

Aftermath

by *cocoachristy*

While Severus copes with feelings and learning to live again, Hermione is determined to build a new life for herself--with or without Harry's approval. This is my response to SW69's Harry Potter challenge.

1. Grimmauld Place

Chapter 1 of 8

While Severus copes with feelings and learning to live again, Hermione is determined to build a new life for herself--with or without Harry's approval. This is my response to SW69's Harry Potter challenge.

Disclaimer: All these lovely characters belong to J.K.R. I just enjoy playing with them for awhile.

A/N: As always, I would like to thank my wonderful beta, Southern_Witch_69, who is also a great mate!

This is a response to SW69's HP Chapter Challenge. Details at the end of the chapter.

****HBP SPOILERS****

Grimmauld Place

Hermione Granger was sitting at the kitchen table at number twelve, Grimmauld Place crying silently. Ronald Weasley had just devastated her once again. The war had been over for six months, and they would be going back to a newly reopened Hogwarts on the first of September in about two weeks. Hermione had never been so happy that she had kept up on her studies, even going so far as buying her required books months ahead of time. Unfortunately, Ron had just informed her that, even though he loved her with all his heart as a *best friend*, he was just not *in love* with her.

They had been dating for the past eight months, and she had no clue he was feeling this way. She vaguely wondered if it was because she had not wanted to have sex just yet. She had done other things with Ron, but she'd drawn the line at sex. She decided it didn't really matter. The point was, as he had informed her, he would be back with Lavender Brown when they headed back to Hogwarts for their last year.

For some reason, she thought of her parents just then. They had been sent to Switzerland under the Fidelius Charm, having Tonks as their Secret Keeper, and liked it so much, they decided to stay. They were upset that Hermione wanted to come back to Hogwarts after the war, but they understood her need to finish her education. Besides the fact, she was a grown woman now, almost twenty, and free to make her own decisions and choices.

She was startled to hear a silky purr behind her. "Do not shed tears for a *Weasley*, girl! He is beneath you!"

Hermione raised her chin indignantly. "Please do not speak of him that way to me, Professor. I do not think anyone *beneath* me. Can you say the same?"

Smirking, the newly reinstated Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher replied, "No. I can't say that I can."

"Oh?" Hermione asked. "Muggle-borns and Gryffindors, Professor Snape? Does that about cover it? Or do you have a thing against headmasters as well?"

"That will do," he hissed in an extremely irritated voice. "You know perfectly well I did what I had to do, as you were one of my strongest defenders, Miss Granger. And furthermore, you also know I am not a pure-blood myself."

Indeed, she was one of his strongest defenders. She was one of the first to have figured out everything had been set up beforehand. From the conversations Harry had told her he'd had with Professor Dumbledore, and other bits of conversations Harry had told her about, she'd been able to put two and two together.

The headmaster had not left the ex-Death Eater out to dry either. He had placed a Pensieve in a locked cabinet, and he charmed it to be opened when Voldemort was defeated. It was pure luck Harry had not found Severus Snape before that moment. Even though he had been cleared of all charges, the only person who trusted him completely, besides Minerva McGonagall, was Hermione Granger. The members of the Order had welcomed him back after he had been cleared of all charges. They had seen Albus' Pensieve, but every one of them always wondered.

Hermione sighed. "Forgive me, Professor. I am not good company at the moment."

"I am not here for your company at any rate. I am here with a request from the headmistress. She wishes you to take your N.E.W.T.s before the start of term. With the death of Horace Slughorn in the final battle, Hogwarts is in need of a Potions teacher. Because you are already nineteen, and with your O.W.L score in Potions, you may teach under my care, providing you pass your N.E.W.T in Potions as well. If you do well, I will apprentice you personally to be a Potions mistress."

"What about my other classes?"

"You will be taking all your N.E.W.T.s. You cannot very well teach and attend classes at the same time, you silly little girl! Now, what say you? I need to inform Minerva of your decision so that she may take the proper steps to set this up. You will also need to get settled in before the students arrive and go over all syllabi with me."

Because she was getting excited, she let the 'silly little girl' comment slide. She had never really thought of becoming a Potions mistress, but this was just too good an opportunity to let pass. "Tell Professor McGonagall I would love to! Who will be teaching her classes?"

"Fleur Weasley. She and her husband will be living at the castle, and he will Apparate to work from the main gates. Minerva seems to think that will be okay since the wound he sustained did not turn him into a werewolf. Now, I will go inform her of your decision. She will be pleased. Provided you pass your N.E.W.T.s, I want you in my office by nine on Tuesday morning. We can discuss what you need that day. I can accompany you and your things from here to the castle on Wednesday."

"In the dungeons?"

Severus sighed and shook his head. "No, your quarters and office will be located in the dungeons now. Mine will be located in the DADA rooms where Lockhart's was. Now, if that is all, Miss Granger, I will be on my way. I have more important things to do than to sit here and talk to you."

With that, he was gone in a flurry of black robes. He needed to distance himself from the Granger girl. He had started to take notice of her after the war, especially when she so adamantly defended him. Nobody, save Albus, had ever defended him in such a way. And now, she was to be his colleague. He was going to have to work closely with her before and during the school year. The only thing that helped him through the slight attraction was the fact that she utterly got on his nerves with her bossy know-it-all attitude.

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Hermione lightly knocked on Ginny's door. Ginny had been unconscious the first three months after Voldemort was defeated. She was awake now and expected to return to Hogwarts, but she tended to take long naps in the afternoon. Harry had not left her side since they all came to Grimmauld Place the previous month.

Apparently, unbeknownst to anyone, Voldemort tried to use part of Ginny's soul as a Horcrux. Because he had possessed her through the diary in her first year, he somehow left a bit of his soul in hers. However, his plan backfired. When Harry killed him, that part of his soul immediately tried to escape, as it had done before, and it had to be destroyed...leaving Ginny in a coma for three months. As it ripped out of her body, Harry cast a *Distraho* before Voldemort could flee, and the impact of the spell, combined with the forceful way the piece of soul came out of her body, was too much for Ginny to take. Thankfully now, she was well on her way to a full recovery.

Hermione heard Harry softly say, "Who's there?" That was Harry, over protective as usual.

"It's me, Hermione." She wanted to tell them of Professor Snape's visit. She hoped Ron was in there as well. She only wanted to tell everyone once.

"Come in," Ginny said. "I'm awake."

Hermione opened the door and was happy to see Ron was, in fact, there. She was also happy of the fact that Ron had probably already told Harry and Ginny of their breakup, if judging by the guilty look on his face was anything to go by. Briefly, she wondered why she wasn't more upset about the breakup. It had hurt her, but it was not the soul-ripping pain that she would have expected. Mainly, it was her pride that was bruised.

"I have some news," Hermione stated. "Professor Snape just came to see me, and Professor McGonagall wants me to teach Potions provided I pass my N.E.W.T.s. She is getting things ready for me to take them sometime this week so that I will have at least a week to prepare before the new school term starts. Also, provided I do well, Professor Snape is going to apprentice me to be a Potions mistress. So, Ron, it's a good thing we broke up after all." She couldn't very well date a student.

Ron and Ginny were staring at her, completely gobsmacked. Harry, however, was furious. "Why would you want to work so closely with a murdering Death Eater, Hermione? You could be next, you know!"

"Oh, stop being so dramatic, Harry! You know perfectly well that Professor Snape was a spy for the Order, and anything he did was done under Albus Dumbledore's orders. I am getting tired of having to defend him to you at every turn!"

"Fine, Hermione, but you know where I stand. I hate the greasy git, and he hates me. Nothing will ever change that, and I wouldn't want it to."

Wanting to stop the argument before it escalated, Ginny asked, "So, we will have to get used to calling you Professor Granger, huh? It sounds so grownup!"

"Bloody hell!" Ron bellowed. "Now, I wish I would have taken Potions! I could easily pass." Ron gave Hermione his most charming smile.

Putting her hands on her hips, Hermione said, "Ronald Weasley! I will not pass someone just because they are my friend. They will have to earn their grades, just like in every other class! I can't believe you even thought that." With a huff, Hermione left the room to go study.

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Nobody was surprised that Hermione passed all her N.E.W.T.s. The day she left for Hogwarts with Professor Snape, Harry would not even look at her. It was as if he took her teaching Potions, and being trained by Professor Snape, personal. She rolled her eyes at his childish attitude.

She understood Harry. She knew how much he loved Dumbledore. It amazed her that a powerful wizard, such as Harry, who could take charge and lead the Order in a battle, could not let his hatred of Snape go. She wondered if he just needed someone to aim his hatred at now that Voldemort was gone.

