

Bookends

by livvy6

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The End of the World

Chapter 1 of 23

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Time it was and what a time it was, it was,

A time of innocence, a time of confidences.

Long ago it must be, I have a photograph.

Preserve your memories, they're all that's left you...

"Bookends" by Simon and Garfunkel

BOOM!

The battle raged outside, shaking the castle as dust sprinkled down overhead. Kingsley Shacklebolt and Madam Pomfrey sat in the Great Hall, silent, as the battle roared. The sounds of the fighting echoed throughout the Hall. Finally, their concern for the wounded that might be trying to straggle in through the main gates drew them out to view the carnage. No one came. They watched the fierce fighting from a distance. There were moments where Poppy wanted to run out to help a wounded student or Order member, but Kingsley held her back...the Death Eaters were out for blood. No one was spared if wounded. They sat all night; the only light came from the illumination of the hexes and curses cast. Towards dawn, Kingsley saw the battle shift slowly from the west towards the east.

Kingsley had witnessed a magnificent duel between Severus Snape and the Lestrage brothers early on in the battle. It had been a ruthless, take no prisoners, fight that the Potions master had won. Yet, as soon as he had claimed victory, a stray spell in the back had taken him down. Kingsley had watched the tall, dark wizard fall gracefully to his knees and then sink to the ground. Kingsley had punched his hand into the wall he had been standing behind in sorrow and frustration. He had hated that he had been ordered to remain behind, to not getting directly involved with the fighting since the Order had decided that if they destroyed Voldemort, Kingsley, with his undercover work experience with the Muggle Prime Minister, would be the perfect choice for the new Minister of Magic. Other warriors who had charged forward and clashed with the vast armies of Voldemort had quickly obscured Snape's figure from Kingsley's sight.

The shifting battle made it impossible for either Poppy or Kingsley to see clearly. The fighting was now a kilometer away. All that could be heard were the screams and

shrieks as spells collided with the fighting and the fallen. Kingsley looked back onto the western field that had been abandoned. The darkness was receding as the sun began to rise over the eastern side where the battle still raged. He wondered if there were any wounded that were unable to speak. Then, he saw a Death Eater walking amongst the strewn dead, casting the Killing Curse as he walked. That did it for the seasoned Auror. There were some things that were NOT fair in war; and the outright murder of the wounded was one of those things. He raced out of the castle gates and strode out with all the stealth with which he had been trained. He crept slowly towards the murderer. Every once in a while he would hear a scream or a guttural pained cry of "NO," a green light would flash, and all would be still.

"Sick bastard," he growled as he carefully edged closer. Finally, he saw the profile of the Death Eater by the glow of the green light as he killed one helpless victim after another. He recognized him as Crabbe, a vicious, but cowardly, Death Eater.

*Only someone as gutless as he would go about murdering young and wandless people*Kingsley thought angrily.

He crept up to him, and before Crabbe knew it, Kingsley cut him down with the same Killing Curse. As soon as the slaughterer's lifeless body hit the ground there was a deafening explosion from the eastern side, where the fighting was still raged. He turned around sharply, blinded partially by the rising sun, yet made out a sweeping green flash and a mighty wind that roared towards him, knocking him off his feet. As soon as he could gain his footing, he dashed back inside the main gates of the castle where Poppy was waiting, wringing her hands in terror and anticipation.

When the sound of the battle could no longer be heard, he and the Mediwitch faced each other fearfully. They both had the same thought: were they the sole remaining survivors? He stood just inside of the gates of battered castle where he had earlier been keeping his vigil. He wearily decided to walk outside of the walled grounds to see if any life could be found on the gruesome battlefield.

Poppy had sobbed on Kingsley's shoulder before he had walked out from the gates, distraught over the death and destruction they were facing alone. Hogwarts was a war torn battlefield full of dead bodies. The steam of so many spells that had erupted from so many wands rose from the ground. The dust from the almighty explosion from the east had finally settled. The field was so hushed; it seemed it impossible for such deafening silence to exist with so many bodies around him. Kingsley could not accept that he and Poppy were alone. He kept walked on, searching, calling out for survivors, and straining to hear, to listen for a call or a scream for help. He stood in the middle of the battlefield turning around and around until he was dizzy. Overwhelmed by the multitude of dead faces in front of him, he closed his eyes to gather himself and return to the castle. Finally, as he slowly began to walk back, he saw two figures had emerged from the decimated corpses: one from the east, one from the west. They were weary, he could tell. He could see one was a witch, the other, a wizard. He yelled for Pomfrey to see to the witch, and he ran towards the wizard. As he came closer, the figure collapsed, and he saw Severus Snape, bloodied and breathing raggedly as he pointed his wand shakily at the older wizard.

*"Don't kill me!"*he gasped.

Kingsley smiled broadly. "Of course not, Headmaster. I saw your spectacular work against Rodolphus and Rabastan Lestrange. Impressive dueling, if I may say," he said while offering his hand to help the wizard up from the ground.

"You certainly may," he groaned as he rose from the ground, holding his side. "I suppose that is one thing I can say to Potter and Black's credit: they assisted me in learning how to survive a double onslaught."

Kingsley laughed in his relief as he supported Snape in their slow gait back to the castle. He was so happy to have found a survivor, he felt practically gleeful!

Snape gasped and stumbled. He was far worse off than he was letting on. He was panting for air, feeling as though he could not draw enough into his lungs. His eyes darted around the blood-soaked battlefield, and in the distance, he saw two figures ahead of them. Kingsley could feel Snape's fear seep from him and into his skin. The wizards heard Madam Pomfrey's jubilant cry, "He's dead! Voldemort is dead!"

They stood frozen at the announcement. Snape finally spoke. "Kingsley, it's far too quiet. I thought I was the only survivor. Please tell me there are people in the castle," he begged softly.

"Severus, I won't lie to you," the wizard said darkly. "Madam Pomfrey and I thought we were the remaining survivors. However, it looks as if another witch has survived. Let's go see."

The two made their way past the castle gates and into the Great Hall. There, with Madam Pomfrey, was Hermione Granger. She was like Snape, bloodied and weary. The two wounded survivors laid down the tables next to each other as Madam Pomfrey checked their wounds. They turned their heads and looked at one another, both in pain, both struggling for breath.

"Miss Granger," he said tiredly.

"Professor Snape," she replied with a wheeze. She was having difficulty breathing.

"Severus," he whispered as he willed her to keep eye contact with him while he watched her gasp for air.

"Hermione," she replied as she continued to take shallow breaths.

They both turned their heads and looked up at the enchanted ceiling as Madam Pomfrey suddenly stood between them to attend to Hermione's breathing problem. It was so quiet in the Great Hall, surrounded only by the loud stillness; it was near apocalyptic in its intensity!

Poppy was a wreck; she stripped Hermione naked right in front of the two men, not even bothering to shield them from each other for propriety's sake. She seemed barely able to function, going on ingrained training alone and allowing the rest of her mind to shut down.

Severus weakly turned his head and looked again over at the young woman as she resumed normal breathing. She was bloodied and filthy, but she had fought bravely and survived. It was a strange feeling, looking at her, naked and wounded. He had seen with his own eyes how extremely talented a witch she truly was. As he studied her, he tried to figure what emotion he was feeling. Then as he watched the young witch grit her teeth while Poppy tended her wounds, he realized what the feeling was: respect.

Hermione felt a sheet pulled up to her neck and soon began to feel warm and cozy.

*Poppy must have place a Warming Spell and Cushioning Charm around me,*she thought drowsily.

She looked over towards Severus. *Yes, Severus.* He had asked her to call him Severus. He was being stripped naked now just as she had been and was being healed. He slipped in and out of consciousness as his eyes opened and closed weakly. He looked bone weary. He was a terrible sight, bloody and grimy, but the young witch felt something familiar bubble inside her: respect.

Kingsley contemplated the witch and wizard before he tore his eyes from them to walk again amongst the carnage outside. He could not contain the vastness of death he was facing in his mind. What was he going to tell the nation? What would the other Wizarding countries have to say that only four out of thousands had survived the final battle against Voldemort? How was he going to tell the parents of so many dead children how they had fought so bravely, but in the end gave their lives? In addition, the question uppermost in his mind was how did it all happen to be that these two had lived while all the others had perished? He would have to wait and find out when the two

could talk. But first, he wanted to see Voldemort's dead carcass with his own eyes.

The Infirmary had been untouched by the battle, and when Hermione awoke, she found herself surrounded by the familiar sights of the white beds with their crisp, cotton sheets, the sun pouring in through the windowpanes, creating beautiful shades of colors that soothed her senses.

She turned her head slightly and saw Professor Snape lying on the bed next to her. He was fast asleep. His usual scowling face was relaxed into a peaceful, tranquil expression. The hardness of his face was softened and he looked...content.

The reality set in all at once and she felt the weight of it like a boulder on her chest. She wanted to cry so badly, but she was so weak, she could not. She lay on her back as the tears streamed down the sides of her face, into her hair and ears. She had to move, she had to do something! She lifted up to a sitting position, and her peripheral vision grew black and fuzzy. She was light-headed and dizzy. She heard a noise and capable hands were gently pushing her back onto the bed. A potion was poured into her mouth, and Hermione found herself falling back into a deep sleep.

Snape woke up and immediately realized what had occurred. He looked over for his fellow survivor and saw she was asleep. She was frowning and had an upset look on her face. *The world is going to hang heavily on her small shoulders*, he thought grimly. She would need a great deal of help to get on with her life. First, the four of them would have to speak of their collective knowledge. Exactly what had happened that left so many dead? They were the only two who would ever know what it had been like on that killing field. He pondered the whys of his fate and hers. However, after so much mental exercise, he fell back into the welcoming arms of Morpheus.

As Snape and Hermione recuperated at Hogwarts, Kingsley returned to the Ministry of Magic. The first sight had deeply unnerved him. The main lobby was full of parents, colleagues, and relatives, trying to find out news of their children, parents, brothers, sisters, and friends. Once in his office, Kingsley had begun to make out his plan of action. He had enlisted the expertise of the Unspeakables to help with the collection of the dead. He had his assistant speak his message to the waiting crowd: *"Hogwarts is deemed off-limits until order can be established. Once a list of the dead can be released, families can come and collect the bodies."* Still, even after the announcement, no one had left. No one had known what to do except wait...

Kingsley sat in his office after a very trying morning. He was faced with a crisis that seemed to unearth more difficulties as he came up with solutions for the original issues. It was a trying time as entire families, such as the Weasleys and the Malfoys had been wiped out. There was more than just the turning over of the remains of the young students and collecting their personal effects. Estates would have to be settled. For example, The Burrow had to be handed to the nearest relative. For the Weasleys, that happened to be the ancient Aunt Muriel. For the Malfoys, their estate, including their manor was given to Narcissa's estranged sister, Andromeda Tonks. Kingsley delegated the Records Office of Birth, Death, and Marriage assist with the handling of estates.

Earlier in the morning, the weary Minister had spoken with the Head of the Aurory, Gawain Robards, and found out how many Aurors had survived, meaning, how many had NOT been at the battle. Telling Robards that there had been no survivors had been extremely difficult. Robards, who had been told to stand down from the battle and remain at the Ministry, had been angrier than a robbed goblin upon hearing the news! The tough, towering man had broken down like a baby and bawled initially, but then had grown furious with rage when told that so many Hogwarts students had fallen alongside his Aurors.

"Minister, I've got greenhorns!" he had roared impotently. "Kids! I did not dare to send them out to fight against Voldemort. Shite! If I had known the *students* were going to fight...*fuck!*" He had hung his head like a beaten dog. Kingsley had then placed his hand on his shoulder.

"Gawain, don't apologize; we need Aurors, no matter how green. Just because Voldemort is gone doesn't mean all the law breaking will end. We needed you to keep the inexperienced ones behind for just that reason. As for you, my friend, I have enough to deal with than to be lacking a new Head Auror," he had said sadly.

"Kingsley, what the bloody hell happened out there? How can they all be dead? This is insanity, this is!" he had yelled. "Minister, how am I supposed to train these kids? Tonks, Moody, Dawlish...what am I to *do?*" he had pleaded.

Kingsley had tried his best to reassure the wizard. "Gawain, the other Wizarding countries are going to help us. We shall get the best Auror Trainers from France and Bulgaria...even the United States has offered their assistance. We just have to hold on to what we have until then!"

Gawain had nodded. He was so tired. After the Minister had left him, he had cried as he stood in his normally bustling office, all the reminders of those who would never return. The overwhelming reality of the loss set in, and he did not know how he was going to face the families of so many dead.

Kingsley sat in his chair contemplating all of the events of the first morning after Voldemort's defeat. He massaged his exhausted eyes and hoped to God that he would have the strength to continue.

A/N: Special thanks to my beta, MadBrilliant, for all her hard work. Please leave a review. This is my own foray into the HG/SS "forced marriage" scenario!

A Generation Lost

Chapter 2 of 23

The legal and mundane aspects of war and death are reviewed.

A/N: I want to thank my beta, MadBrilliant, for all her hard work. I realize this chapter doesn't contain a lot of dialogue. However, this chapter needed to be told this way, in order to show the depth of the loss involved and what is left behind for the survivors after such a tragedy.

The *Death List*, as it was named, came out and the people crowded around to get their hands on a copy. For a minute, all one could hear was *"Accio!"* being said repeatedly as scrolls flew in all possible directions. Kingsley stood, shifting his weight from one foot to the next, waiting for the first cries to start. It was an interminable wait. Even with Gawain at his side, he still felt alone and very responsible for all the lives lost.

Then it came, the first choked scream, followed by strangled cries of the mothers and the curses of fathers above the din of wails of younger children who could not possibly understand the magnitude of what was happening, only that their mothers and fathers were upset and that scared them.

Kingsley swallowed and waited for the people to turn to him. He stood on the make shift podium for this occasion and once enough time had passed he began to speak. With his wand at his throat, he addressed the assembled.

"My fellow witches and wizards, as the newly established Minister of Magic, I am grieved and heart-stricken to be the bearer of such horrific news. Yes, we were victorious against the criminal, Tom Riddle, better known as Lord Voldemort, but at such a cost! The exact details as to what took place upon the battlefield have yet to be revealed. There are two unconscious survivors at the Hogwarts Infirmary. Once they are able to give their eyewitness testimonies, then we shall have an accurate picture of what actually took place the day before yesterday," Shacklebolt said, his voice magically booming as he spoke.

"My friends, the Ministry's Unspeakables have been dispatched to Hogwarts and are there now to assist you in collecting your loved ones remains' and their personal effects, if they were students. If they were Aurors, or members of the Hit Squad, or other part of the Ministry staff, do not expect personal effects there, but here, where they worked."

He took a deep, shaky breath. "I ask for the families of the fallen Hogwarts students to begin immediately Apparating to the castle. The Unspeakables will meet you at the main gates to aid you. Those of you who are here on the behalf of the parents of the fallen Muggleborn students, I ask that you please leave your information with the Secretary at the main entrance for our records.

"Those who are family members of the fallen Aurors, I ask that you come to the Auror Department with our Head Auror, Gawain Robards. He will assist you, along with some of the junior Aurors here, to collect your loved ones' personal effects. All other family members are to report to their loved one's department. There will be a Ministry official to assist you in gathering personal effects. I shall be handling any questions or sensitive inquiries you might have. Along with the help Wizengamot, I shall handle each petition with care and dignity.

"I am so deeply regretful for your losses. There shall be in the very near future a more in depth time to answer all the questions you must all have. However, that time is not now. Now is the time to collect the dead and begin to put them in their final resting places. I only ask that the parents of the fallen students be given enough lead-time before the rest of you go to collect your dead. Thank you."

A second later, families began their exodus to Hogwarts while another large group flooded Gawain Robards. The burly Auror squared his mighty shoulders and gave a glare to his junior staff that said, "Don't you even think about backing down!" He led his staff to the Aurory Department and the families began to collect their loved one's possessions.

Kingsley Flooded directly into the Headmaster's office at Hogwarts. He would keep the connection open until Severus Snape could take over and could disconnect his fireplace from the Floo Network at his own discretion. If he had even entertained the thought that how he handled the families of the dead at the Ministry as "easy", which he would not, this next step in the rebuilding would be a monstrous undertaking. There were still numerous underage students who would be expecting to return to Hogwarts in the fall to resume their studies. The question was who would teach them?

