popping the latch with the side of his thumb, he lifted the hinged top and found exactly what should be there: a piece of iron pyrite he had found as a child, a seashell from the one family vacation they had taken, the filter from the first cigarette he'd ever smoked.

Closing the box, he flipped it over and slid his fingers along the edge. Finding the one spot on the box that would yield, he pushed, and a secret compartment opened. A brittle four-leaf clover fell into his palm, the sole remnant of the only picnic his mother had ever taken him on. She had handed it to him, remarking that little Princes always needed good luck. Reverently, he put the sprig back in the box, replacing it on the shelf.

Thoroughly confused, he left his room, stopping in his parents' room just long enough to see that it had not been touched, either. All of the things his mother had left behind when she had moved to her flat were still there in the same places that she had left them, things he had not bothered to move when she had gone.

He descended to the ground floor, alarmed at what he might find. He felt like a voyeur in his own home, and it was a decidedly creepy sensation.

The smaller appliances in his kitchen were newer, but the oven, range, and refrigerator were the same. Everything was spotless. He opened the pantry...all his favorite things were there.

Had she lied? Did he still live here? Was she renting the attic from him?

That made no sense. Why would she have his books and albums?

Only one answer made even a remote level of sense...

Morbid curiosity took him into the dining room. Mountains of research littered the table, including some very familiar-looking journals and some newer ones... He would need to find a wand so he could copy them for his own reading.

He turned on the lights over the dining room table and began sifting through the paperwork. The girl had definitely done her research on time travel. Some of these books were positively Dark. He wondered how she could have procured them. He picked up one and looked at the flyleaf; "Property of R.A.B." embossed the page. Regulus? What the bloody fuck was wrong with this girl? Did she collect Death Eaters' belongings? Was his home some sort of crown jewel in her collection of Dark things?

His heart was pounding, his head spinning. He stumbled into his sitting room, his fear mounting.

Everything was in complete order, other than the fact that some of his books were missing. Books which now resided in his attic.

One thing had changed; there, at the far end of the room, was a door that had not been there before. Swallowing hard, he crossed the room and, opening the door, entered

a room he did not recognize. The room was faintly lit, and framed newspaper clippings and photographs lined the walls. He walked through the room mesmerized, barely registering the headlines but realizing this room was devoted to *him*. Almost like a museum...

At the far end of the room was a portrait larger than the rest, wall sconces on either side casting light on a mostly black canvas. He looked closer and, seeing clasped hands, realized that part of the blackness was a person, its back to the viewer. Long coat sleeves covered the entirety of its arms. A long black cloak hung to its feet, clad in sturdy boots perfect for the laboratory. Black stringy hair hung down its back.

A portrait? But that must mean I'm... No. Nononononononono...

"Took you long enough to show up," an all-too-familiar voice said, its timbre lower and slightly scratchy.

As the figure turned, the candlelight caught its hawkish profile.

The last thought that crossed his mind before his body hit the floor was at least he wasn't bleeding to death this time...

AN: I really do love this chapter. In my mind, this is really where the story starts flying. I had horrible writer's block after chapter 6, for about a year, and this chapter finally came to me. I hope you enjoyed it. As always, thanks to all my betas!

The Tale of Beetle the Bard

Chapter 8 of 17

The answers Severus seeks lie not within his portrait but within the pages of Rita Skeeter's tell-all.

Chapter Eight The Tale of Beetle the Bard

He awoke on a cold hardwood floor he did not recognize.

"Wake up, boy. You do not have all night. Trust me."

It all came back to him: hearing that scratchy version of his own voice, the wandering through his home, the things that were so similar and yet so very different. The clear realization that in the future he was in fact... dead.

"Stand up and look at me."

He rose, looking up at the portrait. His face was so lined... so harsh. His hair was stringier than ever, his cheekbones more prominent. The voluminous robes did not hide how painfully thin his older self looked. The figure's clothes were awful...high collar, black from head to toe like a priest. He wondered who the hell let his future self leave the house like that.

"I do not know why I thought you'd manage to get here any faster than I had. That is indeed not how this cycle works."

Snape shook his head. "You've been expecting me?"

His portrait looked down at him as if he were an idiot. "Of course I have been expecting you. Do you not realize that I have already had this conversation? I too have stared up at this face wondering what was happening and would happen to me. I thought it would be easier to be the one with the answers, but now I just find you irritating."

Snape glared up at himself. "Don't you mean you find *us* irritating?"

His portrait continued as if not even hearing him. "Below my frame, you will find your wand. Take it, and cast Geminio, focusing your mind on creating a duplicate of the wand in your other hand. That is two swishes and a jab, so try not to mess it up. Once you have a copy, put the copy back under my frame. You will then go to the far end of the gallery and procure a copy of the biography written about my life; the author is one Rita Skeeter. You will read it quickly. You *will* skip the parts you have already lived...it would be a waste of our time to rehash the history you are already aware of. As I said, you do not have all night. After you finish the book, then and only then will I answer any of your questions. Do you understand me?"

Of course I understand you; do you think me an idiot? It was his only opportunity to get any of the answers for his mission, so he decided to listen to the portrait. He snatched up the wand and noticed it was more worn than his own, but still in rather good condition. Turning his back on his portrait, he swished twice and jabbed, and a relatively decent copy of his own wand appeared in his other hand. Swirling around, he slammed the copy down onto the shelf and stomped towards the back of the gallery to the gift shop area.

As he walked away, he was sure he heard his portrait say, "We're going to have to work on that exit walk." Whatever that meant.

He found the book rather easily; there was an entire display of them on a table. Not liking the idea of reading in front of himself, he wandered back into the living room, clicked on a lamp, and began to read.

Snape would have no idea that sharing the prophecy with his Lord would lead to the death of the woman he held most dear. By that fall, the woman he loved and her husband would both be dead, their son whisked away to a horrible Muggle family in Little Whinging (see my forthcoming biography, Harry Potter: Hero or Has-Been, for more on this topic).

Potter... It was always Potter. Potter had taken his dearest friend from childhood, a friend who would now die based on the damned prophecy that had started this entire trip. *Of course* the child, now man, he had been sent to kill would be the son of his arch-nemesis. He supposed he should have been surprised on some level, or enraged, but the knowledge left him numb.

He realized that there would be no future reconciliation with Lily if this book spoke the truth. In all fairness, the childhood love and affection between him and Lily combined with normal hormonal teenage yearnings had made him think she was the greatest girl who had ever lived. But the separation brought on by their last fight have given him the distance he'd needed to see who Lily really was: a wonderful friend while he'd had her, but never anything more.

Morbidly curious as to what else he would find, he continued reading.

Knowledge of Snape's life after the Dark Lord was vanquished the first time is slim, due in part to the fact that he was a reclusive man with seemingly no friends. Was it due to his inability to act with kindness towards others? Or his physical appearance? While not a wholly unattractive man, Snape hid behind curtains of lank hair and layers of clothing, closing out anyone who may have wanted to befriend him. With his connections to the Dark Lord, regardless of the charges having been dropped against him, was no one quite willing to trust Snape again?

And should they have? Even this intrepid reporter had difficulties accessing court records for the case against Snape after the first war. Snape's only vocal supporter after the first war, Albus Dumbledore, was far from a trustworthy source (see my biography The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore). How the wizarding world ever choked down that story of Snape's duplicity and ultimate spy-for-the-Light status, this writer will never know.

Spy. SPY? For Albus Dumbledore? What in God's name could have possibly happened to him that his life ended as a spy for an arsehole who never stood up for him in school? For a man whose own biases against students for simply being sorted into the wrong house were legend in the Slytherin common room. It must have been a mistake. This Skeeter bint must have been off her rocker. He must have been a double agent for Voldemort. It was the only way. And "the first time"? How many times can one be vanquished?

Albus-Fucking-Dumbledore? Really?

In fact, the only moderately believable sources of insight into the psyche of Severus Snape are the memories he gifted Harry Potter with during the Battle of Hogwarts. The court records for the case which absolved Severus Snape posthumously give a detailed account (please see Appendix III for transcripts of these memories) of some of the most emotionally charged moments of Snape's life. They present (should we chose to believe any of them) a Snape wracked with guilt over selling out his only childhood friend to his Lord. A Snape willing to do anything to make that wrong right.

My concern, readers, was his seeming lack of regret over joining the Dark Lord in the first place. Snape seemed not like a person who was sorry for doing something wrong, but merely sorry he got caught. From his memories, and from accounts of students in his care during the last years of his life (Pansy Parkinson, Draco Malfoy, and surprisingly, Hermione Granger), he did protect them in spite of the threat to his own personal well-being.

Snape was beginning to believe that this "biographer" was kind of crap. The book read as a stream-of-conscious rant rather than a chronological telling of his life. And it wasn't particularly kind.

So the girl was his student, then? That explained her statements of how long they had known each other.

Draco Malfoy, it seems, may be the one person that Snape cared for during his adult life. We know through Albus Dumbledore's private papers that he all but coerced Snape into killing him. What is unclear is why Dumbledore would have put the life of Draco Malfoy, son of one of his harshest critics, over that of his master spy. In a rare outburst of love, Snape not only took away Draco's responsibility for Dumbledore's death through his Unbreakable Vow but also provided Draco with an, dare I say it, affectionate father figure for a summer.

Regarding that summer, Draco Malfoy states, "That summer on the run after Snape killed Professor Dumbledore is the only reason that I have grown up even relatively normal [laughs]. While my parents never harmed me, as many have suggested, I was not raised in an emotionally supportive home. Hell, I was raised more by house-elves than humans. That summer, Snape told me much of his own upbringing. How he watched his mother's magic atrophy in a stifling Muggle environment. How his father treated his mother like dirt, and how his mother pulled away emotionally from everyone. How he subsequently began hating Muggles and Muggle-borns in reaction to his father's behavior. And how he learned to think differently when faced with intelligent Muggle-borns every day in the classroom.

"Snape was never what you could call a warm-fuzzies sort of fellow. But that summer, despite the constant fleeing, the malnutrition, and having to sleep on the floor for the first time in my life, I learned from Snape that the ideals I was raised to espouse were not necessarily reality, that Muggle-borns were not the problem which plagued the Wizarding world, and that it was okay to talk about my worries and fears."

It is this author's opinion that Draco Malfoy was the closest Snape ever came to having a son. This period of time must have touched Snape equally, as in his Last Will and Testament, Snape willed all of his Gringotts assets to Malfoy, with a note attached that said, "Stop relying on your parents for everything; be your own man." Malfoy took that advice to heart, moving from his parents' home the very next day, and ever since, Malfoy has pursued a lifestyle very different from his parents', working in the non-profit sector.

Snape could not envision a world where he cared that much about the spawn of a Malfoy. What the biographer said, though, struck a nerve. The thought of Lucius Malfoy as a parent, which entered his mind every time he saw Narcissa these days, sickened him. To be fair, Narcissa Black was a nice enough girl, but she, too, came from a rather... insane family. Furthermore, Abraxas Malfoy had been a terror of a parent, and Lucius, while perfectly respectful of others in public, was a vicious man. He could very much imagine Lucius taking after his father, using his child as a means of advancement rather than treating said child with the love and devotion all children crave. Snape's own father had used him to hurt his mother on numerous occasions...he knew what it was like to be a pawn.

A sick part of Snape was happy, however, that he had been instrumental in the death of Albus Dumbledore. That man had never supported him as a child; hell, the old man had rubber stamped four Gryffindors' attempted murder of him.

Malfoy's comment about Muggle-borns not being a problem stood out to him. Being a part of the Death Eaters had always been problematic for him. Snape had always been caught between the two worlds...living in the Muggle world while going to school at Hogwarts. He associated home with negativity, with his father and his boorish behavior. Growing up with Lily and Petunia as playmates had given him a glimpse into what "normal" Muggle living was like, but he had always been resentful of their happy world. As Petunia became more and more disparaging of her sister's and Severus' magic, and as Lily became more enamored of the Mauraunders, it had been

completely easy to write off Muggles and Muggle-borns entirely.

Therefore, from day one, the Dark Lord's anti-Mudblood ideology had resonated with him, even if somewhere deep down he knew it was not completely true. Many of his peers were pureblood, and true, most of said peers mocked him on a semi-regular basis for his "impure ancestry," but Snape had always thought he could prove himself in spite of his heritage. Though after the beating he had taken from the Dark Lord only days before, it did not seem like his intentions mattered all that much in the end.

He kept coming back to Regulus. Black's pureblood status had not kept him safe, either. If the preservation of pure Wizarding heritage was really his Lord's goal, Regulus should have just been punished severely rather than butchered. That incident reminded Snape just how much his life really was in another man's hands...a man who did not flinch when it came to using violence. Snape rubbed his left arm absently, the memories of his recent torture causing phantom pains to shoot through his Mark.

Though his portrait had instructed him to skip to the portions of the book recounting his life so far, he had to know how history remembered that event. He flipped back in the book and continued reading.

The death of Regulus Black for deserting the Death Eaters was a moment that forever plagued Severus Snape. It is highly possible that this was the moment that Snape began questioning the ideology of the Dark Lord. Ironic, given the Dark Lord did not actually kill Black. Through the Pensieve memories preserved by Albus Dumbledore, we find that Black actually had died attempting to bring down the Dark Lord. Black had become aware of the Dark Lord's Horcruxes (see footnote for a detailed explanation of Horcruxes) and became enraged when the Dark Lord intended to use the Black family's house-elf, Kreacher, as part of the planning.

When Black disappeared, the Dark Lord was infuriated. The last thing he wanted was any of his followers to think they could leave the fold. You-Know-Who staged the death of Black to make a point to his Death Eaters.

The manner of Black's death forever left its mark on Snape. Pages and pages of Snape's journals over the years were devoted to the topic of losing such a close friend in such a gory manner.

Horcruxes? What was the Dark Lord getting into? While Snape had never had concerns about the use of Dark magic in general, Horcruxes were a whole level of Dark he wasn't quite prepared to align himself with.

This was not the sort of thing he had signed up for. Then again, neither was being beaten within an inch of his life. He still was left wondering how had Regulus died. While he was glad his friend had not had to endure such a terrible death, he could not help but feel bad for the poor Muggle who had been murdered in his place, blood status aside. Snape just hoped Regulus' death had not been somehow worse.

As he read about himself, he noticed a common theme: friendless, unloved, alone. If he were going to leave the Death Eaters, and *die* in the process, how was this life he would lead even remotely worth it? He did not have many close friends now, but at least he was *alive*, not teaching snot-nosed brats under the leadership of his most hated teacher. The Dark Lord might abuse him, but he never chose sides over him with other Death Eaters. In that way, he supposed his Lord was fair: he beat all of them with equal vigor. He waited until they had branded themselves for life to reveal this, but he was at least egalitarian in his cruelty.

Snape had to know how he would die. Was it to be a hero's death? It must be if there was a museum in his honor. But how? Would he save someone? Would he kill many people only to be struck down at the very end? Surely, he would not have died in some horrible, pathetic way if people came all the way to the industrial north of England to paw at his things. He was hit with a wave of gratitude that so many of his personal belongings were currently in the attic...she at least had enough respect for him to keep some of his prized items safe.

He found "Snape, Severus...death of" in the index and flipped to the appropriate section.

The death of Severus Snape remains a mystery to Healers and conspiracy theorists alike. The wound caused by the vicious attack on his person by Voldemort's basilisk-hybrid Nagini would have surely murdered any other man, yet we know that Snape was one of the greatest Potion masters of his age. Snape's autopsy revealed trace amounts of antivenin in his system, causing Healers to believe that Nagini's venom did not kill Snape, but rather the massive loss of blood did.

Harry Potter, Ronald Weasley, and Hermione Granger, all three who witnessed the snake attack, have since admitted that due to the massive blood loss and the stillness of his body, they had believed Snape to be dead when they left the Shack. Snape's parting gift to Potter was a collection of memories, which Potter then used in part to defeat You-Know-Who. It was the giving of these memories that many Healers believe led to his death.

Corroborating this belief, and unexplainable to any of the experts who examined his body, was evidence of a nasal hemorrhage which began sometime after the Trio had left. While the wound on his neck appeared coagulated (somehow the fangs just barely missed any major veins or arteries, slicing primarily through muscle and other soft tissues), this nasal hemorrhage likely caused such a severe loss of blood on top of his prior injuries, and it is believed that Snape bled to death.

Some believe that the sheer loss of that many memories at once (it is never recommended to extract more than one memory at a time) caused the hemorrhage that took Snape's life. Other Healers noted evidence of a competently healed hemorrhage in his nasal passages that was not corroborated by his medical records. Did Snape suffer from some medical condition unknown to those around him? Did the giving of his memories cause his own death?

Or, as others have suggested, did the consummate Potions master end his own life, wanting a hero's death? Mundungus Fletcher went on the record stating, "Severus Snape, die of an effin' snakebite? Are you off your rocker? Naw, Snape was always too slippery for that sort of thing. He'd've thought it out and realized that all of his old blokes would be dead or in Azkaban after this fight, see? What would he have had to live for? He always had a right depressing life. I'm sure he invented some sorter potion, undetectable to dumb blokes like the rest of us, which would let him die 'naturally' and let him be remembered forever as a hero who died in spite of trying to save himself to fight another day. Snape was brilliant (and nutty) enough to come up with just such a plan."

We will probably never know which of these theories, if any, completely explains the death of Severus Snape. The means are ultimately irrelevant, as history remembers him as a hero. Harry Potter's stirring eulogy (see Appendix I) describes a Severus Snape completely unknown to most who survived and, in all probability, barely known by those who were lost during the Final Battle. His Snape is a quiet hero, the sort who does everything without thanks, without recognition, all in the name of a Greater Good this author would argue Albus Dumbledore never really understood. The man Potter described was much more emotionally deep than any version of him he presented to the public. The only person alive who knew him in life as closely as Potter came to know him through death is Draco Malfoy, who accepted the Order of Merlin, First Class in honor of his mentor at the First Anniversary Ball.

Memory is short and fickle. Within days of his death, admirers, many of whom were students under his perceived reign of terror as Headmaster, flocked to Snape's childhood home in pilgrimage. Neville Longbottom, son of Aurors Frank and Alice Longbottom, who just weeks earlier had led a student resistance group against Snape, was one of the first to come.

"We all were wrong," Longbottom told me, with tears glistening in his tired eyes, "terribly wrong, in the end. All we had seen for seven years was a cruel, vindictive man who had ridiculed all of us at least once during our years at Hogwarts. A man who, while not nearly as cruel as the other Death Eaters on staff our last year, never appeared to outright stop his seeming cohorts from torturing us. The man had killed Professor Dumbledore... We had no reason to trust him, and yet, so many more of us would be dead, maimed, or insane if he had not lived every day making us think he was on their side. By not trusting him, none of us got close enough to him to reveal his duplicity. And had that happened... I can't even imagine how much worse the last year at Hogwarts would have been. I felt drawn to come to his house, to give him my thanks, even if he'll never know."

The book fell from his hands and landed with a thud at his side. The words from his students, the children of people who had never treated him with the slightest warmth, along with the gruesome description of his own death was just too much to take in.

Honor. Respect. Admiration. *All* of the things he had joined the Death Eaters for and failed to receive... being handed to him on a silver platter. But he had to switch sides. He had to...

He had to die.

Was it worth it? It seemed like either way he was going to get the shit beaten out of him. Hell, he probably would die anyway.

But the assurance of esteem, of prestige... handed to him in a book. From what he had read, he would gain from this life everything he had always craved and had never had. But it would take his death, at thirty-eight, to ensure it.

A wave of nausea squeezed his stomach, and he Summoned a wastepaper basket. As he cradled it between his knees, he thought about Hermione's reaction to his arrival. Not the first part where she had understandably lost it...seeing a younger version of anybody one thought dead would be enough to drive some catatonic. Though she had a lot to learn about interrogation, spying, and general hostage keeping, he had to admit that her spells to keep him in the dark had been ingenious...

But no, the part later when she witnessed him with blood pouring from his nose... especially after how she had witnessed him dying. That look on her face had not been a reaction to blood; it had been something worse. And now he knew why she looked like all the life had drained out of her...she had witnessed blood pouring from his body before.

The clock read 2:17 a.m., and she was an early riser. The book could wait; if he was going to have any time to talk to his portrait, he'd need to start now.

AN: Well, kiddos, we're about halfway there. I hope y'all enjoyed getting into Rita's head a bit (and Snape's). More portrait-talking to follow. Thanks, as always, to my wonderful betas and to linlawless, who is currently serving as admin for all my chapters at TPP.

Déjà vu

Chapter 9 of 17

As Severus continues to learn about his life, the decisions he must make haunt him in his dreams.

Chapter Nine Déjà vu

"Why?"

His portrait-self held him in a fixed glare of disappointment. "Why what, you insufferable boy? I would think you would have a better command over your own vocabulary by now. As I recall, the Dark Lord did not suffer mealy-mouthed minions well."

"Why does it have to end this way? Something or someone wanted me to be here now! Tell me what I need to know to survive."

"And why should you survive? You, a murderer, a Death Eater? Before your life is over, boy, you will allow innocent *children* to suffer and die. Why shouldn't you die?"

"Because we will not be that old when this happens! Because what is the point in coming to the future and receiving all of this knowledge just to die? Why work so hard for accolades I will never enjoy? What's the *point*?"

Somehow, the portrait above him zoomed in so that all he could see was his older face. "The point? The point, you imbecile, is that everything you know will cease to exist if you do not perform your duty. Dark magic will pervade the entire wizarding world. The Dark Lord will win, and all the Muggle-borns will die. *She* will die."

"Don't hold her over my head, you git. You know we haven't loved her in years."

He had to give his portrait credit...that was one impressive eye roll.

"Not Lily. The brilliant woman currently residing in the attic!"

Snape began really listening at this. Brilliant? He knew that he was usually reserved in complimenting others. To hear himself throw this out so easily surprised him.

"Brilliant? Don't you mean show-offy swot?"

The figure before him simply glared. He knew himself well enough to know he'd just said something very wrong.

"That 'show-offy swot' is the only reason you're going to make it to the ripe old age of thirty-eight looking as old as Nicolas Flamel, so you had better change your tune, boy."