She was happy Harry and Ginny had gotten back together, especially now that she would be teaching and not around. Ginny was very good for Harry; she kept him grounded and sane.

A little disappointed she would not be riding the Hogwarts Express back to school this one last time, she hugged and kissed her friends goodbye, and then she walked over to an irritated Professor Snape.

He had been ready to leave as soon as he'd arrived, and he hated these public displays of affection. They made him uncomfortable. "If you are ready, Miss Granger? You will be seeing your friends in one week; there is no need for all this. You are acting as if you will never see them again!"

"I know I will be seeing them in one week, Professor, but I will be seeing them on a teacher/student level most of the time. I can't treat them any different than anyone else, so I wanted to get it out of my system here."

Inwardly impressed by her maturity, but not willing to acknowledge it, he simply swept his arm out in front of him towards the door and said, "After you, Professor Granger."

With her chin held high, she walked out the front door and Disapparated to the front gates of Hogwarts.

Christy's Notes: I hope you enjoy my response to Southern_Witch_69's HP Chapter Challenge at The Petulant Poetess. I have the entire story completed already and will be uploading every few days. There are eight chapters in all.

Southern's Notes: I'm so glad someone finally took up this challenge. It's such a quick write and has hardly any restrictions. Thanks, doll. Good start.

Quote from book one: SS/PS: "Who's there?"

Distraho = to destroy

Challenge Rules

Note by SW69: This has been influenced by Doompark's 394 Challenge. Instead of using random books, we will use the HP books for a single quote per chapter.

Pairings? Choose one below.

Yes, there must be a love match between them.

Hermione/Severus

Draco/Ginny

Harry/Gabrielle

Ron/Luna

1. Take the month and day of your numerical birth date and add them together. (Ex: My birthday is on July the fifth. 07 [seventh month] + 05 [fifth day] = 12)

2. Divide the sum by 2 to get a second number.

(Ex: I would divide 12/2 and get 6. Round all half numbers up to the higher number.)

3. Open up Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's (Philosopher's) Stone and use your SECOND number to figure out what chapter to open up to.

(Ex: I would open to chapter number 6.)

4. Use your FIRST number to find the sentence to use. (Example: I would scroll down to the 12th sentence of the chapter, even if the sentence is on the next page.)

5. The first chapter should include that sentence.

6. Continue the process with Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets following the same formula and the second chapter will be formed around this sentence.

7. Continue with POA, GOF, OotP, and HBP in the same manner and in this order.

Each chapter must be 1000-2000 words long. No shorter and no longer!

BONUS:

An additional chapter or two chapters can be created from the two extra books that J.K. Rowling wrote: Quidditch Through the Ages and Fantastical Beasts & Where to Find Them. These aren't as lengthy as the others, so you'll have to find your sentence and page a bit different here.

Fantastical Beasts...

1. Use your FIRST number to determine what page to turn to. (The highest sum would be 43. Since there are only 42 pages after the foreword, if your sum is 43, use the number 42.)

2. Use your SECOND number to determine which sentence to use on that page. If your number isn't found on the page, simply use the last sentence. (There are so many run-on sentences. You'll probably have to do this.)

3. Record the sentence AND the beast's name in which it falls under. (Example: I would pick sentence 6 from page 12 and note that my beast is the Common Welsh Green.)

4. Write the chapter using the sentence and the beast from that page. Same length requirements as above.

Quidditch Through The Ages...

1. Use your FIRST number to determine what page to turn to.

2. Use your second number to determine what sentence to use. Record the sentence and build the chapter around it. You may not have enough sentences on the page, simply use the last sentence if this is the case. There are many run-on sentences there, and some pictures take up a lot of room.

Same length requirements apply for this chapter.

NOTES:

If you use the six Harry Potter books plus the 2 extra books, you could have an 8 chapter story. The chapters won't be very taxing, as the length requirements are minimum. If you do not have all of these books, please ask me or anyone else who might own them. We will gladly give you the quote you need to get started. This challenge starts as of today, April 27, 2005 through December 31, 2005. That should give people enough time to start up something and begin posting. I hope someone takes up this challenge. If you need anything, please post for help here or send an email to me.

2. Settling In

Chapter 2 of 8

While Severus copes with feelings and learning to live again, Hermione is determined to build a new life for herself--with or without Harry's approval. This is my response to SW69's Harry Potter challenge.

Disclaimer: The Harry Potter world belongs to the brilliant JKR.

A/N: A huge thanks to my beta, the equally brilliant Southern_Witch_69.

This is my response to SW69's HP Chapter Challenge. Information can be found at the end of chapter one.

Settling In

Shortly after Hermione left with Professor Snape, everyone gathered in the kitchen for breakfast. Sulking, Harry took his seat next to Ginny on one side and Mr. Weasley on the other. Mr. Weasley liked Harry to sit next to him at the dinner table so he could bombard him with questions about life with Muggles, asking him to explain how things like plugs and the postal service worked.

"Harry," Ginny started, "please let's enjoy our last week together before school. I would appreciate it if you did not sulk over Hermione Granger the rest of our time here!"

"What is that supposed to mean, Ginny? You know how Snape is and what he has done! Can you honestly say you think Hermione will be okay with him all alone down in the dungeons?"

"That is *Professor* Snape, Harry," Mrs. Weasley admonished. "And Hermione will be perfectly fine. The man has been cleared of all charges, you know."

"Too right," Ron agreed with his mum. "This is probably a dream come true for someone like Hermione, mate. Now, buck up!"

Sighing, Harry thought to himself, *Am I the only one who sees that bastard for what he really is? The ruddy tosser!*

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As soon as they arrived at Hogwarts, Professor Snape took Hermione directly to the dungeons. She had wanted to stop by and see Professor McGonagall first, but as he informed her, there were potions simmering that needed to be attended to. He brewed all the medicinal potions for the school infirmary and hoped to be finished today.

After he got her settled, they went to his, now her, private labs. He saw that she was watching him intently and told her, "Miss Granger, you may as well help with these, as it will be your job to do this soon enough."

He noted that she worked quietly and efficiently. She followed his instructions precisely and only asked necessary questions. When the potions were finished, he noted she cleaned everything, and then put away all the ingredients without having to be told to do so.

One thought crossed his mind as he studied her. *Oh, hell, she is not acting like the bossy, know-it-all Gryffindor I have come to know.*

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After she and Professor Snape finished in the lab, Hermione made her way to see Professor McGonagall. Her mentor was very pleased to see her and hugged her tightly as she entered her office.

"Hermione, it's so good to see you! How are you, dear? Getting on with Severus all right?" Minerva knew how Severus could be.

"Yes, actually. Much better than I expected. I would like to thank you for this opportunity, Professor. I had not thought of going into Potions as a career, teaching or otherwise, although I know a great opportunity when I see one."

"Please, call me Minerva when there are no students around, Hermione. Besides, I am the one who needs to thank you. I was in quite a tight spot, to say the least. I am very pleased with your N.E.W.T. scores in all subjects. I'll have you to know, however, that you came in third in Potions for the highest score in the past twenty-two years."

"Really? Who came in first and second?" Hermione was very competitive in grades and was curious to know who bested her.

Minerva bit back a chuckle. Hermione reminded her so much of herself. "Well, naturally, Severus has the highest, and second place goes to Lily Evans. I daresay she could have become a Potions mistress herself." She smiled at the memory of one of her most gifted students. "Do you have any questions?"

"Well, I was wondering who is going to be Head of Gryffindor?"

Minerva sighed. "The staff and I thought about this long and hard. We all wanted to give you the position, but we felt you are just too young. This year at least. We decided Rolanda would take it this year, and if you do well and decide to continue teaching next year, then the job is yours. We can't very well have the Quidditch coach acting as a Head of House, can we?"

Hermione chuckled. "True. You don't believe I will be too young next year? Do I not need more experience?"

"Well, Severus started here when he was twenty-one and immediately took on his Head of Slytherin position. By September of next year, you will be twenty-one with a year of teaching experience. I have seen your actions as a Prefect, and I think you would handle the job quite well."

"What about Fleur Weasley? Did anyone consider her?" Hermione didn't want any animosity between them, should Fleur want the job.

"She was mentioned and then hastily dismissed. We all agreed you would be more suited for the job, and she and Bill are undecided if they are going back to Egypt at the end of this year. Also, I wanted to let you know that Filius Flitwick has been promoted to Deputy Headmaster."

This caused Hermione to smile. She always liked her little Charms professor. "Who are Head Boy and Head Girl this year?"

3. Beginnings and Endings

Chapter 3 of 8

While Severus copes with feelings and learning to live again, Hermione is determined to build a new life for herself--with or without Harry's approval. This is my response to SW69's Harry Potter challenge.