Kingsley lost himself in his musings as he made his way towards the Great Hall. *Certainly, Severus can pull double duty as Headmaster and Potions master, but not for more than a year. It would wear the wizard down to a frazzle! Miss Granger can take on the Charms position just as soon as she sat for her N.E.W.T.s. Then she could double as Transfiguration or Defense Professor. It will be unorthodox, to be sure, but these are now desperate times!* he thought shrewdly.

Kingsley agonized long and hard at how he was going to keep the doors of Hogwarts open. There was no caretaker and no game keeper. There weren't even any house-elves, for they all had perished in the battle as well. He was going to enforce the more affluent pure-blood families to hand over their house-elves, as well as declare that every Death Eater's body found would have their estate forfeit to the ministry, on a case to case basis, as was done in the case of Andromeda Tonks, and their house-elves would be taken to Hogwarts to work. He would also ask...no, *beg...*for Beauxbatons and Durmstrang to send instructors. Possibly, instructors from the United States could be persuaded to fill in a couple teaching positions. That would just yet another item to add to the growing list. As he neared the entrance to the Great Hall and began to hear the wails and cries echoing around him, he thought that if he could only survive the next few months, nothing would ever bother him again. Life would be pure gravy from here on out.

The Unspeakables had been a Godsend! They had the intuitive nature to comfort and discreetly guide the grieving through the process of identification and then lead them to the separate common rooms to collect their children's personal property. Kingsley felt helpless to give comfort. He stayed in the Great Hall for hours to let them know the Apparition wards had been lifted so the family could Apparate straight from the Great Hall to their private home.

It wasn't until the wee hours of the morning that the last of the parents had left and were the family members of the Aurors could come. It was dawn when the Great Hall was empty at last and all that remained were the bodies of the Weasley family, Luna Lovegood, and Harry Potter. Molly's Aunt Muriel was far too elderly to undertake the possession of ten bodies (Fleur's parents had allowed their daughter's body to be buried next to her husband, Bill Weasley) and their personal effects. A group of Unspeakables decided to take care of the transportation of the bodies to the Wizarding cemetery in Ottery St. Catchpole. Mrs. Prewett had arranged for the internment there. Then, there would be another department of the Ministry who would help with the dismantling of The Burrow its of contents.

Another family that had been wiped out was the Lovegood family. They had been neighbors of the Weasleys, so another group of Unspeakables volunteered to work with the Records Office to find the next of kin. The girl's father had been killed by Death Eaters before the final battle. If none could be located, Luna would be buried at Hogwarts as a hero.

The worst blow came upon the thin and weary shoulders of Andromeda Tonks. She had lost her husband, daughter, son-in-law, both sisters, both brothers-in-law, and a nephew. She was more than happy to hand over Malfoy manor to the Ministry and the house-elves to Hogwarts. Not that it could replace all those she had loved and had once hoped to reconcile, she was now a very wealthy widow. Being the sole guardian of her only child's son, Teddy, she would never want for anything again, at least monetarily. She put up a brave front when she was informed that all Death Eaters were to be burned, not buried. So, in the end, Andromeda Tonks arranged for the transportation of her daughter and son-in-law's bodies for burial near her home.

Kingsley had to think long and hard about how to care for the body and estate of Harry Potter. The boy had only a Muggle family that had hated him. The closest person he had in this world that was close to being a relative was Hermione Granger. That would mean she would have to decide how to care for the body and all of his estate, which included Grimmauld Place. It was a heavy load to place on her shoulders, but it had to be done. At least, she should make the decision about what to do with his body.

Once Kingsley and Poppy were alone, they alerted the four young "greenhorn" Aurors keeping watch of the grounds that they were closing up for the night. Much had been accomplished, but the personal effects of the fallen professors had to be sorted through, not to mention looking after the two survivors who remained mercifully unconscious. They would be time enough for them to be hounded and questioned as to why they lived when all the others had perished.

The Reality

Chapter 3 of 23

Snape and Hermione recall the events of the battle and have an interesting conversation alone.

A/N: Thanks to my beta, MadBrilliant. I hope you enjoy this chapter.

Once Snape and Hermione had regained consciousness, and healed enough to converse, the four survivors sat in the Infirmary ready to speak amongst themselves. Kingsley told them about his report and speech to the Wizarding Community. Afterwards, they were all quiet. It was so hard to know where to begin.

Hermione broke the silence first.

"I remember when I was in school, just before I came to Hogwarts, my class was studying about the Great Muggle War at the beginning of the century. We Muggles called it 'The War to End all Wars'. My teacher said that an entire generation was lost to England."

They all were quite somber then. Silence seemed to be the right thing to do after such a sobering revelation. Indeed, a generation of witches and wizards had nearly been wiped out. Yet, there were still the students too young to fight, who had been evacuated out of Hogwarts. They would return, grow up, get married, and have babies. It would not always be so bleak.

Kingsley cleared his voice. "We need to discuss what occurred during the battle. Severus?"

The dark wizard had been very quiet since regaining full consciousness. He honestly had no idea what had transpired. He recalled that there had been an almighty blast that had mushroomed from the area Hermione had emerged.

"I recall fighting, heavy fighting. I was dueling more than one wizard at the time. I was struck from behind, and then I collapsed. I believe Miss Granger will have a more accurate report on what occurred," he said softly.

Hermione looked bewildered. "It was complete pandemonium!" she blurted out emotionally. "The battle had shifted towards the east. That must have been after Professor Snape had been hit. The fighting became so thick and fierce, it was so hard to see who was there, who had fallen. I was so turned around! I saw Voldemort and Harry fighting. It was a terrible scene. When the last moment struck, their wands burst, and a flash of green light came from them. It was like an atomic blast of the Killing Curse. Bellatrix Lestrange had been directly in front of me, and she flew against me. I guess her body was my shield. Everyone who was there just...*died*! The green light that spread out from Harry and Voldemort carried on with a mighty wind. Bellatrix collapsed on top of me and then when the wind died down from the blast, everyone was dead!" She let out a strangled cry and began shaking her head, weeping silently.

Kingsley cleared his throat and began to touch upon the subject of Harry's body.

Snape became agitated. "Kingsley, does this need to be discussed now?" he hissed.

"Unfortunately, Severus, it does. I have not only Harry's funeral and estate to handle, but also the entire Weasley clan, including the question of their estate and The Burrow. I also need to figure out how to get in touch with Luna Lovegood's nearest relative. There is the question of her estate and family home. I'm just glad Neville's Uncle Algie is sane enough to make the decisions for his great-nephew and his sister! Otherwise, that would be yet another two bodies in the Great Hall waiting to be claimed!" Kingsley's normal cool demeanor was sliding off him, revealing a very exhausted and overwhelmed Minister of Magic.

Hermione looked horrified, and Snape closed his eyes for a moment and hardened his face as he addressed the minister.

"Are you saying that the entire Weasley Family, Mr. Potter and Miss Lovegood are at this moment still lying in the Great Hall?" he asked softly. Hermione emitted a whimper of pain.

"Yes," Kingsley admitted grimly. Snape lowered his head back into his pillow, unable to grasp the mortality of it all. "They are in stasis," Kingsley continued. "I can keep their bodies cool for now, but soon, decisions must be made. Hermione, you are the closest Harry has to a family. Please, where do you want him to be buried?"

"Godric's Hollow," she choked out through her tears. "Harry would want to be with his parents."

"I shall make the arrangements, and as Minister, I shall make you the trustee of his estate. These decisions do not have to be made now, but for the sake of the dead, the sooner the burial..."

"...Of course," she interrupted him.

Her voice was trembling, and her body racked with sobs as she remembered the first moments right after the battle ended. Once she had extricated herself from underneath Bellatrix's body, she saw the dead bodies of Ron and Harry. She had frantically run around looking for signs of life, but each familiar face she had met was frozen in death. She shivered and lay back down on the bed. She could do no more this day. She just wanted to cry and cry. And she wanted her mum. However, her parents were in Australia. She had no idea when or if she would ever see them again.

Severus Snape watched the weeping girl shield her tears from the others. He felt an intense desire, which confused him, to scoop her up into his arms and hold her, comfort her, and tell her all would be well. However, he was far too weak in his body. Yet, his mind, his mind would not rest. How had this small witch survived such a horrific battle?

Kingsley visited again early the next morning to prepare them for the next press conference he was giving at the Ministry of Magic. Families had wanted answers yesterday, and the number one question was "Who had survived?" He had not wanted to answer them just yet. However, public opinion overruled him.

He sighed resignedly before he spoke. "I must reveal who you are to the public. Do not worry, both of you will remain here out of sight and convalesce. No one shall bother you here. You both have your health to consider." He eye-balled Snape. "Consider it an order, Headmaster!" he said curtly.

Snape scowled at the retreating Minister.

"Well, this is just perfect!" he spat. "I would rather be in my dungeons, thank you very much. Staying here makes me feel like a sitting duck!"

"Stop your grousing, Professor!" Hermione chided numbly as she massaged her temples. "There are no more Death Eaters to worry about. You're as safe as you could

ever hope to be right where you are."

He looked at the girl, wanting to glare at her, but found he was unable to do so. Instead, he did something he had never done before. He initiated a conversation with her.

He shifted in his bed to face her better. She was on her side, her blanket pulled up to her chin. She was in the fetal position. Her haunted eyes looked so huge, they seemed to take over her face.

"How did you end up on the eastern side, Miss Granger?" he asked quietly.

She looked at him, her eyes focusing on him. She was speechless. She opened her mouth, but nothing seemed to come out.

"Come now, Miss Granger. If we are to be stuck in this hidey-hole, we should be able to talk civilly to one another. After all, no one else will ever know what it was like to survive the final battle. We are the only remaining *veterans*, after all," he said snidely.

"I'm just shocked, Professor. Is that the best you can do at 'civil' conversation?" she sounded back just as snidely.

He smirked as he crossed his thin arms across his chest. "Are you prepared for all the glory and attention that will be thrown at your feet as the remaining member of the 'Golden Trio'?"

Hermione lifted herself from her side into a sitting position. She was incensed that he could be so crass! She crossed her arms and sneered at the wizard. "What makes you smug, sir? Are you so greedy for the accolades that will be thrown at *your* feet?"

The dark wizard chuckled deep in his throat. The sound unnerved her.

"There shall be no 'accolades', Miss Granger, I assure you! The only thing waiting for me outside this castle will be a cell in Azkaban!" He looked at her, his eyes boring to hers. "I will be put away just on general principle that I have no business to even be breathing!" he seethed.

"So, you're already bailing out on me, eh?" Hermione said in hopes of antagonizing the wizard.

"You insufferable, little chit!" he ground out. "How dare you accuse me of cowardice?"

"I said no such thing, Professor. You were the one saying that you won't be sticking around. It sounds as if you are looking forward to going to Azkaban," she retorted haughtily. She was now looking away from him, her nose slightly in the air. She hoped he was getting riled, just as he had tried (and succeeded) in riling her out of her stupor.

Instead, she heard another throaty chuckle. She turned to face him and he conceded.

"Touché, Miss Granger. You have found me out. I am just as saddened and unnerved as you are, I dare say, even more so. However, Azkaban is not a far-fetched idea. I'm sure there will be many parents at Kingsley's conference tomorrow foaming at the mouth when they hear that one of the two survivors is the dreaded Potions master, ex-Death Eater, and all around *git*. And I am equally sure they will all be chomping at the bit to petition for my immediate expulsion from Wizarding society and banishment to Azkaban. But, for you, Hermione, I will try to be *brave*." He looked at her with his usual cold stare.

She burst out laughing at his dramatics. He smiled a little in return. He thought *I like her laugh. She laughs with her whole being, not like so many of the women with whom I've had to cavort! Laughter for them never went above their mouths or lower than their chins. She throws her head back, laughs, and holds her stomach. She is free. Perhaps it's because she's so young. That must be it.*

Hermione was tickled. She never realized her Professor had a sense of humor! She felt for the first time she understood his personal secret language. It was a sideways, dry type of humor, but it was funny nevertheless! It felt so good to connect with someone. When she stopped laughing, she reached her hand over for him to grasp. He furrowed his eyebrows and looked at her suspiciously.

"Please, sir, just take it," she whispered.

He tentatively stretched his own hand out and clasped hers. She gave his hand a good squeeze and withdrew.

"What was that for?" he asked suspiciously.

"For making me forget. For making me laugh," she whispered. "G'night, Professor Snape." She snuggled down into her bed and went to sleep. Snape sat for a long time with his hands in his lap, unable to comprehend what had happened. He watched her sleep as he lay on his side. She was rather pretty when she slept. Her face was calm and peaceful. It was quite contagious, for he too fell into a deep sleep from looking at the serene young woman in the bed next to his.

Together

Chapter 4 of 23

Headmaster Snape and Hermione Granger leave the Infirmary and together they investigate the Potions lab and storeroom.

Thanks to my beta, MadBrilliant. Also, thank you for all the wonderful reviews I've received. Please keep them coming! I LOVE reviews!

Kingsley came in the next day while Snape and Hermione were eating lunch. They were both doing much better; soon they would be able to return to their own rooms. The mood had been light as they chatted with Madam Pomfrey. She regaled Hermione with the funniest stories of the various injuries, jinxes, and hexes that Snape had come in with during his years as a student.

"Well, only to be fair, I should tell you of some of the more interesting curses I had to cure when Mr. Potter and Mr. Black came to see me. Although, I have ~~no~~ *idea* who

had a hand in such activities!" she said in mock ignorance.

"Poppy, were you a Slytherin?" teased Hermione as she laughed.

"Merlin, no!" gasped Snape. "Poppy was a Hufflepuff, were you not?" he goaded.

"Oh, *you*, Severus Snape!" she huffed. "I was a Hufflepuff and proud of it!" she said with her hands on her hips.

"Loyal to end, right Poppy?" he asked silkily.

"Don't try to work your wiles with me, young man! Don't let him fool you, Hermione. He is Slytherin to the core, even with all his Gryffindor tendencies! More than once he has tried to make me feel sorry for him so I would forget to report his misdeeds to the Headmaster!"

"Oh, really?" flirted Hermione as she turned her head towards him.

"Miss Granger, your tone is not appreciated. Now, eat your lunch! Poppy, I must say, this is not appropriate. Miss Granger is one of my students!" he chided.

"Don't get your Slytherin up with me, Severus Snape!" Poppy retorted. "You are just afraid Miss Granger will see what is truly underneath that prickly nature of yours. He's all bark, this one!"

She turned and stalked off to her office.

Hermione started to giggle.

"Miss Granger, do try to compose yourself!" he snapped.

She snorted in her soup. Snape dropped his spoon in his soup with an audible clank in exasperation.

"I'm s-sorry!" she said as she laughed. "I just remembered we all thought you were part vampire, but now that can't be true, you have no bite!" She laughed harder now.

She looked at him with her bright eyes. He leaned over towards her and whispered, his eyes glittering dangerously. "Oh, but I do bite, Miss Granger, make no mistake."

She leaned over towards him in return, her eyes shining at him. "Where do you bite, Professor?" she asked with fake innocence.

"Anywhere that will give the most pleasure, Miss Granger," he replied seductively.

She felt her mouth go dry and her mouth was gaping wide open with shock.

He leaned back and tucked into his soup with a satisfied expression on his face. He did not look at her again. Hermione did likewise, but noticed that she was feeling rather warm between her legs.

Kingsley walked into the infirmary during the silence and immediately let them know exactly how the public had reacted to the news.

"It was packed. Reporters from all over the globe were there; it was a circus! Then when I announced Miss Granger as one of the survivors, there was the expected cheering and happy words exchanged. Then when I announced that Severus Snape was the other, it was, well, not a pleasant reaction," he mumbled, embarrassed.

"So, shall I pack now for Azkaban, Kingsley, or wait for the mob's assistance?" asked Snape sarcastically.

Kingsley shot him a warning glance. "Severus, I've had a long day," he warned the younger wizard. "It took all that was within me to explain the situation of Severus' role as a double agent to the Wizengamot and the press. Of course, having the documentation from Dumbledore's diary that he had ordered you to kill him helped their minds in your favor. I also told of my version of the events during the battle where you took down both the Lestrage brothers. There will be a full inquiry, but I would not pack yet for Azkaban just now, Severus. After all, Hogwarts needs you!"