"Her? Certainly she's smart...the spells she's been using to hold me in the attic have been quite impressive."

"Impressive? She created half of them herself. On the spot. Including that Year-Erasing Charm. You know how long it took us to develop even one of our spells."

The portrait was right. Sectumsempra had taken months to develop: countless hours of research in Latin and weeks to perfect after that. To create spells on the spot under untold amounts of stress was...

"... Brilliant."

"As I said."

"I still don't see why I have to die for all this to work. Why can't I survive the bite? If all that kills me is this badly healed nosebleed, why not go to a Healer the second I return to my time and have it fixed properly? Why can't I live past thirty-eight to find someone brilliant for myself? Someone like her? You do seem to like her well enough."

His older self sighed and finally zoomed out to normal portrait size. "Live? In what world would we be allowed to simply live? In what universe would a murderer, a Death Eater, the killer of the most beloved wizard since Merlin himself...don't ask me why...be allowed any sort of life? If you choose my path, you end up a hero. Have you not noticed? History loves dead murderers. Look at the Muggle Che Guevara, for instance...adored by so many, yet how many people did he kill in his life? Would he be so lauded if he had survived?

"Spies never live to receive their rewards. Why does James Bond live and get the girl? Because he is not real. Do you not understand? We were doomed from the moment you accepted the Dark Lord's brand. No amount of good done on your part will fix the fact that we consorted with the devil, boy. You can continue that life and be damned anyway, or you can do as much good as you possible can and hope beyond hope that whatever higher power is out there forgives you when you die."

"You seem to think Granger is so bloody important, but I just don't see why."

"*Hermione* is important because she is, in my estimation, the only person alive who wouldn't have called the Aurors to come deal with you, nor would she use her position over you in some sick revenge scheme for the pain we caused her when I was still alive." His portrait crossed his arms and, for once in the conversation, would not look at him directly. "That woman was the most inquisitive, most annoyingly stubborn student I ever had, and she knew it, too. I never saw her hesitate to defend the underdog... Ask her about her attempts to liberate house-elves sometime." His portrait-self smirked. "And she was the only student I ever heard defend me. To her *best friends*. For behavior even I admit was unfair."

"But why is she helping us? It is one thing to keep me from escaping, but she has actually been kind to me. And it's clear she hates who I am."

"Yes, she hates who you are now. But that really doesn't matter in the grand scheme of things. Did you not read the book carefully? She was there when we died."

"Yes, but I don't see what that has to do with..."

"Did you *really* read the book or did you merely skim it? Did you read the part about our death? I suppose you read the part where she attempted to stop the bleeding, to resuscitate us, to make us comfortable when she could not fix the damage? No, neither she nor anyone else did any of those things."

Guilt. She's helping me out of guilt. Guilt, at least, was a motivator he understood. Guilt had gotten him through several years of his life.

"So, assuming I even believe anything you're saying, how am I to know what to do? Are you going to give me any guidance, or are you just going to throw me back into the fire? To leave the Dark Lord is not... recommended. What assurance will I have that, if I go back, change sides, and do my best, I will even be able to make it through to... die?"

"Everything about this cycle must be kept the same. You are playing with time travel, boy, and forward time travel at that. Something *Hermione* is starting to realize is that there is absolutely no real literature on the subject. Luckily for you, with that absolutely horrid autobiography and my journals that I'm sure you will nick before returning upstairs, you'll have the greatest primer ever for going back and doing this right. Unless you take the coward's route..."

The memory of his nightmare still clung to his brain, the outright hate blazing in the eyes of his professors. So many people in his life had called him a coward, and now to have to hear it from himself...

"Yes, I can really see how not wanting to die makes me a coward! You're absolutely right. Except as I see it, if I listen to you, I *will* die, and if I continue in the direction I am in now, I only *might* die!"

"*MIGHT* die? Have you forgotten who you are, you pillock? You're the Half-Blood Prince. Not the Pureblood Prince, not Severus Malfoy, and certainly not Lord Voldemort, Jr. Do you really believe that once you have outlived your usefulness, the Dark Lord will keep you, a lowly half-blood, alive? Use that supposed intellect we have and really think about the situation you got us into! Leaving that life behind and spying for the Light is the only chance you have to die with even the tiniest bit of control over the moment it happens."

His brain was swimming. When he had joined the Death Eaters, it had been because he wanted a family, a group of friends, hell, just a group of people who did not hate him. Who respected him and found him to be of value. Which would make sense if he were pureblood. His portrait was right; why would a man who wished the death of all Muggle-borns elevate him, a half-blood? He had been nothing more than an embarrassment to Slytherin House since the Sorting Hat had somehow gotten confused and placed him, with his second-hand robes and tattered books, in with the wizarding elite.

There was so much to absorb in such a short span of time.

"How much time do I have?"

"Before she wakes up? About an hour."

He was really beginning to be annoyed by his older half. "NO! How long do I have in whatever year it is?"

"A few days."

"And our mother?"

"If you listen to me? You will not cause her death."

"How? You know the task that was put upon us...kill the child. Which obviously I don't do. According to what I've just read, the Potter child is alive and well and has been victorious over our Lord."

"Your lord, boy. He hasn't been *my* 'Lord' in two decades."

"How?"

"It's all in the notes. Go copy all of *Hermione's* research and our journals, and take it upstairs. I'm sure you will find the time while she is gone tomorrow to read to your heart's content. Now get yourself upstairs before she finds you out."

And with a crack, his portrait-self Disapparated.

I didn't even know portraits could do that.

On his way back to the attic, he paused in the dining room just long enough to copy the materials he would need. He quietly slipped upstairs, the fear of discovery lessened greatly by the acquisition of his wand. He cast the necessary Silencing Charms and tiptoed up the attic steps. Making sure the entrance was warded properly once again, he stopped long enough to hide his wand in his bag and to place his shrunken books under the cushions of the sofa before lying down to sleep, reciting potions ingredients in an attempt to keep his mind distracted from the night's events.

A body floated through the room like a buoy bobbing in the ocean. Snape stood there, masked and robed, next to his brothers and sisters, all with their attention fixed on their Lord. The body was limp, its face covered by its hair, limbs pointing out at inhuman angles. A glint of a ring on its hand caught his attention, and he recognized the crest.

Regulus.

A tapestry of light hurtled from his Master's wand, reds and yellows and blues. The body contorted awkwardly, some spells slashing through skin as others cracked what few bones weren't already broken. Blood arced throughout the room, more than he ever thought possible for one body to hold.

A final blast of toxic green light slammed into the body, which fell from the air and landed with a heavy, wet squelch on the tile. He stared at the body, its back facing him, trying desperately to imagine his friend as he had been in life and not this mutilated carcass in front of him.

Slowly, Regulus' head began to turn. An impossible feat, as the Dark Lord had just cast the Killing Curse. The Death Eaters around him began to whisper and twitch.

The head continued to turn well past how far it should normally. As it turned past its shoulder, he realized this wasn't Regulus.

The eyes of the man found his. Black, fathomless eyes unblinking in death. A face far too lined for its age.

He began to scream as his brethren cheered the death of the last half-blood in their ranks.

She awoke to moaning, the sort she had not heard for years. Harry had often groaned and screamed in his sleep...sometimes Voldemort had been the cause; other times, it was just Harry's own mind torturing him in his sleep.

She had never been able to listen to Harry suffer. He had always been so haunted for days after those dreams whether they woke him or let him sleep through it. When they had been running for their lives that last year of the war, she had often woken him from the dreams just to try to alleviate his pain. Sometimes, Harry had responded violently, striking whomever dared sit on his bed and touch him...something he always felt guilty about once he actually awoke. More often than not, though, he simply had grabbed whomever roused him up and clung to them, his body wracked with sobs. That was why Ron usually had made her to wake Harry; Ron was not generally up for early morning, same-sex cuddling.

As much as she hated to admit it, there were times when she almost had looked forward to Harry's nightmares. The isolation of their months alone had been awful, and the excuse to hold someone and to be held in return had been welcome. While Ron and she had not yet come to a true understanding regarding their relationship, Hermione had known something was coming. Nevertheless, Ron had always felt squicky about cuddling in front of Harry, saying it was not fair to Harry when he was all alone. Still, even Ron could not argue against comforting the Boy Who Lived when Voldemort had just been rummaging about his mind.

Knowing it was probably the worst idea she had had since the beginning of this situation, and hearing Snape's older self in her head mocking her horrible prisoner-keeping skills, she approached the sofa and gingerly sat on the edge. He was lying on his side, facing the room, a pillow clutched in his arms, his hands gripping it so tightly that she could see the whites of his knuckles. His hair fell across his face, and only his nose peeked out from the strands.

She gently brushed his hair away from his face. His skin was warm to the touch, almost feverish, and she wondered if he might be ill. The light from a streetlamp illuminated his face, and she saw tears leaking from his eyes. Grasping the end of her sleeve in her hand, and wondering what sort of dream could possibly make Severus Snape of all people cry, she began drying his face.

His hand suddenly shot out, wrapping around her wrist and gripping painfully. His eyes, full of rage and terror, met hers, his face contorted in fear. His gaze faltered as he gained consciousness, and then tears welled in his eyes. As quick as lightning, he forcefully pulled her to lie down on the sofa, her brain screaming that this was wrong, that he was going to harm her after all. She tumbled onto the sofa, somehow landing supine. Before she could begin kicking, screaming, and biting if necessary, he curled his body around hers, his head resting against her chest, his arms and legs wrapping around her like Devil's Snare.

"Please," he whispered.

His body began shuddering against hers, and she knew he was holding back from crying aloud. Images flew through her mind...stories from Snape's diaries of his wishing someone had comforted him as a child when he would wake up terrified, memories of holding Harry in the exact same way.

Unbidden, the feelings of guilt over Snape's death...the fact that he had died alone, with no one to soothe his pain...washed over her. The feelings she had run away from every day since he died.

The man in her arms, head cradled to her breast, tears soaking through her shirt, might be a Death Eater now, but he would mature into a man who would deserve this comfort. In spite of her conscience screaming at her that this was a terrible idea, she put her arms around him, a hand snaking up into his hair to caress away the tension. As she whispered nonsense to calm him, she felt his body go limp and his breathing even out. It was early yet, only about five a.m., and she had time to stay before beginning her day. Besides, it had been a long time since she had been held, too.

He awoke groggy and feeling strangely bereft. As he opened his eyes, he scanned the room, hoping to see that she had already departed and had left him something to eat. Instead, he saw her seated on the floor, her head at eye level with his, her eyes watching him, and her lower lip caught between her teeth. She was already showered and dressed in a smart top and a flowing knee-length skirt.

"Any particular reason you're gawking at me this early in the morning, woman?"

"What was your nightmare about?"

Nightmare? He forced his sleepy brain to concentrate and thought back over the little sleep he gotten. He had had the Regulus nightmare again, but something had been different this time...

His face, looking up at him from Regulus' corpse. The gravity of everything his portrait had said finally hit him.

"Don't remember."

"Liar! It was written clear on your face just now that you remember exactly what happened. And given how much you were crying earlier, it couldn't have been good."

Crying? He didn't cry and certainly not in front of her. He shifted his head, and the smell of berries wafted from his pillow.

The smell was enough to trigger the rest of the memory. "You tried to wake me, didn't you? And I... I grabbed you, didn't I?"

"Something like that..."

"Why did you allow that? I thought you hated Death Eaters?" He gave her a piercing look, hoping to unsettle her.

She glared at him. "Well, you did grab me, didn't you? I couldn't really extricate myself until you'd fallen back asleep. You seem to forget that I knew you after... No, no, you're just trying to get me to talk again."

He groaned inwardly. Of course she would think that. The first time she was opening up to him since he got here, and he was not actually grilling her for answers. The answers he needed were actually under him now, poking awkwardly into the cushions. He was glad that she had not noticed earlier.

"Yes, I may have forcibly cuddled you, Granger. But you didn't have to wake me." He paused and searched her face, trying to guess what she was thinking. "Why did you?"

She gave him a defiant look. "Tell me what your dream was about, and then maybe I'll answer your question."

Knowing there was no way he could get her to stop asking about it, he figured he'd give her the condensed version.

"Do you know how Regulus Black died?"

She raised an eyebrow. "The Death Eater version or the actual account?"

His eyes widened...this was the closest she had ever gotten to willingly giving him information. "The actual account? How does one die in more than one way?"

Awareness of her mistake was clear in the scowl she now graced him with. "Let's just say, Snape, that Regulus Black died a hero's death, and he wasn't butchered like you think he was."

"I'll have you elaborate on that later. But to answer your question, I dreamed of the night I watched him die, as I have many times. Only this time... this time, it was different."

Her eyebrows furrowed. "Different? How so?"

"I... Well, I was the corpse this time."

The color drained from her face. "I've read accounts of that night. And I'm sorry you have to dream of it so often. I knew you did... But I didn't know the dream ever changed."

"This was the first time it ended this way."

He was shocked when she reached out her hand and rubbed his cheek. "No wonder you were so upset."

"So upset,' she says, and yet, I woke up alone this morning..." He smirked, and she blushed prettily. "Between snuggling up with me and taking care of my sorry hungover arse, you're being awfully nice again, Granger."

She grinned. "Let's just say I've always been a sucker for lost causes."

"Lost causes? What, like house-elf liberation?" He could not resist figuring out what his older self had meant by that.

She flinched. "Excuse me?" She somehow managed to look guilty and confused simultaneously.

"Dunno, first ridiculous cause I could think of off the top of my head."

"You sound like Harry and Ron."

"Who?"

"Never mind, Snape."

"And now, I believe it's your turn to answer my question." He sat up, towering over her as she sat on the floor. Remembering the reaction he had gotten last time, he crossed his arms and glared down at her. He flexed his biceps for good measure.

She burst into laughter. He responded by raising an eyebrow.

"You're doing it again!" she said, gasping for breath.

His lame attempts at flirting were getting out of hand, but if he was going to die, he might as well enjoy his time with this witch.

"I know," he drawled. "And the answer to my question?"

She looked almost embarrassed. "One of my best friends had horrible nightmares when we were younger, more often than not caused by your Lord. Seeing you suffer reminded me too much of that... and I just couldn't watch it anymore."

He was shocked. The girl offered him comfort simply because he was suffering. He could not remember the last person who had offered something so simple with no ulterior motive.

His portrait-self was right, there was something remarkable about this witch.

"If it is possible for you, could you tell me how Regulus actually died? You said it was a hero's death..."

She seemed to consider how to tell this story very carefully. "Regulus Black joined the Death Eaters about as young as you did, as you know. And it did not take him long to realize that, while he might have agreed with some of the Dark Lord's ideology, he did not agree with his methods. He defected, not to the side of Light, but to his own side... a resistance fighter, I suppose."

"Why?" He already knew the answer but was interested to see how much she would reveal.

"Black discovered a secret bit of Dark magic that the Dark Lord was using. He, along with the help of his house-elf, attempted to destroy this magic and replace it with a close facsimile... The elf survived; Black did not."

"How did Regulus really die, then?"

"The Dark Lord's Inferi... which caused him to drown."

His Master was toying with Horcruxes *and* Inferi? How big of a mistake had he really made? And poor Regulus...death by Inferi wasn't something he'd wish on even his

worst enemy.

"I still don't understand how that makes him a hero?"

"Of course you don't! He was a hero because he attempted to end what he perceived as injustice. He realized he had made a grievous error by aligning himself with the Dark Lord and attempted to change it. He saved the life of his house-elf and died himself for a cause he believed in. Before he died, he had the elf swear not to speak of this to anyone, and in doing so, Black protected his family from the wrath of the Lord he had left. He did the right thing, knowing he would not receive accolades or even live to even see if what he attempted made any difference."

She sounded so much like his portrait had. It could not be this easy for people to think there was such a thing as a reformed Death Eater. Yes, he was not always happy in his Lord's service, but to switch sides? To align himself with Dumbledore?

"So, now I'm sure that history remembers Regulus Black as a kid who just made a big mistake? A hero with a shady past? A good guy that got caught up in something bad but miraculously saw the error in his ways? A reformed murderer?"

"Absolutely not. *History* doesn't much care either way about Regulus Black. He is a footnote, an aside, a detail you throw in to the greater story. In fact, there is only one Death Eater who is remembered for being a true hero. Who, at his death, died the most reviled man of the war for those of us who opposed the Dark, save Voldemort himself, and yet, within a few short moments, was elevated to the greatest hero of our time, second only to the Boy Who Lived. A man who died alone, with no one willing to help him because of his perceived atrocities, and yet, through the entire war, cared for us more than we could *ever* give him credit for in life. A man who protected the people I love more often than I like to admit, and whose life I didn't even try to... save."

Tears were streaming down her face. She had no idea that he knew exactly whom she was talking about, but he was not about to admit that to her. Yet he could not just let her sit there crying, not after this morning.

He slowly moved from the couch to sit next to her.

"What in God's name are you doing, Snape?" She looked terrified and began to scoot away from him.

"I keep telling you I'm not going to hurt you, woman. Now shut up and come here." He held his hands up in supplication, hoping she took it as a sign he really did not mean her harm. And he didn't, come to think it. He was just as confused and upset as she was at this point and was finding it hard to remember why he had ever joined the Dark Lord in the first place. Not after what he had just heard about Regulus.

She hesitated only a moment before she launched herself into his arms, throwing them both back against the sofa, before letting out tears he supposed she had been holding in since his arrival. As she cried, he stroked her back and whispered into her hair. Again, his nose was filled with the scent of berries, and his traitorous brain mused that he could get used to this.

Her arms came up around him, and she clung to him like a life preserver, burying her head into his chest. Her sobs turned to hiccups, and he smiled in spite of himself.

When it was clear she was calming down, he lifted her away from his body slightly and, catching his fingers under her chin, tipped her head back to look at him. Her eyes locked with his, and his breath caught in his throat. In spite of the bloodshot eyes and the puffy face, she was lovely. For a moment, he actually considered kissing her. She must have seen it in his face, as her pupils dilated and her hands spasmed against his back.

He leaned forward as if to kiss her cheek and could have sworn he felt her lean into his body. Barely brushing his lips against her cheek, he moved to whisper in her ear.

"Aren't you supposed to be at work, dear?"

She went rigid, but whether from realization of his statement or from frustration, he could not tell. "It's Sunday."

He rubbed his thumbs against either side of her spine. "Then aren't you supposed to be downstairs figuring out how to send this big, bad Death Eater home?"

She pushed away from him and stood up, looking down at him imperiously, her hands twitching at her sides.

"Indeed."

As she stalked away, he leaned back against the sofa and could not help but chuckle.

AN: I really enjoyed writing this chapter, but let me tell you, pronouns get *really* confusing when people are talking to themselves! I hope the finished product meets your expectations, dear readers. Thank you so much to clairvoyant, dragonhideboot, and linlawless for their amazing work on and support for this chapter.

Hindsight

Chapter 10 of 17

Hermione spends the day researching and reviewing—and maybe eating just a little bit of crow.

Chapter Ten - Hindsight

Hermione Granger was a perfectionist, a trait that lent itself well to homework, housework... work of any kind, really.

It was not a personality trait that helped in situations where a gut feeling is the final decision maker. It did not help in Potions, it did not help in cooking, and it certainly did not help in life-and-death situations.

Well, that wasn't completely true. She was fine if she was in dire situations where she did not have time to think. Jumping on the back of that dragon at Gringotts? Made perfect sense at the time, but was a decision she would have never made had she the luxury of more than three seconds to think about it. Answering the riddle when they searched for the Sorcerer's Stone? That had just been too easy to even think twice.

But now, in spite of knowing she was going to figure this out and having every affirmation that Snape was going to return home and survive, she still couldn't drop the

feeling that she was missing something vital in her research. All that she could detect, with any certainty, was that Snape really was the only person to have ever successfully achieved forward time travel, which surprised her. When he successfully returned, why had Voldemort not sent others into the future to find out other things? Would this Time-Turner be damaged in its journey? Was it one of a kind?

Then again, until just a few days prior, Hermione had believed herself to be an expert on all things Snape, and yet this entire episode had been missing from his notes. In all likelihood, others had traveled forward as well. If that were the case, why had Voldemort lost? Surely, she was keeping all knowledge of the future from Snape, but who knew who else would be sent along on this sort of mission should Snape return home without knowledge?

And what would happen to him if she did let him go home with no information? Would he be tortured? Killed? Certainly not killed, as six years of classes with the man, not to mention his portrait downstairs, proved he had lived beyond this jump to the future. But had he lived longer because of her meddling? Was she supposed to give him some sort of information to take back? Or would he survive because she sent him back with absolutely nothing, leaving him to his own devices?

As to the physical side effects of time travel, well, from her own experience, the worst that had ever happened was a bad headache that took an hour or two to shake, and that had happened rarely. From her research, other side effects could include trouble sleeping, vertigo, nausea, and migraines. There had been absolutely no mention of any sort of cranial bleeding in any accounts she had read, but none of her references dealt with jumps of time of this magnitude. According to her sources, time travel of greater than one year to the past is never recommended, but she could not for the life of her find out *why* this was the case. Her best hypothesis was that something akin to Chaos Theory came into play...much more than a year, and one really could not have any idea what one's actions might change.

There was no evidence that anyone had ever made a jump of more than about eight months or so, and certainly not twenty years... forward. He had been here four days already...five if you counted the night he showed up...and she was no closer to finding a safe way for him to return than when he had arrived. Assuming, of course, she was right in thinking that the travel was actually unsafe. *Sometimes a nosebleed is simply a nosebleed, Hermione.* She would do well to remember that and not let the trauma of his death cloud her judgment.

It was times like these, when answers felt just outside her grasp, that she began to wonder how different her life would have been had she completed her seventh year of study. She had done the readings on her own but had never taken that final step and actually taken her examinations. After everything that had happened to her, it just had not seemed important anymore.

Regardless of what Ron and Harry, and even Professor McGonagall, had to say, what she was doing was important. She really did not believe anyone else would have done such a professional and thorough job of setting up the museum, and she never would have trusted the job to someone who had not fought in the war. So many of the people who could have handled this job, say like Remus, were dead, and the rest were off in adrenaline-charged occupations because their bodies had never gotten used to not being on edge after the war.