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A/N: Many hugs and kisses to my wonderful beta, Southern_Witch_69!

This is my response to SW69's Harry Potter Chapter Challenge. Information can be found at the in of chapter one.

Beginnings and Endings

Draco went storming through the castle to Professor Snape's class. He knew his ex-Potions professor would not be happy with having his class disrupted, but he needed to find out what in the hell that *Mudblood* was doing teaching! He had been upset about it since the welcoming feast last night when he found out.

Professor Snape had just assigned a reading assignment on vampires throughout the world when a loud knock sounded at his door. Instead of calling for the visitor to enter, he decided to open it himself to see who was there. To his surprise, it was Draco Malfoy.

"Mr. Malfoy, what are you doing here? Are you not supposed to be in your Potions class?"

Draco sneered, "That Mudblood Granger is teaching that class. I won't have it, sir. Of course, father can't do anything about it, but I thought maybe *you* could."

Glaring, the Defense professor asked him, "Why would I want to do anything about her teaching Potions? It allows me to teach Defense Against The Dark Arts. Besides, she had the third highest N.E.W.T. for Potions in twenty-two years. She is more than capable to teach this subject."

"But, sir," Draco started, confused, "she is a *Mudblood!* I thought you hated them as I do? I mean, I know you were in league with Dumbledore there at the end, but you were still a *Death Eater*. I just hate knowing she will have authority over me."

"Then I suggest you get over it, and lower your voice, boy! She is the Potions professor here now, and if you want a N.E.W.T. in Potions, you will have to accept her. And for the record, I do not hate those that are Muggle-born. You would do well to shelve your prejudices; they are unwarranted and unnecessary."

During the war, Draco Malfoy's loyalties were with the Order. He knew he could hex people, but he could not *kill* anyone. So, his mother asked Severus for help concerning her son once again, and Draco was well hidden within Order headquarters. Narcissa Malfoy was one of the most happy when Harry Potter defeated the Dark Lord.

Draco sighed with exasperation. "Could you teach me privately then?" There was a hopeful gleam in his eye.

"Absolutely not! Do you think I have nothing better to do than to cow to your ridiculous demands because you do not want to be taught by Professor Granger? I suggest you either get over yourself, boy, or drop Potions."

Defeated, Draco nodded and left. He decided he would get the homework from Pansy and stay in the class. He was unsure of what occupation he wanted, if any, so he wasn't sure if he needed Potions or not.

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Professor Snape decided he was going to go speak with Hermione after the evening meal. He had only worked with her a week, but they had worked very closely during that time. For one thing, he wanted to see how she was after the stunt Malfoy had pulled earlier and also see how her other classes went.

He found himself attracted to her and decided he was not going to fight it. She was pleasing enough to be around and much more mature than he previously remembered. It had been awhile since he had dated a woman. He never had the time and energy to put into all that nonsense, but he found the idea of a true lady friend pleasing to him now.

Hermione did not seem indifferent to him either. She even came to his private chambers one evening after supper to finish a discussion they had been having.

It had been about two hours since they had eaten, so he figured now would be a good time. As he got to her chambers, he knocked.

Hermione was surprised to hear someone knocking. She was not expecting anyone, so as soon as she came back from the Great Hall, she'd bathed and put on her flannel pajamas and thick socks, as it got cold in the dungeons during the night. Expecting Minerva, she was taken aback to find Professor Snape at her door.

"Professor Snape! What can I do for you?" Hermione was embarrassed for him to see her in her old, comfortable pajamas. She had been pleasantly surprised by him this past week and had been thinking of ways to get him to see her other than just as a colleague or his apprentice. She wouldn't go as far as to say she *fancied* him just yet, but she did enjoy his company immensely.

"I think it would be fine for you to call me Severus, Hermione; after all, ~~were~~ co-workers now." As she just stood there gobsmacked, he asked, "May I come in?"

Backing up to allow him entrance, she said, "Yes, of course. Would you care for anything to drink?"

"I will have what you are having so long as it's not pumpkin juice."

While she summoned a house-elf for tea and biscuits, she was surprised to find out he was only there to ask of her day and see how she was after the Malfoy incident. He wasn't there to give her an assignment or berate her, as she'd thought he may.

To her pleasure, he stayed about two hours talking with her. When she yawned, he told her it was time to take his leave, and she walked him to the door. When they reached the door, he turned to her and told her, "This has been a most enjoyable evening."

"Yes, for me as well, Severus. I always enjoy our discussions."

"As do I. Would it be acceptable to you to have dinner with me outside the castle this weekend?"

She didn't think she could have been any more surprised than she was at that moment. Just for clarification, she asked, "Do you mean a date?"

Smirking, he replied, "Yes, a date. If that would be acceptable to you?"

"I'd love to!" She couldn't have stopped the huge grin on her face if she tried.

"See you at breakfast then," he told her before kissing her hand.

"Good night." As he walked away, Hermione blushed. Feeling lightheaded, she made her way to her bedroom to go to bed. However, sleep evaded her because she could not get the enigma that was Severus Snape out of her mind. Who would have thought he would ever ask *her* to dinner?

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Because the seventh years were so much older, one Saturday of the month they were allowed a day trip to Diagon Alley. On this first weekend, Harry and Ron were excited to go. Harry didn't have to do his homework under the blankets anymore; now he could sit in the bright sunshine outside Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlor, finishing all his essays with occasional help from Florean Fortescue himself, who, apart from knowing a great deal about medieval witch burnings, gave Harry free sundaes every half an hour.

However, Harry felt bad for leaving Ginny behind, so he planned on surprising her with a gift as soon as he finished his essay. Ron grumbled, "Why are you doing that essay here, Harry? You have all day tomorrow to finish it!"

"Because, I plan on spending the entire day with Ginny tomorrow, and I don't want to have it interrupted with homework! Besides, it's nice finishing this up here. I love his sundaes!"

"I suppose. Glad he came back from hiding." Ron sighed contentedly. "Tomorrow is the last Sunday before Quidditch practice starts. Are you looking forward to choosing the team, captain?" Ron was grinning from ear to ear. He loved Quidditch.

Harry sighed, "Not really. I hate seeing the disappointed faces of those who don't make the team. Anyway, I want to talk to you about Hermione. Have you noticed she has been acting different this past week? Especially today?"

"Well," said Ron thoughtfully, "I think she is just getting used to teaching, especially those who are her same age. I don't get to talk to her much though. But Lavender told me she is acting like a woman with a new boyfriend. I just ignored that. I mean, who would it be? She won't date students so that only leaves the staff."

Harry thought about that for a moment, and then it came to him. "Circe, Ron, you don't suppose she could fancy Snape, do you?"

"Snape? Are you off your rocker, mate? You know what I think? I think *you* are just plain obsessed with Snape, I do. I hate the git, too, Harry, but you need to let this go. It's not normal, I say. Move on."

Gathering his books, parchments, and quills, Harry told Ron, "Let's go. I want to hurry and get Ginny a gift and get back to the castle. I want to go visit Hermione and see what she is on about. Lavender is usually right about those kinds of things. Where is she by the way?"

"Off with Parvati and Padma. Said they wanted to make this into a girls' day, get makeovers and such. Okay, let's go then."

After buying Ginny a compass for her broom, Harry and Ron made their way back to Hogwarts. The students had been given a Portkey for the trip. Ginny was surprised to see them back three hours early. "Hi! What are you guys doing back so soon? I wasn't expecting you until later!"

"Well, if you'd like, I can leave again," Harry teased.

"No, come here, love, and give me a kiss."

After the rather long kiss and Ron clearing his throat several times, Harry asked Ginny if she wanted to go with him and Ron to see Hermione. She accepted the invite, and they headed down to the dungeons.

Severus had only been there about fifteen minutes to finalize his plans with Hermione for that night when they heard a knock on her door. Hermione opened it to find Harry, Ginny, and Ron. "Hello. Come on in," she invited.

"Snape!" Harry exclaimed. "What are *you* doing here?"

Raising a challenging eyebrow, Severus merely said, "That is *Professor* Snape, boy, and I am sure I do not have to explain my comings and goings to you. As it is, I will be on my way." Turning to Hermione, he bowed slightly, and then told her, "Until tonight. I will be back to collect you around seven." After one last glare at the trio of students, Severus billowed out of the room.

An uncomfortable silence lasted for about three minutes. When Harry couldn't take it any longer, he glared at Hermione. "How could you betray me like this, Hermione? I thought we were best friends! I will tell you this once; if you are going to see Snape on anything other than a professional level, then I think we should end our friendship." After saying that, Harry stormed out of the room leaving a hurt and angry Hermione and an uncomfortable Ron and Ginny behind.