At this revelation, Kingsley stood and paced a bit, finally placing his large, dark hands to rest on the chair in front of him. "Actually," he began, "Hogwarts needs both of you! I need a Headmaster and a Potions teacher. I also will need a Transfiguration teacher, a Charms, and a Defense teacher. It will be hard, you both will be working harder than you have ever had to before, but I'm going to be getting some teachers from the other Wizarding schools. Hogwarts will open this fall! When you are both well enough, you will be able to see the work that is starting outside. We are rebuilding!"

Snape and Hermione sat in their beds with surprised expressions on their faces. Neither one spoke.

Poppy felt the overwhelming tension emit from her patients and took over. She whisked their lunch trays away with a flick of her wand. "Now, Minister, these two have had quite enough excitement for one day!" she said as she shoed him out the door. "You may return this evening. We'll try and have a meeting in the Headmaster's office."

She turned to her charges and Accio'd two phials of Sleeping Draught. "Drink up and sleep!" she ordered.

They obeyed with no complaint and drifted off into slumber.

After Poppy curtained off their areas, the two survivors dressed to leave for their separate rooms. Both were now fit and able to resume their lives. Although the two did not know what that would entail. It was an uncomfortable state of limbo for Headmaster and student. After they both were dressed, Poppy removed the sheet that separated them and they saw each other as they had for so many years before: she in her Hogwarts uniform and he in his heavy black robes. For a while, they sat and regarded the other. Images came to both minds of the other minutes after discovery. Lying bloodied and weak, scared that death was waiting just around the corner to claim them.

Snape stood and said matter-of-factly, "I shall be returning to the Headmaster's chambers. First, though, I should like to see the dungeons. Would you like to join me in checking the Potions storeroom, Miss Granger?"

Hermione looked up at him and nodded. She stood as well, and they gave their thanks to Poppy.

The mediwitch embraced the young woman. "Hermione, you are going to stay in my rooms until we can get you new ones of your own. Kingsley and I have discussed it, and we don't want you rooming in Gryffindor Tower. But, I know you would want to go and see your old common room. You will find there are other items still there, but do not be alarmed. They are just items from the younger students that they couldn't take during the evacuation."

Hermione turned to leave with Snape but turned back and asked her, "Where will we eat now?"

"In the Great Hall. The Malfoy, Nott, Crabbe, Goyle, Macnair, and Yaxley estates along with some others counted forfeit to the Ministry, and all their house-elves have been sent here. They have done wonders cleaning up the Great Hall. The three of us will eat together at the normal times, just as we have done here. In a couple of days, the workmen will arrive and the rebuilding shall begin." She glanced around her. "It won't be silent for long, praise be!" She smiled at the two. "Alright, off with you!"

As they walked out, Snape gave a low growl of displeasure in his throat.

"What was that?" asked Hermione.

"She still thinks I'm an eleven-year-old with skinned knees and a bloodied nose!" he snarled.

Hermione giggled.

"Must you do that?" he said uncomfortably.

"Sorry, Professor," she apologized. "I just find it interesting to picture you as a little first-year."

He glowered at her, but it only caused her to giggle again. He stopped walking and pulled up his full height. "You will control yourself, Miss Granger! Otherwise, you can be on your way. I was only being polite. After all, we are the only other living people in this entire castle!"

"I apologize," she said, utterly chastened. "I'm sorry my giggling bothers you."

He looked at her with exasperation. "It does not bother *me*. It is just that it does not become *you*, Miss Granger. You are a young woman now, not a second-year...and I am no Gilderoy Lockhart!" he grumbled.

Hermione blushed at his mention of her second-year crush on her Defense teacher. *What? Does he think I'm flirting with him?* she thought.

Snape cringed. *Damn and Blast! What was that? Infernal woman! Well, she is no girl anymore. That is clear from the look of her. Why did I have to bring up that dunderhead Lockhart?*

Snape began to walk a bit faster, taking longer strides. Hermione saw his face was set hard. She lengthened her strides to keep up with him. The wizard was extremely uncomfortable. Each time she giggled a shock went up his spine and shot to his heart where it beat into double-time and then sank down into his belly...and lower. He was feeling the heat now burning in his thighs. He tightened his hands into fists and willed the feeling to subside.

Their footsteps echoed painfully in the hallways. Hermione kept envisioning the people she would have normally seen running, gossiping, and laughing in these halls. Now she was accompanying her professor. They made quite the pair: the taciturn, potent, dark wizard with the most bright, brilliant, and clever witch of her generation, both powerful in their own unique way. They were a true complement to each other, but they did not see it. Not yet. They kept walking together in unison. He slowed for her, she sped up for him, and they found their stride.

Together.

When they had reached the dungeons, Snape was easily able to break through Slughorn's wards. He snorted at the idiocy of the man. He had been an idiot when Severus was a student and had been an even bigger idiot when he returned: in mind and body. He went directly to the storeroom and steadied himself for whatever he might find, taking a deep breath.

"Professor, are you alright?" Hermione asked tentatively. Her hand snaked out to touch his arm lightly. It felt...nice, soothing, and warm. It was not what she had expected coming from him.

He stiffened and closed his eyes. "I assure you, Miss Granger, I am perfectly well. It is that I am unaware as to what type of travesty I am about to find behind that door!" he snapped.

She removed her hand from him. He had felt so strong to the touch, solid, like steel. She had never touched him before...ever, but it felt strangely nice.

After breaking the wards, he wrenched the door open and walked inside. Hermione held back. She did not want to find herself in close proximity with a volatile Snape. She cringed, waiting for the inferno to erupt. Finally, he blew like a volcano.

"BUGGER!"

She had never heard, even on Ron's worst day, the filth that came from this man. He was right brassed-off. She stood with her mouth open like a perfect "O." She exhaled and walked slowly inside.

He was muttering to himself. "Couldn't be arsed, that bleeding tosser!" He swung around; his face was blushing.

"Pardon my language, Miss Granger, I hope you can understand the reason for my...*anger*," he said unevenly. She could tell he was only keeping his tongue in check for her benefit.

"Perhaps, Professor, if you and I *both* work on cleaning up and putting things to rights, then it will go faster. I know how orderly you like things to be," Hermione offered.

He shifted his eyes to her. A mad glint came over his hard, coal-black eyes. "I say, Miss Granger, you would, knowing as I do how much time you have spent in here rifling through to find ingredients."

Hermione blushed. Then she grew sad, remembering that month she had spent in Moaning Myrtle's bathroom making Polyjuice Potion second year with Ron and Harry. Snape sensed her sadness. He hoped she wouldn't cry.

"Let's start working, Miss Granger," he said softly.

He watched as she carefully removed each bottle, dusted, and examined its label. She was careful and conscientious. He kept glancing at her hands. They were so small, but capable. He lowered his head, letting his hair curtain around his face so he could watch her without her knowing. He looked at her figure. She had taken off her robe earlier and was wearing her uniform. She had a pleasant face, very pleasant and comforting. His eyes flickered to her chest and wished he could see a better outline. He looked at her skirt and followed her legs down to the floor. She had developed a woman's body as well as coming of age on the run.

He tried to remember the times he saw her at Headquarters during the early days of the war when they were meeting at Grimmauld Place. He decided to forget it. No use daydreaming about nonsense. Besides, she had been a child and had looked as such. The Hermione of those days meant nothing to him. He knew from the moment they had lain together side-by-side in the Great Hall struggling for their lives that something had changed. He felt he was no longer the same person somehow, and it worried him.

They worked all afternoon, cleaning, sorting, and re-labeling. Together, in unison, without direction or conversation, they kept on with their task. It was a comforting afternoon. At times, their fingers, hands, or shoulders would touch, and it felt delightful to the wizard. Hermione found her brain had shut off; it was as if she was just doing detention and at the end, she would return to Gryffindor Tower where Ron and Harry would be waiting for her. Snape kept glancing at his young companion. She was happily quiet with him and he appreciated her silence. He could get used to this new Hermione.

Snape finally broke her concentration and announced it was time for dinner. At first, she was confused and then it hit her all at once. She lowered her head and swiped angrily at her eyes. Snape stood straight and tall. He was uncomfortable with tears. He waited quietly until she left the storeroom. They washed up without a word, and they walked soberly to the Great Hall where Poppy joined them. They told her of the state with which they had found the Potions lab.

Hermione whispered to Poppy, "It was a right tip! He went beserk!"

"I can hear you, you do realize that, do you not?" he murmured as he ate.

All That's Left

Chapter 5 of 23

Severus and Hermione visit the graves of the fallen, and Hermione finds comfort in Severus' arms.

A/N: I want to thank everyone for all the wonderful reviews I've received! Also, many thanks for my beta, MadBrilliant. I hope you all enjoy this chapter!

After dinner, Hermione said she wanted to see Gryffindor Tower. The Fat Lady had scarpered, so the entranceway was unguarded. It was so dark and lonesome. Snape lit the torches in the common room and started a nice fire in the fireplace. Together, they walked up to the seventh-year dorm room. Here would have been where Harry and Ron would have lived, and where Neville and Seamus had lived. They had been the only ones that had been allowed to return. Dean Thomas had been on the run along with all the rest of the Muggle-borns. She sat on a bed, not knowing whose it had been. It did not matter. Not anymore.

"I wish there was something here of Harry and Ron's that I could...Oh! Ginny!" She dashed out of the room and went into the sixth-year dorm room. Snape slowly followed her, looking concerned. Hermione eyed the room carefully and saw Ginny's locker. The Unspeakables had packed it up and had placed it on top of her bed. She draped herself across it and sobbed. The wizard walked in and saw her weeping. He walked up close beside her and saw the initials GMW, for Ginerva Molly Weasley. She rose up from the locker and opened it. Inside, she found a picture of Ginny, Lavender, Padma, Pavarti, and herself. They were laughing, so happy and carefree.

She glided her hand across the picture, and her tears fell freely again. Snape cautiously placed a hand on her shoulder, and she turned and flung herself at him, holding on for dear life. She felt so lost and small; she needed to feel his strength. She never thought she would be so happy her snarky, rude, sarcastic professor was alive. She held on, breathing in his scent, happily knowing that just as his arm had felt like steel when she had touched him earlier, his chest was just as hard and strong. She felt safe. He did not know what to do in such a situation. His arms were stiffly held out, refraining from touching her.

"You understand, don't you, Professor?" she murmured against his chest. "After all, you lost friends from your youth. Even if they turned to Voldemort and changed, they had been your friends. We've lost everything now. We couldn't save them...any of them. All we have now are pictures and memories," she said as she sobbed.

That did it. Snape knew then that all they had was each other. Poppy and Kingsley would know what it meant to survive, but only the two of them had fought, killed, and lived to see the end. That carried a unique pain.

"Hermione," he whispered as he wrapped his arms around her in return. "We shall endure. We shall."

She looked up at him. "Promise me?" she whispered. "Can you promise I won't always hurt like this?"

He looked so sorrowful as he brought up a large, white hand to stroke her face. "I can't promise you anything that is out of my power, Hermione. However, you will always have me around to talk...that is if you wish..." he finished abruptly.

Hermione looked into his eyes and found a fellow soul with whom she could be herself, the only one who would truly understand the loss. Then she realized how close she was to him and how intimately they were looking at each other. She felt nervous and untangled her arms from him. He did the same. She put the picture in her pocket and softly closed the lid. She ran her fingers gently across the gold letters.

"How shall we endure, sir?" she asked softly.

"You and I will assist the Minister in starting over. And we shall do it together, Miss Granger," he said firmly. "Come," he said simply as he offered her his hand as he led her out of the tower. They were silent as they walked through the empty halls. Hermione kept her hand grasped tightly in his.

He led her to his office, and she gave a cry of delight at Dumbledore's portrait. She dashed to where it hung and sat where she could speak to him closely. "Headmaster!" she called to him. "Please, it's Hermione Granger. Talk to me!"

"Miss Granger! What a pleasure to see you. My, Severus, she is no longer the little girl she once was. You are all grown-up!" He twinkled his blue eyes at her, and she burst out crying anew.

"I-I'm s-sorry, I j-just miss everyone s-so m-much!" she choked out.

"Miss Granger, you have endured such losses. I am so glad you can find comfort with me in this form. You are always welcome to talk about anything on your heart and mind. I trust Severus will take care of you as well. Right, Severus?"

"Yes, Albus," replied Snape. "Miss Granger shall be sitting for her N.E.W.T.s soon, and she shall join us here as Charms instructor, Deputy Headmistress, and Head of Gryffindor house."

Dumbledore's blue eyes were solemn. "That is such an undertaking, Miss Granger. You and Severus will have to work hard not only to build up a new teaching staff, but also to usher in a new era of Hogwarts. However, I have complete faith in your abilities, Hermione. You have always been an intelligent and brave young woman!"

Hermione beamed. "Thank you, Professor Dumbledore. I'm so glad you're here. I miss Harry and Ron so much! I just don't know how to get on without them." She began to sob in earnest. Snape knelt down and placed his hands on her shoulders, and she flung at him again in her desperation.

Dumbledore smiled painfully. "Take care of her, Severus. And Miss Granger... Hermione?" he called.

"Yes?" she asked softly.

"You will help Severus as well. As Deputy Headmistress, you need to assist him in making many decisions. Severus is a most capable Headmaster, but he does tend to overtax himself and gets rather grumpy at times."

"No! Really?" she exclaimed in fake shock. She looked over at Professor Snape who was scowling at Dumbledore. She burst out laughing at the look on his face. She was

so glad for this, at least. She looked at her companion. They were friends now. They both knew that. There were just some things two people could not go through and not become friends on the other side. A fleeting memory of a Mountain Troll her first year came to mind. That's when things had changed for her with Harry and Ron. She had been just a girl then. Now, she was all grown-up.

Equals. They were now the same. No longer student and teacher, together they would support the other and fill this hollow and empty castle again with the sound of laughing children. But they would remember forever how sad it was to have seen their fallen friends on the battlefield...

The following morning, Kingsley arranged a Portkey for Snape and Hermione to visit the graves of the Weasleys' and Harry Potter. Luna's estate was counted as forfeit by the Ministry, since no family member had come forward to claim her body. She was buried on Hogwarts grounds as a fallen hero with full honors, and was awarded a posthumous Order of Merlin; First Class that Hermione would keep in her new office, along with the bottle cap necklace she always wore.

Snape and Hermione stood at Luna's grave, saddened and grim.

"This is going to be so hard, Professor," she said weakly. "I'm afraid."

Snape looked at her profile that seemed so strong, staring sternly into the distance. "What are you afraid of, Miss Granger?" he asked softly.

"I am afraid of the finality of it all. I am afraid of all the feelings that are inside me. I'm afraid I shall be swallowed up by my grief." She shook her head as the tears began to flow. "I'm so tired of crying. But I don't believe I shall ever be able to stop."

"You shall, Miss Granger. You will cry less and less, and if you are very brave, you will allow yourself to laugh a little until your laughter outweighs the tears. Then you shall be able to bear it." He turned to her and forced her to look at him.

"Hermione, you *must* bear it. I would hate for you to become a bitter old sod like me!" he said disparagingly.

She smiled faintly and slid her arm in the crook of his. "I know you only say such things to make me laugh, but it is entirely unnecessary, I assure you, Professor."

He looked at her and raised an eyebrow in disbelief.

"Honestly, Professor. How old are you, late thirties? Early forties?"

"Something like that," he muttered.

"Well, you are not old, and you most certainly are not *an old sod*!"

"Thank you, Miss Granger," he said uncomfortably.

"You're welcome, Severus."

He looked at her in surprise. "I suppose we can officially make that adjustment to our relationship," he said wryly.

She tightened her grip on him as they readied themselves to be transported. Both enjoyed their nearness to one another.

They huddled close as they visited the burial sites. They stood under a large oak tree as they pondered the three graves next to each other. James, Lily, and now Harry Potter. Hermione knelt down and touched the headstone that bore his name. Her fingers traced his name. She softly whispered things Snape could not hear, and didn't care to try. He was looking at the grave of his first love. His only love.

Lily. Goodbye, Lily. You have your boy with you now. You can now rest. Voldemort can't hurt anyone anymore. It's all over.