In the end, Hermione knew she really was the only viable option if this museum was going to be run correctly. She could have handled something much more challenging than answering questions like what Snape's favorite breakfast cereal was... but until recently, she had not wanted to. Staying in one place with no one relying upon her but herself had sounded like a fantastic option... at the time.

Getting Snape back to 1980 was the first project she had had since the initial setup of the museum that gave her purpose, that tasked her brain at all. Sometimes, she could not help but wonder if her intelligence had somehow atrophied. She was finding it more and more difficult to concentrate, partly in due to her increasing fear of mistakes and partly due to thoughts about the man in her attic.

She could certainly see why James *et al* had despised Snape. Most Gryffindors were not known for their understanding of and appreciation for sarcasm, so naturally, every word that came from Snape's mouth could easily be misinterpreted by the Marauders as rudeness. Moreover, while much of it had been bad mannered, some of his comments to them, as recounted in his obviously biased journals, were positively hilarious. If those Gryffindor boys had been anything like her two best friends, it was not that hard to believe that James and his friends would have avoided Snape. Their relentless bullying, however, was completely uncalled for.

All this research into the mind and life of Severus Snape had certainly changed her sense of humor. She often found herself laughing aloud at some of the stories in his personal writings, and she was constantly amazed at how deliciously funny the margin notes in his books were. She had read a couple to Harry when she had first taken the job, and he had not understood the humor in them, mumbling the usual vitriol about their Potions master. She was sure Harry's scoffing had something to do with a combination of Severus' wit being just that dark and Harry's not having an appreciation for Potions in the first place.

Yet it was Snape's cleverness that she found... dare she admit it... attractive. The man upstairs had it, though not as refined as he would as an adult. There had been more than a few moments in the last few days that she had been surprised at how... unfettered he could be. His inebriation had peeled away at the layers he would later muster, and she was surprised to see the silly boy underneath.

His intelligence was what had kept her engaged in the first few months of cataloguing his life. The man was brilliant, in many ways more than she. His ability to use half-truths and white lies in the face of the most terrifying wizard of all time, and Dumbledore, was astounding. In fact, reading his personal accounts of how he had managed to do this repeatedly had been part of how she had managed to continue half-lying to him this entire time. The Hermione of Hogwarts days had been very good at staying out of trouble, but the Hermione of not even a few years ago could not have handled keeping Snape here. She would have relied heavily on Harry's *de facto* leadership in a situation like this.

So, in spite of all her misgivings, it was nice to realize that she had this in her too. That after months and months of doing nothing but cleaning up potted plants in the living room and straightening food cupboards, she could jump back into a challenging situation and come out victorious...without Harry Potter leading the way.

Assuming she could figure out how to send Snape home.

As Hermione made to grab another book, she heard a telltale tapping from the kitchen window. Receiving owls only rarely, she supposed this would have something to do with yesterday's run-in with Ron. Sure enough, sitting outside the ledge was Harry's new owl, Yo-yo. The owl's name never ceased to make her smile; leave it to George to find Neil Gaiman's *The Books of Magic*, think the kid on the cover looked like Harry, and buy it for him as a "Happy Anniversary of Voldemort's Death Day" present. She figured the gift was meant to distract George from thinking about Fred just as much as it was to cheer up Harry in general. Harry had been hooked on the books instantly and had named his new familiar after the owl of the books.

She unfurled the parchment and smiled again...Harry had sworn off quills the second they left Hogwarts, but rather liked parchment. His letter, as always, was written in bold felt-tipped pen.

Hermione,

After that last major fight you had with Ron, and our discussion at the time, I swore I would not get involved between you two again. I spent most of my youth making you guys "make up" after fights (and, of course, ridding the world of evil), and I'm not doing it again. I simply cannot play peacemaker between the two of you again.

The three of us went through too much together for us to no longer speak. You can't just turn your back on those years, Hermione. They are a part of who we are and who we will always be, for better or for worse. I'd like to think for better, but with my two best friends no longer speaking to one another, I just don't know.

Do you remember the night before the museum opened when Ron wanted to take you out to dinner with us? Do you really remember? Did you know that

Ron bought that suit especially for that night...the first suit he ever owned that wasn't a hand-me-down from Percy or Bill? Or that he purposely found the one restaurant in all of Diagon Alley that did not rely upon house-elves in the kitchen? Some of the many things about Ron you failed to see. I've never seen a guy try so hard to live up to a girl's expectations, only to have his efforts ignored because your brain was God knows where...

All this time, you've thought Ron and you split up because you took that job. Ron wasn't mad at you for taking the curatorship, or not moving in with him...do you think Ronald Weasley so stupid as to think he would ever chain you to a kitchen like his mum? He's always known that you'd far outshine him in whatever career you chose, and being the decent bloke he is, he's always been okay with that. Don't get me wrong, I think he acted like a prize idiot that night, but what you've failed to see is that his acting like that is the exception more often than the rule...something you would see if you were around.

Ron was and continues to be hurt because, like so many other people in his life, you didn't put him first. Did you know that the first day I met Ron, all those years ago on the train, he confided in me that his own mother failed time and time again to even make sandwiches he liked? Ron has been forgotten and put last his entire life. And you did the exact same thing to him when you put the museum first. We had all come off the war, Hermione. We all needed support. But if you loved Ron as much as we all thought you did, how could you not see how much he needed you?

For cripes sakes, Hermione, think about the guilt Ron goes through on a daily basis. Ginny and his dad almost died due to Voldemort, Fred actually died, I all but died. And all Ron survived to do was play the best game of chess known to man and smash a locket. Hell, even Neville got to kill the world's largest fucking snake. But does Ron ever remember the heroic stuff he did? No, all he can remember is that he left us in the woods. And you know who ended bailing us out of that, bringing us a sword, and reuniting us? Severus bloody Snape. Don't think Ron hasn't figured that out, too. And now you're walled up in the house of the guy who stepped up when he screwed up the worst, and Ron has no idea how to compete with a dead hero.

Hermione, you must know that I am proud of you for the work you do. If anyone deserves to be remembered, it's Professor Snape, and you're the only person who could have done that job with any hope of objectivity. I don't think you are completely in the wrong in this situation with Ron...we all know Ron tends to react first and think later, and this current fight hasn't been any different in that regard than any other row you two had as kids. After all, maybe Ron and I have hidden from our past for far too long, but Hermione, you never left it. It's been nearly two years. The war is over. Remember when you wanted to be a lawyer? Whatever happened to that girl? The one who drove Professor Snape to drink every time she obnoxiously waved her hand about? The girl who wanted to prove herself to everyone and anyone around her. I haven't seen her since you locked her away in that attic.

I love you, Hermione. You're my sister, and you always will be. But honestly, get your head out of your arse! For your sake and ours. We miss you terribly!

Kisses,

Harry

Hermione stared back at the parchment, stunned. While Harry had always stood up for people, for the first time in a long while, his righteous indignation was focused upon at her. And in many ways, he was right. They really did grow up experiencing too much together to no longer speak to one another. But Ron not supporting her in her need to run this museum, well, that was just as bad as what Harry was accusing her of... wasn't it?

Except Ron did support me. All he wanted that night was one night for the two of us before the stress of the day-to-day operations of the museum really got to me...

That fight had been horrible. When Ron had shown up at her Floo, unannounced, she had been in the middle of getting ready for the next day. She had been a wreck...quills holding her hair in a look she had never quite shaken from her school days. And Harry was right, Ron *had* looked quite nice that night. Funny that it took Harry pointing it out to her all these months later for her to even remember that.

The argument had escalated instantaneously from the moment she said no. He'd left, accusing her of never wanting the things he wanted. She had always thought he had meant marriage, cohabitation... babies. To hear from Harry now that all Ron had *really* wanted was for her to put him first for two hours... It stung.

She supposed it was her own fault on some level. Harry had shown up to her apartment too, hours after Ron's rage-filled exit, trying to talk her down and maybe get her to come back to his house and talk to Ron. She had treated Harry in her typical supercilious manner, pushing him away and putting the blame solely on Ron for not realizing that the last thing she had needed was to go out the night before her big day.

Which, in hindsight, was probably exactly what she had needed. To *leave* her apartment and actually celebrate her accomplishments. With friends. Like people do.

Poor Ron. From the moment he had rejoined them in the forest, he had been trying to make up for his betrayal of their friendship. And what betrayal? In many ways, Ron was the one of their trio who had the most fodder for the Horcrux's torture...sixth of seven children, followed by the only girl, whom all of the family doted upon. Sidekick to the Boy Who Lived. Constantly reminded of his poor status as compared to other old pureblood families. Brothers who had gone on to open their own shop, train dragons, break curses. And what did Ron have now? A good-paying job at the Ministry pushing papers like his father.

And through all of it, being one of the kindest, gentlest friends she had ever had. To be sure, he had his temper, but so did she... And at the end of the day, he always found some way to apologize...

Except she had just thrown his last apology back into his face, keeping secrets from him that she never would have kept as a child.

She folded her arms on the table and lowered her head in sadness, in shame. Somehow, when all of this madness with Snape was over, she would have to eat crow and fix this.

AN: Don't worry, dear readers, we'll get back to Hermione and Severus in the next chapter. As always, thank you so much to my betas!

I am on the road the next week, so here's your update a day early! the next one may be a day late. Sorry in advance!

Unlocking the Future

Chapter 11 of 17

Severus is occupied by court transcripts, journals, and his own thoughts. Hermione all but gives up.

Appendix II: Court Testimony of Harry James Potter, Trial of Severus Tobias Snape, April 15, 1999

Chief Warlock: You come before us today, Mr. Potter, asking for a reversal of the charges against the late Severus Snape, who, you argue, killed Professor Dumbledore under the Headmaster's orders. You further argue that Snape served as the spy for the Order of the Phoenix even after the death of Professor Dumbledore, without the Order's knowledge, and that you know all of these things from memories he left you moments before his death. Are you prepared, under oath, to affirm the validity of these statements?

Harry Potter: Yes. All of these statements are corroborated in the memories that have been transcribed by the Court Scribe.

CW: From those closest to you, Mr. Potter, it seems your opinion of Severus Snape has changed greatly since your student days. Are these memories the cause of that?

HP: In part... That and hindsight.

CW: Would you please elaborate?

HP: There was so much about Professor Snape that I just had no way of knowing as a student. Like the fact that Dumbledore extracted a promise from Professor Snape to protect me after my parents were murdered. Looking back on my childhood, I see he really was always there protecting me. I thought he had some sort of trace on me sometimes... He always seemed to know when I was getting into trouble. My first year, he attempted to save me from a jinx being cast by my Defense professor. Hermione Granger lit him on fire that day, thinking he was the culprit. Luckily, he managed to knock over Quirrell in the process of putting out the flames, accidentally saving my life. It was the first of many times he would keep me alive.

My third year, Snape showed up just in time to save me from my own godfather, who we thought, at the time, had been partially responsible for the death of my parents. I hate admitting that I cast quite possibly the strongest Expelliarmus of my life that night, with help of course from Ron Weasley and Hermione, and gave Professor Snape quite a concussion. In spite of the beating he had just taken, he regained consciousness and threw himself bodily between us...myself, Hermione, and Ron...and a werewolf who also happened to be my Defense teacher.

In fifth year, he lied to Umbridge's face to keep me from being interrogated under Veritaserum, telling her he was out of the potion. As if Professor Snape would ever be without such a useful potion in a time of war.

My sixth, he kept me from casting Unforgivables against him, telling me, at that moment, that I had not the nerve or the ability. Even then, after killing a man we both respected, he was still worried about keeping me away from harm and evil.

During the last year of the war, in spite of the castle falling apart around him, and in spite of being the most hated Headmaster of all time, much to Phineas Black's chagrin, he still managed to keep us safe, deflecting information about our whereabouts. He sent us the only tool he knew of to help us defeat Voldemort's Horcruxes.

Looking back, without Professor Snape's constant interference, Hermione, Ron, and I would have been dead by our third year, if not sooner. And before someone asks me if he could have simply been doing it to keep me alive so Voldemort could kill me, well, just ask yourselves why he would have risked his life to give me the one thing I could use to kill Voldemort.

CW: The one thing?

HP: The sword of Godric Gryffindor. Snape somehow knew exactly where we were while on the run my seventh year and brought me the sword of Gryffindor. In hindsight, it still baffles my mind...the consummate Slytherin being courageous enough for the sword to answer him. Anyway, the sword was the best tool we had for destroying Horcruxes. The forest we were in, the Forest of Dean, was crawling with Snatchers and Death Eaters, and if he had been caught helping us in this way... having stolen the sword from Bellatrix LeStrange herself, well, it would have been his last action on earth.

Of course, there were other ways to kill Horcruxes we discovered... basilisk fangs and Fiendfyre. But leaving me an instruction manual on how to cast Fiendfyre wouldn't have worked...Snape knew I wouldn't have read it. And it would have gone against his belief that I was not to perform Dark Magic. And as to basilisk fangs, well, not everyone can Parselmouth their way into the Chamber of Secrets.

CW: Mr. Potter, do you really expect this court to absolve the late Severus Snape of his crimes, including the murder of Headmaster Dumbledore, based on a collection of memories from a biased source and your guilt?

HP: No, sir. Not only do I expect you to exonerate Severus Snape because of the preponderance of evidence presented by myself, the other witnesses, and the portrait of Headmaster Dumbledore himself showing that Snape was the only fucking reason any of us are here today, I also expect you to award him a Order of Merlin, First Class. I expect you to then put Professor Snape's name on the Wall of Heroes as it rightfully deserves to be, and expect you to have done all this before the first anniversary celebrations next month!

Snape did not know what was more preposterous: anyone nominating him for an Order of Merlin, any class, or reading the call which came from the mouth of a Potter.

Absurd, and yet he loved every word, the tone of respect washing over him, comforting him. Sleep usually gave him a perspective on events, calming away stress, but last night's nightmare had only intensified his fears and apprehension.

He flipped to the next page of the book, and sure enough, there were the pictures of this Wall of Heroes, his name ensconced between Albus Dumbledore's and Harry Potter's. Second on the list of at least a hundred.

And what sort of honor would he gain if his Lord won this war? The pleasure of serving his pureblood compatriots in their new world? The privilege of not being killed?

Well, he certainly hadn't enjoyed the privilege of not having the shite kicked out of him.

With a swish and a flick, he reheated the tea in his mug and began reading from his own journals.

Fuming and frustrated were not a good combination for her. Some people wore anger well...their remarks becoming scathingly brilliant, their ability to weave a tapestry of curse words legendary.

She just got crabby and forgot to take care of her hair. Which was now a sea of tangles as she kept messing with it.

The fact that she even noticed her physical state as she passed the mirror on the way to the kitchen told her something she really did not want to know...that she cared about how she looked today. She never had cared about such things at Hogwarts. Not out of a self-deprecating belief in her own lack of assets; she knew she was pretty enough. No, Hermione Granger could clean up when she wanted to. But in the middle of studying for OWLs and NEWTs, or preparing for examinations, or even (let's be

honest...especially) translating *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* time worrying about appearance was time wasted from learning.

Unless there is a younger version of the man you've allowed yourself to have an academic crush on sitting two floors above your head... probably without a shirt on...

Fantasies about Snape had been the forbidden place her brain had gone to for years. And until now, they were safe. Snape was dead, and no one would ever know.

Her obsession with the museum was always something, in her mind, she had seen as separate. She was sure it had something to do with her overwhelming need to keep his memory alive.

Her fantasies were much more physical. They centered around the Hero Snape...the swish of his robes and click of his heeled boots as sexy instead of terror inducing, the lines on his face softened, that voice... Fantasy Snape wasn't her Potions master; he was the man who had saved her life without her knowing it. In her dreams, she was able to thank him.

On some level, this was why the jokes from Harry and Ron about her fixation on all things Snape rankled. It was like being back in school. Who does Hermione like? Who would ask Hermione to a ball? And absolutely, the only way they would ever know where her mind went was if she told them. Which she never would.

But it didn't help that sometimes she was pretty sure that they knew.

That the Snape in her mind wasn't eighteen years her senior. He wasn't a Death Eater, and he wasn't greasy and batlike. Hook nosed, yes, of course. What woman in her right mind would want to get rid of a nose so well suited for...

No, her fantasy did not make disparaging remarks about her teeth or call her an insufferable know-it-all. He did not mind ink smears on her face. He smiled on a regular basis with straight, white teeth.

But the best part about her fantasy Snape? He wasn't real.

Unlike his younger counterpart upstairs, who also wasn't nineteen years her senior...

Taking out her wand, she began spelling her hair into some semblance of order, Vanishing the smudges of ink off her face.

He skimmed through many pages of his journals in the hours waiting for Granger to return, and the elation he had felt from Harry Potter's pretty speechmaking had been crushed under the weight of his own words. He had liked the notion of being a hero until he read page upon page of what it actually meant to live the life.

The court transcripts had made it sound romantic...working for all those years without recognition, having the fun of actually sticking it to Albus Dumbledore.

Of course, it had left out the difficult bits. The years of near celibacy because of sheer physical exhaustion. The stress that would cause his face to age so quickly. The recounting of every bone broken, every scar received, at the hands of his Lord. Wasn't the point of getting out of the Death Eaters to stop being tortured? Because it seemed that his life, should he go back and choose the Light, would be nothing but an endless attack on his person.

He got to the last diary and found that it was mostly empty. The few pages in it discussed his anguish over his castle being turned into a house of torture and being the most reviled man in their world, save Voldemort. The last page mentioned Harry Potter and rumors that he was returning to the school.

He was surprised at the sheer volume of writing he had skimmed through. He had been known to scribble before, but never to leave such detailed descriptions of his life. And he had to admit his older self was a pretty damned good writer. He had felt as if he were actually present at many of the scenes he had read about...in all their gory detail.

Feeling the need to add something to the pages and to purge some of his thoughts, he dug around the attic until he found a pen.

He started by signing his name. It seemed as good a place as any to begin, and he always enjoyed the flourish of writing it out, even if he hated his middle name.

As he picked up the pen to begin writing again, his name began to disappear from the page. Below it, in blood-red letters, appeared:

Took you long enough to start scribbling, boy.

As his shock abated, he became curious. Before he could write something else, more words began to appear:

Well, now that I actually have your attention...yes, this is an impressive bit of magic, yes, I did learn it from your Lord, and no, it did not involve splitting up our soul. We are not that foolish.

Hermione has no idea how important she is to us, mostly because I have hidden every reference to her in these pages. To read the entirety of your journals, simply write the words "Permissum lacuna videor" on the inside front cover of each journal. The additions will be highlighted in green.

And you might want to shrink these down and hide them immediately. She's walking up the stairs at this very moment.

Having no reason to disbelieve himself, he quickly shrunk all of the materials he had stolen from downstairs and quickly shoved them and his wand into his bag. She had not touched it, he believed, since the day he arrived, and it was safer than under the sofa cushions, where he might smash his wand by sitting on it.

Just in time, he flopped onto her bed as the stairs began to descend. He sprawled, attempting to mimic a sleepy state, eyes shut, mouth slack. He heard her slam something onto the coffee table and had to stifle a smirk.

"And just what are you doing in my bed?"

He popped open one eye and looked up at her scowling face. "Sleeping?"

"In my bed?" Her hands were perched on her hips; the glare on her face could have pierced armor.

"Sofa is too narrow for a good nap." *I should have been a goddamned actor.*

She flicked her wand at said sofa, and it widened to a double bed's size. "I expect that I will not find you in my bed again, Snape."

"Indeed. However, you are always welcome in mine." The words squeezed their way out of his mouth before he could think.

She really was quite pretty when she blushed.

"Are you hungry? I've brought up dinner." Clearly, she was trying to ignore his *faux pas*.

He sat up and surveyed the table. On it was a tray with a small, old casserole dish, one he recognized quite well, a spoon protruding at a precarious angle from the food.

A wave of aromas assaulted his nose...beef, onion, potatoes, basil, parsley...

"Granger, have you made cottage pie?"

"A passable version, yes. It's one of my favorite comfort foods."

"Anything in particular you're trying to comfort yourself over?"

"I dunno, just that you're still here, and I have no idea if it's safe to send you home. And you do have to go home."

He sat down on the floor, legs folded over each other, and beckoned her to come eat with him. "Why such the rush to get me home? Do you have a date tonight that you had to cancel on my account?" He spooned a generous portion on to a plate and handed it to her.

She did not seem amused by his jibe. "Hardly. Wizards rarely knock at my door."

This actually surprised him. "And why ever not? Other than being my captor, you seem nice enough. And you can hold a conversation. And you're quite... pretty." *What the hell is wrong with me? I might as well have said "Hello! Might I sleep with you? Ta, dear."*

"As to holding a conversation, most wizards prefer their women like their children: seen but not heard. And pretty? You must be confusing me with some other witch holding you captive, not this frizzy-haired, bucktoothed harridan." She looked up at him, a mischievous look in her eyes.

She's fishing for a compliment... Strange, she doesn't seem the type.

"I see no issues. With your teeth, that is." *Smooth, old man. Very smooth. It's compliments like that that get you so far with the ladies...*

She grinned, showing off her decidedly straight teeth. "True. You should have seen them when I was a child." And then she giggled, and he got the feeling he was being left out of some grand inside joke.

"And what else is for dinner? Man cannot live by pie alone."

She sat down at the table next to him and procured a bag from the floor. "Crusty bread and Boddies." She ripped a sizeable hunk off the bread and handed it to him. An ice-cold bitter followed.

She really was a woman after his own heart.

I really am the worst captive-holder in the history of people holding other people captive. She groaned internally at how ridiculous that sounded. At any point tonight, he probably could have taken her wand, or worse... But he really seemed just to want to drink her Boddies, eat her delicious home-cooked food, and enjoy her company. The universe would probably implode at any moment.