Christy's Notes: For those who think Harry is being childish, don't forget he witnessed Severus killing Albus, and he hasn't gotten over it, yet.

Southern's Notes: Prat Harry! And I felt sorry for the buggler in the last chapter. I'm certain she won't let his funky little threat stop things. He didn't hold Bella in such contempt after she killed Sirius, always did blame Snape for that too. Grrrr...

Quote from POA: Harry didn't have to do his homework under the blankets anymore; now he could sit in the bright sunshine outside Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlor, finishing all his essays with occasional help from Florean Fortescue himself, who, apart from knowing a great deal about medieval witch burnings, gave Harry free sundaes every half an hour.

4. An Evening With Professor Snape

Chapter 4 of 8

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A/N: Many, many thanks to my wonderful beta, Southen_Witch_69!

An Evening With Professor Snape

After Harry left her rooms, Hermione didn't quite know what to say or do. It was Ginny who finally broke the silence. "Don't worry, Hermione. I'll talk to him. He just needs to get used to this."

Ron, who finally found his voice, asked, "What exactly *isthis*, Hermione? I mean, what did Snape mean when he said he would see you around seven?"

Hermione sighed. "It's *Professor* Snape, Ronald. He asked me to dinner tonight, and I accepted."

"What kind of dinner?" Ron was starting to get a little worried.

"What do you mean? It's the kind of dinner where you sit down and eat. Honestly!"

"Is this a *date*, Hermione?" Ginny was positive this was going to be a very bad week.

Cocking an eyebrow, she inquired, "What if it is? It's no one's business except my own."

"Damn it, Hermione!" Ron screamed. "Have you lost your mind? Do you fancy *Snape*?"

Turning towards Ron, she answered, "I honestly don't know. I find him interesting and a great conversationalist. We get on well while working together, and I wouldn't mind seeing how we get on in a personal level, but this really does not concern you, does it, Won Won?"

Ron blanched. He knew this was Hermione's way of reminding him that he let her go for Lavender. He supposed he really *didn't* have a say as a boyfriend, but as a friend, he was concerned.

"Look, Hermione, I just don't understand, is all. He has always hated you, along with Harry and me. I just wonder why he is suddenly taking you out to dinner. I don't trust him. I mean, I know all about Professor Dumbledore, and why he had to do what he did but still. I just don't see him going from hate to... to... whatever this is in a week's time."

Hermione sighed. She didn't really feel like having this conversation. Harry and she had never, and apparently would never, agree on Severus. Now, Ron was starting. They were growing apart, the three of them, and it saddened her. However, she just couldn't live her life to suit them.

"Ron, I refuse to argue with you or Harry over this. If I want to go out to dinner with Severus, I will. Now, I have some things I need to take care of today, so if you don't mind? You guys can come around for tea tomorrow. How does that sound?"

"Sure, Hermione. Harry will probably be cooled off by then." Turning to Ginny, Ron told her, "Let's go, Gin."

When the brother and sister shut the door, Hermione leaned against it and thought to herself, *You better take me someplace nice, Severus Snape!*

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Hermione was just putting the last pin in her hair to secure it up when she heard a knock on her door. "Coming!" she called out.

She opened the door and allowed her date in. He started looking her up and down. She wore a simple, but elegant, Muggle dress of deep rose that came to the floor. Starting to get uncomfortable under his scrutiny, she inquired, "Well? Do I pass inspection, sir?"

Cheeky witch! "Yes, you look quite nice. I was a tad worried. I've seen the sort of stuff your lot wear."

Offended, she raised an eyebrow. "My lot?"

Immediately realizing his mistake, he tried to make amends. "Your generation, Hermione. Some of the people your age wear some outrageous things, you know."

He's one to talk with those billowing robes! Looks like a cross between batman and a vicar. "Well, I wasn't sure where we were going, so I choose to dress of either world, Wizarding or Muggle. If you don't think this is appropriate, I can change."

"No, you look perfect. Shall we?" He was going to have to work on his compliments.

She took his arm as he led her to the gates. He Apparated them both to a restaurant that he had Owled earlier for reservations. It was nice, and Hermione was impressed.

Severus found Hermione a quite pleasing dinner companion. She was well read on many subjects and could make her points when she disagreed with something. He enjoyed that. It had been a long time since he had such an interesting and fairly attractive date. He decided he would pursue a relationship with her and see where it led.

He thought of his Grandfather Prince just then. When his mother had married a Muggle man, his grandparents had disowned her. When Severus was born, and it was discovered he did have magical abilities, Grandfather Prince decided he needed a wizard to show him the way of things. *Never date anyone except a Ravenclaw, boy. They are the only ones clever enough to keep up with us Slytherins*, the old man's voice said in his mind. Severus shook his head at the thought of that. The man was old as dirt then and still going on about the Houses of Hogwarts.

Severus thought there was a little of each House in everyone, if the truth be told. He himself was certainly as brave as any Gryffindor; he'd proved that by going back to the Dark Lord when he returned...not to mention having to kill Dumbledore. Well, best not to dwell on that. He was also clever as any Ravenclaw, spying without getting caught for all those years. Certainly, he was as loyal to Dumbledore and the Order as any Hufflepuff could have been. It was just that his high ambition outranked everything else when that hat had been placed on his head.

No, he decided that Hermione Granger was definitely worth getting to know better on a personal, adult level. He was looking forward to it. He had always wanted a family, but he'd never thought much on the subject whilst he had to spy. Now, he was free, and things were different. He was going to start living his life.

Hermione had never had such a fun date in her life...not that she had many dates before to compare it with. Severus was attentive and a great person to converse different subjects with. He definitely knew about more things than Quidditch and was able to keep up with her and spar some to boot. Not once since she started Hogwarts had she found someone who could keep up with her and her many interests until now. She really hated to see the evening end.

After dinner, neither was in a hurry to get back to the castle, so they walked around a small park in a part of Muggle London not far from Diagon Alley. They found a bench as they were walking and sat a bit in companionable silence. It was nice to just be able to sit and enjoy the other's company without unnecessary chatter. When Severus saw Hermione yawn, he decided it was time to head back.

Hermione was fuming. This was beyond ridiculous to her. "You know what, guys? Just forget it. I absolutely *refuse* to baby Harry. I love him and you guys, but that does not give either one of you the right to dictate whom I choose to spend my time with. His problem with Severus is just that, *his* problem, and I am not going to let his opinions sway me. I have opinions of my own, thanks."

Ron and Ginny were staring at her like they had never seen her before. Finally, Ron found his voice. "Let me see if I understand you, Hermione. You are going to let Snape, who has treated us like the dirt beneath his shoes the whole time he has known us, come between your friendship with Harry? Why?"

"Oh, grow up, the lot of you! He was a *spy*, for Merlin's sake! How else was he supposed to treat us? And, I have to say, you and Harry have never shown him much respect either."

Ron was starting to get angry as well. "Why should we? From day one, he has treated Harry with nothing but contempt, and you just expect us to forget that? Harry feels like you are betraying him; don't you see that?"

"Well, guess what, Ron? For once, this is something that has absolutely nothing to do with Harry Potter! This is about *Hermione Granger*! I like Severus. I enjoy his company, and I intend to continue to see him until that changes. You have Lavender, Harry and Ginny have each other, and I am supposed to be content?"

"NO! We want you to have someone too!"

"Oh, I see, but you want it to be someone you choose or approve of? What if I told you I wanted you to dump Lavender, or what would Harry say if I said I thought Ginny was all wrong for him? Would he break up with her?"

"That is not the same thing, Hermione, and you know it!" Ron was getting exasperated.

"It's *exactly* the same thing."

Ginny was starting to get worried. She didn't mean for this to become a shouting match. "Look, guys, that's enough." Turning towards Ron, Ginny said, "Ron, Hermione can date anyone she wants to. She is a grown witch." Seeing the smug look on Hermione's face, Ginny turned to her next. "And, Hermione, you can't just expect everyone to be thrilled you are dating Professor Snape. You know his past with everyone, and he *did* kill Dumbledore, no matter the reasons why. He is still not completely trusted by the Order either. So, if you continue to date him, you are going to have to accept the fact that there are going to be people who do not approve."

"Frankly, Ginny, I don't care if people approve or not. I have spent my whole time in this world being disapproved of by someone. I am going to date Severus as long as we both want to, and that is the end of it. When Harry, and you, too, Ron," she said looking over at Ron, "grows up, then we can talk. Until then, I have nothing to say. Please close the door on your way out."

After they left, Hermione sat down and rubbed her temples. She wondered if Severus was going through what she was and doubted it. Nobody would dare question him this way.