It's all over, he thought as he looked at his crying companion while she knelt upon Harry's grave. He scooped her up into his arms, and she rested her head on his proffered chest. It was right and comforting that she should take her solace and comforting from him. They were the same now.

"I can't bear it that I was unable to be here for Harry's burial," she choked out through racking sobs.

"I know, Hermione," Snape said softly. He didn't know what else to say.

"Come, Hermione, We have to Portkey to Ottery St. Catchpole," he reminded her.

She nodded dumbly and allowed him to lead her. She was just too weary to think for herself anymore.

Snape held the young witch to him as she cried over the loss of her dearest friends, the Weasley family. It was too much to bear...seeing all the graves in a row. She had hoped that she would be strong enough to attempt to visit Andromeda Tonks and see Teddy Lupin and visit the graves of Remus and Dora, but after seeing the graves of the entire Weasley clan, she was emotionally spent. She gratefully and without resistance allowed Severus to pick her up, carry her away, and Apparate them back to the school.

Snape carefully brought her back to the castle and carried her to Poppy's quarters. Poppy fussed over her like a mother hen, which was what she needed most. Snape turned to leave the young witch, and she called out to him.

"Please, Severus! Where are you going?" she asked desperately as she reached out for him.

He extricated himself from her grip. "Hermione, I must return to my own quarters. I shall see you in the morning."

She looked at him with so much pain and fear, he wished he could gather her up in his arms, take her back to his own quarters, and care for her. He would love nothing more than to just hold her for the night, close to him, and soothe her with his embrace.

He left then, shaken by the intensity of his feelings for her. He tried to rationalize it, but as he sat alone in his quarters with a glass of firewhiskey, all he could think of was how soft she had felt in his arms, how small and delicate. Yet, there was a firebrand hidden somewhere inside her. He had seen her boss around her fellow Gryffindors enough and had heard stories of her dueling capabilities. Even in his class, she was an exceptional Defense student. Of course, she did not possess the raw talent that Potter had, thanks to the transference of the Dark Lord's powers, but she was tough and determined. Otherwise, how would she have been able to survive? That's what he would do, coax that fire out of her, and make her inert bossiness rear its head. This weak damsel in distress role appealed to his ego, and certainly, he would not mind taking a demure and shy Hermione into his bed, but how would she be if she were her dominant, bossy, determined self? A series of various erotic images of a sensual, take charge Hermione ran through his mind. He shook his head. *Stop this, Severus!* he chided himself.

The Return of Rita Skeeter

Chapter 6 of 23

A damaging article questioning the relationship between Snape and Hermione leads Kingsley to a startling request.

A/N: Thank you to all who have read and reviewed. I am so excited this fic has been received so well! I hope you enjoy this latest chapter. As always, huge thanks to my beta, MadBrilliant!

A week later, Severus Snape and Hermione Granger stood in front of the Wizarding community and received their Orders of Merlin, First Class for their bravery and honor during the final battle. Severus watched Miss Granger as she gracefully accepted her medal. As he accepted his, Hermione watched her professor finally receive the acknowledgment he had always craved. She felt so proud of him. She felt an urge to hold him and kiss him. She felt her face grow hot and she knew she was blushing. She stood next to him with their new medals as their pictures were taken and questions were asked. As the voices grew in number and the flashes from the photographers' cameras flickered incessantly, Hermione found herself edging closer and closer to the safety of Severus' strong, solid frame. Both of them were far too shocked and overwhelmed to answer. Kingsley, noticing the dark scowl on the ex-Death Eater's face and the overwhelmed face of Miss Granger, smoothly took over, saying they both were in shock and needed time. He ushered them away from the crowd and back to Hogwarts.

Later, the four survivors sat in the Headmaster's office, which Kingsley decided would remain as Snape's post since he had been the last Headmaster. Hermione would take over as Charms professor since her abilities with Charm work was exceptional. Until a new Potions professor could be hired, Snape would continue as Potions master. While Snape and Hermione had been convalescing, Kingsley had received thousands of offers for help to rebuild Hogwarts. He reported that Madame Maxine was sending professors who had recently completed their apprenticeships in Muggle Studies, Ancient Runes, and Arithmancy. The meeting had been quite productive, and when the Minister left Hogwarts, he felt confident he had left its care in capable hands.

Kingsley continued to work tirelessly with the Wizengamot to help the nation grieve all the losses it had sustained. Having placed Hogwarts in the back of his mind, he was shocked and appalled when gossip began to spread concerning the older, dark, ex-Death Eater Headmaster and the young, fresh-faced, nubile witch alone in the huge castle with only Poppy Pomfrey as a chaperone.

Rita Skeeter, who admittedly was no fan of Miss Granger, fanned the whispers into a mighty roar with an article about the two lone survivors who were trying to find solace and comfort inside the empty castle within each other's arms. The day her article hit the *Daily Prophet*, Kingsley had choked on his coffee and rushed to Floo to get to the Headmaster's office as soon as possible. There were the witch and wizard in question, eating toast and drinking coffee whilst making plans for the new fall semester. They were deep in a discussion of sorts when he stumbled in, paper in hand. Snape was sitting behind his desk, surrounded by an abundance of paperwork while Miss Granger sat across from his desk on the sofa, arguing a point over curriculum. She stopped mid-sentence when she saw the Minister, and Snape, following her stare, jerked his head towards the fireplace.

"What?" the Headmaster snapped. He knew bad news when he saw it.

"Have either of you read the *Prophet* this morning?" Kingsley asked.

Hermione got up and offered the Minister a chair. "Please, sir, calm down and have a cup of coffee." She began to pour while he gathered his thoughts and opened his copy of the Morning edition.

"Well, I suppose my question is answered, seeing how calm you both are," Kingsley said clumsily.

Snape narrowed his eyes and glared at the man suspiciously. "Minister, there is a saying that paranoia is not paranoia if there truly is someone out to get you," he said in a clipped tone. "I'm getting a very strange feeling akin to paranoia. *Spit it out!*"

Kingsley braced himself with a swig of coffee and began to prepare the two. "There is an article on the front page of the *Daily Prophet*," he said nervously, his eyes darting between them. "Rita Skeeter wrote a piece on her views of the 'goings-on' here at Hogwarts." He handed the paper to Snape who ripped it from his hands and scanned the front page.

Snape stood and let out a tirade of the foulest language as he read the article, and Hermione jumped up and tore the paper from his hands. She made a sort of growling noise deep in her throat, and Snape looked down interestingly at the little spitfire beside his arm. She sat back down, seething in her chair, mumbling something about a small jar with no holes in it before bursting out in fury.

"Damn that foul, irritating, meddlesome bitch!" she snarled.

Snape sat back down at his desk, crossed his legs, and rested his head on one hand. His long fingers framed his face. A sly smile quirked on the corners of his mouth, and he cocked an eyebrow in amusement. Kingsley considered the Headmaster as he watched him drink in the sight of a truly hacked-off Miss Granger with pleasure.

Her brown eyes were ablaze, and her bosom was heaving as she panted with rage. "How dare that woman write such utter tripe? This is complete rubbish! *How dare she!*"

Snape kept his eye on Hermione with amusement. He had never seen her in such a state. He saw now how she could be a lethal opponent in battle. She had the fury and the frame of mind to keep her wits about her as she unleashed her wrath.

"Minister, isn't there anyway she can be brought up on charges? This is defamation of character!"

Snape tore himself from the sight to call Poppy from the infirmary. As she stepped through the Floo, Hermione gave Snape a withering look.

"*Please!* Spare me the smelling salts! I'm not about to swoon, for the love of Merlin!" she bit out at the Headmaster.

He smirked as he sat back down behind his desk with a flourish. "Oh, no, Miss Granger. I just wanted Poppy to hear the news as well. After all, we are all family here."

She glared at him and fixed her hands on her hips. "You think this is funny, do you?" she accused.

He lifted a hand to stop her. "No, Miss Granger. I find this situation to be most distasteful. What I do find extremely entertaining is your magnificent reaction. You have an amazing capacity for fury and rage. I never knew you possessed such a quality."

"I'm so glad I can give you such entertainment, Headmaster," she said silkily. "Now, will you wipe that smirk off your face before I come over there and smack it off?"

Snape glared at her, his black eyes glittering as he spoke. "Tut, tut, Miss Granger. You are now teetering on the precipice. Keep those claws sheathed, young woman! I am your employer, after all," he said dangerously.

"Will someone please inform me as to what is going on?" Poppy said irritably.

Hermione snapped the paper upright. "Allow me," she said to the group. "I quote from the front page of the *Daily Prophet*. Miss Rita Skeeter has the headline in bold,

Love Nest at Hogwarts Exposed!

Since the newly appointed Minister of Magic, Kingsley Shacklebolt, announced the names of the two survivors of the final battle against the criminal, Tom Riddle, AKA Lord Voldemort, a secret, clandestine relationship has been born from the tragedy of that horrific battle.

The reconstruction of Hogwarts Castle continues, yet inside the depths of the castle that remained intact are the two survivors, now lovers: Headmaster Severus Snape and his student, Hermione Granger, the sole survivor of the "Golden Trio".

It has been brought to the attention of the workers on the Hogwarts sight of the couple. "They are inseparable", says one workman, who refuses to give his name, on the basis he might lose his job. "They are together at all hours of the day, eating together, alone for hours in the Headmaster's office into the late hours of the night." Another workman said he viewed a heated exchange between the Headmaster and student. "Their physical closeness was such that it looked like a lovers' quarrel!" stated another workman. One wonders, what is going on at Hogwarts?

The Headmaster, an admitted ex-Death Eater, who was exonerated for the murder of the late Headmaster Albus Dumbledore, is 38 years old and before becoming Headmaster was Miss Granger's Potions teacher for five years and Defense Against the Dark Arts for one. Pansy Parkinson, a fellow classmate said, "Hermione Granger was always getting the top marks in class, even though we all knew that Draco Malfoy was the best in our year." Parkinson wept at this moment, remembering the moment she learned of Draco Malfoy's death during the final battle.

Minister Shacklebolt has continued to insist repeatedly that Hogwarts will re-open its doors in the fall. Classes will resume, and this institution, which has educated witches and wizards for 1,000 years, will not surrender its reputation as being the best and most influential school for the European Wizarding community. Yet, one wonders what type of education will our young children be receiving when the Headmaster and his Deputy Headmistress are living an immoral lifestyle for all the students to see. How can the Ministry condone such a relationship with a man twice the girl's age that has not even sat for her N.E.W.T.s? Is this the type of education parents want their daughters to receive, being at the mercy of a lecherous teacher? On the other hand, perhaps it is the other way around. Do parents want to send their sons to a school where they could be at the mercies of a known scarlet woman who tried once before to pit celebrity Quidditch Seeker Victor Krum against Harry Potter when she was only a fourth-year?

Should Hogwarts even reopen its doors if this is the type of depraved behavior that is occurring?"

Hermione ended her reading of the article, and Poppy sat dumb-founded in a nearby chair, unable to speak for fainting. Hermione poured her a cup of coffee and got the Mediwitch to focus.

"How dare that vicious woman!" Poppy cried. "After all we have been through, the hours you both have worked trying to put this school back together...oh, this is just awful, awful!"

Poppy turned to the Minister. "Whatever shall we do, Minister?" she implored.

Kingsley hated this entire mess! It was quickly turning into a chaotic situation that had owls pouring into his office as he left and he was afraid to return. Suddenly, he saw in the distance dozens of owls coming towards the windows. Hermione stood and gaped at the sight, looking very pale.

"Oh, no!" she whined. She buried her face in her hands and sat back down on the sofa. Snape calmly let each owl in and methodically untied the scrolls from each leg and gave each one a bite of toast. When he finished with the last one, he noticed some were starting to fume and shake. He jumped and started to rip them open. The Howlers screamed out, dozens of yelling, screaming voices berating and threatening the Headmaster and Miss Granger in unison.

Once the last Howler had burst into cheery flames, Snape then sat down and began to incinerate each letter at a time.

"You aren't going to read them?" Hermione asked unbelievably.

"Whatever for?" He frowned in return. "Why on earth would I want to read letters from people who do not know me and who obviously have no interest in the truth of the matter? I have more important affairs to attend to than to dwell on the one affair that has been concocted in the brain of a meddlesome bint who has spoon-fed bilge to an entire willing nation!" he replied indignantly.

He then in a pique of anger destroyed the entire pile and returned to his previous work. He did not look up, but said acidly, "Miss Granger, you have your N.E.W.T.s to study for, please make sure you study *properly*. I will be most displeased if I am to defend why I have hired an complete imbecile as my Deputy Headmistress, even if she will be Head of Gryffindor house!"

Hermione smirked. *Well, at least he's keeping his sense of humor!* she thought. She returned to a book she had been trying to finish on Charms before she sat for her N.E.W.T.s. They went right back to work, with no more to say on the subject. Kingsley exchanged glances with Madam Pomfrey. Oh, there was something going on between the two, but it had not turned indecent...yet.

Once Rita Skeeter's article had circulated amongst the masses, Kingsley received more and more opposition about the Headmaster and Miss Granger. One common complaint was that Snape was the Headmaster and should be above reproach. The other, as newly instated instructor, Miss Granger should be a paragon of virtue that the students could look up to. But what to do? A decision had to be made...and fast...before school started in the fall.

So, there the new Minister sat, in his new office, and after reminiscing about the last couple of months, he made a decision. There was going to be yelling and cursing for sure. *Perhaps, I should take their wands from them before talking?* he thought grimly.

He met with them in the Headmaster's office and told them of the pressure he was getting from the parents of the returning students. By this time, Hermione had sat for her N.E.W.T.'s and had passed with extraordinary marks, the highest grades Hogwarts had seen in fifty years. She even surpassed Snape's record. The Headmaster was far too pleased with Hermione's success to care much about what some parents had to say about a situation that didn't even exist! He had filed the Skeeter issue as a done deal in his brain and went on to more pressing matters. Therefore, when Kingsley met with them to discuss the issue again, Snape was confused as to why such an obviously dead topic needed resurrecting. Hermione argued that they would not be alone for long, that in a month's time, the other professors would be arriving and the problem would resolve itself.

"Besides," she growled, "with all the work being done to rebuild the castle, we have barely been alone! And I have *proven* that I received my marks on pure talent and old-fashioned hard work!" Her chest puffed out proudly as she spoke, and Snape could not help but stifle a chortle at the sight of her righteous indignation.

She turned her head and glowered at him. "I heard that, you evil bat!"

Snape laughed heartily at her comment, and Kingsley was intrigued. What has been going on between these two? Well, whatever it was, it made the news he was about to break all that much easier to say. It was apparent the two of them had an undeniable sexual attraction between them.

Kingsley replied that as Headmaster and Deputy Headmistress, they would continue to work closely together and, although other professors were coming, that would not change the fact. So, he had an idea. They should get married.

A/N: Oh, snap! Well, the next chapter will give you Snape and Hermione's thoughts on the matter, and yes, I know I am evil. He-he.

For the Greater Good

Chapter 7 of 23

Severus and Hermione give their reactions to Kingsley's suggestion of marriage to him and then privately.

A/N: Thank you for all the wonderful reviews! I really enjoyed the bribes of chocolate, coffee, and pop-tarts if I would update soon. I hope this will make up for being so evil last chapter. Warning: Lime alert!

"Are you fucking insane?" Snape bellowed.

Hermione at first had been furious with the Minister, but when Snape said *that*, she whirled around on him and gasped in indignation.

"Oh, what's that supposed to mean? What am I? An old hag?" she thundered.

"Oh, spare me your hurt feminine pride, Miss Granger! I'm sure when you were just a little girl in your frilly, pink room, you always dreamt of marrying your future, hideous, greasy, bat of a Potions master!" he snarled.

"Alright, stop!" Kingsley shouted as he began to pace nervously. "I can't make you two do anything you don't want to do, but I'm begging you both. We are in a season of transition and turmoil. Scandal and weakness amongst the staff at this school will only result in tearing down this entire institution. You both know we cannot force magical parents to bring their children here; they can be educated at home, and there are other magical institutions that Muggle parents can send their children to if they wish. Hogwarts has always been counted as the finest educational institution in all of Wizarding Europe! I know I am asking a lot, and I won't force you, but it really would make things so much easier. Besides, Hermione, you said it yourself, nearly an entire generation has been wiped out. Whom will you marry? And Severus, if you would make half an effort at marriage and parenthood as you give your potions, you would make an outstanding husband and father, I'm sure. You both are bright, intelligent, and powerful in your magic. Together you could have talented, powerful children. Please consider what I'm saying, Severus, Hermione?"