They had talked about so many things, most of which she knew from studying him. And yet, it was so different to hear it from him at a younger age. His retellings of life events were brighter, less jaded than his diaries. He had her laughing to the point of tears from stories of a young Lucius Malfoy trying to woo Narcissa Black. Who would have ever thought there was a time that Lucius Bleeding Malfoy could be tongue-tied?

Two cans of bitter shouldn't leave her this giggly. But this young man made her laugh, in spite of who she knew him to be. In spite of knowing that his adult self would never take the time to ever make her laugh.

The end of the loaf of bread sat between them on the coffee table, and she reached across to take it. As her fingers grasped at it, his hand shot out and clasped around her wrist, the bit of bread dangling from her digits.

"Didn't anyone ever tell you to always offer your guest the last of the food, Hermione?"

Her eyes, which had been focused on his fingers, shot up to his face. His eyes smoldered as they fixed on her mouth.

She watched as he slowly leaned forward and, teeth bearing down ever so gently, prized the bread from her fingertips.

He chewed the bread, looking at her thoughtfully, his thumb lightly grazing the inside of her wrist. He swallowed, and she was mesmerized by the bobbing of his Adam's apple. He did not stay her hand as she moved it towards his face, her fingers trembling as they came ever closer to his face.

He closed his eyes as her fingers began tracing along his cheekbones, the grip on her wrist becoming lax. She watched, amazed, as he leaned into her touch before his hand came up to cover hers.

Amazement quickly turned to outright shock as he took her hand and tipped it away from him before pressing a kiss into her palm.

This was crazy; she knew it was wrong. The fantasy was never ever supposed to become reality. She was falling for a reality that could not possibly exist, something that would only end badly for both of them.

Yet she was powerless to stop herself. She knew he was going to kiss her, and she knew everything would be ruined if he did. That the guilt she felt now would be even more painful as it would also be tinged with regret.

She did not care.

He must have sensed something; she felt his fingers grazing her temple, tucking a stray strand of hair behind her ear. As she looked into his eyes, she saw a question there, one she was afraid of him to ask. Hoping to silence him before he spoke, before he could say anything that could change her mind, she rose to her knees and slowly moved across the floor to him. Straddling his legs, she took his cheeks between her palms and lowered her lips to his.

Electricity coursed through her body. She sighed as his hands came up to grasp her waist, and he used the opportunity to deepen the kiss. As their tongues intertwined, she hoped that he wouldn't stop, that he wouldn't pull away, that he wouldn't realize just how insane they were being.

Before he could call a halt, she ground her pelvis into his. She really could not think of a better way to make her intentions clear.

He pulled away from her suddenly, and she knew she had made a mistake. The reality of what she was doing crashed down around her, and she knew she had to get away, remove herself from his grasp, flee.

She pushed away from him as hard she could and stood; as she turned away, he grasped her wrist, turning her towards him. He must have stood as she ran, as when she turned around, she crashed into his chest, her hands finding his shoulders for balance. His arms came around her, and she read his face for a sign, expecting his rejection.

Instead, she only saw desire.

Pushing her naysaying thoughts away, and knowing she would have to deal with the consequences in the morning, she twined her fingers in his hair and crushed her lips to his.

AN: Mine is an evil laugh! Thanks so much to my betas and to linlawless, my TPP admin.

Just Like That

Chapter 12 of 17

A final encounter with his portrait gives Severus the answers he needs. That is not to say he likes what he hears...

Chapter 12 Just Like That

He stood before his portrait, feeling as though he had been called to the headmaster's office. It was a unnerving sensation...looking yourself in the eyes after you have slept with a woman that your... self cares about far more than you do.

"Are you just going to stand there staring up at me, or are you going to say something? I have other places I could be."

His older self had been rude to him before, but now he just sounded petulant. It annoyed the piss out of him, especially when he knew the portrait was well aware of what had just happened.

"I've just slept with Hermione..." There, let his portrait deal with it.

He shifted uncomfortably under his older self's glare. If this was anything like how he acted as a professor, he could easily understand why his students were terrified of him. Good thing he knew that his first line of defense was irritating sarcasm...

"So what do I do now?" A legitimate question, he felt. Of all the things he had read in his future journals, the path home wasn't one of them. Or anything about his liaison with Hermione.

"You go back."

"How? I don't even know where the Time-Turner is! And Hermione..."

"Hermione? You sleep with her once, and she suddenly goes from a 'show-offy swot' to someone you don't want to go back over? You don't want to go back because of one night with her? *One* night? You are starting to understand her worth, but you still have not the faintest clue what you're giving up. What you *have* to give up. She is going to have a long, wonderful life...with someone else. And you will die. You will save the whole fucking world, but you *will* die, *knowing* what you have given up.

"Just you wait, just you wait until you read those diaries of mine in full. Then you will know, you will know exactly what it is that has made me the son of a bitch I am today. You think you love her now because of her warm body and her gifted mind. You have no idea the regard she will have for us...*has* for us. That she would give anything for you to still be alive, in spite of, deep down, knowing there was nothing she could do."

He hung his head, feeling both ashamed and angry. How dare his portrait berate him like this? He knew how he felt about Hermione, even if the feelings were new. His older self knew what was going to have happened that night...he could have warned him, told him to stave off her advances. To find an excuse to end it. To stay out of her bed.

But why would he have tried to stop himself? Their encounter had been... Well, there just weren't words. And if it really was the best thing he was going to have, well, a man would have to be a saint not to be so selfish as to want that.

And it really had been good, so good. From the moment he had stopped her from fleeing, the entire encounter had been so intense, like nothing he had ever experienced.

As he spun her around, he was shocked at the force with which she hit his body. The shock lasted but a moment before she practically launched herself at him, her lips seeking his, her hands twining in his hair.

It was the first time in twenty-four hours he wasn't terrified, that he wasn't thinking about any life or death choices. As the whispers of her shampoo and something uniquely her wafted around him, he surrendered, drawing his body into her warm embrace.

He took her face in his hands and angled his lips, pausing to nibble on her lower lip, prizing them open, snaking his tongue with hers. She moaned in response, and the sound shot straight to his groin.

His hands seemed to have a mind of their own...within what seemed like seconds, he had peeled away the layers of her clothing. His fingers traced their way over her curves, and she molded herself to him, her hands ghosting over his shoulder blades.

He made to lead her to his couch, but she dragged him to her bed, pushing him down to the mattress. He landed awkwardly, legs hanging off the edge of the bed, his back flat against the sheets. Before he could sit up, she began to undo the tie of his loungepants. A second later, she slid his pants down past his ankles, then threw them somewhere across the room.

He was completely exposed to her from the waist down and could not help but feel some pride at the feral look in her eyes. Placing her hands on both of his ankles, she slid her hands up his shins, rubbing and stroking as she went. By the time her hands reached his thighs, he was shaking, completely flummoxed by the sudden change in their dynamic.

He closed his eyes and focused on his breathing, trying desperately to calm himself. His efforts were short-lived; as her lips came around the head of his penis, breathing became all but impossible. His eyes flew open, and he looked down at her, his mouth going dry at the look in her eyes as she stared up at him, the tip of his cock slipping between her wet lips.

She's thought about this before.

She must have because she moved like a woman choreographed...in the lead of the dance. She played his body like a tightly strung harp, and as much as he would have loved to reverse their positions, he somehow did not mind her taking the lead.

Which she did without hesitancy. As she continued her ministrations, he found himself almost without control of his actions. He began shallowly thrusting into her mouth, and she took him deeper, the head of his shaft pressing against the back of her throat. Her hands, which had been splayed against the top of his thighs, moved...one to cup his balls, the other to push her hair away from her face. His hands followed and dug their way into her hair.

She groaned, and the vibrations shot straight up his cock through to his spine. He whispered her name, and she released him, crawling up his body, her mouth tracing the ridges of his muscles, her tongue snaking across his skin.

"Say it again," she whispered into his ear.

He leaned up, nipped at her earlobe, and growled, "Hermione."

Stars lit up the back of his eyes as she slowly sank down onto him, an astonished sigh escaping her lips. As she rocked, he thrust up into her body, angling his pelvis to drive deeper... deeper. She lifted herself up from his chest and braced her hands on his shoulders, staring deep within his eyes. As his hands came up to massage her breasts, her eyes rolled back, and she ground into him, a circular motion that threatened to send him over the edge.

Needing to somehow get closer, to lose himself in her embrace, to keep this from ending far too soon, he rolled them over. Immediately, her arms and legs wrapped tightly about his body, and her lips sought his. He poured all his feelings into this kiss...the first he had given willingly during a moment of passion. For so many months, sex had been associated with politics and advancement. He had not yet made love to a woman simply because he found her to be stunning, and no woman had ever kissed him like this before.

He wanted to keep things gentle, but the frustration and anger and confusion in his body needed release. He slipped his hands under her shoulders, and he used the leverage to begin thrusting harder, faster, angling his pelvis differently with each stroke. She arched under him and shouted his name, and it had never sounded so wonderful to his ears. As her nails scratched across his back, he knew he would bear the marks of their passion the next day. He buried his head in the crux of her neck and shoulder and abandoned all hope of coming out of this night, this week, unscathed.

She was close; he could feel her inner walls spasming around him. Willing himself to slow his thrusts, he tried to calm himself, to make it last, but she would have none of it. Hooking her feet under his arse, she pulled him to her, bucking against him, seeking her own pleasure. His name tumbled from her lips like a mantra. He clung to her for dear life, giving himself to her completely. He kissed her, hoping that someday, from his kiss, she would understand that, if nothing else, he did appreciate being treated well, for the first time in years, by a person who put his well-being ahead of her own. Who, on some level, gave up part of her life to ensure that he would live beyond the grave.

Her nails, digging hard into his back, brought him back to reality. She came, and a rush of warmth poured over him. A few thrusts later, and he followed her into oblivion, all the stress and resentment from the last week pouring from his body. His forehead met her own, and they both held eye contact, breathing heavily. Every few moments, her quim clenched, drawing electric jolts of pleasure through him. He kissed her, softly this time, sucking her lower lip between his own. Her hands cradled his head, and he collapsed against her, his head nestled between the valley of her breasts. As they laid together, his body twined with hers, their breathing slowed. He drew lazy patterns on her stomach and breasts, and she rubbed circles on his back. He quickly found himself dozing off in her arms.

He awoke less than an hour later to find that she must have somehow rolled to her side. She was spooned up to him, her back pressed against his chest, his arms around her, a breast cradled in his palm. He knew he had to leave her, to have the time with his portrait to try to sort all of this out, so he had grabbed all of his possessions and fled the attic.

And now he stood before his portrait, and instead of some sort of comfort from his older self, he was greeted with derision. He had fallen in love with Hermione Granger, and his older, angry, cynical self had not wasted any time in reminding him that his affection for her was doomed to fail. Had been from the moment he landed in his... her attic.

"Fine, so this is the most meaningful sexual experience I'll ever have. And instead of remembering it with happiness the rest of my life, I'll die feeling like a perv. Congratulations. Way to make me really want to return home."

"Have you forgotten what will happen should you not return?"

"Mum..." He hadn't thought about her in days. His older self was a supercilious know-it-all. It was no wonder he would grow to have no friends. But he was right. Regardless of the choices he would make...and he was pretty sure after a night with Hermione Granger he knew exactly what those choices would be...he did have to return. He could not allow his mother to be killed or worse because of a witch he had no right to care for.

"Yes, Mum."

"But what if he enters my mind again? What do I do? He will know if I'm lying!"

"Then you must not give him any reason to question your honesty."

"But what if..."

"He will not attempt Legilimency again... for now. At some point, you will need to learn Occlumency and Legilimency. It will be in my journals. But for now, he will be so overjoyed by your news that he will not enter your mind."

As relieved as he was for that, Snape still felt completely lost. Everything was changing so suddenly.

"When do I leave?"

"Tonight."

"Tonight? No... Hermione... She'll think..."

"That you just fucked her and left her? I suppose. And then she'll storm down here and start screaming at me again, and I'll have to finally clean up our mess."

He knew it was a horrible question to ask, but... "And is there any way she and I... that is to say..."

"The next time you see Hermione Granger, she will be eleven years old. What do you think?"

"And before I die? She won't be eleven then."

"No, but you will be thirty-eight."

"Fucking hell. So this was all for nothing? Listening to you go on and on about the Light was for nothing. Falling in love with her was for *nothing*? Why don't I just go back and ignore you. This. Is. Not. Worth it!"

"Leaving the Dark and going to the Light isn't enough of a motivation for you? Not following in Regulus' footsteps isn't enough? Then look at it this way: go back, join

Dumbledore, protect Hermione."

"I thought if I went back, it was to protect Potter... That Skeeter bint went on and on about this ridiculous promise I made to Dumbledore about Lily..."

"Do you really think I went back and told Dumbledore about my long lost love from the *future* and how in, I don't know, about ten or so years she would show up and I would want to protect her all my days? Of course not, you pillock. I had to tell Dumbledore something he would actually believe. He knew how I had mooned after Lily my first few years of school. He also knew of our falling out. What he *didn't* know and what I didn't bother to tell him was that *you and I* had moved on. He fell for it hook, line, and sinker. The man had weird guilt associated with love...probably because he's the only wizard in our world that actually fell for a Dark Lord, if that Skeeter woman is to be believed.

"In any case, do you know how often protecting Potter and Hermione will go hand in hand? Potter is... special. Some combination of his mother's love, Voldemort's curse, and dumb luck usually keep him alive even when we aren't around. But Hermione will be a target. Top-of-her-year Muggle-born during a war waged to eradicate her and her kind from Magical history? She will need protection. She will need *you*."

"And she'll never know... what we've done for her."

"I wouldn't say never. In fact, I'm pretty sure by this time tomorrow, she will know everything."

"Why. Do you plan to tell her?"

"In a manner of speaking. I'll have you leave the clues for her own discovery."

"And the Time-Turner. I'm to go back right now. Just like that?"

"Just like that."

"Where is it?"

"In the flour canister."

He grinned. "She really is a Muggle deep down, isn't she...?"

His portrait nearly smiled in response. "Yes, but then again... so are we."

"And I won't bleed all over the place this time?"

"No."

"I won't die?"

"Not yet."

"And the hell we're going to through, it's all worth it? Just to protect her?"

"Other than that horrible decision to join the Dark Lord, do we often make decisions lightly?"

His older self had a fair point.

"You'll find parchment and quills on your dining room table. Leave her the key to getting into my diaries...she deserves to read them in their entirety. And don't write her any sentimental drivel."

"Anything else?"

"Send yourself back to the moment after you left. You're going to need that week to read and... cope."

It was the closest his portrait had ever seemed to caring about how he was feeling during all of this.

He picked up his effects and made his way to the dining room. Her research littered the entire tabletop. Insuring she would actually find something on the desk, he quickly piled all the paperwork and books into neat stacks, cringing as he did. He hated when anyone moved his research, but at least he knew that she shouldn't need it any longer. He procured a parchment and a quill and scratched out a note.

Not seeing her one more time before he left was devastating. But his portrait was right...he really did need to leave. If he saw her again... it would be nigh on impossible to do what he must.

Before he could change his mind, he stormed into the kitchen. Sure enough, he found the Time-Turner in a plastic bag buried in the flour canister. He sat on the floor and began setting the dials. Just in case his older self was lying to him, he pulled a dishrag from where it hung on a cabinet door and pressed it to his nose.

He lay down once again on the floor, taking a deep breath, and hoping nothing terrible would happen to him, he released the dials and blinked out of the room.

AN: Cringing...

Everything Had To Stay the Same

Chapter 13 of 17

Hermione discovers the secrets to Severus' journals and then confronts his portrait.

She and Harry brought up the rear, ascending through a dark, dank tunnel. In front of them were Professor Lupin, Pettigrew, and Ron, with Black floating Professor Snape between them.

She was scared...they had gotten into some rather amazing situations in the past, but she was completely unable to think of a way out of this. She was going to lose house points, for sure, and would probably be serving detention with Professor Snape until she graduated...assuming she was not expelled.

Harry walked ahead of her and began whispering with Black. She was clearly excluded from their conversation but picked up snippets of words: "guardian," "leave the Dursleys," "move in."

Hermione shook her head. Leave it to Harry to see the good in everyone. Only he could go from wanting to murder a man to making plans to move in with him in a span of less than an hour.

Professor Snape's head intermittently scraped across the ceiling, sending dust and bits of rock filtering down into her eyes. As much as Professor Snape and Black seemed to hate each other, she really did not think it was necessary for Black to be that callous.

As they neared the end of the passage, Black levitated Snape out of the hole, then stood aside to let her and Harry pass. She looked up at Professor Snape and marveled that this was the first time she had seen him looking relaxed in the whole three years she had known him. He was not as terrifying this way. He almost looked... nice.

In less than an instant, all hell broke loose. The moon peeked from behind the clouds, and Professor Lupin went rigid, his body frozen in place. This lasted mere moments before he began to transform. As Black ran to assist him, his concentration on Professor Snape lapsed, and the professor fell to the ground in a heap before standing up angry and fuming. Any disorientation he may have felt must have been overcome by his rage, as he advanced upon them immediately.

"Potter, Granger, Weasley, come with me right away..."

"But, Professor!"

In spite of her fear, Hermione had to smile at the fact that even while under duress, Harry was very quick to remember to call Professor Snape by his proper title.

The werewolf...she couldn't think of him as her professor...fully transformed, batted Black to the ground like a puppet; he didn't move. In response to Harry's yelling, the creature began creeping towards them, a low growl emanating from his throat.

"No 'but, Professor,' Potter. You will come with me. Now."

This was getting out of hand. "Professor, look behind you!" Hermione shrieked as the wolf came closer, closer...

Looking more annoyed than ever, Snape turned his head and froze. The wolf fixed his attention on the professor, and Snape regained his concentration, walking backwards slowly, spreading his arms wide, blocking the students from view. The Trio hid behind him, and Hermione prayed that all the rumors about Professor Snape and Defense Against the Dark Arts meant that he was talented enough to deal with a fully mature werewolf.

Keeping one arm up in a protective stance, Professor Snape brandished his wand towards the werewolf, seemingly about to curse him, when the wolf pounced. She, Harry, and Ron dove away as Snape was knocked to the ground. Black immediately transformed to his Animagus form and tackled Lupin, trying to pull him away from Snape. A flurry of fur and teeth blocked Professor Snape from view, before Lupin tossed Black aside like a rag doll. As quick as a snake, Lupin lashed forward and bit cruelly into Professor Snape's neck, tearing through his skin and flesh like tissue paper. Hermione stifled a scream as they stared on in horror.

From the distance, she heard the howling of a werewolf, and her fear magnified. More than one werewolf? There was no way they could survive. Lupin raised his head from Professor Snape, pricking up his ears at the noise. At the second howl, Lupin left his victim and loped off into the Forbidden Forest.

Blood gushed from the wound in Professor Snape's neck as they stood transfixed, unable in their fear and shock to assist him. Ron gasped as their professor's head turned towards them, his eyes fixing on Hermione's.

"Look... at... me..."

And then his eyes glazed over, his jaw falling slack.

Hermione couldn't stop herself from screaming.

She woke up facing the living room, the space illuminated with the earliest rays of sunlight, her heart pounding from the dream. She often had dreams about the night Snape had died, but that event had never infiltrated another dream. Oddly enough, she rarely thought of the night that she and Harry had saved Sirius Black, and she was confused by her brain's choice of that event for her dream, let alone combining it with another horrible memory.

She focused on the sofa and realized that Snape was not there. She rubbed her eyes sleepily and wondered if she had forgotten to cast the charm. As her eyes surveyed the living room, she saw other things... empty cans of bitter, a casserole dish, plates...

Oh! Oh...

Everything flooded back into her sleepy memory. Him kissing her palm, her all but attacking him on the living room floor. Making lo...no, having sex with Snape. Severus now. There was no way she could ever refer to him as Snape again.

Bracing herself for quite possibly the most awkward situation of her life, she rolled over to face him.

Empty.

The door to the loo was open, and the light was on, so she donned her wrapper and crept towards it, hoping not to startle him.

Vacant.

Unless he was hiding in her closet, which was decidedly a rather silly idea, there were very few other places he could be...

She walked back into the main room and only then realized that the stairs to the lower floors were opened.

Bugger.

Summoning her wand, she quickly descended the stairs and ran at full tilt down the hall, turning her head to look in rooms as she went, finding them to be empty. It really did not make much sense that he would be hiding in these rooms, but she planned to make a second sweep if need be.

As she barreled down the second flight of stairs, she panicked. What if he had found his wand? He would have easily been able to dismantle the wards she had set up and

fled...

Fuckingshitwankerbollocksfuck! This was all her fault. She let him get too close, and now he was probably gone, off to fulfill whatever the Dark Lord's request had been.

She skidded through the hallway and was surprised to find lights on. Following the lights, she ended up in her dining room.

Her research. He'd gone through it all.

He knows everything now.

Everything she had been researching, stacked neatly on the table, far more organized than her work had ever been in the midst of a project. In the center of the table was a piece of parchment with all too familiar handwriting scratched across it.

Hermione,

I had to go home. When you read my journals more carefully, you will see it had nothing to do with my... regard for you.

Try not to pour turpentine on my portrait.

Severus

PS: The password is "Permissum lacuna videor."

She glared down at the offending piece of parchment. His regard for her? That's all he could give her after last night? And password? The journals had a password? That would explain the complete lack of reference in them to anything regarding this crazy week.

Itching to go scream at his portrait and knowing he would probably tell her to go do her reading like a good firstie (and somehow retroactively remove house points), she grumpily sat down in a chair, and flourishing her wand at the first journal, the one covering the time of her years at Hogwarts, she jabbed at it, reciting the password.

And nothing happened.

A swish and a flick.

Nothing.

A swirl and a tap.

Nothing.

Angrily, she opened to the flyleaf and cast a different incantation on it.

"I solemnly swear that I am up to no good."

Of course it wouldn't work, but it made her feel better.

Ever so faintly, words began to appear on the page.

Hermione,

If you were silly enough to try that incantation, you must truly be running out of ideas. Just send my younger self home...I will be fine.

Severus

The words faded after a few moments.

She really needed to figure out how to unlock these diaries.