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Severus was not surprised, but he was a little disappointed, that Hermione didn't come to the main hall for breakfast. After the enjoyable evening he spent with her last night, he was looking forward to seeing her. After he finished his meal, he went to his office to get the list of things he wanted Hermione to complete this week and his list of supplies he needed from the apothecary.

Right before lunch, he headed down to the dungeons to gather Hermione. He was actually looking forward to another outing with her. When he got to her door, it was slightly ajar. Looking in, the sight before him took his breath away. There was Hermione...on her hands and knees...wearing nothing but scraps of denim, looking for something under the cabinet behind her desk. Severus had to control the urge to join her on the floor.

"Miss Granger! What do you think you are doing?"

Startled, Hermione jumped and banged her head. Scowling at her stern looking professor, she informed him, "I've dropped my favorite quill under this cabinet, and I am getting it. What does it look like I am doing, sir?"

"What if I had been a student, Hermione? You cannot parade around your office half naked and on all fours! It is not appropriate." Raising his wand, he said, *Accio quill!* Suddenly, the quill flew into his outstretched hand.

Agitated that she had not thought of that herself, she grabbed the quill and told him, "If a student had knocked, I would have put my robes on."

"The door was ajar. Any student who came here would have gotten an eye full. When in your office, classroom, or anywhere other than your private chambers, I expect you to be appropriately attired. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she said through gritted teeth.

"Good, I am glad that is settled. Now, here is your list of things for the week. When you change, we can go. I assume you are hungry, as you missed breakfast."

She smiled inwardly at the thought of him noticing she had not been present at breakfast. This drove away some of her anger with him. She shook her head and sighed, determined not to let this ruin the rest of the day. "Okay, Severus, just give me a few minutes, and I will be right out. Make yourself comfortable."

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The trip to Hogsmeade and lunch was a pleasant affair. Hermione was beginning to realize that outside of Hogwarts, he treated her as a man does a woman, not as an apprentice or even a colleague.

Hermione was disappointed that she didn't get to see Madam Rosmerta, as she was visiting a sick sister, but she enjoyed her time in the apothecary and bought a few items herself. Soon, they found themselves heading back to Hogwarts. Hermione had not put in an appearance at breakfast or lunch, so she definitely needed to attend the evening meal.

When she was seated, she looked to the Gryffindor table for Ron, Harry, and Ginny. Ron and Ginny slightly nodded and waved, but Harry would not even meet her eyes. She sighed. She felt like everything she did was a struggle.

She looked to the Slytherin table when the hairs on the back of her neck stood on end and saw Draco Malfoy smirking at her. She knew just then that he knew of her problems with Harry and was enjoying her distress. *Smug little bastard!*

Severus noticed both exchanges, but he decided not to comment on either. Instead, he asked, "We are both free of hall monitoring this Saturday. I was wondering if you would like another outing."

"Yes, I would like that very much. How should I dress?" She was teasing him, and he knew it.

"I have enjoyed the Muggle opera before, so I should like to take you there. Dress should be slightly formal, I think." He smirked at her astounded expression.

"I tend to forget you are not a pureblood. I have a hard time picturing you at a Muggle opera while dressed in a Muggle suit." Hermione shook her head. She couldn't wait

to see him in a suit.

"The opera is something my mother enjoyed. My father had introduced it to her early in their relationship, and from that point, she could not get enough of it. Later, he started to refuse to accompany her, so I began attending with her when we could save the money. Those are some of the fondest memories I have of my mother. But enough of that. If you can be ready by six, we shall dine beforehand."

"That sounds perfect, Severus. I can't wait."

"Neither can I, Hermione."

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Hermione thoroughly enjoyed the evening out with Severus. They didn't talk much this time due to listening to the opera, but she was content just being with him. About halfway through, he took her hand in his, and she was thrilled.

It didn't surprise her that he wore a solid black suit...what else would he wear?...but it did surprise her how attractive she thought he looked in it. Typically, Severus was not attractive, but the more she got to know him on a personal level, the more attractive he became to her.

When the evening was over, he walked her back to her rooms. She invited him in, but once again, he declined. He leaned down and kissed her goodnight, a little more aggressively this time. When he turned to walk to his chambers, he left a breathless and frustrated Hermione Granger in his wake.

Christy's Notes: Hermione and Severus seem to be getting closer and closer!

Southern's Notes: Ah, lovely. Glad she told her mates to sod off if they didn't like her decision. I want Snape to enter the chambers. Hehe!

Quote from OOTP: But where's--?

6. The Green-eyed Monster

Chapter 6 of 8

While Severus copes with feelings and learning to live again, Hermione is determined to build a new life for herself--with or without Harry's approval. This is my response to SW69's Harry Potter challenge.

Disclaimer: Even though I love to shape them to my will, these lovely characters all belong to JKR!

A/N: Thank you, Southern_Witch_69, for being an awesome beta! You rock!

The Green-eyed Monster

As the months slowly passed, it became an unspoken agreement that when Hermione and Severus had the same Saturday night off, they would go out together. This troubled Harry deeply. Since Hermione started dating that git, Harry had been having dreams of Dumbledore.

Many different things from their last year together would come back to haunt him at night!"*If there is an attack,*"said Dumbledore, *"I give you permission to use any counterjinx or curse that might occur to you."* Harry often awoke wondering why Dumbledore didn't release him and let him curse Snape. Harry could tell that Malfoy would not have killed the headmaster. He had been faltering and had lowered his wand. Then, along came the greasy git to save the day for Malfoy. What a hero.

For the life of him, Harry could not figure out what Hermione saw in Snape. He was ugly, sarcastic, and just plain evil. He decided that while she was seeing the tosser, he would stay away from her. Well, here it was, nearly three and a half months later, and they were still going strong. The Christmas holidays were coming up, and Hermione was not coming to stay at the Burrow. She was staying at Hogwarts with that *arsehole!*

He had ignored her in her class unless she called on him. She had asked him to stay one afternoon after class and tried to talk with him, but he'd told her that unless she had a Potions related topic to discuss, he had nothing to say to her. As he'd turned to leave, he'd noticed that Hermione had been holding back tears.

Harry had felt he was right in this situation, and he refused to yield. However, he was really starting to miss his friend, and the argument was putting a strain on his relationships with Ron and Ginny. He was thinking about going to her and patching things up before he left for the Burrow when he heard Ginny telling Ron that Mrs. Weasley had invited Hermione and Snape for Christmas dinner. Bloody fantastic. Ginny had told her mother that Hermione was seeing Snape. Great. He decided to wait and see what happened when she showed up.

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The only tarnish on Hermione's wonderful mood was the continuous argument she was having with Harry. After awhile, she'd decided she would be the bigger person and offer the olive branch. So she'd asked him to stay after class one day, but he'd ended up breaking her proffered branch in two. She sighed. There was nothing she could do if he refused to acknowledge her.

She was currently getting ready for Severus. She had talked him into going Christmas shopping after their dinner later in Muggle London. She specifically wanted to look for a CD player for Arthur Weasley. She smiled, remembering the mock fuss Severus had put up when she'd told him that is where she wanted to go.

She was falling in love with him, and instead of being scared out of her mind like she had been with Ron, she was giddy. Besides spending every free Saturday and Sunday together, they usually met in the kitchens for a midnight snack after weekend rounds. The only thing that bothered her was that he still refused to come into her room after their dates. *Well, I am changing that tonight!*she thought determinedly.

Hermione heard a knock on her door at precisely six.*Right on time as usual.* "Come in!"

Severus opened the door and walked in. "Are you ready to go?"

"Yes, just let me get my cloak." She grabbed her cloak, and he helped her put it on. On their way out, she turned to him. "Thank you for this, Severus. I know you hate Muggle London, especially this time of year."

Embarrassed, he simply told her, "Think nothing of it."

After dinner, they went about the shops looking around. After she purchased her gifts, they decided to head back to Hogwarts. The children were getting hyper with the holidays coming up. When they got back, it was barely ten.

After the first goodnight kiss, she whispered, "Would you like to come in?"

He kissed her again lightly, and told her, "Thank you, but no, I better get back to my chambers."

She gently pushed him back and glared. "May I ask you why not?"

Severus sighed. "Because, Hermione, *when* I come into your room, it won't be for tea and biscuits. To put it simply, I want you. Are you ready for that type of relationship with me?"

Finally! "Yes, I am. I have been for the past month. I want you, too." She then took his hand and led him directly to her bedroom. Once inside, she turned and gently kissed him. "I am ready for you, Severus, and whatever step you'd like to take."

He put one hand behind her head and another on her waist as he bent down to claim her lips. She immediately opened her mouth for him, and he lightly traced her lips with his tongue before devouring her mouth. She moaned and started to rub his chest, liking the silky feeling of his robes.