They both looked at the minister and then at each other. Hermione spoke up. "Let us please have some time to consider your thoughts, Minister," she said shyly. Inside she was a wreck. *What will Severus say?*

Snape cleared his throat and said deeply, "I agree with Miss Granger." He did not look at her again.

Kingsley clapped his hands together and smiled. "Well, it is the best I can hope for at this point. At least, it was not a 'no'! I shall give you a week to decide."

Headmaster and Deputy Headmistress sat in an uncomfortable silence as the minutes ticked away slowly. Neither one knew where to begin. They had gotten along quite well since the war had ended, finding that their preconceptions of each other were inaccurate outside of the classroom setting. She found that he was not nearly as harsh now that he wasn't forced to lead a double life, and he found that she was not as much a know-it-all, rather a young woman with a true love of knowledge. They had become close companions. Both had envisioned a future relationship with the other, even if neither had admitted it. Now, both witch and wizard were nervous wrecks. Who was going to stick their neck out first? Hermione decided, being the Gryffindor she was, to attack the problem head on.

"Well, Severus, I think that we should discuss this 'possibility' or-or 'opportunity' the Minister has given us." She cringed inside at how badly she had handled that.

She waited for a crushing reply, but none came. Instead, Severus was speechless it seemed. Or, he was very much deep in thought. Hermione sat back uneasily and waited for him to speak.

Thank God, she spoke first! he thought. Snape could never have managed the courage to do it. After all, a man has his pride! How would it look, a man old enough to be her father trying to coerce her into marriage? She'd run screaming into the night, or would she? He regarded her. She was really getting to him. He would never admit it to anyone, not even her, but she had been the guest star in many a naughty fantasy when he was alone in bed and could not sleep. The past month with her continuously by his side had been the most frustrating, annoying, exhilarating, and challenging time of his life. She was so much smaller than he was, but she was a ball of fire that never seemed to run out of flame. She was determined, headstrong, self-reliant, and she knew her own mind. And what a mind! She was brilliant, intelligent, and clever. It also didn't hurt that she had a very pleasant figure that he was itching to uncover. Every day for a week now, he had been pitching tents every time she had come into his personal space. It was quickly becoming pure torture for him. Once he had been able to sneak a peek down her top and saw she had a delicious little cleavage. He wished he could remember that awful day when they were stripped naked in front of each other after the battle as fodder for a fantasy, but she had been covered in so much copious amounts of mud and blood that he ran the risk of being turned off permanently. So, now what was he going to say?

"What are your thoughts, Hermione?" *Oh, so very Slytherin, Severus!*

She seemed to agree. She crossed her arms and scowled at him. "That was a very underhanded maneuver, Severus! I took the high road and broke the silence. The very least you could do, as a gentleman, is to speak your mind first!"

He felt like an utter prat. *Well, here goes...*

"Hermione, I think you and I would be very well-suited for each other. We have common interests, goals, likes, and it seems our futures are set on the same path, at least for the foreseeable future. I realize this is not the most ideal of marriage proposals, but I would be very honored if you would become my wife." *There! Now sit back and*

wait for her hex your dangly bits off, you dunderhead!

"I accept, Severus," she answered softly, her eyes concentrating on her hands folded in her lap.

He blinked several times in astonishment and then got up from behind his desk, sitting down next to her on the sofa.

"Yes?" he asked, not quite believing his ears.

"Yes," she murmured. Her face was blazing red.

He didn't know how to interpret that. He sat dumbly, wondering what he was supposed to do next.

"W-would you like to kiss me?" she stammered. Hermione was so nervous, she thought she would faint dead away. She would never admit it to anyone, ever, but she had been thinking of him while they had worked together this past month. She would stare at his hands and how dexterous they were, and she would watch his mouth as he spoke, wondering what they would feel like on her. She remembered how good it had felt to be held by him when she was so desperately sad after visiting the graves of Harry and the Weasleys. He had carried her back to the castle and had felt so strong and powerful. She knew she was blushing terribly now as visions of what it would be like underneath him, naked, being taken by him, danced unbidden through her head. He was so intense and passionate about so many things; she wanted desperately to know if he went about lovemaking the same way.

He leaned in and when that wasn't close enough for him, he slid his arm around her waist, roughly pulled her flush against him, and tasted her lips. He didn't just kiss her, he *tasted* her. She felt a shiver run throughout her body. The hair on her arms stood up and her nipples hardened against the scratchy lace of her bra. She thought it was either hotter than blazes in the room, or she was coming down with a fever. He continued to taste her lips with his lips, teeth, and tongue. She felt she was going into sensory overload. His mouth felt so good on hers, his smell...*is that cologne? It's very nice*, she thought. Then his arm was around her, holding her firmly against his chest. His body was hard, and she wanted to wrap her arms around him, but she was unsure of herself. She gasped, and he took the opportunity to delve into her mouth. She was terrified and excited all at once. She didn't know about kissing. She had kissed Ron once, but it had been a disaster, and she had certainly never French-kissed before. She was scared she was doing it wrong, and he must have sensed her fear, for he stopped.

"Did you not like it?" he asked softly.

She had to take a moment to catch her breath. "Oh, yes, I did. I-I just don't know how to do what you were doing." She covered her face with her hands in mortification. She couldn't even say the word "French-kissing" to the man she had just agreed to marry. If she couldn't even say that word to his face, she was in for a world of embarrassment when the wedding night came around!

Severus lowered her hands and darkened the room. She couldn't see barely anything but an outline of him.

"What is this?" she asked nervously.

"I thought perhaps, in the dark, not being able to see me, it would be easier to talk to me about some things. You don't have to worry about body language, posturing, blushing, or looking me in the eye." He took a deep steadying breath. "Tell me, Hermione. Were you sincere in your acceptance of my proposal?"

"Oh, yes!" she said eagerly. "Please, don't think about the kiss as an indicator of my wanting to marry you."

"Hermione, have you ever kissed anyone before?" he asked gently.

"Uh, once, but it was terrible, and my mouth was closed," she said in complete embarrassment. *God, I sound pathetic!*

"Perhaps, I took things a bit too far. Would you like for me to give you a simple, small kiss on your lips to start?" he asked softly.

"Please," she breathed. *His voice is so hypnotic!*

He leaned into her, and she could feel his breath on her cheek before his lips brushed hers and then came back and placed a firmer hold on her waist, deepening the kiss. It was so nice, like touching heaven, that she involuntarily sighed noticeably, and he chuckled.

She was embarrassed and lowered her head. He was laughing at her!

"Hermione," he whispered seductively in her ear, "you have the softest lips. I could kiss you for hours and hours."

She found that his words and that voice had a way of making their way down to between her legs. She was so warm and tingly, and she didn't want it to end.

"May I kiss you?" she asked nervously.

"Oh, yes, Hermione, please," he groaned.

She took advantage of the dark and kissed him the way he kissed her. Soon she found her body was taking over for her, and she was kissing him with her open mouth. She didn't even know what the hell she was doing, but it sure felt bloody fantastic! Soon, she felt his arms around her, and she wrapped her arms around him in return, taking her time to slide up his arms and feel around to his back. She loved the feel of his robes under her fingers. He broke from their kiss to taste her neck. She was in flight, as if she were no longer earthbound. His hands wandered their way to her collarbone, tracing delicately the bone and lightly slipped down to lightly graze her breasts. She was breathing hard now and she hoped he wouldn't stop. She felt her face was on fire and all she could think about was how her mind was screaming at her to tell him to touch her nipples. She desperately wanted to, but she couldn't say the word "nipple" to him!

She pressed her chest into his suggestively, hoping he would take the hint. He broke off the kiss and nuzzled her ear whispering, "Hermione? Are you alright?"

"Um-hmm," she answered as she pushed harder against his chest.

He chuckled deeply in her ear. She moaned and gripped his arms.

"You want something badly, don't you, Hermione?" he whispered softly.

"Yes."

"Tell me." His voice held a ghost of his commanding professor's voice to it, but she was too embarrassed.

"May I look in your mind, Hermione?" he asked silkily.

"Yes," she breathed.

He broke from her, took his wand, and whispered, "*Legilimens*." He sat back and watched the glow in her eyes from his wand. He placed his wand down and asked seriously, "Are you sure, Hermione?"

"Um, what do you mean?" she asked nervously. She knew there was many things she wanted him to do, but only one she was willing to do this night.

He began to unbutton her blouse as he whispered in her ear what he had seen.

"Yes, that," she said excitedly.

He chuckled again and eased her shirt out of her waistband. His hands were warm and so large against her rather small chest. She was just starting to wonder if this had been such a good idea when she felt her bra pushed up, freeing her breasts, and his skilled hands grazed her nipples. She choked out a cry of pleasure, and he delved into her mouth again. *This is good...this is so good!* Hermione thought over and over. She felt him pick her up by her waist and straddle her onto his lap. His legs felt like steel against her inner thighs. She was unsure and lost her balance, falling forward, and nearly smothered him with her small breasts.

"Oh my God! I'm sorry!" she whispered.

"Why are you whispering, Hermione?" he said in his normal tone.

She was humiliated and hurriedly pulled down her bra and buttoned her blouse. He let her dress in private before turning on the lights. She was beet-red and went to get her things to leave when he stopped her and made her sit back down.

"What's wrong?" he asked concerned.

"I'm so stupid! I nearly suffocated you!" she said hopelessly mortified.

He laughed. Out from his throat came a rich throaty laugh that made her smile in spite of herself.

"Oh believe me, Hermione. If I were to die, I couldn't think of a more enjoyable way!" he said as he chuckled deeply.

She cleared her throat and straightened herself. She wanted to tell him he was being very indecent and shouldn't say things like that, but she found that she enjoyed it, and the smirk on his face told her he knew it as well. There was only one thing to do: *make a quick exit!*

Marriage, Hogwarts Style

Chapter 8 of 23

Severus goes shopping for wedding rings, and he and Hermione decide not to delay on the nuptials.

A/N: Thanks to all who left the wonderful reviews! I'm tickled to know how much you all are enjoying this fic! Also, thanks to my beta, MadBrilliant!

Snape had successfully diverted Hermione to the capable hands of Poppy. Madam Pomfrey all of a sudden came under a desperate need for certain items for the infirmary, insisting she wanted to be ready ahead of time before the fall term began. Hermione had been none the wiser, only shocked that Severus would entrust her with helping make potions for the students.

He made his way to Diagon Alley where he could look for a suitable wedding ring. He contemplated going into Muggle London, but decided that he would see what he could find in Diagon Alley first.

He stumbled upon a small store, out of the way, named Gemma's Gemstones. He looked at the display window and liked the simple designs of the settings. When he walked in, a middle-aged witch introduced herself as Gemma. She had just started in on her professional business of selling jewelry when she stopped and said, "Mighty Merlin! You're Severus Snape!" She went all aflutter and started stammering and fawning. Snape closed his eyes and tried very hard to maintain his composure.

"I am looking for a ring, a simple, yet elegant ring for a very busy witch. She doesn't like anything flashy, nevertheless, I want to see only the best quality you have on hand."

"Of course, Headmaster Snape!" the woman gushed. She practically genuflected in the worshipful looks she was giving him.

Two years ago, she would have had me arrested, drawn, and quartered! Now I manage to live to see the end of a battle, and I am a ruddy hero! More than that, I am a seducer of women. She probably thinks I have nothing more on my mind than to take advantage of her in this store!

He rolled his eyes as he waited for her to bring out her finest quality of rings. He ignored the yellow gold entirely. He saw many lovely rings. As he studied them, he said to the witch without looking up, "I am only interested in white gold. Platinum is too soft, dings easily. And no goblin-made items! The last thing I need is one of those little hairy tyrants on my back! 14 karat, nothing higher or lower."

She conjured a smaller box and magically transferred the ones that matched his specifications. There were nine rings. He debated whether or not he should even have a gemstone, just a plain band. Well, for himself, that would do, but not for Hermione. He saw a nice old-fashioned ring with a square setting. A blood-red garnet was in its center, surrounded by tiny diamonds. It was delicate, simple, but elegant. It was perfect!

He knew, as he left to Apparate, that the news of the Headmaster of Hogwarts buying wedding rings would be front-page news in the morning *Prophet*. He wondered if Hermione would mind being married immediately.

He decided to go to the Ministry of Magic and speak to Kingsley in private about the matter. He was nearly overwhelmed by the amount of people wanting to speak with him, if he had been with their child, brother, husband on the battlefield, while others merely stared open-mouthed or gasped in horror. He paid no one any mind. He was on a mission. He showed Kingsley the ring, and the wizard shook his hand heartily.

"Kingsley, I am concerned that the news of my purchases today will be front page news in the *Prophet*," he said gravely.

The older wizard became solemn. "I am sure it will, Severus. What is it that you want?"

Snape gave a smirk. "I do appreciate a wizard who can get right to the point," he replied as he sat down across from Kingsley.

"I want to marry Hermione immediately, or whenever she feels comfortable to do so. I do not want to pressure her, however, I wish to protect her reputation. At least hers is

salvageable," he said ruefully.

"Shall I join you for dinner tonight?" Kingsley suggested. "We can discuss the matter, visit, and then we'll see where things stand."

"Yes. Thank you, Minister," Snape said as he stood up, shook the wizard's hand, and Flooded back to his office.

It was pleasant having Kingsley there for dinner. The four friends, who now were more like family than anything else, openly discussed Snape and Hermione's upcoming nuptials, and the question of when the marriage should take place was put to Hermione.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "I haven't thought about it, actually. I mean, you did give us a week to even consider, but I suppose the sooner we marry then all the nonsense will stop. We would just be putting off the inevitable." She seemed to be discussing the matter over more with herself than with the others.

Snape sensed her uneasiness. He knew that she was very concerned with her lack of sexual experience. He asked the other two to excuse them for a moment, and he led his young fiancée down to the end of the Great Hall.

"I thought this matter would be best discussed between us," he whispered. "Hermione, we don't have to, uh, consummate the marriage until you are ready. There should never be a rush concerning that sort of intimacy. We could be married and have done with the nonsense, as you put it, and then you and I could carry on getting to know one another as gradually as you wish."

He looked her so intently and with such fervor, she couldn't help but blurt out, "If it were only up to you, would you want to wait? Wouldn't you want to make love on our wedding night?"

He shifted his weight from one foot to the other. He was very uncomfortable with that question. *Of course, I would! I want nothing more than to...STOP!*

"Hermione, I am a man." A pregnant pause lingered between them, and she looked at him with huge brown eyes, urging him to continue.

"It doesn't matter what I want, damn it!" he snapped. "It is a ludicrous question that has no basis in reality. Making love is about two people's wishes, not one. If you do not wish to make that step...and it is a HUGE step...I will understand and support that decision and will not hold it over your head." His stare grew softer and he exhaled. "Hermione, remember, I am a man. Living with me will expose you to certain things I cannot help."

He was getting flustered now. *How the bloody hell am I going to explain this?*

"Do you mean morning erections and all that?" she whispered.

He looked shocked. "*What!* I mean, how?" he sputtered.

Hermione smiled up at him. "Severus, I know about things. I've read about sex and listened to the girls talk about it. My problem is that I haven't experienced practical application of said knowledge," she whispered shyly.

"Okay," he began uncertainly, "well, I think we've discussed *that* enough. So, what say you?"

"Let's get married straight away," she answered.

He started fumbling in his pocket. "I bought these today for us. I hope you will like what I chose. This is the reason for our rush. Perhaps I should have waited to buy them..."

Hermione placed her finger over his lips. "You're babbling, Professor," she teased.

He blushed at her innocent flirting. "Such cheek. I should take off house points!" he said haughtily.

She giggled. He sighed. *That's another thing! I'll be pitching tents all day long if she continues to do that!*

He took out the box and showed her the rings. The garnet-diamond ring for her and the plain white gold ring for him.

"Oh, Severus, they're lovely. So lovely," she breathed.

He took out her ring and placed the box back into his voluminous robes. Then he led her just outside the hall where no one would see them. He glanced around out of pure habit; no one was around. Hermione beamed at the sight of Professor Snape being nervous. He got down on one knee and whispered, "Hermione, would you please do me the honor of becoming my wife and partner?"