Speaking the password had not worked, and if Ginny Weasley's experience her first year had been any indication of the type of spellwork present on this book, there was really only one other choice. Uncorking an inkwell, she dipped in her quill and scribbled the words across the flyleaf.

She pulled her hand away from the pages and waited, not knowing quite what to expect. The book lifted slightly off the table and slammed itself shut, the back cover facing upward. Thinking that was it, she made to grab the book when again it reopened, back to front, its pages flipping one by one in quick succession, green scrawling appearing between lines. When the spell was complete, the book landed softly back on the table top, the flyleaf once again facing her. Words yet again appeared on the page:

Hermione,

I am sure the first thing you will be wondering is if I have created some sort of Horcrux through this journal. I have not. What you have cast is similar to a Revelio spell. Nothing will change about this journal...it will not be interactive in the same way that Tom Riddle's was. So please, do not worry about that.

If the words which have now appeared upset you in any way, I am truly sorry. It was not my intent to keep these events from you, but secrecy was of the essence until my younger self appeared. Before you become too enraged, please remember your experience with the Time-Turner: everything had to stay the same. Also, please understand my selfishness in not wanting to change a thing...my time with you, especially the events of our last night, was something I could never give up.

Given I am cursed enough to warrant a portrait after death, feel free to come berate me after reading a few of the passages in this volume. I am sure that you will want nothing more than to tell me off, and I am sure I will deserve every word of it.

Severus

PS: The spell will work on all of my journals, revealing many more details about my life. I hope that you will be able to use them to set the record straight on a few things. S.

More confused than ever, she settled down to read, wondering what she would learn about the Snape of her childhood.

June 4, 1992

Tonight was one of the stranger nights I have had since my return from the future. I knew tonight would be difficult: the return of the Dark Lord, sending three of my students into very real danger... but knowing what would happen and living through the event itself are far different situations.

Hermione, you were as brilliant as I knew you would be. I purposely put my all into creating that riddle, on some level hoping that you would not be able to figure it out and that I could keep you from harm. Foolish, as your discerning the riddle's answer really was necessary to set everything into motion; Potter certainly could not have solved it on his own. We can't change the present, can we?

You, of course, rose to the occasion. I was so proud of you, my brilliant girl. Of course, the height of my pride was then undercut by yet again feeling so very horrible, wrong even, for loving you as you are now. To be sure, I know the woman you will grow to be, but you're not quite there yet, are you?

Knowing you were entering into such danger, and not being able to do a damned thing about it, was one of the hardest things I have ever endured. I paced my office until I was certain I would somehow fall through the hole my feet were surely making in the stone floor. Did you know you can only break a quill so many times before it is no longer repairable by magic? The "magic" number is 13, in case you were curious.

I knew Potter was successful in an instant, as for the first time in eleven years my Mark began burning. It was faint, barely registering. Tonight really does mark the beginning of my end in so many ways. I wonder if it was enough to awaken my fellow compatriots.

Soon, I will have to go to Dumbledore's office and discuss what "all this means." As if I do not know. Spying for the Order has always come easily for me. Being a solo spy for everyone's future has been more lonely than I could ever have imagined. I wish I had you, Hermione, to talk over these things with. I wish I somehow had been able to keep the Time-Turner to go and talk with you about how hard this is. But after the way I left you, I'm not sure you would even want me to.

Hermione put the journal down, hands shaking. She hadn't thought about the night Harry found the Philosopher's Stone in so many years. She smiled, remembering the day she had set Professor Snape's robes afire, thinking he had been trying to harm Harry. All of the adventures of that first year...scary at the time, child's play in hindsight. She had been told that Professor Snape had created that riddle, and she had been proud of herself for being intelligent enough to puzzle it out, though even at the time, it had seemed remarkably easy. To hear Harry and Ron tell the story, it was the hardest question they were ever asked at Hogwarts...

But to know that Profess...Severus...had been so worried about her and so proud of her for solving his riddle... It was so inharmonious with how she remembered him.

Her dream from earlier swam back into memory. While she always remembered the terror she felt in response to Professor Lupin's transformation, she had quite forgotten how Severus had forced the children behind him and had taken on the werewolf directly. She had only learned later how Professor Lupin had almost killed Severus as a child, through no fault of his own. He must have really cared about them to face that sort of danger...

December 26, 1995

I do not know why I decided to torture myself last night. I had been lucky enough not to be required to attend the Yule Ball. I should have stayed away.

Instead, I attended, Disillusioned to not garner any attention. If I had known you were going to be there, dressed so lovely, I would have hid in my rooms for the duration of the Christmas holiday.

Last night was the first time I've seen you in so many years looking as I picture you...an adult. Hermione, your dress, just the right shade of blue, flattered you better than any outfit I had ever seen you in. I saw you smile at your friends, and for the first time, I saw your adult smile without the front teeth I wish I had not had to mock. You will never realize how horrible Draco's ill-timed hex and my response to it made me feel.

I left the ball right as Krum and you began to dance. Seeing you there, so lovely, so adult... It was the first time since leaving you in the future that I really got a glimpse of what I had left behind. I will not lie to you and say that it didn't affect me. I wept last night for the first time since the day I returned to my past, Hermione. I am so lost without someone who knows about us.

He spoke of them as if there were a relationship between them. That might be endearing if she had never had feelings for him, but with those in the mix, Hermione only felt sad... and slightly used. How dare he use her memory in this way? She was infuriated and yet oddly flattered. She had also had no idea he had been there that night. She loved those blue robes; they still hung in her wardrobe, and every few years, she would try them on, marveling that it still fit. So much of that night was tinged with sad memories...her row with the boys, specifically...and it was nice, even after all those years, to know that someone besides Viktor had regarded her as lovely.

Nervous and insatiably curious to know what else Sna...Severus...had written, she continued.

June 8, 1996

If nothing else, I suppose the burden of my secrets over the last sixteen years has finally been lifted. Dumbledore knows everything now, Hermione. Well, not everything. I was not foolish enough to give him my materials from the quickly approaching future. He believed a lie about my future self warning me that I was to share my journals and books with no one. I have, however, put as many wards up around my belongings as I can, knowing Dumbledore will probably try to find these writings the second I leave the castle.

But yes, he does know about us. And that using Lily as my excuse to join the Order of the Phoenix was a lie. He was surprisingly calm as I told him. As long as a love is in the mix, and yes, I still love you more than I ever thought possible, I do not believe he cares. Of course, I did get a stern warning that should I ever confront your younger self with this information, I would be severely punished.

Luckily, you were unconscious when the reason I had to tell Dumbledore everything happened, or I would have been "severely punished" as we "speak." I knew you were going to run off with Potter after Black, and yet again, I had to let it happen. I knew you would be cursed, but not with what. Given the nature of the battle, I was not surprised when Dumbledore called me to the hospital wing to look over some of the injuries...some of the spells are so Dark that Poppy is completely unaware of their existence.

I was not expecting you to be the only student in the room, nor that I would be the only adult present. As I rushed to your side, I saw that you were as pale as the sheets you lay on. Your hospital gown was ever so slightly opened, and I could see the scar that bisected your chest, curling around to your heart in electric green intensity.

The Heart Curse. The True-Love's Curse. The Snow White Curse. Whatever you called it, it was one of the most deadly curses in Dolohov's arsenal. Had I not had the cure, you would have died within forty-eight hours. I wonder if anyone ever told you that?

Its only cure was, of course, a kiss from your beloved. Krum was long gone, and Ron was in no state, given his own injuries, to come to your assistance.

I sat next to you on the bed. For the first time, I realized you had gained your full height...you were becoming ever more like the woman I loved. As I took your hand in mine, tears began to fall. I swear, Hermione, you are the only woman who has ever made me cry like this. Brushing your hair away from your face and feeling forever the pervert I suppose I am, I leaned down to kiss you. Your skin, which had been cold to the touch, flushed with warmth, and your lips pressed back to mine for just a moment. As I leaned back, your eyes flickered opened, and I quickly dropped your hand. I wonder if you even

remember?

"Professor Snape," you said to me, a look of puzzlement flashing over your weary features, "what is happening? Why am I here in the infirmary? With you?"

As quickly as I could, I turned away from you, willing the glassy sheen over my eyes to abate. Turning back with my fiercest glare, I responded.

"To cure you from the curse you so irresponsibly received. Do try not to waste my time again with such unnecessary trips to the infirmary."

I stormed out of the room, not looking back to see your face crumple into what I assumed was tears at receiving my condemnation. I thought I had made it out with no complications when I heard a slight cough coming from the end of the corridor.

Dumbledore.

"Severus, I believe it's time for a long-needed conversation."

He must have suspected something, from God knows what action on my part. Either way, I found myself in his office, sitting in the students' chair across from his desk, pouring out my story to him. He gave me the task of protecting you, as well as Potter and Weasley, as I knew he would. I had already written it in these journals, so how could I be surprised?

As I sit here now, retelling this story to you, Hermione, I write hoping that you can at least forgive me. You have no idea what it is like to love someone you cannot be with...that through circumstances, time, and age, you have no right to even speak to. Loving you is my blessing, my Hermione, and my curse. I live day to day, just hoping that the things I must do lead to you living a happy, blessed life and that you remember our time together at least with some fondness. I know I have no right to love you as I do and no real reason...we were only together a week. And yet through all of the stress of my life, through knowing the exact details of my necessary death and ultimate vindication, you have become my touchstone, Hermione. I would not be able to survive without your memory.

Tears were streaming down her face. Severus was absolutely right...no one had ever explained to her the curse she had been hit with. She realized she had been absently rubbing the top of her curse scar through the entire reading, and she wondered if her feelings for Severus after his death had in any way been affected by it.

No, Hermione. Your regard for Severus went far earlier than the curse.

It was all so hard to comprehend: his treatment of her in school versus the very real evidence that he had loved her and had been protecting her at every turn. That somehow, her treatment of him, through her kindness and honesty, she supposed, had touched him such that he was able to go back and become the hero he was. All because Voldemort had sent him on this path.

She had to talk to him. But what to say? What could she possibly say to him now? He had been waiting twenty years for this conversation, both in life and after death, and she had no idea how she was to respond. The memory of their night together, and the week before, was so new, so fresh... She had not even had time to deal with it. And to find all of these journals written to her?

Yes, she needed to talk to him. But first, she needed to sleep. And take a gratuitously long bath.

She could not believe herself, fidgeting with her hair, putting on makeup, picking a flattering outfit. She knew she was stalling, but at the same time, part of her was still angry in spite of all of the things she had read. Last night had been special to her...far more so than she could have ever imagined...and yet he had left her with only a short note. No morning to explain everything, no day to figure out the best way to send him home. As she had taken her bath, she had gone over every moment of their interactions and had come out wondering how, if he had such regard for her, he could just vanish like that? How he could just ignore all of her research and time and heartache and just leave? As sympathetic as she had been upon going back to her attic, her time there, seeing the leftover bits of him he had left behind, had just infuriated her anew.

She picked a deep V-neck periwinkle dress just to infuriate him, makeup meant to accent her eyes. Her hair, pulled back in an intentionally messy twist, was intended to remind him of their night together.

Hermione Granger had spent the last two years guilty and miserable in life; she was not about to give him any mercy in his death.

She moved through the house in a daze, trying to think what the first words out of her mouth should be, planning something so scathing his older self might be proud, had she not been herself. As she approached the door, she paused, pulling her dress into its appropriate shape, making sure she looked her best.

She had finally decided how she was going to address him...rather than come at him yelling, crying, and hurt, she would merely inquire as to what he wished to happen with his newly annotated journals and ask him for suggestions on a historian to write his true biography. In no way would she acknowledge the changed dynamic. For once since he was twenty, Snape wouldn't know what was coming, and she hoped to throw him off long enough to be able to keep it together. She had no wish to cry and sob in front of his portrait as she had the first night of his appearance in her attic.

Afternoon light poured into the gallery, bouncing off the hardwood floor. All of the figures in the wizard photographs on the walls seemed oddly still, as if they were waiting to see what would happen just as much as she was wondering that herself. Her apprehension must have reached new levels; as she arrived at his portrait, the sconces on either side flared into life. She had not performed uncontrolled magic since she was a child, and the abrupt outburst of light startled her.

Finally, she raised her eyes to take in his portrait. Headmaster Snape's portrait, usually depicting his entire body, showed merely his face and shoulders, life sized; his painted likeness stared down at her with an inscrutable expression.

She was taken aback. She had been so focused on the present-day Snape that seeing him this old and sad... It brought her abruptly back to the present. This was the Snape of her childhood...the man aged far beyond his years. The man who had abused her and her classmates far more than any other teacher.

The man who had saved her time and time again. Who had lived only to make sure she survived. Who had died because she had done nothing. The man she had just...

All the preparation, all the knowing exactly what she was going to say...all the preening and getting ready...gone. As she sank to her knees, she was aware of tears welling in her eyes and hated herself for the response. She looked up into his eyes and saw something there... Compassion? Sadness? Love?

One of his hands entered the frame and ran through his hair. He opened his mouth as if to say something, then closed it.

For so much of her life, this man had had complete control over every single verbal exchange they had. Seeing him this powerless to speak to her made absolutely no sense. She could not handle it.

"Please, Headmaster, say something..."

His eyes, which had wandered away from hers, shot back to hers. A look of shock replaced his earlier features.

"Headmaster? *Headmaster?* Did you even read the journals? After all of this, you call me Headmaster?" His voice, usually so strong and forceful, wavered through the entire phrasing, the scratchiness from the snake's bite worse than normal. She found herself even more frustrated.

"Well, yes, I do believe that is your title." She could not falter now...if she did, all of her control would be lost. She rose to her feet again, attempting to gain back what little confidence she had left. "I would like your input as to who should receive your journals. With all of this extra information, I believe an accurate biography should be written, one where your obsession with the *proper* Muggle-born is explained."

His face crumpled. At least she still had the upper hand.

"I suppose I deserve that. You should probably know that I spelled those journals so only you could see the information about us. The other additions throughout will be able to be seen by the public. Though, I wish you did not consider my love for you an obsession..."

"What else do you call a man who painstakingly chronicles his entire life for me to read? Who insists that he loves me after leaving me! Who..."

"Hermione Granger!" Her name, yelled in that tone, had always been able to make her freeze. He looked down at her apologetically, but continued.

"Hermione... have you not yet realized that the night I left you, which I had no choice but to do, I threw away, in one moment, the one good thing I have ever had?"

No, she had not realized that.

"Think about everything you know about me. You are as aware of the events of my life as I am. When has anyone ever treated me with the respect you did? You kept me prisoner, horribly I might add..." He smirked, and she felt herself smiling in spite of herself.

"And yet you made sure I was warm, well fed, and safe. You treated me like a human being, something my father, my Lord, my classmates, and Dumbledore certainly never did. In spite of our history, you still treated me kindly. When we were together that last night..."

"I do not wish to discuss that, Headmaster!"

"Severus! And you will listen to me. When we were together that last night, it was the first time, the *first*, that I was with a woman because it was what we both wanted. Without political aspiration, without someone losing a bet. In spite of knowing better, and I *know* you knew better, you had shown me true compassion that morning. The nightmare you comforted me from was one of the most terrifying of my life, and you made me feel safe.

"You brought me food that you had made yourself, with a recipe I swear you lifted from my mother, in an attempt to make me feel comfortable. You spent hours researching, trying to find me a way home, a *safe* way home. No one, not one person for the rest of my life, cared about me the way you did that week. And if I love you because of all of these things, you cannot blame me. It was all your doing."

She breathed in deeply, trying to quell the shaking that wracked her body. It was all too much to take in. "And your behavior the day I visited your portrait the first time? Why were you so cruel then? Your life was over...you had no reason to lie to me anymore."

The Potions master grimaced. "And have you and me get along? Become friends? Do you think that you would have treated my younger self with such skepticism, such mistrust, at first? If you had just come back from a nice chat with your former Professor? If we had come to an understanding in this life, would you have been able to send my younger self back? No, you needed to continue to have no attachment to me, or as little as possible. Everything had to play out as it had before."

"You didn't have to make it so hard... If we hadn't... If you had just gone back... Or let me find the answer..."

"If we hadn't what? Made love? It's been twenty years for me, but as I recall, Hermione, that was your idea..."

She cursed her traitor cheeks for flushing. He was right, though; while he had just been teasing her, she really had led them down that path. She looked away, focusing all of her attention on the flickering candles.

"You could have stopped me..." She was quickly falling apart. All of her intentions...all of her wishes to keep control, shattered in the presence of this man. So many dreams from the past and memories of the present slipped away as her heart broke, its pieces longer able to contain them.

His rich, deep laughter had survived the snake's bite, apparently. It filled the gallery, echoing off the walls and piercing her heart. "Look at yourself, Hermione. God, you are as beautiful as I remember. If I were alive, do you think we would be talking right now? Honestly? If my nearly forty-year-old self can't resist you, how could my twenty-year-old self?"

It just wasn't fair. As she brought her eyes back to his, she realized he was looking at her, even now, with more appreciation than any living man in her life. Tears began to fall from her eyes, and she could not bring herself to care.

"And what do I have now? I lived the last two years of my life trying to make up for what I did to you, just letting you die like that. And now you're telling me otherwise...that you had to die, that there was nothing I could have done to stop it. That you do not hate me and that there is no way we can actually be friends. I gave up my life, my education, my *friends*, to make sure you were remembered properly, and I am learning today that I do not even know you...me, the expert in your life! What do I have, now that you have taken everything away from me?"

"Ron. You have Ron."

Ridiculously long AN: *Permissum lacuna videor* in horrible Latin means "Let the words appear."

Yes, I did combine movie canon and book canon for the werewolf scene. I just think that there are good bits in both (the head scraping, mostly), especially the protective gestures Rickman gives in the movie. It fits with what I'm doing, so in this one case, I veered into movie canon.

For those of you who are about to burn me at the stake: this conversation between the two of them is not finished. You should now be hearing maniacal laughter in the distance.

Finally, muchos gracias to clairvoyant and dragonhideboot, who talked me off a ledge through part of writing this chapter!

Breathe

Chapter 14 of 17

Snape returns to 1980 and, after returning to Spinner's End, assumes his role as double-agent.

Chapter 14 Breathe

Spring 1980

He awoke in his kitchen in much the same position as his first trip, the dust and grime greeting him and immediately reminding him of what he had left behind. His older self had said he would need time to himself for this week, but for some reason, he hadn't been expecting that need to smack him in the face the second he arrived.

His eyes were watering and his nose running, probably due too the copious amounts of dust and dirt he was lying in. He was grateful for the dishrag he had stolen; it served quite well now as a handkerchief.

He did not know what he would do with himself. He could not leave the immediate area of his house...any whispers making it back to the Dark Lord that he had returned before he was supposed to would only cause someone he cared about harm. He was stuck in the End for a week. Like so much of his childhood, he was not optimistic for this vacation.

"Cope." That was what his portrait had told him to do. With a bag full of Muggle money, he would be able to cope rather well.

Hours later, he woke up on the floor of his living room, surrounded by takeaway containers and empty bottles. He had coped the way he knew best...greasy food, Irish whiskey, and bad telly. He had put off thinking about the last week as much as he could, but faced with exhaustion from his day, thoughts of Hermione Granger had swirled in his mind.

As he had drifted off to sleep, he knew this week would be very long indeed. He had only hoped his dreams would leave him in peace.

Now, awake again, he knew that he would not sleep well until he had confronted the Dark Lord. It was going to be a very long week.

The self-pity of the day before lifted with the dawn, and Snape found himself going slightly stir-crazy. He knew he could not change the house in any way, judging from the state of his museum, but he did find himself wishing to improve it. Having seen his home that clean and orderly made him realize just how bad he had let the house get. Not wishing to call attention to his magical signature, he decided to do it the Muggle way.

It took days, but the house had never looked better. There was something soothing about polishing old silver pieces and rubbing wax into bannisters until they gleamed. For the first time in his life, every window in the house was open, and the breeze took away the dank, depressing atmosphere of the house. He replaced every burned-out and ancient light bulb in the house with newer bulbs, and the house almost felt cheery with their warm light.

He even took the rugs out into the back alley, hung them over a gate, and beat them within an inch of their life. Decades of dust and dirt flew in every direction as he vented out his anger and sadness. At times, the Dark Lord's face appeared in front of him; at other times, Hermione's. More often than not, it was his father or Lily...the two people who had betrayed him first. At night, he read the journals he had taken with him, and in its pages, he found that, eventually, he did seem to come to terms with all of this rage. He had a feeling that if he ever were to learn Occlumency as his older self had instructed him to do, all of these extra emotions had to go, so into the rugs they went.

He expelled all of his despair into the house, exorcizing demons and trying to remove Hermione from his mind. He knew the latter was in vain...he had spoken to his future self, and it was clear that what had happened between him and Hermione would never leave him, and it would only intensify throughout his life.

He saved the attic for last. He was not sure he could handle revisiting the site of their relationship. While so many things were indeed different, all it took was closing his eyes and he was right back there with her. He did not move a thing other than to dust, but as he worked, he focused on his memories, trying to imbue his few good memories of this house into the very matter surrounding him. The attic had been the place he hid as a child when his parents' rowing would get too much to handle. For once, the attic held good memories... too good and, by the same token as the bad, equally painful.

After wiping the last bits of dust from the baseboards, he stretched, working the kinks out of his back. For just a moment, he closed his eyes, envisioning the attic as it had been with Hermione... her bed just over against the far wall...

It was the last time he ever entered the room.

Once again, he prepared to go to the Dark Lord without summons, hoping that the news he brought would be enough to keep him from harm. Had it only been a week since he was here? On his way to the Malfoys' home, he quickly stopped by his mother's. He did not approach her...he just wanted to make sure she was safe. A rapid glance through her kitchen window proved she was just fine; in fact, she was, of course, preparing the same meal Hermione had fixed for him on their last night together. He would far rather have spent the evening eating with her than eating whatever five-course feast would be put before him tonight.

As he approached the front gates of Malfoy Manor, he realized how foolish this trip might have been. Had his mother not been home, he would not have been able to keep control of himself in his Master's presence. Showing up half-cocked ready to defend his mother would have only served to harm them both. He had a lot to learn about this spy business.