Slowly, they backed to the bed. When her legs hit the edge of the bed, he stopped and started undressing her. Following his lead, she began undressing him, as well, although her hands were shaking. Once they were completely rid of their clothes, he simply said, "You're lovely."

Embarrassed, she slightly blushed and rose on her toes to kiss him. As they were kissing, he eased her down onto the bed and moved his mouth from her lips to her neck, slowly working his way to her breasts. He found a highly sensitive spot right above her nipple and ravished it with his tongue. She moaned loudly and lifted her hips to have contact with his. He groaned and brought his hand to her center.

He gently cupped her before slipping one finger in. She gasped at the feeling and started rocking her hips in time with the movement of his hand. When he felt she was ready, he positioned himself and slid home. She cried out, and he stopped his movements, looking at her. He was stunned.

He'd had no idea she was a virgin. That thought had never once entered his mind. She had dated the Weasley boy for *at least* six months; he thought for sure they would have had sex. It was very unusual for someone to be twenty and still a virgin in this day and age, especially in the Wizarding world. "All right?"

"Yes. Keep going." He started to thrust again as gently as his body would allow. When she found her rhythm and started matching his, he groaned with pleasure and began to move a little faster. He could tell that he was close, so once again, he moved his finger to her center and gently worked her nub, causing her to cry out. Shortly after she'd found her release, he found his.

After catching his breath, he rolled to his side, taking her with him. "You were amazing," he said, kissing her softly. "Why did you not tell me you had never lain with a man before? I would have taken better care with you had I known."

"You were wonderful, Severus. I didn't tell you because I didn't want it to be an issue. I wanted you, and I don't have any regrets. You?"

"Only that I wish I had known." She yawned then, and he pulled her back to his front so that he could spoon with her. Moments later, they drifted off to sleep.

When they awoke the next morning, he told her that he wanted to go to his chambers to shower and change. He asked if she wanted to accompany him to Hogsmeade, as he wanted to pick up a Christmas gift for Minerva, and then, they could lunch at the Three Broomsticks. She agreed, and when he left, she went to shower. *This is going to be a wonderful day! I can feel it.*

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After the shopping was complete, they headed for lunch. Hermione was glad to see that Madam Rosmerta was back and asked after her sister. "Oh, she's fine! Can't keep her down long." Rosmerta then turned to Severus. "Hullo, Severus. It's been a long time since I've seen you. How have you been?"

"I have been well. You are looking especially nice today." When he smiled an actual smile full of warmth, Hermione was surprised. She had only ever seen him smile that way a couple of times.

Rosmerta raised an eyebrow. "I am leaving at seven this evening. Would you like to join me later?"

"Thank you, but I can't. I have plans." Severus shifted, getting uncomfortable.

Smiling fondly, Rosmerta told him, "A rain check it is then. Let's make it soon, okay, love?" Then, she winked and bent down to lightly kiss his lips. It was almost a simple, friendly kiss. Almost. But Hermione could tell there was something more to it.

As she walked off to place their lunch orders, Severus looked up to see a highly agitated Hermione. She had her arms crossed at her chest and was glaring at him.

"What?" Severus was trying to look innocent, failing miserably. Severus Snape could not do innocent.

"Just what exactly is Rosmerta to you? She is obviously more than a mere acquaintance of many years. Do you date her as well?"

Severus sighed. He did not want to get into this here, but he had no choice. He needed to fix it immediately before it got out of hand. "I do not now, nor have I *ever* date Rosmerta. We would just get together on occasion. That is all."

"What do you mean by get together on occasion? Is that not dating?" She gasped suddenly. Her eyes grew wide in shock as she threw her hand over her mouth. "She is your *shag* buddy! Oh my god!" For some reason, the thoughts of him having a shag buddy surprised her, even though she knew he was no innocent in the ways of the bedroom.

Severus raised an eyebrow. "Shag buddy?"

Glaring once more, she told him, "Yes, it's when--"

"I know what the phrase means, Hermione. I just have never thought of Rosmerta in quite those terms. Although, I suppose that would accurately describe our... relationship. When one of us would have a certain, um, need, we would call on the other." He couldn't understand why she was getting so upset. Surely she realized he had a past?

As if reading his mind, she hissed, "Why did you not let her know about *us*? You let her think that you would get in touch with her for a little slap and tickle at another time! If you are about seeing other witches, then I think we should stop our association now, even after last night." She rose to leave, and he grabbed her wrist to stop her.

"I did not tell her about us because *you and I* have not even talked about our relationship and where it stands. I have no intentions of seeing her or anyone else for that matter. After lunch, I was going to ask you to come to my chambers so we could discuss things. I was thinking we could make an announcement at the Burrow during Christmas dinner."

Hermione was so upset that she didn't realize what Severus had just said. "Where it stands? I don't go around casually making love as you obviously do." Hermione realized she was starting to yell and stopped herself. "I went out with Ron for eight months and still didn't go all the way!" She jerked her wrist from his grip and turned to go. "I need time to think--alone. I understand you have had a past. I am not that naive, but you didn't say *one word* to her, Severus! It's like you didn't want her to know. It's not the fact that you have been intimate with her; I know you have had lovers, Severus. It's the fact that when she asked you if you wanted to meet up with her later, you didn't say anything at all, leading her to believe that you might!"

"Hermione, we need to discuss this like *adults*. You are acting like a child and blowing this way out of proportion! We will discuss this in private when we get home. Now sit and eat your lunch." Severus hated public outbursts; luckily, nobody seemed to notice.

"Like *adults*? I am acting like a *child*, am I? Severus, I think under the circumstances, I need some time to my self to get things under perspective. Whereas Ron didn't have a real past, you do, and I'll need to get used to that. I'd appreciate some privacy. Good day.

Pinching the bridge of his nose, Severus thought sarcastically, *Now, I know the other reason I have avoided relationships for so long!*

Christy's Notes: Well, it would shock me, too!

Southern's Notes: I hope Snape tells her to find the nearest playground. There should be other kids about for her to play with. Yuck.

Quote from book six: HBP: "If there is an attack," said Dumbledore, "I give you permission to use any counterjinx or curse that might occur to you."

7. Making Up Is Hard To Do

Chapter 7 of 8

While Severus copes with feelings and learning to live again, Hermione is determined to build a new life for herself--with or without Harry's approval. This is my response to SW69's Harry Potter challenge.

Disclaimer: All these wonderful characters belong to JKR. I only wish they were mine!

A/N: I bow to the wonderful Southern_Witch_69! I am not worthy, but I accept her help anyway!

This is a response to SW69's Harry Potter Chapter Challenge. Details at the end of chapter one.

Making Up Is Hard To Do

Hermione knew she was being unreasonable. She had been jealous of Ron and Lavender in her sixth year, but it had *never* been to this extent. She couldn't even go in the Three Broomsticks and face Madam Rosmerta after finding out she had seen Severus starkers! There was nothing else for it. She was bothered by it, though she knew it was ridiculous.

She hated being torn by such jealousy. Having such feelings wasn't like her, and what frustrated her the most was that she didn't know how to deal with them. But she knew something would have to give soon, as Severus would not tolerate her avoidance long. Did she care? Did she want to see him after the way she'd acted and the things she'd said?

It had been one week since she had found out, and she had refused to see Severus. She sent all her assignments and finished potions to him by owl. When he came to her chambers, she would not answer the door...mostly because she was ashamed of her behavior and partly because she was somewhat upset with her wizard.

What bothered her was not the mere fact that he had actually slept with Madam Rosmerta, she'd known that he'd had lovers before her; it was the fact that when Rosmerta made those innuendos to Severus, he never said he wouldn't meet her. He didn't even bother to mention that he had been dating Hermione. It hurt terribly, and she was pouting, plain and simple.

She had a free period and decided to walk about the grounds. She found herself by Hagrid's hut and stopped to listen to him lecture one of his sixth year classes.

"The creation of Basilisks has been illegal since medieval times, although the practice is easily concealed by simply removing the chicken egg from beneath the toad when the Department for the Control of Magical Creatures comes to call."

She quickly scanned the class to make sure Ginny was not in attendance, knowing it would be a bothersome subject for her. Changing her mind, she left and decided she would talk to him another time. Sighing, she made her way back to her classroom to prepare for her next class.

She was happy she had not had any more incidents with Malfoy since that first class. Whatever Severus had said to him worked. Not that the little ferret was friendly! He just ignored her existence, which was fine with her. She entered her classroom and started writing the assignment on the board. It had been a long, lonely week.

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Severus was fuming. He could not believe how immature she was acting. He was a thirty-nine-year-old man *Of course* he had been with other witches before. Surely she wasn't of the mind that he should have scolded Rosmerta for asking him a question? How ludicrous! He didn't meet with his former lover, did he? No! Nor did he plan to.