"Yes," she whispered.

Severus looked at her and considered her response. "Hermione, we have been forced into a whirlwind relationship. Partly due to the fact we are the only survivors of a horrific battle that took everyone we loved from us. I would like to think we've discovered something more there than we had expected to find. I do enjoy your company, your brilliant mind, and I do find you very desirable. I want this marriage one day to be everything it should be, although I realize it will take time. I want to be clear from the start. I want to love you, Hermione. I want to work toward that goal. I believe it can be achieved...in time." He stopped talking and waited for her reply.

Hermione blushed. "I care for you, deeply. I also find you desirable, although I will need time. I do want this marriage to be everything it should be, as well. I want to love you, I think I may already be in love with you; I just don't know for sure."

She took his hands securely in her own and looked intently into his eyes. "I do know this: I respect you, Severus Snape. I was taught that if you can at least respect the man, love will happen in time. I believe this and need to know, Severus, do you respect me?"

Severus cupped her cheek in the palm of his hand and watched as she leaned into it. She wasn't afraid to be vulnerable to him. She wasn't afraid to try. He would not be either.

"Hermione," he said with difficulty. "I deeply respect your openness and the trust you have in me. I will never harm you. I will be faithful and completely yours. I have ~~ghosts~~ from my past that may be difficult to release myself from. You deserve as my future wife to know the truth. I loved a woman, for the better part of twenty years. However, the losses we have witnessed has changed something inside me. Being with you these last couple of months has made me feel more alive than I ever thought possible. I think I am ready to start again...with you. You need to know I will always love her... Lily. She was my first love, however, she is my past and you are my future. I shall never compare you to her or hold her over your head. I want to marry you, Hermione, because I feel we have something that could be magnificent one day. We are so different, yet so compatible...even *complimentary*. Can you accept this?" he asked with a touch of fear in his voice.

Hermione was touched. "I can, Severus. I realize you must have had a past; after all, you are nearly twenty years my senior; although, I'd be a liar if I didn't say I feel a little envious. She got the luxury of having your love just because you chose her. We MUST marry for the good of Hogwarts." Her face fell, sad and distant.

Severus stood up and cupped her face, turning it up to face his own. "Hermione, I will try to make this up to you. You won't regret marrying me. I'll work hard to make you happy. You give me more than Lily ever gave me. Sometimes, I think she was more of a dream than a reality. I think we have all the ingredients to make a successful

marriage. We DO compliment one another. It will take time, but I am yours, Hermione, if you'll have me."

"I hope you can respect my wishes to wait on sexual intimacy until I'm ready," she replied shyly.

"Of course," he said reassuringly as he kissed her hand. "I think your innocence is lovely and refreshing. I will follow your lead."

He slipped the ring on her finger and kissed her tenderly on the lips. She stood on her tiptoes to accommodate him. She had not kissed him standing before! The height difference was intimidating, but they managed quite nicely.

They walked back in the Great Hall with smiles on their faces, holding hands.

Poppy and Kingsley stood and clapped happily for the couple.

"This deserves something special! Shall we adjourn to your office, Headmaster, for the ceremony? Poppy can be your witness, and we can go into Hogsmeade for some champagne! We can visit Rosmerta and spread the happy news!" said Kingsley.

Poppy clapped her hands together. "Oh, that would be so nice, to visit old friends and finally have something to celebrate!"

Severus looked concerned. He turned to Hermione. "My concern is for Hermione's feelings, Minister. I really don't want anyone prying into the privacy of our marriage or embarrassing Hermione."

"Have no fear, Severus. The marriage will be legitimate. You and Hermione can have your privacy. The Ministry will not be interfering. Now, I can't promise that others won't have a word or three on the matter. You'll have to face facts, Severus. You'll put up with good old-fashioned teasing on having such a young wife, and I'm sure Hermione will have to deal with some old gossips who may ask indelicate questions about your martial relations. All of which I cannot stop," he admitted with a smile.

"Hermione?" Severus asked.

"I think it would be good to go out and see some familiar faces, and we might as well get the word out on our own terms," she answered shrewdly.

Severus smiled at the tenacity of his bride. They all went up to Severus' office and Kingsley performed the ceremony.

It was a very romantic setting, with candlelight. In hushed tones, witch and wizard vowed their fidelity, faith, and charity to one another. As Hermione slipped Severus' ring on his hand, she realized how small her hand was compared to his. It frightened her, but excited her at the same time. She looked up into his eyes. He had become her friend, someone she trusted. Would it have happened if life had not forced them into the situation of being the sole survivors of the final battle? Probably not, but it did not matter. Not now. Life had brought them to this point, and she was not altogether sad that her once dreaded Potions master would now be her husband. She knew they respected one another. It was a good starting point, she figured.

Once they had been declared husband and wife, they kissed and that calm, lovely feeling came back to her. She could get used to this kissing thing. Definitely.

They went into Hogsmeade and retired to the Three Broomsticks. Rosmerta was ecstatic to see them. She hugged them both tightly. Hermione and Severus announced their marriage, and the pub burst into drunken cheers for the couple. Rosmerta brought out her finest and insisted they come upstairs with her while she gave everyone a round of free drinks.

They went up to Rosmerta's cozy sitting room and she said, "Let's Floo some of the old crowd! What say you, Minister?"

Kingsley smiled widely and said, "Why not? I know Amos Diggory is working tonight, along with Mafalda Hopkirk and Arnold Peasegood. Oh, try to see if Gawain is in, as well!"

Soon, the room was full of witches and wizards who knew the couple and were so happy to see familiar faces. Amos Diggory was very happy for the newlyweds and, with a tear in his eye, wished them the best of luck and many happy years and children.

Andromeda Tonks spoke with them through the Floo. She couldn't come, Teddy was in bed for the night. She gave them her best wishes.

Gawain Robards came in with Savage, the young Auror that had been training under Tonks the year before.

"I wish we could stay longer, we just can't spare anyone these days, not until the Americans arrive," he said sadly. "We have our patrol as well. Just could not at least stop by and wish you both well. That damned Skeeter woman is a right foul bint, but as along as you both are happy, well, that's what matters most!"

Severus and Hermione heartily thanked the Head Auror before he and Savage Flooed back to the Ministry.

The small gathering was a happy occasion for everyone as they reminisced about the old days. They all spoke about the re-building of the castle and the coming school year.

"I believe we all shall be relieved when our Wizarding friends arrive," said Mafalda nervously.

"You have doubts, Mafalda?" asked Peasegood.

"Well, I'm just saying that it seems the Americans work on their own timetable, and when they do show up, they have this aura about them that wants to just charge in and take over!" she said hotly.

"Gawain is a good leader," Kingsley responded. "He will keep them in line."

"What of the Hogwarts staff, Severus?" asked Diggory. "Have you and Mrs. Snape settled on who will be teaching?"

"Yes," began Severus. "I will be taking over Potions, as I want to take my time to make sure the right person is hired for the position. Madam Snape will be teaching Charms. Hopefully, next year we will have someone who can assist her in her formal apprenticeship. For now, she has the talent and the ability to handle the course load, I'm sure." Hermione squeezed his hand as he praised her openly.

Severus continued. "I also have contacted a very responsible young wizard who worked with Charles Weasley in Romania. He's British and was unable to return for the war, but it is just as well. He shall be our new gamekeeper and Care of Magical Creatures professor. Mr. Shunpike will be joining us as our school's caretaker. Then we have an American teacher coming to take over as Transfiguration professor. She is very skilled and comes highly recommended. Her name is Samantha Holden. Madam Maxine from Beaubaxtons has a group of capable young witches who have just finished their apprenticeships for Muggle Studies, Arithmancy, and Ancient Runes. Durmstrang will be sending us a Defense against the Dark Arts teacher, a Roman Selinski, and a Herbology teacher, Ivan Domanski."

"The young man that will be your gamekeeper... what's his name? If he's British, wouldn't we know him?" asked Rosmerta.

"Perhaps," Severus replied. "His name is Alun Ketsall. He was in Charles Weasley's year. A fair hand with Potions, but I can't seem to recall anything else from his school days. He comes with excellent references, though."

"What I am curious to see is how they shall be sorted!" said Hermione enthusiastically.

"Ah, yes!" said Peasegood. "Head of houses and all that! Well, Severus, are you going to take back your position as Head of Slytherin?"

"Not if I can help it, but it may be that I must. I am wary of any one coming from Durmstrang, for obvious reasons," he said darkly. "But," he said on a lighter note, "Mrs. Snape shall be Head of Gryffindor house!"

"Oh, well done!" said Mafalda. "I was a Gryffindor, you know."

Hermione smiled at the witch. She was getting very tired. All the alcohol and the excitement of the day was wearing her out. Severus felt a tugging on his frock coat. He looked down and saw his bride's tired eyes. He made their excuses, and they made for home. Sure enough, saucy smiles and feminine tittering rose into the air as they exited to Floo back into the Headmaster's office.

Hermione emerged from the bathroom wearing a long sleeved white cotton nightgown that fell to the floor. She sat at what was her own vanity. *Lord, these house-elves work fast...* combed her hair and plaited it. He watched as she did this and found it to be very soothing. He continued to look at her as she tentatively approached the bed and slipped under the duvet.

"My, this bed is so soft!" she exclaimed.

He smiled down at her as she snuggled into bed. Her gown revealed her collarbone and he could make out the outline of her pert and rosy nipples. They lay there in the huge cozy bed and the minutes ticked away.

Severus turned to his bride and asked if he could hold her hand. She placed her small, warm hand in his. She snuggled closer to him, her feet touching his legs. It was so intimate and innocent, he didn't want to spoil what seemed to be moving along, albeit, slow as a snail, but progress, nonetheless. She rested her head on his shoulder and sighed. She sounded content.

"Hermione," he whispered, "I am at a loss as to what you are expecting from me."

"I would just like to be close to you, get used to being near you like this. Is that okay?"

"Of course," he replied.

He drew his arm up and around her, pulling her close to him. She rested her hand on his chest and toyed with his nightshirt. She burrowed deep into the crook of his arm and fell quickly asleep. Severus looked at his sweet bride. His wife! He was overcome with happiness. It felt so nice, just having her warm, soft body next to his. He put out the lamp and fell asleep.

When morning came, he awoke to find his wife sleeping with one naked leg resting on top of the covers. She was deep asleep, and the sight of her naked thigh made him crave to touch her. His morning erection was screaming for attention, and he wished with all his might that he could just wake her up and bury himself inside her. *Damn!* He had to wait. He slipped into the bathroom, took off his nightshirt, and began to stroke his aching cock. He imagined her naked thigh and the outline of her breast and fantasized about taking her nightgown off, taking her breast into his mouth, and teaching her how to stroke him as he placed her hand on his erection. He was stroking hard now, panting and sweating. He was so close now, *so close...*

A/N: Lemons ahead! Sorry for being continuously evil! I hope I make up for it spades in the next chapter! *evil grin*

A Virgin's Dilemma

Chapter 9 of 23

Hermione gets her nerve up to ask Severus for some sexual exploration.

A/N: Here is the first of many chapters that will explain the reason for the Explicit Sexual Content Warning! Enjoy!

As expected, the *Daily Prophet* announced the marriage of Headmaster Severus Snape and Miss Hermione Granger. Rita Skeeter couldn't resist getting her digs in, but there was little to say that would do much harm. The two were married and now their business was that: their own.

It was a whirlwind month, that August. Preparations for the new semester were underway. The final touches on the castle were being completed. Stanley Shunpike arrived for his new position as caretaker and Alun Ketsall arrived from Romania to begin his position as gamekeeper and professor of Care of Magical Creatures class. Hogwarts was starting to feel like Hogwarts again. The ghosts came out of hiding, and Hermione was most pleased the first time she saw Sir Nicolas floating by one afternoon.

"Sir Nicholas! How wonderful to see you! Where have you been all this time?"

"Oh! Madam Snape! How delightful to see you again. I'm afraid we spirits had a most trying time with the upset in the castle. It is just our way to go off alone when things are so unsettled. Now that the Magic in the castle has been stabilized, you shall be seeing more of us and unfortunately, that nuisance, Peeves!" he said with irritation.

Hermione laughed a bit at his pomposity, but that was a part of his charm.

"Sir Nicholas, how did you know my name is Madam Snape?" she asked.

"Oh, my dear lady, although we ghosts have been hiding away, we still have our ways of knowing what happens inside these walls," he said mysteriously.

"Ah! The portraits have been talking to you," she guessed shrewdly.

"Of course!" he smiled. "How would it look if I, the ghost of Gryffindor house, did not know about the Head of house's marriage?"

She laughed heartily as she bid him a good day and went to see Severus about hiring a new librarian.

Things had been well since their wedding. It had been two weeks now, and Hermione was becoming used to sleeping next to her husband and kissing was now very exciting. They had moved on to touching more under their clothes, and Hermione blushed as she thought perhaps now she might want to experiment a little more. She

noticed that each morning he slipped out of bed first thing to take a quick shower. She also noticed when she took the time to carefully watch him that it was true what she had read about men and their morning erections. She felt guilty that she wasn't being fair to him that she should just get on with things, but he sensed her unease and always stopped their explorations first. She thought perhaps he would feel terrible if she were to pull away first, so she didn't fuss about it.

Hermione did feel extreme low self-esteem about her abilities in bed. She examined her body and didn't feel she possessed enough assets. She felt her breasts were too small, her hips not curvy enough. She just didn't feel sexy and wanted to badly, but she had no way of going about it and had no one to talk to that she felt comfortable divulging her greatest shame: she felt inadequate to seduce and keep her husband's affections. She thought once about talking to Andromeda Tonks but had dismissed the thought. After all, Andromeda had lost her husband, and at least Hermione had hers alive and with her. How could she be so tactless as to bring up a subject that could cause her so much pain?

Hermione had seen since their marriage how women looked at Severus. Oh, he paid those types of women no mind and only had eyes for her, which pleased her immensely, but she felt threatened and guilty about withholding her husband's marital rights. She berated herself mentally, saying that it was only a matter of time until Severus gave in to his needs with one of these women if she didn't give him sex. There were times she had almost told him to go ahead, yet each time she had faltered, and whenever he pressed the matter, she always said it was nothing important.

When the Ministry had awarded her and Severus with the Order of Merlin, first-class, there had been a fabulous ball with all the dignitaries and fancy, rich witches and wizards from over the world to celebrate the fall of Voldemort. Hermione had almost burst into tears when a dark-haired temptress with curves that didn't seem to quit sidled up to Severus and played the coquette with him. He had been standing nervously alone, waiting for Hermione to return from the ladies' room. Oh, she had been a sly one, waiting until the wife was away to make her move. Hermione took one look with that slag draping herself all over *her husband* and wanted to hex someone. She just couldn't decide if she wanted to hex the dark-haired slut for touching her wizard or if she wanted to hex Severus for not forcing her to keep her distance. As Hermione had approached them, hiding herself behind a potted palm, tears welling up, she had seen just how trapped Severus looked. A thought had crossed her mind that perhaps her husband had no more experience with these matters than she did! His face had begun to form a fierce scowl, and he extricated himself from the succubus in black. Hermione, still hiding from view, had breathed a sigh of relief.

"Hermione," he had said desperately once she had decided to materialize, "do not EVER leave me alone with these vampires! I can't handle this. No one gave a damn if I was around before, but now that I'm a supposed 'hero,' witches are coming out of my arse! I keep telling them I'm married and happy, but they don't seem to care! Are they all completely *insane*?" he had snarled.

Hermione had slipped her hand into his, and he had hid their hands from view with his billowing robes. He had looked down at his young wife, and she had smiled timidly up at him with huge, loving eyes. She had wanted to tell him that he was irresistible and she loved him. She had wanted to tell him to make love to her, to make her his own, but she was too embarrassed.

Severus had looked right miserable, hating the suffocating pageantry of these events. Severus Snape was not a man who liked to be pampered and coddled, and he certainly was not the kind of man to relish in small talk with false motives lingering below a very thin surface. Hermione had promised she would not leave his side, and if she had to in an emergency, she'd make sure Kingsley or Poppy would be there to deal with the poor, deluded witches.

He had sighed in relief and then a minute later had begged to go home. He had confessed he hadn't felt so targeted since he had been spying against the Dark Lord! It wasn't a pleasant sensation, he had confided in her.