Having finally made it to the end of the walk, he raised his hand to knock on the door. Before his knuckles could make contact, the door swung open abruptly. As he looked down the hallway, he was surprised to see no one there.

"Sir is back! I is being so pleased!" Dobby looked up at him shyly, his unbandaged hands fidgeting with a drooped ear.

"Yes, Dobby, I have returned. I believe the Dark Lord is expecting me?"

"He and the Master and the Mistress is eating dinner. You is coming with me now."

And before he could respond, the little elf slipped his hand into his own and practically dragged him down the hallway. It was such a simple gesture, and yet it calmed him. As they approached the door to the main dining room, Dobby squeezed his hand once more and winked out of the room. He heard himself being announced and waited a few seconds before entering.

He quickly glanced up to confirm the members of the room before deciding upon a chair. He could not believe it, but Narcissa somehow managed to look markedly more pregnant than the week before. He took the seat next to her. His nerves got the best of him, and he found himself unable to make eye contact with anything but his teacup.

As he seated himself, this time a house-elf strangely absent, his Lord began to speak.

"I see you have returned, Severus. I do hope your journey was... successful. I would hate to think of the consequences should you have returned with nothing."

"Yes, my Lord, aside from a few inconveniences, my trip to the future was indeed successful."

"Inconveniences?"

"Yes. I suffered from a fairly severe nasal hemorrhage the night of my arrival."

"Ah. Noted. And the boy?"

"Already dead, my Lord. By your own hand." He hoped his words sounded convincing. They must have, judging by the predatory gleam in the Dark Lord's eyes.

"When?" The Dark Lord leaned forward in anticipation.

"In 1998."

"Must I wait so long, Severus? Who is the child? If we know now, why can we not just act at this moment?"

"Potter, my Lord. A boy named Harry Potter."

"Potter? The child will be the son of that boy who married your childhood Mudblood?"

Lucius snorted, his best pureblood look of disdain crossing his face.

Snape desperately tried not to flinch at that, thoughts of both Lily and Hermione flooding his mind. "Yes, my Lord."

"So why not kill the boy when he is born?"

Snape took a deep breath. This was the moment that changed everything.

"Because, my Lord, through this boy, you will create the means for your own immortality."

Narcissa gasped. In all of his years of association with the Dark Lord, Snape had never seen such a look of shock cross his face.

"And what could you possibly mean by that, Severus?"

"Horcruxes."

The Dark Lord actually dropped his fork. "Lucius and Narcissa, leave us."

Lucius glared at him, affronted. "But my Lord..."

"Now!" The Dark Lord bellowed.

Narcissa scurried to the exit with an irritated Lucius at her heels; that was as close as any Malfoy would get to stomping out of a room.

The Dark Lord pinned him with a stare nearly lethal. "Nobody knows about my Horcruxes, Severus. Nobody!"

It took everything he had in him to remember to breathe. "I do, my Lord." *Breathe in, breathe out.* "And your killing the Potter boy will create your strongest Horcrux. It is the Horcrux that assures your ultimate immortality."

"Why? Why is it the strongest?"

"It will begin in October, my Lord, when you will attempt to kill the child."

The Dark Lord did not look pleased. "Attempt? Severus, I never fail to kill those I have marked for death."

In spite of his obvious annoyance, the Dark Lord did look curious. It was then that Severus knew he had him exactly where he wanted him.

"On October 31 of next year, you will attack the home of James and Lily Potter. James you will kill instantly. Lily will be guarding her son and will give her life to save him. When you cast the Killing Curse upon the child, the spell will backfire, damaging you for many years. Then, when you come back to full power, you will truly kill her son. You see, the magic Lily will use to save Harry is an old magic. Blood magic, governed by love. When you ultimately kill Harry, you will become truly unstoppable."

It was clear that his Lord was tempted by this information. "When you say damaged, what do you mean?"

This was the catch, and Severus knew it. "You will live a half-life... moving from host to host until you are able to regenerate. It will take some time..."

"How long?" the Dark Lord demanded.

"Fourteen years."

Severus braced himself, expecting to be tortured. He was completely shocked by his Lord's response.

"Fourteen years seems a simple price to pay for everlasting life."

His Lord smiled, and Severus let out a breath he didn't know he was holding in. *Shit, forgot to breathe, again.*

"And all this comes about by the killing of Lily and James Potter. Tell me, Severus. Does it bring you joy to know that those who have hurt you so deeply will die?"

Don't falter now. Do not falter now. "Yes, my Lord."

His Master paused at this, taking a few bites of food. Not knowing what to do, Snape fixed himself a plate as well. As he attempted to savor the first bite, the interrogation began again.

"And how did you come by all of this information?" It was the one question Snape had wished he would not be asked. He hoped the speech didn't sound too rehearsed.

"When I arrived in my future, I found that my house had been purchased by a woman, a Mudblood, one not sympathetic to your cause. I immediately found myself held captive by..."

"Held captive? I expect better from you. How did you escape this Mudblood?"

"In just a few days, I managed to gain her trust. After a few more, I fucked her. The last night, I overpowered her, regained my wand, forced her to take Veritaserum, and she divulged everything I needed." He had to find a cold place in his brain he never knew existed to be able to deliver that lie. He supposed it would be the first of many such deceptions.

The Dark Lord looked amused. "Well done," the Dark Lord responded, "exceedingly well done. And in this future of ours, do you gain the Potions position at Hogwarts?"

Snape swallowed hard, preparing himself for yet another accursed string of lies. "Yes, my Lord. I will obtain the position for next fall. I will gain the old man's trust by telling him of my betrayal of the Potters, using the love I had for Lily Evans as a child as my trump card. You know how the man is with love. He soaks it up like a sponge, thinking me loyal to him. The information I gain from Dumbledore helps you take over the entirety of the wizarding world."

The Dark Lord began to laugh, a slow pealing melody that was as far removed from a normal sound of joy as one could possibly imagine. "Dumbledore, taken down with

his own emotions. What a fitting death for my former professor."

Another interminable pause. Another set of bites, each of which threatened to cause his stomach to expel its contents.

Breathe in, breathe out.

"Severus, if Lucius were here, he would probably ask why we should believe you. After all, could you not just be saying these things to gain my favor and a position of honor within my ranks?"

Shit. He has a fair point.

The Dark Lord paused, then continued, "And I would have to respond to Lucius that I have complete faith in you. Why, you might ask? Because should you be lying to me, you will have created your own death. Any betrayal, any slight deviation in your story or any information you bring me from this day forth, for the rest of your life, and you will be punished. Your very. Short. Life. You see, Severus, you have now become my font of knowledge. Should history play out as you have described, I will know the veracity of your statements. Should it not, well, then I suppose your life will indeed be truly mine."

Snape had never had so much difficulty keeping his breathing even in his life. He wondered if this, too, like the lying, would ever become easier.

"My Lord, I assure you, my death will never come in response to my betrayal of you and our your cause." Another lie.

"We shall see, Severus. We shall see. And the Time-Turner? I assume it is still in working order?"

"I suppose so. I have not attempted a second trip, but everything seems to be intact." As he slipped a hand in his pocket and retrieved the bauble and chain, his stomach clenched in sadness. By giving the prototype back, he was giving back any hope of seeing Hermione again...any hope of escape from his future. He handed the Time-Turner to his Master, and as their fingers grazed each other, a cold feeling washed over him, akin to descriptions he had read of the physical effect of Dementors on humans. His future self was correct on at least one point: there was something molecularly evil within this man.

The Dark Lord pocketed the device, and as quickly as their conversation had begun, it ended. With a snap of his fingers, Dobby reappeared.

"Elf, summon the Malfoys back. It is now quite past time for their dinner."

Dobby only managed a terrified squeak before leaving the room. Soon, the Malfoys entered. As Narcissa made to take the seat next to him, Snape rose, pulling the chair out for her. He searched for any conversation piece...

"Narcissa, you are looking positively radiant tonight! How long until the baby arrives?"

She smiled and placed a hand over her stomach. "Only a few more months now, and our darling Draco will be born. The Healers believe he will come in early June."

Snape attempted not to let his disdain at the name show on his face. "I'm sure you cannot wait."

Lucius, whose look of insatiable curiosity had been obvious the second he had entered the room, finally spoke up. "We were so abruptly interrupted before, Severus. Do tell us about your tri..."

"The information Severus provided me was for my ears alone, Lucius. Should I find a need for the details to be shared with you, I will inform you." The Dark Lord's tone indicated that no further questions should be asked. Lucius seemed to do his best to keep a look of irritation from his face. Snape did not blame him...how unfortunate to be so emasculated within one's own home.

Other than that brief moment of tension, as the night progressed, the atmosphere became decidedly happier. For a few blessed moments, he almost forgot that he was a sheep in wolf's clothing...a pariah amongst those who had, just a week prior, been his friends. A liar. A double agent. Now he had one master...soon, he would have two. Three if he included his memories of Hermione. He counted the moments before he could easily make his exit.

As he left the Malfoys' that night, all he could think about was how alone he would be from this night forward. Having to carry this burden... knowing his death was coming, and how unfair it would be to any other person to ever enter into a relationship. Understanding he would simply exist, living for one goal alone: keep Hermione Granger safe. He spun, Apparating back to his street, not yet wishing to return to his home, itself full of too recent memories. A shop on the corner sold stationery, and he entered, looking for a journal markedly different from those he had returned with. Purchasing it and a box of biros, he made the journey home.

The house was dark by now, and he preferred it that way. No longer kept from using his magic, he quickly spelled all of the windows shut. Crossing to his father's roll-top desk, he opened it and sagged into the chair. Clicking on the lone light in the room, which illuminated just the desk, he opened the new journal and began to write.

My Hermione,

If tonight is any indication of how hard this life I've chosen to return to will be, then I will probably be making use of this journal quite often. What you have had before now, I suppose, are my official journals, with additions for your eyes only. I will leave you clues to find this journal at some point (or I suppose I already have, given I have my own journals...even now, discussing my two lives and time travel is difficult), I'm sure.

I called you unspeakable things tonight, Hermione. I stared into the Dark Lord's face and called you a Mudblood. I impugned your honor. From what I gather from our future relationship as teacher and student, tonight was the first of many times I will have to say horrific things about you.

I'm sorry.

Until the next time I am Summoned, I suppose I will become an expert in my own future, as sad and damned to end as it is. I do not completely understand how portraits work, but if even a small part of me lives on in mine, I cannot wait until I once again am able to speak with you as I know you and... love you.

S.

AN: And we're back in 1980. We've got two more chapters and an epilogue at this point. Thank you all for your support thus far, even if it does sting. And thanks to clairvoyant, dragonhideboot, and linlawless for the use of their editing eyes!

And In the End

Chapter 15 of 17

Severus once again finds Hermione, and his true role begins.

Very Rare Pre-Chapter AN: Grab tissues...

Chapter 15 And In the End

September 1991

Snape had managed to avoid Quirrell for most of the summer, but tonight, of all nights, the turban-headed professor had taken the seat directly next to him. His left arm tingled and burned, as if he had slept on it awkwardly all night, being so close to the presence of his former Master.

The stuttering fool wanted to talk, on and on, about absolutely nothing. The quality of the wine, the adorable shining faces of the first years... An off-hand comment about the bushiness of one little girl's hair in particular nearly caused Snape to quit the table.

It was the first time he had looked upon her face in eleven years, and seeing her there, oversized front teeth worrying her lip in nervousness, not yet grown to her adult height, completely oblivious to his presence, was startling. As the Sorting Hat called her name, she raced to the stool, nearly ripping off the brim of the hat with the force with which she brought it down over her head. He mouthed "Gryffindor" along with the hat as he reached for his water goblet, almost knocking it over with shaking hands.

"Are you qu-qu-uite well, S-s-severus? You do not s-s-seem to be enjoying the S-s-sorting."

"Sod off, Quirrell."

Yelling at Quirrell felt good. It was the closest he ever got to staring the Dark Lord in the face and telling him off.

As Harry Potter walked up to the stool, looking more terrified than all the other children put together, a flash of dream raced through his brain. But this bespectacled James, with *those* eyes staring up at him... It was distressing in its own way.

Though he was sitting in his seat, his life lurching ahead with yet another tug, the room around him carried on as it did every year: the children took their seats, Dumbledore muttered some nonsense, and the first years' collective gasp rushed through the room at the appearance of their feast. Harry Potter sat at the Gryffindor table, finally looking happy. To his right was the Longbottoms' boy and another dark-haired child whose name he would have to learn. Across from him, the only Weasley child he honestly could not stand: Percy.

And to Harry's left... Hermione. He could not take his eyes off her... Seeing her again brought every emotion he had tried to leave behind back to the forefront of his mind, and he pushed them away, fearing that somehow the ghost of the Dark Lord sitting next to him would know.

The Dark Lord, however, instead of somehow Legilimizing him through Quirrell, seemed fixated on Potter, if Quirrell's intense stare were any indication. In the next instant, Potter grabbed at his forehead, a look of pain shooting across his face. Quickly, Snape turned to Quirrell, trying to stop the situation.

"Quit hoarding all the potatoes, Quirenius!"

For an instant, as Quirrell's eyes locked with his, he saw the eyes of the Dark Lord glaring back at him. Then Quirrell blinked, and he seemed bewildered.

"I'm s-s-sorry, S-s-s-everus?"

"Potatoes!"

Quirrell passed them along, looking confused as to why he was being yelled at.

Snape sighed and kept himself from looking at Hermione. He could feel the Potter boy's gaze fixed upon him, and he ignored the boy. Potter probably thought him a monster already. And judging from his journals, his first Potions class would seal in that reputation for a very long time.

It was the first of many times Snape would intervene to keep Potter from harm.

~~&~~

June 24, 1995

He stayed just long enough to get Pomfrey to their newly discovered Mad-Eye Moody. As he strode out of the castle, he forced himself to clear his mind. It had been years since he had had to play this game, to stare the Devil in the face and not flinch, and now that he was older, he hoped he had the strength for the years to come.

Pressing an index and middle finger to his Mark, he winked out of existence.

He was greeted by utter chaos. Death Eaters unmasked, screaming at each other. The Dark Lord watching over it all serenely, waiting for his followers to calm themselves, giving them far more consideration after all these years than Severus had ever thought the Dark Lord capable of. Taking a deep breath, he walked through the melee, eyes locked with his Lord's.

"Nice of you to bother showing up, Snape." A voice whipped through the crowd. Snape did not flinch, ignoring the challenge, and knelt before the Dark Lord, newly reformed.

"Severus, did you take care of loose ends as we planned?" The Dark Lord's form was hideous; only a shadow of his former handsomeness remained. His eyes burned red, his nose two slits, his skin paler than death.

"Yes, my Lord. Dumbledore believes Crouch to be the only perpetrator. As we speak, a Dementor is *en route* to Hogwarts to dispose of Crouch's soul. Dumbledore will be livid, but knowledge of our plans will die with Crouch." Yes, plans that he and the Dark Lord had invented prior to that fateful October, his Master completely unaware of just

how greatly he was being fooled.

Lucius Malfoy slipped to the front of the crowd, kneeling before the Dark Lord. "My Lord, am I to understand that your return has been orchestrated by Snape? Snape, who did not even come tonight when you called us?"

Snape was always surprised by how quickly a person's body could fall to the ground as a result of the Cruciatus Curse. Malfoy, in all his pureblood glory, was no exception.

"I have already spoken of my disappointment with you, Lucius. Do not make me remind you."

With a flick of his wrist, the punishment ended. Lucius struggled to stand, his normally icy glare looking merely sullen in his pain.

The Dark Lord stood from the tombstone he had been sitting upon and cast a quick Muting Spell on his gathered followers. The Death Eaters' complaints and conversations stopped mid-sentence. They turned to face their Master, some with guilt, others with rage.

The Dark Lord looked from follow to follower, and as he did, they sank to their knees. He looked last at Severus, already kneeling, and instead, extended his arm towards him, his pale-white hands beckoning Severus to his side.

"My... *faithful* followers. I have returned, as Severus so long ago had foreseen. Tonight, he has proven himself more valuable to me than any of you. I am *never* to hear one of you question him again, *is that clear?*"

Even without voices, the shock at this pronouncement could be heard from the rustling of robes to the stomping feet.

The Dark Lord gave them all one withering stare before waving his hand, Disapparating them all back to whence they came.

Severus barely kept himself from sucking in his breath. The Dark Lord had become far more powerful than he had in his previous body. Even with this ringing endorsement, he would have to walk a far narrower line than before.

The Dark Lord held out his arm to Severus in the position most often used for Side-Along Apparition. "Severus, come with me. We have much to discuss."

In a whirl of disorientation, Severus found him in his very own sitting room. The Dark Lord had never seen fit to come to his home. Severus was relieved that his journals had forewarned him of this. He had hidden some of the more obviously Muggle devices, though the radio and turntable cabinet he kept out of defiance, planning to explain it away as a novelty wet bar if need be.

Severus struggled to remain calm, knowing he was forever to return to his scripted life. The ensuing years since the Dark Lord's first downfall had been fairly miserable, but nothing, not even his journals, could have prepared him for the anxiety coursing through his body.

He realized he had lost himself in thought when the Dark Lord cleared his throat. Severus quickly offered his Master a seat before using the ritual of making tea as a distraction while he waited for his Master's interrogation.

The ticking of his watch drove him to distraction. He wondered if the Dark Lord was purposely setting him on edge or just failed to realize that most of his "friends" saw it as certain death to speak first in a conversation.

"Severus..."

Oh, thank God!

"... how have you been?"

In hindsight, Severus kicked himself for dropping that spoon. The noise was deafening in the quiet home. But how was he to have expected such a... nonchalant question from the Dark Lord?

He swallowed thickly before responding.

"Continuing your work, my Master. I have remained at Hogwarts as we planned..."

His master's raised hand cut him off.

"No, Severus, how have *you* been?"

Severus really wished his future self had warned him this question was coming. It was the kind of question he would prefer to have had a canned answer for.

"Oh... well... fine, I suppose. Doing my own research, fixing up my house in the summers..."

The Dark Lord snorted, his opinion of the "fixing up" abundantly clear.

"And seeing your juvenile Mudblood at school? That must have been... interesting? Especially given the circumstances under which you last saw her?"

At heart, the Dark Lord really was a nosey parker. Severus grasped at anything that would not give away his sentiments.

"The Mudblood is an insufferable know-it-all. The absolute dross put forth by her other Gryffindor classmates barely mitigates her own behavior." Severus used the opportunity to bring the tea things to the table.

The Dark Lord chuckled. "You always had a soft spot for Gryffindors..."

This was getting far too personal, far too quickly. This conversation was very different from the kneeling and scraping required of him in the old days. Severus' new position of authority, while less painful, was far more uncomfortable.

"I believe you're confusing a soft spot with my younger self's need to get laid." His eyebrows came together in the scowl that most terrified his first-years, hoping it would have the resulting effect...

"No need to get crass, Severus," the Dark Lord snapped. "Obviously, I value you far more than ever, now that I have returned. How is my... Horcrux?"

"Safely residing in Harry Potter, my Lord."

"And does anyone suspect?"

"Dumbledore may... but he finds suspicion in everything, so chalk it up to one more conspiracy theory rattling around in his old head."

This seemed to please his Master. "And the next step of the plan?"

"The Department of Mysteries, my Lord. My journals indicate it is time to test Lucius Malfoy's loyalty..."

The Dark Lord's face remained passive, but his eyes gleamed. Snape knew this was the final step in completely earning the Dark Lord's trust. After Lucius' behavior tonight, Snape knew that the Dark Lord was looking for any excuse to publicly humiliate Malfoy. And Snape had just the tools needed to ensure that end.

~~&&~~

June 1996

"A werewolf? A half-breed. Lucius let a monster distract him away from the one assignment I have given him all year? Tsk. Tsk. Tsk."

As amused as Severus was to have been able to set up Lucius so brilliantly, he winced with every click of the Dark Lord's tongue.

"And to then be arrested... I was led to believe I could trust the Malfoy family to serve me. Please, explain to me how this was possible?"

Narcissa Malfoy's gaze never left the tiled floor in front of her. The Death Eaters surrounded her in a semi-circle, their Master's idea of further intimidation. From the set of their jaws, the Dark Lord's followers felt nothing more than sympathy for her.

Narcissa's eyes were nearly swollen shut from weeping. As much as she tried to hold herself steady, Severus could see that her legs were shaking. After interminable seconds, she opened her mouth to respond.

"Crucio!"

An explosion of red light blinded Severus. Narcissa's cry of pain was so strong that everyone in attendance, save the Dark Lord, flinched. As the spell lifted, Narcissa's slight frame quaked and shook on the floor, and everyone knew from experience that she was holding back sobs.

"You will bring your son before me tomorrow evening, Narcissa Malfoy," the Dark Lord hissed. "I have a very special assignment for him. Maybe he can bring some honor back to your family."

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March 23, 1998

Severus paced through Dumbledore's...*his*...office. This was the night he had been dreading: the night Hermione would be tortured by Bellatrix. All had to go according to plan...he knew this...yet the soon-to-be worn carpet in his office showed how much energy he had expelled *not* Apparating to Malfoy Manor.

After weeks of absence, Headmaster Black appeared in his portrait.

"Did they get out, Phineas?" Snape breath hitched. In spite of knowing exactly what would happen that night, he still found himself doubting.

"Why hello, Severus, and how are we tonight?" As always, the portrait seemed annoyed that the proper pleasantries had not been exchanged.

"About to pour turpentine on you if you do not answer my question, Black!"

"Potter and Weasley are fine. Miss Granger will need some healing but is otherwise stable. Surprisingly, there was only one casualty."

Severus started. His journals had said nothing of a casualty. Had Potter managed to take down a Death Eater during his escape?

"Who?"

"Dobby, the house-elf."

He felt his eyes well up uncontrollably. Of all the pure souls to lose in this war... Dobby had been close to his heart. Ever since that blasted night so long ago when he had heard that cursed prophecy, Dobby had cared for him whenever possible, healing him after nights of being tortured, feeding him when he would forget to take care of himself. Keeping watch over Harry and Hermione when he could not...