He was beginning to rethink his *relationship* with Hermione. Severus could not believe how juvenile she was behaving. *She has the nerve to refuse to see me, does she?* he fumed. Just as quickly, he tampered down on his contempt. Making rash decisions would not be prudent in this situation. He realized that she had acted immaturity due to inexperience. He decided he would speak with her the next day, which was their normal Saturday outing, however, before he made any solid decisions on moving on with his life without her and her schoolgirl tendencies.

He sighed as he put the boggart in the closet for his third year students. He really enjoyed spending time with Hermione. But for this one instance, she had really pleased him in all things. He just couldn't understand what her problem was. He had little choice but to wait until the next day to find out. She hadn't been answering her door when he'd tried to call on her. He pushed the thoughts away as his third years began entering the classroom.

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At around six on Saturday afternoon, Severus made his way to Hermione's chambers. He still had not heard from her at all, but going out when they both had a free Saturday had been their routine for a few months now. Therefore, he suspected she would be expecting him. He didn't know how wrong he was.

Just as he rounded the corner, he heard his little witch laughing at something some male had said to her. He knew it was not Potter or Weasley, as he had passed those two dunderheads on the way there. He decided to slink back into the shadows and see who it was. *Viktor Krum. Just bloodyperfect. What is he doing here anyway? Shouldn't he be off playing Quidditch somewhere?*

The ex-Death Eater was livid at this point. Enough was enough. He was very disappointed in Hermione. He felt like she was playing childish games and decided he would not tolerate it. Taking down her wards, he decided to wait for her to return in her chambers. He was damn well going to be comfortable while he waited!

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Hermione arrived back at the castle shortly after ten to find a very irate Severus Snape sitting in her chambers. *Thank Merlin I didn't ask Viktor in!* "What are you doing here, Severus? As I recall, we had no plans tonight."

"I beg to differ. We have had plans every Saturday when we are both free for months now. And tonight, we are going to talk and resolve this one way or another. I am sick of your childish games."

"Excuse me?" Hermione could not believe the nerve of this wizard! Yet his words had not fallen on deaf ears. They worried her. She quickly began speaking. "I am not being childish, nor do I play games. *You* were the one who acted as if you would be meeting Madam Rosmerta at a later time! You never even told her we were together!" Even though she *did* feel she was acting immaturely at the moment, she was not going to openly admit it to him.

"I think you are *highly* exaggerating things a bit, don't you? I have explained to you why I did not tell Rosmerta we were dating, Hermione. We had not discussed things ourselves. But I will tell you this: *Adults* discuss things. They do not avoid each other and try to make each other jealous with former lovers. *Won't* have it."

"Oh, is that so? Well, let's get this straight. I was not trying to make you jealous, as I had no idea that you even knew I was going out to dinner with Viktor tonight. Viktor is very happily married. He happened to be in town, and we were catching up. That is all. Unlike you, I informed him of our dating from the beginning."

Severus sighed. This nonsense had gone on long enough. "If you can't handle a relationship with a real man and act like a woman, you need to tell me right now. I've had enough of this. It ends here." He waited for her to answer. She said nothing. "Well?" He eyed her shrewdly and saw that her eyes were welling with tears. Sighing, he said, "Hermione, I cannot change the past. Rosmerta has been my lover upon occasion, but it was nothing like us. We never seriously dated, nor did we wish to. I have rectified my mistake and let her know that I am in a relationship with you. What more do you want?"

Hermione looked away from his piercing black eyes. "You made me feel insecure, Severus. I could sense that something had been going on between the two of you, and it seemed you were in no hurry to inform her of your relationship with me. I didn't know how to deal with it, so I lashed out at you. Now, I wonder if my stupidity has cost me everything."

"I see."

She looked back at him then. "Do you, Severus? Do you understand that I am saying I *want* jealous? That I want no other hands on you again but mine? That I want us to be exclusive?"

"Are you saying you want to lay claim to me, Hermione? Claim me as yours?"

"Yes, that is exactly what I am saying, and to be honest, I don't think I could deal with any other type of relationship. So... if you feel differently or if you want to see other witches, please tell me now."

"Silly girl," Severus sighed, exasperated. "You are the only witch I want." He went to her then and took her in his arms. After kissing her gently, he told her, "Promise me that there will be no more public scenes or avoiding me when you are upset. If you want things to work, we have to discuss our problems *like adults* would." As she started to look down, he lifted her chin with his finger. "There is no reason for you to feel insecure with me, Hermione. Now, I want you to promise me."

"I promise, and I am sorry I acted childishly. I was hurt, and I dealt with it by avoiding you. I won't do that again." She wrapped her arms around his neck and whispered, "I have heard that make up sex is wonderful." Then, she licked his earlobe and trailed her way down the side of his neck.

He groaned and kissed her again, passionately this time. "I have missed you."

"Me, too," Hermione said, whimpering when his hands began caressing her body. Getting carried away in the moment, she started unfastening his robes. She wanted to touch him, to feel him. "I need you... please."

Not wanting to wait long enough to go to her bedchambers, he lowered her onto the rug in front of the fireplace after removing the rest of their clothes. He looked down at her, lying on the rug, glowing from the fire. "Beautiful," he murmured before kissing her again.

He started with her lips and didn't stop until he had kissed, licked, and nibbled every inch of her body. Just when she thought she was going to explode from wanting him to fill her, he slid in and started thrusting within her, gently at first, and later, after relishing the feel of her wet heat, he thrust with more urgency. It didn't take long for her to come undone, and he followed shortly after.

Hermione sighed, content to lie in his arms on the rug. They were face to face, and he pulled her to him for one last, long kiss. Just as she started drifting off, she mumbled, "Love you."

Hugging her tightly, his heart filled with joy. He replied, "And I, you." After casting a Cushioning Charm so they would be comfortable, Severus joined Hermione in sleep.

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During the Christmas holidays, Severus and Hermione stayed at the castle together. She was only mildly surprised to receive an engagement ring on Christmas morning. She happily accepted, and they decided to get married in June as soon as school was finished.

They went to the Burrow for Christmas dinner, and Hermione happily told everyone that she and Severus were engaged. Harry got up and left the table. Ginny started to follow, but Hermione stopped her and went upstairs to talk to him herself.

"Why, Hermione? I don't understand it! He killed him in cold blood!"

"He did no such thing, and you know it. You have seen all the evidence. I won't discuss his innocence again. We have been over it enough. I will say this. Professor Dumbledore loved him, Harry, just as he loved you. He wanted you both to be happy and live your lives to the fullest. You can't continue to hang onto this hatred; it will

destroy you. I am not asking you to be his best mate. I am just asking you to accept the truth, and we both know what the truth is."

Harry just sat there, refusing to look at her. She sighed. "I love you. I will always love you. We are adults now, and we have to get on with our lives. I expect you will end with Ginny while Ron will end with Lavender. We couldn't stay 'the golden trio' forever, you know. More people have been added to the mix." She smiled softly and kissed his cheek.

As she turned to go, Harry told her, "I *do* love you, too. I couldn't stop if I tried. You're my family." He got up, walked over to her, and hugged her. "I hope you'll be happy." With that said, he went back downstairs and out the back door. Ginny followed Harry then, and they decided to go flying. Soon after, Ron and Lavender joined them.

Saying their goodbyes, Severus and Hermione headed back to Hogwarts. She had a wedding to plan!

Christy's Notes: What an emotional chapter! Whew! Only one more to go. LOL, I agree with Sun, but with limited words and only one chapter to go, he had to forgive quicker than I think Snape normally would.

Southern's Notes: I think Snape was too easy on her. A week of avoidance? Going eat out with another guy? Well, that's worse than what he did. He only told Rosmerta hello.

Quote from Fantastical Beasts: "The creation of Basilisks has been illegal since medieval times, although the practice is easily concealed by simply removing the chicken egg from beneath the toad when the Department for the Control of Magical Creatures comes to call."

8. You Can Count On Me

Chapter 8 of 8

While Severus copes with feelings and learning to live again, Hermione is determined to build a new life for herself--with or without Harry's approval. This is my response to SW69's Harry Potter challenge.

Disclaimer: The Harry Potter universe belongs to JKR. I am just playing.

A/N: Well, Southern, it's been another fun ride! Thanks for being the best beta anyone could ask for, and thanks for coming up with this wonderful challenge!

You Can Count On Me

After the Christmas holidays, Harry seemed to slowly ease back into his friendship with Hermione. He just stayed after class one day and began talking to her like old times. Hermione could not have been more thrilled. She'd missed her friend.