"What do you suggest we do then, Severus?" she had asked.

"Oh, that is simple!" he had said with longing in his eyes. "You and I in our nightshirts, snuggling in bed, reading a Potions magazine together, all cozy and warm."

Hermione thought about all these things as she made her way to her husband's office. Severus had looked so serene and happy that night; Hermione knew he deserved more. He never complained, but she would have to face her fears and insecurities at some point.

Well, tonight I'm going to change things! she thought determinedly. Oh, yes, she was going to allow things to go farther...soon. She would just have to summon the courage to let him know.

"Severus?" called Hermione as she walked into his office.

"Yes?" he answered, not looking up from his writing.

"I was thinking about the new librarian position. Madam Pince still refuses to come back. She says she's done with Hogwarts, but that her niece, Miss Opal Pince, would be ideal for the job."

Severus looked up from his work and rubbed his eyes. "If she's one-half as militant as her aunt, I daresay we have a fair chance at a decent librarian. Did Madam Pince include the girl's references?"

"Here," she said, handing him the scroll. "And she's hardly a girl, Severus. She's nigh on to fifty!"

"Really?" he said, shocked. "I didn't know Irma was that old! Well, everything seems to be in order. You can handle the niceties, I'm sure," he finished, returning the scroll to his wife and resumed his work.

"Severus," Hermione said again.

"Yes?" he asked with more impatience in his tone.

"May I please have a word in private?" she asked.

At first he looked at her as if she were mad, but then he realized they were in the company of many past Hogwarts Headmasters and Headmistresses.

They adjourned to their private sitting room, and Hermione fiddled with the fabric on the sofa chair as she stood behind it. She was determined to cower behind it if he refused or laughed at her.

"I wanted to know if tonight when we go to bed if you would like t-to do some m-more exploring?*There! I managed to stumble it out!*

He crossed his arms and looked at his wife. She was beet red with embarrassment. He smiled at her wickedly. He had a very naughty glint in his eyes. That look made her feel he could see right through her clothes. It was unsettling and exciting all at the same time.

"I'm sure that would be a most pleasant diversion," he purred. "However, we don't have to wait until bedtime, do we? After dinner, we could adjourn here to our quarters and take our time. Would that be acceptable?"

She nodded, unable to speak. She then went back into his office, took her papers, and returned to her classroom for work. She had to keep her mind occupied and not indulge in woolgathering all day long. After all, she had her own classes to prepare.

Dinner was an exercise in torture. Severus deliberately caressed her leg when no one was paying attention and murmured indecent things into her ear. By the time they'd excused themselves, she was burning up and felt a familiar wetness between her legs. She recalled the first time she had ever felt that way. It was her fourth year, and

Victor had been dancing with her. There had been something about the way he had held her and twirled her around the floor that had given her a shiver, and she had noticed a humming slickness between her thighs. She had gone to the bathroom and had been disgusted by what she found. She had felt dirty and had gone immediately back to her room to change her knickers quickly before she would be missed. At the close of the evening, she had lain in her bed, listening to Lavender and Pavarti talk about their evening. Pavarti had managed to escape from Harry, who was mooning over Cho, and had danced with a very dashing young man from Durmstrang. Lavender's date had also been one of the blokes from Durmstrang as well, and they decided to exchange stories.

Hermione had pretended to be asleep when she had heard them talk about how the boys had made them feel. They had described in vulgar terms exactly what she had experienced! The next day she started to learn all she could about sex and her body. Then she became curious about male anatomy as well, so she read and studied about the sexes and felt much better when she had finally realized she was just a normal girl experiencing sexual attraction.

Now she was back in her bedroom with her husband and she was already slick with desire. She wondered if Severus would like how she felt if he touched her, or would he think she was too wet? She decided to just dive in and not think about it.

She came to bed with her usual white nightgown and slid under the covers to wait for Severus to emerge. She didn't plait her hair, as she wanted to look soft and alluring. She unbuttoned the top three buttons and let the nightgown slip from one shoulder. She sat and fiddled with the bed sheet and waited.

He came out wearing his bathrobe. He stood at his side of the bed and took it off, showing her his nakedness. She closed her eyes from instinct, but then reopened them and viewed her husband's half-erect penis and somehow couldn't manage to stop looking at it. She *really* tried, but she couldn't tear her eyes from it. Severus got into bed with her and pulled her close to him. She was nervous but felt safe with his arm so secure around her.

"I see you've decided to try and work your wiles on me," he murmured.

She blushed and lowered her head as he stroked the exposed skin on her shoulder. "You feel soft," he whispered in her ear. Soon, their kisses were urgent, and she decided the hell with her nightgown and took it off. Severus inhaled deeply as he looked her naked for the first time.

"Before we start, can I ask a favor?" she said timidly.

"Anything you want," he blurted out.

"I just want to know what it would feel like for you to lay on top of me. I-I'm just curious as to what it would be like to-to be in a sexual position. Does that make sense?" She cringed. *He probably thinks I'm a complete idiot!*

He said nothing, but rose up on his knees to face her and took her by the ankles and bent them back. Then he slowly parted her knees, sliding his hands down the insides of her thighs. She kept on spreading for him as he went lower and lower. She had propped herself up against her elbows to see what he was doing, but he leaned over her and gently pushed her shoulders down so she was flat on her back. Then he knelt and hovered over her. She could feel his erection grazing against her moist center, and he was staring into her eyes so intently, she thought she would disintegrate from the intensity. His hair came down and covered most of his face, but his eyes, oh, his eyes! They were burning! She moved her hands up his arms, feeling the strength in them and squeezed her thighs against his hips. She felt down his back and slid her hands over his bum. She felt him shaking as he began to grind his warm erection against the tender skin of her nether lips. She grew alarmed and looked into his eyes with fear.

"Hermione, you are playing with fire. This exercise must end now or I shall not be able to stop myself," he said in a voice she had never heard before. It was commanding, like when he spoke as a teacher, but there was an ache and a passion that sent her shivers throughout her body. She agreed, and he hastily moved from between her thighs onto his back. His erection was looking painful. It was almost purple. She decided it was now or never. She remembered how she had read about masturbation and how the girls talked about the various techniques. She took him in her hand and stroked him delicately. His hand clasped over hers in shock and in pleasure. Their eyes met and they stared into each other's face as he guided her hand to touch him how he liked it. She tore her eyes from his to watch his movements intently and glanced back to observe the look on his face. His eyes were glazed over her body in lust as he began to moan. Then he released her hand and let her set the pace. He cupped her face and kissed her passionately and then moved his lips down to her neck. He was panting now, and he pushed his thumb inside her mouth. She sucked on it, and he gasped in surprise.

After a long moment, he pulled it out and grazed her left nipple with it, tracing a slow circle around the furled peak. The wetness hit her like a shock and she uttered a startled, "*Oh!*"

It was all he needed as he grabbed her breasts and moaned her name, *Hermione, ah, ahhh!*

And he came hard, his seed spilling all over her hand and splashed onto her stomach. He pulled her to him and kissed her lovingly as he sank back onto the bed, taking her with him. She felt it was his way of saying, "Thank you."

He continued to kiss her lazily as his breathing slowed while the throbbing between her legs became more urgent and demanding. He pulled them both up onto their knees, and he insinuated his knees between hers. She felt exposed and nervous. He put his hands on her waist and made her kneel while he continued to lean on the backs of his legs. She felt herself spread to the point she could feel her vagina was open and exposed somehow. Severus cupped her breasts with his hands. They fit into his hands easily, and Hermione felt humiliated that she didn't have a larger chest. Then, he leaned over and took almost her entire breast in his mouth. He looked into her face as she leaned her head back in pleasure. He sucked hard on her nipple and she felt her thighs quake. She was grasping onto his hair as she moaned. She desperately wanted him to touch her between her legs, where she felt so wet and open, but was too embarrassed.

Soon, he released her nipple and whispered in her ear, "You want me to touch you, don't you, Hermione?"

"Yes," she breathed.

He slid one finger into her cleft, grazing the area that was throbbing so badly.

"*Oh!*" she exclaimed.

He laughed deeply into her ear and kissed down her neck towards her breast as he slid his finger back up again.

"*Ooohh!*" she moaned.

He did it again, and again. She started rocking her hips and ground against his finger. She wanted to squeeze her thighs together and trap it inside her, but his knees kept her spread. He added another finger with which to torture her. He continued to suck on her nipple as she wriggled around his fingers. She felt so light and...

"*Oh my God!*"

She was screaming and her body felt so good, she never wanted this high to stop. She was vaguely aware of her husband's voice urging her to go with the feeling. He slowly slid a finger inside her, and she involuntarily clamped her walls down on it. The burst of pleasure was subsiding and she wanted him to stop.

"Please, I don't like that," she whispered.

Severus looked at her flushed face, confused by her words. "I would say, to the contrary, you liked it very much."

She pushed his hand away and said, "I'm not ready for you to do that with your finger," she said softly.

"Do what, exactly?" he asked, even more confused.

"Inside me!" she mouthed, pointing at the area. She was too embarrassed to say it aloud.

He smirked and his eyes were glittering. "Oh, I see. Well, what about what I did before?" he asked as he withdrew from her.

She sank back against her fluffy pillows and pulled the cozy duvet up under her arms. "Mmmm, that was very nice. I've never felt that way before!"

"Really?" he asked as he raised an eyebrow. "You've never gone exploring?"

"My mother told me never to touch that area unless I was washing, going to the bathroom, or taking care of my menses," she answered.

"*Why?*" he asked, confused.

"My mother said it was dirty and that was only for my husband to touch," she answered calmly.

Severus stared at his wife. She didn't seem to grasp the cruelty her mother had done to her.

"So, it's dirty, but I am your husband, so therefore, I am dirty?" he asked, trying to understand the logic behind this asinine theory.

Hermione bit her lip and diverted her eyes from his as she said, "My mother said men have needs and that I would understand when I was married. She warned me to never let anyone touch me until I was married. She told me if I waited until I got married, I would enjoy sex, but if I didn't wait, it would be awful."

Severus took a deep breath and blinked his eyes a few times, trying to wrap his mind around this concept.

"Hermione, what do you think about what your mother told you?"

She looked back at her husband and said, "I think she just wanted to scare me into staying a virgin so I wouldn't get pregnant, or something. I know logically what she says is not true, it's just hard to undo years of thinking a certain way about things."

"Well, how do you feel?" he asked as he slid his arm around her waist and drew her to him.

She grinned. "Wonderful! There are so many things I've read about I want to try...er, if you want," she muttered at the end.

Severus nuzzled her neck as he spoke. "Oh, I'm sure I would. Hermione, I am willing for whatever you want." Then suddenly, he pulled away from her and took her face into his hand to face him. "Nevertheless, I warn you, do not take advantage of my giving nature in this area. Don't play games with me just to see how long I can hold out. Remember, you are playing with fire. I do not want to burn you. You need to understand that given enough stimulation, *he* takes on a life of his own!" he said, gesturing to his penis.

"Okay," she said nervously as he released her face and held her close to him. It was quite a while before she settled into sleep.

A/N: What can I say? Believe me, if you went to college where I did, you'd have heard it all. I know I certainly have, whether I liked it or not! Oh, Severus, now why did you have to scare the poor girl? Well, he'll pay for that one. Sometimes men can be so tactless!

Conquering Old Fears...

Chapter 10 of 23

When three beautiful witches arrive from Beauxbatons, Hermione decides she needs to take her marriage to the next level.

A/N: I want to give my deepest thanks and gratitude to all who have read and reviewed. This fic has reached the 200 mark! I can't tell you how tickled I am that so many of you have been enjoying my little story. Thanks again to my fabulous beta, MadBrilliant!

Severus wondered if he had been indelicate towards Hermione. For four days, she had come to bed dressed in her usual cotton nightgown, but he could tell she was wearing knickers and a bra underneath. She had not shown him any physical tenderness, nor had she even so much as kissed him on the cheek. He had tried to kiss her a couple of times, but she had ducked and had practically run from him. She slept with her back to him and was constantly skittish as if she had drunk ten cups of coffee in an hour's span!

By fifth night, he had decided enough was enough. When she came to bed after plaiting her hair, she slipped into bed and curled up with her back to him. He sighed audibly and rolled his eyes.

"Hermione, look at me," he demanded.

She scooted herself upright and turned to him.

"What is going on?" he snapped.

"What?" she asked in return.

"Do not repeat what I say, girl! I am perfectly capable of retaining my own thoughts!" he barked at her.

She was angry. How dare he use that tone with her and how dare he call her a girl!

"I am your wife, Severus, not a girl! I do not appreciate your tone, nor do I appreciate your choice of words!" she retorted hotly.

He smiled victoriously. "Now that I have the Hermione I wish to speak with, and not some shrinking violet, can you please inform me of the reasoning behind your behavior towards me, your *husband*, as of late?"

"You told me to watch out for the *Fiendfyre* between your legs! I don't want to get burned or cause any trouble. I still don't feel ready to take the next step, and I don't want you accusing me of being a tease!" she fumed.

He laughed heartily now. "Hermione, I would never take you against your will. I was just saying that my *ardor* for you might be too passionate if I were stirred up enough. You may not be prepared for the rougher side of sex. Now, as to the 'next step,' I would like to inform you that intercourse is *not* the next step. Have you truly forgotten what you studied, or did you decide to pass on certain chapters?" he said sarcastically.

She looked puzzled, but then a wave of realization came over her. "Oh,*that*," she whispered with disappointment.

He looked at her in interest, raising his eyebrows questioningly. "Do I dare even venture into this territory?" he asked her wearily.

"You mean oral sex, right?"

"Yes. Does that bother you?" he asked calmly, praying to God she would say 'NO!'

"Well, I just remember listening to the girls in Gryffindor talking about it. It seems all nice and fine for the bloke, but what's in it for the girl?" she challenged.

Severus rolled his eyes. "I cannot believe—no actually I can—*Gryffindors*!" he muttered. "I assure you, Hermione, oral sex is meant for *both* partners to enjoy, not for just one at the expense of the other," he said sourly.

My, he looks offended! Hermione thought. "Well, what do you want from me?" she said exasperated.

"Take off those damn knickers, your bra, get over here like you normally do, and let me hold you!" he bit out at her.

She got out of bed in a huff, and when she came out, he quickly appraised her through her lightweight nightgown *Dark patch, good! Knickers gone. She's slipping into bed; aha, there are her breasts; no bra!*

She snuggled up to him and snapped, "Are you happy now?"

"Quite," he replied smugly.

The teachers began arriving the week before classes were to resume. There were three lovely young ladies from Beauxbatons who had finished their apprenticeships: Mlle. Belfort who would be the Arithmancy Professor, Mlle. Toulouse who would be the new Ancient Runes Professor, and Mlle. Beauharnis, who would be the new Muggle Studies Professor. They stepped off their flying coach in identical robes of Beauxbatons blue. All three were blonde and fresh-faced as the morning dew. Severus and Hermione stood at the main gates to welcome their new staff members. They reminded Hermione very much of Fleur Delacour, who had married Bill Weasley, both of whom had perished in the final battle.

"I wonder if they are part Veela?" Hermione whispered to Severus as they walked towards them.

They seemed to be attached to the hip somewhat. All three women said "Hello!" in a charming accent. Thank the Lord it didn't sound as thick as Fleur's! Hermione wondered how the students would learn if they had to continuously fight through translating their teachers' accent into English!

One of them began to speak. "My name is Emile Beauharnis. May I introduce to you my colleagues, yes? Satine Toulouse and Christine Belfort."

Severus bowed genteelly and welcomed them to Hogwarts. "I am Severus Snape, Headmaster and Potions master of this school. I would like to introduce my wife, Madam Hermione Snape; she will be teaching Charms and is Deputy Headmistress."

Hermione nodded politely. "How do you do?"

The five walked into the castle and went immediately to the Headmaster's office. The young ladies were unimpressed with the structure of Hogwarts. They fairly shivered.

Hermione noticed their discomfort and said, "We shall be getting you settled with Hogwarts teaching robes. You may find them warmer and cozier in the castle."

They all were silent as they headed inside. Hermione inhaled and rolled her eyes at Severus. It was going to be quite frosty, no matter how many robes and jumpers these Frenchwomen wore!