"Calm down, Severus. He was just an eccentric little house-elf."

Black's pureblood sentiments drove him over the edge. A glass of water from his desk somehow found his way into his hand before smashing against the former Headmaster's portrait.

"Leave me, *now!*" he bellowed.

Before he could see if the portrait acquiesced, he swept from the room, the back of his hands brushing the tears from his eyes. Ripping the now-tattered spiral-bound journal and Binos from a well-warded drawer in his bedroom, he poured out his grief to the only person who would ever know his heartache.

~~&&~~

May 2, 1998

Snape was terrified. For nearly two decades, he had lived his life according to a script, cobbled together from his diaries and the materials he had stolen from the future. And now, the last night, he went in knowing the result but few of the details. The Dark Lord would accuse him of being the Elder Wand's master, Nagini had to kill him, he had to give Potter his memories. How they got from the former to the latter, no one had ever written down, been able to write down. The problems of a one-on-one audience with a psychopath.

Everything had to go to plan...he *had* to die, but what if he did not say the right things? What if he responded in the wrong way and, for some reason, did not actually die?

The stress he was feeling from lack of control was almost worse than knowing that today was his last day. At least this would *finally* all be over.

And yet, without notes, he felt as if all he could do was fail.

From the battle, he was summoned to the Shrieking Shack. Of course it would be here. The Fates had to be given their due. He had cheated death twice here, once as a boy, the other only a few years prior. At least this time, no werewolf would add to the terror of his last hours. He would die here. He wondered: if he had died in his youth, would that have solved all manner of problems?

He stood before his Master, who was rambling on about how he was no longer necessary. Try as he might to be brave, Snape found himself begging to leave, to go find Potter, to get away from the Shack. The fear the room already inspired in him was multiplied a hundredfold. The walls felt as if they were closing in, the air so heavy he felt he could barely breathe.

He desperately fought to remain composed, knowing that Potter, Weasley, and, especially, Hermione were watching at some point during this conversation. He felt like the world's worst craven, wondering if the rumors of his cowardice were finally going to be proven true. Keeping his voice steady, in spite of the words, the pathetic begging words, was nearly impossible.

Then the subject changed, as he knew it would. His eyes flicked to where Nagini was being held in her protective sphere. The end was coming fast.

"Why did both the wands I have used fail when directed at Harry Potter?"

Because you are not the wand's master, you idiot.

"I I have no explanation, my Lord."

At the end of it all, it came down to that bloody wand. He should have broken it when he had the chance, snuck into the tomb before Voldemort had the chance and incinerated the bloody twig.

I took it from the grave of Albus Dumbledore

Severus felt the blood rush from his face. The last thing that needed to happen in these final moments was for Voldemort to realize that Snape was a member of the Order, that he was the one orchestrating everything tonight. He poured what little of his resolve he had left into his Occlumency shields, on the off chance that his Lord was picking up on any of his thoughts.

The conversation felt as if it would never end. Severus knew his time had come, and like with everything else, the Dark Lord was dragging out the conversation for dramatic value. And they didn't even have an audience to impress.

"The Elder Wand belongs to the wizard who killed its last owner. You killed Albus Dumbledore. While you live, Severus, the Elder Wand cannot be truly mine."

Well, the Dark Lord was half right. He did kill Dumbledore. Yet Severus knew he never could have been the master of that wand. As strong as he was, he liked to think that he was not quite evil enough to be the master of the Death Stick.

Here it goes. The big finale.

"My Lord!" he responded. He raised his wand for good measure, hoping the flick alone would be enough for the Dark Lord to sic his snake on him. It was not. The madman continued his pontificating.

"It cannot be any other way," said Voldemort. "I must master the wand, Severus. Master the wand, and I master Potter at last."

He watched as the Dark Lo...Voldemort, for he would not go to death calling him anything but his chosen name...slashed Dumbledore's wand through the air. Bracing himself for the end, he could not help the look of relief that passed over his face. And then the hiss that spoke his doom.

As the snake lunged towards him, a beam of light caught Nagini's fangs, making them appear more horrifying than he thought possible. He did not feel the teeth that plunged through his neck at first, as the shock was too great. And then the most horrifying pain of his life, burning like fire, as his body finally felt the tearing of flesh, the poison seeping into his veins. The anti-venin he had taken was strong enough to keep him alive for a few hours, but not strong enough to ultimately allow him to live. Uncontrollably, his hands came to his throat, trying to stop the blood, to gain more time, to keep from dying before the three saviors of the wizarding world could find him.

The whisper of Voldemort's robes as he swept from the room. The sound of footsteps as Potter and Weasley approached, Hermione behind them.

As Harry bent over him, Snape panicked, not knowing how he was to give his memories...some real, some enhanced so the boy would believe the tale that Dumbledore had demanded of him in return for asylum...to the boy.

With what little strength he had left, Snape **seized the front of his robes and pulled him close.**

"Take... it... Take... it..."

With the last slivers of magic left in his rapidly fading body, he pushed every important memory to the forefront of his mind, focusing on his temples. He hoped his magical body would understand. He felt the memories course from every orifice in his head, save his nose.

A flash of light caught his eye...light bending off a conjured flask.

Hermione.

He watched as Potter siphoned his memories into the flask, his body blocking any view, save Potter's eyes, full of tears, behind those horrible black glasses.

He had one chance to see Hermione before he died. His body was useless...the last of his strength leaving with his memories. And yet he still tried.

"Look... at... me...", he managed to whisper.

Potter's face came closer, completely obscuring his view of anything else. Giving up, he drew within, completely prepared to die. His hand lost all of its strength and fell to the floor, the thudding sound deafening in the empty room.

The sounds of Voldemort's voice invaded what little of his self was left, the high, cold voice speaking horrible things to the boy. The Trio must have thought him dead, as they talked quietly to each other without giving him any further consideration. As they made to leave, Hermione glanced at him one last time.

The last thing he saw before the darkness overtook him was her face.

The Trio left, crawling back through the tunnel, where he should have died as a boy, leaving him to die a broken man. A sharp, stabbing pain ripped through his face, and his nose began gushing blood, like all those years ago. He began to feel cold, in spite of the warm spring air surrounding him in the stifling old house, and he knew it was time.

And then he knew nothing.

All bolded material is taken directly from my copy of Deathly Hallows.

My betas are awesome. They know who they are.

The Hero Dies in This One

Hermione copes with her loss as she reads through a journal intended just for her. Harry and Ron meet with Hermione to discuss the past week.

Chapter 16 The Hero Dies in This One

The days following his departure found her more depressed than she had felt since the war. Hermione went through the motions at work, cleaning up the museum every night after the guests had left, heating her soup and eating it directly out of the can, spending her nights trying to read trashy fantasy novels... and failing. She felt empty, emotionally and mentally exhausted, and spent the wee hours of the morning trying to figure out just why all of these things had happened to her.

It had not taken her as long as she expected to reread every single document at her disposal regarding Snape, to see if there was anything she had missed...anything that would have somehow allowed him to survive and live with her now.

The answer, of course, came to her from the source she had least wanted to find it in. As she thumbed through Rita Skeeter's tell-all, she got to the point where Skeeter was talking about his death.

Corroborating this belief, and unexplainable to any of the experts who examined his body, was evidence of a nasal hemorrhage which began sometime after the Trio had left. While the wound on his neck appeared coagulated (somehow the fangs just barely missed any major veins or arteries, slicing primarily through muscle and other soft tissues), this nasal hemorrhage likely caused such a severe loss of blood on top of his prior injuries that it is believed that Snape bled to death.

Some believe that the sheer loss of that many memories at once (it is never recommended to extract more than one memory at a time) caused the hemorrhage that took Snape's life. Other Healers noted evidence of a competently healed hemorrhage in his nasal passages that was not corroborated by his medical records. Did Snape suffer from some medical condition unknown to those around him? Did the giving of his memories cause his own death?

No, it wasn't the memories. For months, Hermione had felt so guilty about his death, never knowing that she really *should* feel responsible for it.

Casting Rita's book aside in disgust, she worked her way through the newly unlocked journals, looking for any indication that he blamed her, hell, if he even knew about the long-term implications of the hemorrhage.

She reached the end of the last journal. On the last page, a cryptic message had appeared.

You didn't think I was above squirreling possessions away under the floorboards of my bedroom, did you?

Puzzled, she went up to his bedroom. Though she rarely entered unless it was absolutely necessary, she loved his childhood room. Snape had always seemed most human to her in this room with his Manchester City pennants and rock posters (and one of the periodic table)...a far cry from his damp, molding rooms in the dungeons.

Other than her occasional sweeping or beating out of the knotted rag rug, the floor had never really caught her interest. Now she found herself on her hands and knees, feeling every plank of wood, hoping one would give way under her hand.

One did.

Under it, she found a very Muggle notebook, complete with spiral binding and filled with line upon line of blue, ballpoint ink.

My Hermione, it began. It was a new journal, just for her. Curling up on his small twin bed and pulling an old knitted afghan over her legs, she continued.

If tonight is any indication of how hard this life I've chosen to return to will be, then I will probably be making use of this journal quite often...

~~&~~

She read the whole thing through the night, finishing only when the first rays of sunlight crept into the room and filled her surroundings with hazy light.

The final pages of the journal, dated to the week before his death, gave her the answers she needed, though she did not like to read them.

April 25, 1998

The story of my life, Hermione, should a real version ever be written, should begin "The Hero Dies in This One." No one should come into it under false pretenses of a deus ex machina. While I was in your time, my portrait told me that there was no future for someone like me. I wanted him to be wrong. I even scheduled an appointment with a Healer to fix the hemorrhage you healed, knowing it would give me a shot at life. I didn't go.

Now, older and with far more distance from our time together, I can see his point. Heroes never live, or if they do, they live a half-life, hounded by those who would honor them. To live would be to wish to gain you back, but would you have me? Older, crueller... a murderer so many times over. To live would not be to gain back what we had...it would tarnish it, demean it.

From the moment I left you, I lived only to ensure your life and the lives of as many as I could help keep safe. I will feel guilty about maiming George well into my afterlife, whatever it may be, Hermione. Tell him that, please. And for all those I could not save... Their memories haunt me every waking moment. I've read every source I could about time and time travel, both science and science fiction, and they all seem to agree: do not change anything. And yet, I can't help but ask what was the use of all of the resources I had been given if I could not change anything? If I could not take back one death? I hate the Dark Lord most for this...for giving me this gift of time travel, fully realizing, I'm sure, that the what-ifs would destroy me.

The Final Battle, as I hope it will be called, is only days away. It is my last task, and I hope that I manage to succeed. I have thrived so far in spite of myself. There were a couple of narrow escapes. But you are safe, Potter's safe, even Weasley, in spite of his inability to just stay where he's supposed to be, is safe.

Safe as anyone being chased by all of wizarding kind's worst ilk can be, I suppose.

Stop mourning me, Hermione. I will die a hero's death. All I ever wanted as a child was to be loved and respected, and through my death, I will be. For a brief few days with you, I lived that life. Soon, I will for all our history. Without your kindness, that would not have been possible.

Stop blaming yourself. You gave me all I ever wanted.

...Severus

He was asking her to let him go, which was all her friends had been asking of her, too. He had given her permission to move on, but how? How could she possibly deal with the knowledge that it had been she, and not Lily Evans Potter, who had been Severus Snape's inspiration to endure all those years as a spy?

The last page of his diary was open before her.

May 1, 1998

Hermione,

Tomorrow will be the last day I see you in this life, if that blasted biography of Skeeter's is to be believed. I assume when I see you tonight, you will look at me with scorn...how could you possibly know of my life? I am the killer of Dumbledore, the taker of house points... The week we had together, when I was twenty, has not happened for you yet.

I would like to say I go into my death relieved. Anyone else might say I should be. What kind of life would there be for me after the war? No one forgets a person accused of murder, even if they are exonerated. As if I would ever be forgiven. It does not matter that Dumbledore ordered me to do it...I could have chosen to die that day, breaking my Unbreakable Vow and asserting my own agency.

But where would that have left you? Quite probably dead, and my entire reason for going through the last decades would have been for absolutely nothing.

No, I do not go to my death happily. I suppose you should ignore my last entry, wherein I tried to act the long-suffering hero. I am not sure why I even felt the need to lie to you sometimes in this journal. My entire life at this point is a string of lies, and given this is my last full day of life, I do not want to lie anymore.

This is the truth. The only thing that has gotten me through the past weeks has been fantasizing about not going to the Shack tomorrow...to shirk my duties and somehow find a way to have a life with you. To suddenly approach you after you would have encountered my younger self.

Of course, that would never be possible. If I did not go to the Shack tomorrow, I would not die, the museum would never open, and that week in my past would never have happened. All you would see is me, old, grey, and bitter. Why would you be attracted to that when you have so much more to live for?

I know that I have held on to your memory in a way that is completely unseemly. Nearly the entire time I have known you, you have been a minor... a child. There is something completely disgusting in me that I try not to dwell upon. And yet remembering how you were so very kind to me, in spite of your hatred of who I was at that time... That kind of caring has buoyed me through my most difficult times.

This is the last time I will be able to write you. Please know that, in my own twisted way, I do love you. I hope you take this to heart when I say don't let Ronald Weasley go. I promise you that, like most men, he will grow out of the many habits that annoy you, especially if his father is any indication of the man he will grow to be. You may think that he rushed back to your side as soon as he could because of his loyalty to Harry, but it was for you, Hermione. Let him give you the life I never could.

Tonight, I will go to my childhood home for the last time to hide this journal in my bedroom. I hope it will bring you some peace.

Goodbye,

...S.

As she read through his last entry, she was moved by the desperation, the sorrow. The last paragraph stung even more than her fight with his portrait. Because on some level, she knew he was absolutely right.

Looking at the clock, she realized that she had less than an hour before she would have to open the museum. Rushing to her attic, she quickly got dressed before jotting off a quick note to Harry and Ron at their office at the MLE. She hoped that they would come... But in all honesty, she only expected to see Harry.

Throwing some Floo powder in the fireplace, she called out the office address and tossed the letter through the grate before running down to work.

~~&~~

Harry Potter sat on the edge of his desk, thumbing through yesterday's mail, pausing only to take sips of tea. It was early, and Ron had not yet made it to the office.

A belch of green dust shot from the fireplace, startling him and causing him to slosh tea on himself, followed by a piece of parchment addressed to himself and Ron written in incredibly familiar script. He leaned over to grab it, then perched on his desk once again, wondering what Hermione could possibly have to say to the both of them.

Harry and Ron,

I need to speak with you both. I think I have needed to for a very long time. We have so much to talk about... one note from me could not even begin to address the issues between us.

Harry, could we please meet at your house tonight? And can just the three of us be there? I know it's a lot to ask, but I just need the three of us to have some time together... alone. It's been so long.

Ron... I know that you are probably looking at this, angry and confused, and vowing not to come.

Please come. I need you.

Love, Hermione

Ron found him as Harry finished reading the note, Harry's mouth open from shock, the parchment clenched in his trembling hand.

"S wrong, Harry? You look like you've seen a ghost?"

"Not a ghost, no. Just a note from Hermione. It's addressed to both of us."

The look of shock on Ron's face was quickly replaced by anger, then morbid curiosity. "What the bloody hell could she possibly want?" he asked, the venom Harry expected to pair with the words noticeably lacking. The shock on his face must have been worse than he thought.

Harry handed Ron the note to read and watched as an array of emotions passed over Ron's face. He was pretty sure one of them was hope.

"Seems our girl needs us, Harry. We haven't let her down since the troll, have we?"

Harry grinned, fairly sure that Hermione would disagree. But frankly, it wasn't worth mentioning to Ron. "Nope. Let's not start now."

~~&~~

Hermione could not believe how nervous she was to see her best friends. Two people she had seen naked on multiple occasions (Ron because... well... and Harry because he always seemed to forget his towel while they were camping), and yet she was as nervous about their upcoming meeting as she had ever been as a friendless first-year.

Emotionally, she was stretched thin. Anything could set her off tonight, either into tears, screaming, or hysterical giggles. If she had any hope of mending her broken relationships with the people that mattered most to her, she probably needed to do none of these.

She Apparated to the front steps of Grimmauld, brushing away the hair that had escaped from her ponytail in transit. Taking a bottle of whisky from her pocket, she enlarged it to full size.

Before she could knock, Harry threw the door open and pulled her into a hug. They were nearly the same height when she wore heels, and his hugs always fit perfectly. Screaming internally at the tears that tried to rush to her eyes, she clung to him, not realizing how badly she needed to be held.

Over Harry's shoulder she saw Ron, arms crossed, leaning against the wall of the hallway, his gaze nearly Legilimizing her.

Harry finally pulled away, remembering his manners.

"Can I have your coat? Do you want something to drink? Well, beyond what you seem to have brought?"

Hermione managed a wan smile and held the bottle out to him. "With what I need to tell you two tonight, I thought it might help..."

"And what exactly is that, Hermione? Going to tell us what all that research was about?" Ron's voice, while not as angry as the last time they had spoken, still sounded hurt.

She reached out and clasped his hand. "Yes, Ron. All of it."

Harry, never one to handle awkward situations well, blurted out, "Brilliant! Dinner's under the warmer. Why don't we start talking first and grab a bite in a bit?" And without waiting for an answer, he dragged them into the dining room, busying himself with grabbing glasses and ice and fussing over everyone.

"Okay," Harry said, throwing himself into a chair and sloshing a few fingers of amber liquid into his glass. "Everyone have what they need?"

Ron nodded. He had been oddly quiet since the foyer, and Harry, bless him, ignored it.

"Actually," Hermione responded, not quite making eye contact with either of them, "Harry, could you go and get your Pensieve?"

Harry had bought a Pensieve shortly after the war ended. While he did not want to forget his memories, he had told her, Harry did find it easier sometimes to put certain memories in the bowl. He said it helped him gain perspective.

"Sure... I'll be right back."

Harry left the room, and the awkward silence became deafening. Ron just stared at her, again seeming to try to deconstruct her with his gaze. Not able to stand it any longer, she interrupted the silence.

"I just thought... I just thought it would be easier. To show you both what I need to say instead of saying it. To not lose it in translation from thoughts to words."

Again, Ron simply nodded, but curiosity sparkled in his eyes. Hermione felt compelled to squeeze his hand again, but refrained, instead, taking a sip of her drink.

Harry returned, the beautifully engraved Pensieve levitating before him. He eased it down on the table, the bowl so large it covered nearly the entire surface, and resumed his seat.

Hermione drew her wand slowly, laying it across her palm. "Harry... Ron... I need you to witness an oath for me?"

Harry looked perplexed. "But why? We will always believe you, Hermione. 'Sides, we know your 'tell' when you lie." Even still, he was trying to lighten the mood. Ron looked as if he might smile.

"I know," she responded, "but what I have to tell you... It would be better if you knew that my words were true from the very beginning. They will be... hard... to believe."

The boys drew their wands and placed the tips on her palm. Closing her eyes, she invoked the words of the Wizard's Vow:

"I, Hermione Jean Granger, hereby swear that the memories I am about to put forth are in no way fabricated. They are given of me of my own free will, and they are representative of complete reality."

The tips of Harry's and Ron's wands glowed red, and the tip of Hermione's shot red sparks. They all withdrew their wands, and Hermione dug in her pocket for her vial of memories.

Using the Pensieve was a good plan, she thought. Removing enough of each memory for them to see had calmed her down significantly. She still had enough to know the context, but many of the strongest emotions had been stripped away from them. If anything, this would help her make it through what was to come.

She tipped the memories in the bowl and watched as they slipped through the liquid of the Pensieve. Motioning for the boys to enter, the three of them stood and dipped their heads in at once.

While she had once told them of her first encounter with Snape's portrait, she had never given details of his dressing down. She started with this moment.

They stood to her memory-self's right, able to see both her face and Snape's portrait. As Snape berated her, Ron leaned and whispered mockingly in her ear, "He speaks to you this way, and yet you still defend him?"

Hermione sighed. "Just watch."

Ron took a step back and continued glaring.

The scene melted, and they found themselves in the attic, observing Hermione getting ready for bed. She was lying in bed, reading one of her books, as they watched.

Harry laughed. "I don't seem to remember you wearing *that* the last time you slept over."

"Shut up," she hissed in return.

Both of the boys noticeably jumped when the body appeared on the floor. Even though Hermione knew the thud was coming, it still startled her.

"Bloody hell, Hermione. Who is that? I thought you had Apparition blockers on the attic?" Ron turned toward her, puzzled, hurt.

"I do."

"Then who..."

As the body rolled over, his face becoming clear, Hermione clenched her fists, her nails biting hard into her palms, bracing herself for the onslaught.

Ron's face went white as a sheet. Harry, gobsmacked, turned toward her, his mouth hanging open.

Ron started the onslaught of questions.

"Is that...?"

"Yes."

"But he's so..."

"Young?"

Ron nodded.

Pensieve-Hermione's scream rang through the room, and on instinct, Harry ripped his wand from his sleeve. Hermione watched herself run from the room to cloister herself in the bathroom. The slam of the door finally broke through Harry's shock.

"That's Snape?" he asked.

"Yes."

"He was here?"

"Yes, Harry."

"How?"

"Time-Turner."

"From what year?" Harry knew, as she had, that this was a critical part of *which* Snape was there.

"1980."

To be continued...

AN: Originally this was one very long chapter, so I have split it into two (the second half will post next week).

The working title of this entire story was "The Hero Dies in This One" (from The Ataris song of the same title) but too many people told me that it would cause an uprising. After all these months of posting, I'm pretty sure I should have left it.

Thank you to my lovely betas!

Was It Worth It?

Chapter 17 of 17

Hermione reveals the rest of her secrets, and time moves on.

AN: This story is now complete. For story arc and resolution reasons, I combined the last chapter and the epilogue. Enjoy!

Chapter 17 Was it Worth It?

Air whistled through Ron's teeth. "1980? And you didn't think to contact us? To have us come and make sure you were okay? What did you *do* with him?"

Hermione, embarrassed and ashamed, turned back to the scene at a loss for words.