Sunday teatime usually brought Harry, Ginny, and Ron to Hermione's quarters for tea. Sometimes they would go to Hagrid's, but most of the time, they stayed at Hermione's. She'd begun to notice subtle changes in Harry and Ginny's relationship. She was almost positive they had been intimate. She was happy for her friends. She even told Ron that he was welcome to bring Lavender if he wanted to. Ron was relieved to hear this, as his visiting without his lover every Sunday had been causing problems in his relationship.

As they were having tea one Sunday, Hermione brought up her binding ceremony. The girls started chatting excitedly while the guys said nothing. Noticing this, Hermione made a bold move. She informed Harry and Ron, "I would really like the two of you to be a part of my ceremony. You have been my best friends since our first year and are like my family. I love you both, and it would mean a lot to me to have you guys standing there with me." She chuckled lightly and said, "Besides, we have always taken our adventures together!"

Ron agreed immediately. He loved Hermione and wanted to see her happy. Besides, agreeing to be a part of Hermione's binding ceremony would prove to Lavender he did not still hold any romantic feelings towards his ex-girlfriend.

Harry was more reluctant. He truly wanted to be there for her, as she was like his sister, but she was marrying ~~Snape~~! He sighed. "I will try, Hermione, but just in case, can Ginny be my stand in?" He looked at her with sad, hopeful, green eyes.

Bothered, but not wanting to admit it, Hermione said, "Sure, Harry, but promise me you will try, all right?"

"I will do my best. That is all I can promise." Not wanting to spoil the day, Harry quickly changed the subject, but it was too late. Everyone felt uneasy. Not even twenty minutes later, the four friends left Hermione to go back to their common room.

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The months passed quickly, and before they knew it, the N.E.W.T.s were upon them. Harry and Ron felt that they were as ready as they could be and were both very happy to have finished. Mostly, they were looking forward to finishing school.

Hermione and Severus continued to get closer. It was hard for them both to believe that they had fallen for one another. Severus would have never guessed that he would have ended with the resident know-it-all, even with the slight attraction he'd had in the beginning, and Hermione surely never expected to fall in love with the greasy git of the dungeons.

In the beginning of their courtship, she thought of that saying about opposites attracting, but Hermione didn't think they were all that opposite after she'd learnt things about him. They were both intelligent people who loved to read and learn on many different subjects, they both enjoyed the same kinds of activities...especially the ones in the bedroom...and they both enjoyed going to the same kinds of places.

Severus felt that they were very lucky to have found each other. He thought himself especially lucky because he figured he would never find anyone that he thought he could live with.

As they were making the final arrangement for their binding ceremony, Hermione asked who else he wanted to cast the circle. Harry had still not given her a definite answer, but she was still holding out hope that he would consent to stand with her.

"I have given it a lot of thought and have decided to ask Arthur Weasley and Kingsley Shacklebolt. Those were the two men with the most faith in me after all was said and done. I am sure they will agree."

Hermione was relieved. She liked both of these men and was also sure they would do it. It saddened her that Professor Dumbledore would not be able to perform the ceremony and that some ministry official would have to do it. She supposed that as long as they were married in the end that was all that mattered.

Severus decided he wanted to have a very small reception at Grimmauld Place. He and his love had discussed Spinner's End, Severus' home, but they'd both decided that with the amount of work that needed to be done they would just have it at Grimmauld Place. Severus also decided they were going to do the least amount of work needed to repair his home so that they could sell it. His home did not hold a lot of fond memories for him, and Hermione was looking forward to buying a place for them together...a new start. When she thought she'd found the perfect place and showed it to Severus. It was a small cottage in the outskirts of Hogsmeade.

Severus agreed upon seeing it and told her, "We need to repair Spinner's End quickly and sell it. I want to have the Galleons to secure the cottage before someone else beats us to it."

Hermione nodded, saying, "I want to also begin looking at furniture soon as well."

While they were in Diagon Alley one evening to check on furnishings, Hermione wanted to have a look in the tapestry shop. Her grandmother always had a tapestry hanging in her front room, and every time Hermione had gone to visit her, she had spent hours looking at it.

The saleswizard told them, "In the final portion of the tapestry, we see the wizard who caught the snidget being presented with a bay of gold."

Severus glared, "Do we look like huge Quidditch fans to you?"

Embarrassed, the saleswizard stuttered, "Um, no, my apologies, sir, this tapestry is new, just arrived today, and I have been fixated on showing it."

"No worries," Hermione assured him. "Perhaps we will just browse around ourselves."

Relieved, the saleswizard left them to help other customers.

Noticing the time, Severus decided they needed to leave for Hogwarts. "It is growing late, love. If you wish, we may come again another time. The evening meal will soon start."

"Of course," Hermione replied. "I would like that very much."

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With N.E.W.T.s over, everyone was able to relax again. Everyone was leaving the next day, and during the next week, Hermione and Severus were getting married. The only rain cloud on her ray of sunshine was that Harry would not commit to being in her ceremony. The bushy-haired girl wanted to pull her hair out, or better yet, she wanted to pull Harry's hair out.

"Just give him time, Hermione," Ginny assured her. "He'll come around. He loves you, you know. He truly does want you to be happy!"

"Ginny," Hermione groaned, "time is what we *don't* have! The binding is next week! He *just has* to be a part of it. Harry, Ron, and I have done everything together since first year. I really don't want to do this without him, but I will if I have to."

"You won't. I really don't think he will let you down, but if he just can't, I'm not so bad, am I?" Ginny was trying to tease Hermione to get her in a better mood. It worked.

"No," the nervous bride-to-be answered. "I suppose you'll do in a pinch." She quickly ducked as her flame-haired friend threw a pillow at her.

Laughing, they made their way to the Quidditch pitch to watch the guys play one last fun game before they had to leave Hogwarts the next day.

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The day of the binding was beautiful. Hermione was anxious because Harry still wasn't there. She had resigned herself to the fact that he was not going to show. His absence, along with Professor Dumbledore's, was depressing. The bride decided not to dwell on it; she had Severus waiting for her.

She wore wedding robes of the palest ivory and a crown of flowers on her head. Severus wore wedding robes as well. However, his were black. Just as she stepped in the circle and the Ministry Official started to speak, Harry ran into the circle as Ginny backed out.

"Sorry for the disruption and that I'm late." He smiled at Hermione and nodded briefly at Severus. "Please, continue."

Hermione felt like a weight had been lifted. She beamed at her lover, and he grinned at her. He was happy Potter was here, but it was only because of the joy it had given his witch.

As the final words were spoken, a Phoenix flew from the trees and burst into song. After it was finished, the Phoenix flew away through the clouds. It made Severus feel that maybe Dumbledore was there after all.

During the reception, Hermione left her parents talking to Severus and made her way to Harry and Ginny. She gave Harry a hug and told him, "Thank you so much for being there, Harry. You don't know how much it means to me."

"Of course," her best friend replied. "You can count on me, Hermione. Always."

Epilogue

Today was their twenty-year anniversary. Hermione smiled to herself. She loved him even more today than she had twenty years before. Not that they never had any bumps along their path, but they always worked through them.

The couple's fifteen-year-old daughter and twelve-year-old son were arranging a *surprise* party with the Potters. Severus had grumbled about having to spend an evening with the Potters, even if it was in his honor. Hermione told her grumpy husband to hush and bear it, even if he didn't *grin* while doing so!

Hermione smiled as she thought about the years that had passed. She was glad they both had continued to teach. Severus was now Deputy Headmaster. Minerva was still going strong as Hogwarts Headmistress, a fact that warmed her heart, as Hermione dearly loved her ex-Transfiguration professor and Head of House.

Mrs. Snape was also pleased that Bill Weasley decided to take the Defense Against the Dark Arts job after Fleur decided to continue to teach Transfiguration. Hermione was happy there had been no friction between Fleur and her when Minerva made her prized ex-pupil the Head of Gryffindor during her second year of teaching.

Surrounded by friends and family, Severus thought back to the events that brought them to where they were, and he decided he wouldn't change anything. Life had gone on in the aftermath of a horrific war, and his destiny had led him to Hermione. Even though nobody could tell by looking at him due to his fake scowl plastered upon his face, he decided he was most happy indeed.

Christy's Notes: Well, there you have it! The end of *Aftermath*. I hope you enjoyed it! Be on the lookout for my next fic, which will be a response to Ladyofthemasque's YLC challenge! (I do love those challenges, don't I?)

Southern_Witch_69's Notes: Well, I'm glad it's a happy ending, and I'm equally happy that Harry came to his senses.

Quote from Quidditch Through The Ages: In the final portion of the tapestry, we see the wizard who caught the snidget being presented with a bay of gold.