And quickly, memory after memory, the boys observed many of the events of the last week. Hermione screaming at the empty portrait. The nosebleed... Harry looked positively green, and she was sure he was thinking of the Shrieking Shack.

They watched her create and deploy her charm, the one that changed names and removed years. She was pleased that Harry and Ron seemed suitably impressed.

She watched herself give her speech to Snape, the one about not trashing her apartment or going through her things. Memory-Hermione looked a mess, having not slept, and her voice possessed a screeching quality she had not realized.

"Brilliant, but scary." Ron smirked.

She smiled, remembering the first of many times Ron had said that to her, all those years ago when she had hexed Neville.

Her return up the stairs that night, food in tow, to find a drunken Snape. Their conversation about his albums and his ripping apart of her flat. She witnessed Harry's face...amused, horrified, baffled...as he encountered a different side to this man whom he had once reviled and now idolized, a man nearly the same age as them and just as flawed.

"How long have I been dead?"

Ron shook his head. "That man was always too smart for his own good."

Hermione remembered thinking the same thing.

The scene quickly shifted. They were now in the dining room, Pensieve-Hermione slouched over the table, poring through research. She looked as disheveled as she remembered, with broken quills holding up her hair and ink smeared on her skin. It did not help when Harry snorted...

"What? Reminds me of school, that's all!"

She shot him a glare.

They watched her Pensieve-self become frustrated, and then a look of clarity, followed by despair, crossed her face.

She was on her way to Grimmauld Place.

Ron must have realized it, too, because out of nowhere, Ron's hand came to rest upon her shoulder. She tilted her head and pressed her cheek against his hand briefly. He squeezed her shoulder, and somehow she knew that she was forgiven, a little.

The scene became dark: she was in bed awaking to the sounds of Snape's nightmare. They watched her awaken him, saw the look of panic on his face, and then... Snape pulling her into his arms. Ron exhaled angrily, but Harry seemed to understand.

"Just like when we were camping..." Harry's arms wrapped around her from behind, his chin resting on her shoulder. She leaned back against him, gaining some comfort from his gesture. The worst of it was about to come, and Harry's touch was the only thing that would ground her.

Their conversation about Regulus' death. Her quip about liking lost causes.

"Lost causes? What, like house-elf liberation?"

"Excuse me?"

"Dunno, first ridiculous cause I could think of off the top of my head."

"You sound like Harry and Ron."

"Who?"

"Never mind, Snape."

Ron looked confused. "Kind of strange that Snape came up with that example..."

Hermione frowned. "Not so surprising... Keep watching."

Early the last morning Severus had been there... They saw her come from the bathroom in her wrapper looking confused. A quick glance to the couch and...

"Where is he?" Ron's eyes were transfixed by her Pensieve self's fear.

"Get ready."

Harry and Ron both seemed to realize what was about to happen the second they noticed the attic stairs were open. They quickly ran after the memory-Hermione, watching her make her way through the house, skidding behind her into the dining room.

"What happened?" Harry immediately noticed how clean the table looked. They rushed behind the memory, reading the note over Hermione's shoulder.

Hermione,

I had to go home. When you read my journals more carefully, you will see it had nothing to do with my... regard for you.

Try not to pour turpentine on my portrait.

Severus

PS: The password is "permissum lacuna videor."

Ron frowned. "What does he mean, his 'regard for you?'"

Hermione blanched. "I don't know. You know how cryptic his notes on our papers were." She had to be careful with such answers to avoid testing the parameters of the oath.

They watched her attempt to open the journals, but with no luck. Finally, they observed as the journal unlocked. Harry and Ron attempted to read the pages, but she pulled them aside, purposely having chosen far more of this memory than necessary to give them a chance to talk.

"What did that spell do, Hermione?" Harry asked.

"It's Latin. It means 'let the words appear.' Basically, it revealed entries that had been hidden."

"But why?"

Hermione swallowed... the hardest part yet. "Professor Snape found the gallery the night before he left. He talked to his portrait and found out everything about his life... He even found his... wand."

Ron's eyes bulged. "But that means he knew..."

"...Everything." Hermione interrupted. "He used his wand to make copies of all the notes, even Rita's horrible book, and he took them back with him."

Harry looked confused. "But how do you know?"

Hermione gestured towards her self. "Because it's all in the journals. Written for... me." They turned to watch her jabbing at the journals, finally writing in the flyleaf.

"So he knew everything that was going to happen in the war. He was a bloody Death Eater when he got here, Hermione. How could you let him escape? He could have ruined everything!" Ron was livid, as she knew he would be. As careful as she had thought she was being, in hindsight, she really hadn't thought through most of what had happened with Snape very well, and the methodical side of Ron reared its head in response.

Harry seemed to get it, though. "That's not how time travel works, Ron. This had already happened before we were born. Time is... cyclical. You didn't go back with Hermione and me third year when we saved Sirius. I can't really explain it. But if Snape came forward in time, this was always part of how history played out..."

Ron shook his head. "If he knew that he was going to die, why didn't he just stay? Live his life now and never return?"

"His mum. Voldemort threatened to kill his mum if he didn't come back with the information he wanted."

"And that was...?" Ron still seemed thoroughly unconvinced.

Harry's face paled. "Me. He had to find out about me, didn't he? 1980... He'd just heard the prophecy, and Voldemort sent him to find out it was me, didn't he? That's the only reason Tom would have chosen me over Neville, isn't it?"

Hermione nodded. "From what I read in his journal, Professor Snape came to find out if the prophecy had been fulfilled. Getting jailed by me... didn't factor into that plan. He managed to break out of the attic one night, spontaneous magic... and met his portrait. I am not fully aware of what they discussed, but apparently it changed his mind. Snape needed more time to research in the museum, so he came back one night, hiding his wand from me. He went back for the rest of the information.

"Something his portrait said changed his mind. I'm not sure what. But it was coming here that caused him to switch sides."

"And he had a script for the whole war. Brilliant. No wonder he was such a great spy...he knew how every move would play out before it happened..."

It was the only remotely nice thing Hermione had heard Ron say about Snape in years.

"Must have been weird seeing you as a firstie, though," Ron added. "All buck toothed and bushy haired."

Hermione blushed. "I suppose..."

The scene finally shifted once again. Hermione looked at Harry and Ron. "This was a horrible fight. I've brought you to the end of it, as I did not want to see it again."

Well, that was one way to protect the secret of their liaison.

They watched as Severus' portrait stared down at her, Hermione with tears in her eyes.

"And what do I have now? I lived the last two years of my life trying to make up for what I did to you, just letting you die like that. And now you're telling me otherwise...that you had to die, that there was nothing I could have done to stop it. That you do not hate me and that there is no way we can actually be friends. I gave up my life, my education, my friends, to make sure you were remembered properly, and I am learning today that I do not even know you...me, the expert in your life! What do I have, now that you have taken everything away from me?"

"Ron. You have Ron."

Ron blanched. "What?"

Not able to look Ron in the eyes, she muttered to her feet, "Professor Snape has kept up with our lives via the other portraits at Hogwarts. He apparently thinks I'm an idiot for ruining my... relationship with you... I can't say I disagree with him."

Her tears turned to hysterical laughter. "Ron? I have Ron? I barely have Harry anymore, and you're going to throw my mistakes with Ron at me? How dare you. How dare you!"

Snape frowned. "I know you have had your differences..."

"No, Snape, you don't. You really don't. We no longer speak because of you. I took this job to protect your bloody memory, and he didn't understand..."

"He did understand, Hermione. I've talked with Minerva and Harry both about the breakup of your so-called Golden Trio, and Ron did understand. In the end, all he truly cared about was you being happy, and he knew that you keeping yourself holed up in my attic, which is exactly the path you were heading down, was not what was best for you."

"So you're saying Ronald Weasley, of all people, knows what's best for me? That he is the expert in my life?"

"No, what I am saying is that you threw away one of the best friendships you've ever had over a dead man. You've had your eighteen months to mourn your losses in the war. When I say, 'You have Ron,' it is only to say that you still have people who care about you that you must seek out. You never really lost Harry, but if you don't do something, something very soon, one of your oldest childhood friends will be gone to you forever. I know far better than you the pain that causes."

"So I'm just supposed to forgive and forget everything? Run back into his arms and act as if nothing happened? Marry him because everyone expected it of us, in spite of all of our differences?"

"Yes, Hermione, that's exactly what I am saying."

His voice dripped with sarcasm. She bit her tongue, knowing that on some level he was right; he wasn't suggesting that at all.

"What I am saying is that man cares for you more than you have ever given him credit. Do you honestly believe I am commanding you to throw yourself at another man? I can barely stand the thought of you living on without me. I am saying that there is far too much between you and Ronald for you to just let him go, especially over me. I chased away everyone in my life that cared about me. I would hate to see that happen to you."

She felt her heart breaking afresh with the realization that she really was walking down his path. The miserable nights she had spent alone for so many months ripped through her mind, the evidence of her depression and sorrow in such clear focus.

"You just don't know... how hard it was, the days and weeks after the war. Visits to the Burrow and not seeing Fred. Watching Harry play with Teddy and knowing both had lost their parents to these wars. The museum was a salvation; no one there expected anything of me, because the only person I had to care for was already dead."

"The museum hasn't been your salvation, Hermione. It's been your prison."

Yet again, she felt it wasn't fair. He shouldn't be allowed to be so right all the time.

"So what am I supposed to do now?"

"I think you know."

Before Ron could respond, the scenes shifted once again. They saw her guilty face as she read through the journals, the desperation as she pored through his words. Finally, they witnessed her writing the note that had come to them just that morning, and then they tumbled out of the Pensieve, landing in their chairs at Grimmauld Place.

Before Hermione could speak, Ron had already shoved his chair back, storming from the room.

Her breath caught in her throat...even now, he did not understand.

Harry quietly Summoned the bottle before refilling all of their drinks. "Give him some time, Hermione. You know he doesn't handle shock well. I'll know if he leaves...the house tells me."

She wrapped her hands around the glass of liquor, staring numbly into the amber liquid. It had all been for nothing, sharing this week with them. She was barely aware of Harry replacing her memories into the vial and returning the Pensieve to his office, then returning to sit next to her.

A slamming door broke her reverie. Ron reentered the room, plates and silverware in hand, a casserole dish levitating before him. The dish landed in the middle of the table as Ron handed out plates, knives, and forks.

"Come on, we all know I can't think without food..." Ron flashed them a smile, timid and lacking its normal cheerfulness, but clearly an olive branch.

The three of them dished out their food, Ron digging into his as if nothing had happened. Harry made a valiant attempt to keep up, but Hermione only poked at her food, still not sure what to make of the situation.

The click and clack of forks hitting plates echoed throughout the room. Ron's voice eventually cut through the awkward silence amongst friends.

"Hermione, dear, I'm sorry, but you really are the worst captor I've ever seen..."

Harry chuckled before trying to regain some semblance of a straight face. Hermione's face broke into a grin.

"Funny, Professor Snape said the same thing..."

As they ate and drank together, for the first time in months, they began talking in depth about Hermione's experience. It brought to mind so many other memories of their childhood, and they talked well into the night.

At some point, they all hit that semi-philosophical stage of inebriation, trying to piece together time-travel, life, the universe, and everything.

"It's so strange... For the first time since the war, I feel as if I can take care of myself again...that I'm not just tied here. Professor Snape spent all those years making sure we would all survive and be together, and to throw that all away now seems... cruel. Nothing is going to bring those we lost back, but if I lost you all... then everything he did would have been for nothing."

Harry reached across the table and clasped her hand in his. "That's never going to happen. Never."

Hermione smiled. "I've reread everything Professor Snape wrote, including the new passages... and all of the terror of the war has lessened somehow, knowing how much more terrible it could have been if he had not been watching over us. All I knew about the war and our childhood has changed somehow..."

Ron nodded. "Yet everything stays the same."

~~@~~

One week later

Hermione closed down the museum. Starting next week, there would be a new curator. She had decided to go back to school, to finish her NEWTs and pursue a career in law. Luckily, the Headmistress had been sympathetic once Hermione had finally explained the reason behind her visit to Hogwarts two weeks before. Hermione would be allowed to live at the school, working one-on-one with the faculty to prepare. She hoped to attend Oxford University's School of Magical Law the following fall.

As she began straightening up the kitchen, she heard a knock at the front door.

"We're closed," she called out.

The knocking came again, more insistent this time. Annoyed, she threw down the rag she had been using to wipe out the sink, drying her hands on her jeans as she went to the door.

She opened the door to find a familiar man standing there in clothing she had not seen for far too long. The look of him was incongruous with how she had last seen him, paler, his features slightly drawn, nervous almost. In his hand was a bouquet of tulips, which shook slightly.

"Hello, Hermione."

She could not believe he was here, standing at her door after so many years and yet really just a few days. Her mouth did not work...words would not come out.

He smiled at her, and her knees nearly gave way; it had been so many years since she had seen this face smile at her so genuinely.

"There's a new restaurant open down the street that I hear is pretty good. I was wondering... if you were hungry? After all those meals you made for me, I think it's only

fair..." His eyes searched her face, so clearly hopeful.

Doubt raced through her mind... and hope. She had thought of nothing but him in the days since she last saw him, the memories of that time together plaguing her. Was this the right path to pursue? As much love as there was, they really were so different in so many ways... Could it even work? Everyone in her life just wanted her to be happy, but *would* he make her happy?

If she said no, would she live the rest of her life wondering if she had made a huge mistake? If she said yes, would it ruin everything else in her life?

She owed it to him, to *herself*, to try. And she *was* hungry...

"That sounds lovely, Ron. Let me grab my bag."

Spring 2019

He stared down at the little girl, his trademark sneer affixed on his face. She looked terrified, as did most children who entered this office. And, like so many others before her, she had nothing to worry about...the Headmistress only had praise for this child. This one in particular had apparently done quite well on a project, and Minerva had brought her here to congratulate her (and then would make her swear to tell the others she had been punished...the only way the older woman felt she could keep her stern public face affixed at this late point in her career).

This girl had to be a Weasley, though a softer form of one. Instead of the ubiquitous freckles, she had only a spray over her nose. Her eyes, wide with fear, were a honey-brown instead of the normal blue or green. He was about to write her off as entirely unremarkable, with her askew blue-and-bronze tie and shirt half-tucked in and her red, curly hair an absolute mess, when he saw the book lying across her lap - *Asiatic Anti-Venoms*.

But she cannot be more than a second-year.

"Young woman, whatever are you doing with that book? It is far too advanced for a student your age."

Her eyes immediately found his portrait, and she blinked at him; her hands shook nervously, and she almost dropped her book.

"I just find it interesting, sir."

A Weasley that finds a fifth-year Potions text remarkable in any way?

"Oh?" It was all he could muster in his confusion.

"Yes! Uncle Harry said he read part of it once, doing an assignment for your class, and he said I would like it. And I do! Surely, *you* must understand that."

How dare she speak to him so familiarly? He may only be a portrait now, but he was once the most feared Headmaster at Hogwarts.

"Must I?" He was beginning to find this conversation to be quite tedious.

"Oh, yes! Mum said you were ever so clever with Potions. And that you were the bravest man, besides Uncle Harry, that she ever knew! But whenever I bring home good marks in Potions, she always says I'm the only Weasley other than Uncle Fred and Uncle George that would ever have made you proud!"

The young girl looked as if this idea pleased her, indeed.

"And which Weasley, dare I ask, is your mother?" Obviously not Ginevra...those brown eyes would never have made it through the sludge of her and Potter's genetic makeup.

"Hermione Weasley, sir."

What was only hinted at before in her features now stood out to Snape in stark obviousness. That hair could only have come from her mother, even if the hue was her father's. And Hermione was absolutely correct: the only Weasley besides the twins that he ever could be proud of in Potions would be one she mothered. And her eyes, staring up at him like they had so many times in class, searching for approval... At least this time, there was no harm in giving it freely.

"You do know you are not in trouble, correct?"

The teeth that had been worrying at her bottom lip abated, and her face broke into a brilliant smile.

"Really?"

"Yes, really. Headmistress McGonagall was just going on about some student who was coming to visit who was to be treated to pasties and tea for achieving the highest marks in her year. Could that be you?"

The girl blushed from her neck to the roots of her hair. "I suppose..."

"Young lady..."

"Rose!" She clamped a hand over her mouth, looking ashamed and slightly concerned that she had interrupted him. At least his reputation for stern behavior still held.

He decided not to pursue the error and gave her a small smile. "Rose, then. Do not ever be ashamed for being brilliant. You come by it honestly, in spite of your father's poor record. Actually, he was far smarter than most people gave credit. If you truly are as excellent at Potions as your mother seems to think you are, savor it. People with the skill are few and far between."

She beamed. "Really?"

He nodded. "Really."

She tilted her head slightly, considering him. "You know, Professor Snape, you're not nearly as mean as people say you are."

Trying so hard not to smile, he glared at her with his worst detention-stare. "Don't. Tell. Anyone."

The girl had the audacity to giggle, and he couldn't help but grin right back at her.

He knew Minerva would be back at any moment...she usually only let the children stew for about ten minutes before she whisked in...and he knew this might be the last time...

"Rose?"

"Yes, Professor?"

"Could you please pass along a message for me?"

She looked confused but quickly recovered. "I suppose..."

"Tell your mother... tell Hermione that I miss her. I miss her every single day. Will you tell her that for me?"

An odd look passed over her face, so like her mother's when she was thinking hard, a look almost as if she understood something she had no business knowing.

"Of course, sir. I think that would make her happy."

He was so glad portraits could not cry, or he knew his eyes would be welling up at this very moment. "Thank you, Rose."

The door to the Headmistress' suite creaked, and he took that as his opportunity to exit. Safely back at his portrait in the museum, he started when a hand clasped his shoulder.

"Was it worth it, Severus? In the end?"

He turned and fell into that piercing blue gaze, his former master looking at him with such concern.

There was not much to do as a portrait but think about your life, especially when your portrait was not one regularly sought out by those looking to chat. These days, his only conversations were with Phineas and Minerva, and even they seemed only to want to rehash the old days or, in Minerva's case, to complain about growing old...something he, for obvious reasons, held no sympathy for.

Coming back to his reality had made him hard, bitter. He knew he had it in him to be so cold...he had had flashes of it his entire life. But he could not help but think sometimes that maybe he would have ended up a little more well balanced if he had stayed with the Dark Lord. Or had stayed in the future and never looked back.

He only thought these things at his most maudlin. His portrait...himself now...had been absolutely right. Even now, well over a decade after the war, very few people had kind words to say about him. And knowing his own propensity to get angry first and to actually try to fix things second, he was sure that if he had survived to deal with the nincompoops, he only would have made his reputation worse.

Severus Snape had lived a hard life; no one could argue that...even his biggest detractors conceded that point. He had no doubt that, had he returned into the Dark Lord's service, he would have been killed by the time Lily and James had been murdered...either in a skirmish or by the Dark Lord's own hand. His ability to duel came during the quiet years before the Dark Lord's return, as had his skill in Occlumency and Legilimency. He spent those years learning everything he could to keep himself alive... until his life was no longer needed.

And those years had not been exactly awful. He'd been with a few women, had actually had been able to study the things he loved in addition to the skills he needed to survive... and a few students came and went that made teaching worth it.

The day Hermione Granger all but skipped into the Great Hall to don the Sorting Hat had been the single most painful day of his life, prior to his last. People always thought portraits could only remember what they knew at the time of painting, and that was true of most. But his, like all the other Headmasters' portraits, was uniquely magical. A single drop of their own blood, shed at death and mixed in with the black paint of the backgrounds, gave the portraits far more sentience than any portrait had a right to...and his painter had had access to buckets of it.

So yes, he remembered everything. And on most days, those memories told him he had done the right thing. On *most* days.

Had Albus asked his question even an hour before, he wasn't sure he would have been able to answer the question either way.

But seeing this little girl...Rose...today... She was so happy and so perfect. The kind of child he never could have raised. All her mother's curiosity and father's energy and a chance to live in a world without war. Neither in 1980 nor when he died would he ever have been able to create something so wonderful.

Rose had finally given him what he needed: the knowledge that Hermione had moved forward. He got the reports from Minerva...her picture-perfect wedding, her quick rise from law school to the top of her law firm, first Rose, then Hugo's birth...so he knew she was successful. Now he had to know she was, at the very least, happy. How could you not be with such a child?

The answer was clear for the first time in nearly thirty years, and the weight of all those years finally left his body. Had it all been worth it?

"Absolutely."

Ridiculously long AN: To start, thank you so much to everyone who has been involved in this story directly or indirectly, especially my reviewers. Special thanks to clairvoyant, dragonhideboot, aurette, tonksinger, dickgloucester, and linlawless for their various involvements as my beta team.

Well, that's it. I told you I wasn't lying. For those of you who read it and hate me, I can only fall back on the fact that I did warn you.

For me, canon is important. Does that mean I don't love AU fics? Absolutely not. Go look at my favorite stories lists on the different archives and on my LJ. What it does mean is that I find "Canon Compliant" as warning to be... well... offensive. Following what JKR wrote isn't a warning; *not* doing so is something to flag.

Nearly everything I've written prior to this has been DH-noncompliant/EWE in some way, because it's very difficult to write anything at this point that is canon compliant completely. And, frankly, it's way harder to do. As much as I've said that this story is canon compliant, I definitely took advantage of the fact that we only have Harry as a narrator and there are no guarantees to how reliable he is in that position (or how honest any of the characters that interact with him are).

But in the end, as I said from the get-go, this story follows the major arc, and it stays in-character (because, ultimately, if something isn't in-character for a reason, like potions failure, poisoning, backfired spell, severe psychological trauma, injury, death, etc., it's just your own thing, which is awesome, so make up your own character/place names and call it o-fic). Because, ultimately, the story is why we fell in love with this universe in the first place. Snape dies because he must, as must Dobby and Hedwig and everyone else. Every death allows Harry to do what he has to do, and without these details, the story could not have ended the way it did. Of course I cried when Dobby died (you'd have to be lacking a soul not to), but I understood why it happened. And I don't reject it just because it made me sad.

The same goes for Snape. RIP, old buddy. You're the best.