They silently walked into the Headmaster's office and without ado; Severus explained the necessity of House Sorting and took the old, dusty hat, placed it on Mlle. Belfort's head.

"Hufflepuff!" cried the Sorting hat.

Next was Mlle. Toulouse.

"Hufflepuff!" cried the Sorting hat.

"We may be in deep trouble, sir," whispered Hermione to her husband.

Last was Mlle. Beauharnis. Hermione thought, *She seems the most intelligent of the lot. Please, please let her be a Ravenclaw!*

"Ravenclaw!" cried the Sorting hat.

"Oh, well done!" exclaimed Hermione. "Now we will have to choose who will be Head of Hufflepuff house."

"Let us not make hasty decisions, Hermione," corrected Severus. "After all, Mr. Ketsall still has to be sorted as well as the American witch and the Durmstrang wizards." He eyed the three witches appraisingly, wondering which would be the best choice for Head of Hufflepuff house if it came down to it.

"Ladies, we shall be meeting again for dinner, which is served promptly at five o'clock in the Great Hall at the Head table. Madam Snape shall see you to your quarters. Your steamer trunks will have already been brought in by our house elves. Welcome again to our school, Mademoiselles," Severus said graciously.

Hermione loved it when her husband used that voice. He had no idea, but these blonde birds had better not try any funny business, or she'd have them out on their ears! She couldn't believe the roaring jealousy that was coursing through her. No matter that the triplets had shown absolutely no interest in her husband whatsoever, the issue was that Hermione felt inferior to these beautiful women with their curvy bodies and long, blonde hair. It also didn't hurt that they each had more than a handful of breasts and were tall. All three had legs that went on to their throats. She felt very much like a little French horse compared to the thoroughbreds beside her with her small features. What if Severus became attracted to them? She needed to have sex with her husband. She wasn't going to lose him to another woman. Not after everything they had been through and done! She blushed at the intimate acts they had engaged in, and her heart hurt at the thought of Severus doing those intimate acts with another

woman. That settled it. They were going to have sex—*tonight!*

She had lied to Severus about needing to work in her office, but actually, she had snuck out of the Floo in her husband's office to the Three Broomsticks to meet up with Rosmerta. She had owed the bar owner earlier and had asked if she could ask the proprietor of the local lingerie shop to stay open after hours for her to buy something special in private.

Hermione stumbled through the Floo, and Rosmerta was waiting. The older witch beamed and grabbed her cloak.

"Let's get to it, shall we?" she asked. "What's the special occasion? Did you do something bad and now you have to make it up to him?" she inquired, laughing.

Hermione blushed. "It's just, well, we got married so fast, and I don't have anything frilly or sexy. I am feeling more confident now and felt the time was right."

Rosmerta snickered. "You're gonna have him climbing the walls, eh? Well, that's good. A witch ought to feel secure in her sexuality! Well, here we are!"

Hermione looked up at the dark marquee. In golden letters it read, "The Witch's Wardrobe."

"Interesting," Hermione murmured as she looked at the outside of the store.

Rosmerta smirked. "This here is the best lingerie store outside of Diagon Alley. Hell, I'd even wager even in Diagon Alley you won't get the kind of service Rosie provides!" She leaned in and whispered, "Some think that she's a Legilimens or a Seer. She just *knows* things. She'll get you the *perfect* ensemble. Trust me!" Her words assured the younger witch.

They went into the store and it was very girly. Pure whites, pale pinks, delicate, cream lacy things were everywhere. Rosmerta pulled her towards the back. Here it was NOT so very girly. Hermione's eyes popped wide open at the outfits in front of her: leather, spikes, lingerie that had strategic bits taken out, it was *very* intimidating.

"Here's where you want to be, Hermione! Rosie! Here is Madam Snape!" Rosmerta called.

Rosie, the owner was a very dark, sultry, provocative woman. Her dark brown hair was rich in volume and hung loose about her shoulders. She was no youth, but seemed to know how to use her assets to her advantage. She reminded Hermione of the Muggle actress, Sophia Loren. Rosie eyed Hermione and told her to take off her cloak. Hermione complied, and the witch asked her if she wore anything underneath her robes.

"I have jeans and a tee-shirt on. I'm Muggleborn," she said meekly.

The older witch eyed the girl. *She's a virgin, but not completely. She has yet to experience all of her husband,* she thought.

"No, she is not ready for the trifles back here, she is still too virginal," she said out loud to no one in particular. She turned to Hermione, her dark-lidded eyes were smoky, and she said, "You want to seduce your husband, but you don't know how, yes?"

Hermione opened her mouth and nothing came out. She shut her mouth and nodded.

The witch smiled as she walked a circle around Hermione. "I know Severus. I am most shocked he is married," she said matter-of-factly. "Although what shocks me most is that he has caught himself such a young witch!"

"How do you know my husband?" demanded Hermione. She was getting riled again and she didn't understand why. "I'm sorry for being rude. I didn't mean to come off so harsh," she apologized with her head hanging low.

The older witch laughed. "Don't be concerned! I was a seventh year Ravenclaw when Severus was just a little first year. He was gloomy even then. One doesn't live in the Wizarding world without knowing the more *notorious* members of our community; and Severus Snape is a very well known man. *Very well known*," she said cryptically.

"Come," she said as she offered her hand. She took Hermione's small hand in her own and walked her around to the very front of the store. Hermione glanced behind her to make sure Rosmerta was nearby. It was eerie being in a strange, dark place with this dark, mysterious woman who seemed to see right through her and knew her husband in some strange capacity.

The candlelight shone beautifully on cream lace in front of her. It was a very innocent piece, with tiny pink rosebuds on the shoulder straps and on the center where the cleavage met. Hermione touched it fondly.

"I think this will suit you, my dear," Rosie said sweetly. "Look at me, Madam Snape," she said forcefully.

Hermione jerked her head up as the witch peered into her face. "You are afraid, but you should not be insecure. Severus Snape is a loyal wizard. He sees things that ordinary wizards do not see or appreciate. Yet, it is important for you to feel comfortable and able to please your husband. Here, try this on," she ordered.

Rosie spun her around a bit and marched her into a dressing room. "Take off everything, including your knickers," she said. "Then come out so I can see how it fits."

She did what she was told and came out. Rosie smiled at the young witch. Hermione looked at herself in the mirror. It was like a very short dress that was form-fitted and showed just a peek of her bum. It finished with a lace border around the bottom. She looked in the mirror and couldn't help but cup her breasts. They seemed larger!

Rosie chuckled. "Feel the sides of your breasts. There is a built in padding that gives your bosom a bit of a lift!"

"Oh," said Hermione, "like a Wonderbra."

"Indeed, I am not unfamiliar with Muggle ingenuity," the sultry proprietor replied smugly.

Hermione loved the lingerie. It was very seductive and innocent at the same time. The lace showed the color of her areolas and the dark thatch of hair between her legs. She turned to Rosie confused.

"Am I to come out into the bedroom in just this?" she asked.

"Oh, no!" Rosie laughed. "Although, there's nothing wrong with that! But, you want to *seduce him*, not merely get him randy. Here, this is a garter belt and stockings. Do you know how to put these on?"

"Uh, in theory. I understand the concept, but I've never worn one before."

Rosmerta laughed. "We'll help you!"

In no time, Hermione was in cream silk stockings, garter belt, and the lace lingerie outfit. She felt a bit silly and exposed, especially since she wasn't wearing any underwear!

"Shouldn't I have knickers?" she asked.

"Why?" said Rosie carelessly. "You have no need for knickers if you are having sex, right?"

"Won't I look a bit *desperate* if I show up like this?"

Rosmerta smiled broadly. "Honey, Severus won't even have the ability to think when he sees you in that! As for the knickers, all he'll be thinking is, 'I can shag her, and I won't have to take anything off!'

Hermione blinked and felt warm at the thought of Severus thinking like that. Surely, he must, they had fooled around, even if they had not had intercourse yet.

"Okay, I'll take it!" she said, feeling light-headed.

Rosie went to tally up the amount. She smirked to herself. She was very happy for Severus and his little bride. She was the perfect counterpart for him. She knew how difficult it was going to be for them to build the school back up again. However, they would work together well, holding everything that was needed in place.

Hermione took her bag and shook Rosmerta's hand, thanking her for her help.

"Good luck!" the bar owner teased her.

Hermione smiled slightly. She knew when she came out of the Floo; her husband would know she had lied to him and that he would want to know immediately where she had been since she obviously had not been in her office.

She stepped out of the Floo and there was Severus, sitting calmly on the sofa chair facing her.

"Explain!" he snapped. His expression was etched with anger and worry.

"I went to get a surprise for you. It was a little sensitive, so I made arrangements so I could be discreet."

"Where were you?" he asked calmly this time.

"I went to a store with Rosmerta."

He cocked his head to the side and eyed the bag. "What store?" he asked curiously.

"A lingerie store."

"Which one?"

"The Witch's Wardrobe," she whispered shyly.

He raised an eyebrow. "When will I be able to have my very own fashion show then, Madam Snape?"

"I thought about now," she whispered as she sauntered towards him.

He narrowed his eyes and considered her. "What were you hoping to achieve with this?" he asked bluntly.

She blinked. That was not what she thought she would hear from him.

"I suppose what any woman expects when she buys lingerie," she said stiffly, her ego a bit bruised.

Severus took the bag from her hand and set it on the floor. He then put his hands underneath her cloak and placed them on her hips, nudging her closer to him. She came closer and he lowered his hands to drag his fingers up from her calves, catching her robes and pulling them up higher as he wedged his legs between hers. He pulled her closer until she fell on him, straddling him. She giggled, and he groaned.

"Do you have any idea what that does to me?" he whispered as he looked into her face.

She shook her head.

"No?" he replied. "Hermione, you don't need lingerie to entice me, although I am very curious as to what you've chosen. I've heard witches talk about Rosie and her abilities." He cocked an eyebrow and gave her a very wicked look.

"What do you want tonight, Hermione?" he whispered softly against her neck.

"I want it all."

A/N: Woo-hoo! Major Lemons up next!

...Facing New Fears

Chapter 11 of 23

Mr. and Mrs. Snape consummate their marriage with a couple of hitches that leave Hermione feeling like a sexual failure. Severus tries to encourage her, and a new teacher arrives that sends Hermione's jealousy meter off the charts.

A/N: Okay, y'all, I am doing this from Italy and on my brother-in-law's personal computer that is in Italian. Do I speak Italian?...no! Therefore, what we have here is an amalgamation of which Dr. Frankenstein would have been proud. I can't begin to tell you how thrilling it is to know my little rabid mutant bunny blossomed into a story that so many of you are liking. Many thanks to my darling beta, MadBrilliant, and to all of you! Now, on to the LEMONS!!!

She loved how he made her feel. He was so entrancing in his affections. He stripped her bare and laid her on their bed as he hovered over her in his black robes. She felt so vulnerable, being naked while he was fully clothed, but it increased her desire for him. He lowered himself slowly down her stomach, kissing his passageway downwards, and urged her to open her thighs for him. Hermione immediately propped herself up on her elbows and watched in disbelief as her husband splayed his hands onto her inner flesh. Hermione felt her heart race as she felt his lips—those warm lips that had kissed her mouth until she was mindless—brush against the most sacred and intimate part of her. Hermione felt she had been seared and branded. She heard words fall from her lips that were base and guttural. At first, she felt a small part of her mind cringe as she continued to moan and pant from the pleasure she was experiencing, but soon it was banished.

Severus didn't seem to mind her dirty talk at all—in fact, it seemed to spur him on to give her more until she literally squealed. She felt a building, a pulling from deep inside that exploded. All thought and meaning was contained in a tiny place between her legs where her husband worshiped. She felt scandalous. What he had done to her had to have been indecent, dirty, and *very naughty*. If so, that was what she wanted to be for always. She was done with waiting. This was it. She grabbed him by the arms and pulled him up to face her.

"Clothes. Off. Now!" she demanded.

He smiled and began to undress. She was tingling all over. *This is it! I can't believe it—and I didn't need the lingerie after all!*

He kissed and nipped at her dusky peaks until she started wiggling underneath him in eager anticipation. He positioned himself between her legs and asked once more, "Are you sure, we don't have to if you're not ready."

"Yes, yes! Please go on!" she breathed impatiently.

He looked serious for a moment, and then she felt burning pressure. She felt her eyes scrunch up in pain, and Severus was whispering in her ear to just breathe. She tried, but the tightening feeling was growing, and she felt like she was suffocating. She tried looking at him, but he was so close, and his eyes were so piercing, she felt overwhelmed.

"It hurts," she whimpered.

"I know," he whispered sympathetically as he stroked the hair from her face. "Just try to relax and know I care for you."

She nodded and felt him break into her. She stiffened but it wasn't too painful. It was the pressure, stretching, and fullness that was uncomfortable and threatened to squeeze the air from her. Severus had stilled while she struggled to breathe. Once she began to calm down, he started to stroke slowly and deftly. As he shifted inside her, moving back and forth, she heard him panting and moaning in her ear.

"So good..."

"So tight..."

He picked up the rhythm, and she felt a pleasant sensation of being carried along as he moved in her. She finally opened her eyes to watch him, and he suddenly hiked her up by the underside of her knees, and he drove deeper into her.

"Severus, stop," she said suddenly.

"What?" he said huskily.

"I need to go to the loo!"

"Shhh, go with it," he whispered.

"No! I don't feel comfortable, please stop!" she said as clenched her vaginal muscles around his shaft. He emitted a choke of pleasure, and Hermione didn't realize her clenching was driving him over the edge.

Severus was shaking, trying to hold himself back. "Hermione, I can't—I—so long since..."

Hermione closed her eyes as he convulsed over her, breathing her name. She suddenly felt a rush of lust come over her. It felt wonderful, knowing she had made her husband feel so good. The way he whispered her name against her lips was like a confirmation of sorts. He was hers, as she was his. She was just very confused over how she had felt so strange when it should have felt so right. Hermione felt she had rushed him, that she had ruined everything.

She turned to her side after he withdrew from her and shied from him as he tried to embrace her.

"Hermione?" he asked.

"I'm sorry!" she said as she burst out crying.

Severus turned her to him and held her in his arms as she cried.

"I'm sorry!" she whispered against his chest.

"Don't, Hermione. No, I should have stopped. Please don't cry. It's my fault!"

"No, it's okay, it's not that—that was thrilling! I could feel your passion flowing into me. I just felt so strange and uncomfortable just before... I should have joined you, and I ruined it. I guess it's something I'll have to get used to," she said sadly.

Severus held her and felt like the world's biggest arse. His precious wife, who had given him so much of her body now berated herself for something she didn't yet understand.

"Hermione, the first time is difficult, but we'll learn together, okay?"

She looked up at him, her wet brown eyes clung to his black ones. He was so concerned! He stroked her hair and held her until she slept.

The next day, she looked at their bed sheets and saw all the blood there. She was embarrassed and flung the duvet over on top of it. She took a long, hot shower. She felt an ache in her abdomen all day. She sat in her office, worked on her lesson plans, and ate lunch and dinner with the new staff. The three Frenchwomen were the center of attention as Alun Ketsall and Stan Shunpike made asses of themselves over them. Alun had been sorted earlier in the day, Severus told her over dinner, and he was a Gryffindor.

"But I'm not about to have him be Head of Gryffindor house over you," he murmured confidentially as he watched in disgust over the young man's attempt to work his own unique magic on the young beauties. Hermione thought it was funny. She and Poppy had a hard time not laughing outright at both of the young wizards.

"Well, we shall see tomorrow how the American and Durmstrang Professors do," Hermione said brightly.

"Umm," was his reply. She knew that meant he didn't hold out much hope. She knew as well as he did that the two wizards from Bulgaria would be nothing other than Slytherins. It was the American witch that would be the deciding factor.

They continued the discussion back in his office. "I truly hope this Miss Holden turns out to be a Slytherin. I don't know if I could bear having to turn over Slytherin house to a Durmstrang dunderhead!" he growled.

It was a concern Hermione held as well. Well, they would just have to wait it out. Hermione hoped the American witch would be nice. The three Frenchwomen were just, so, *perfect*! She just didn't feel good enough to be near them.

She had been extremely quiet today and knew that her silence was not lost on her husband. She felt her first attempt at lovemaking had been a complete failure. She felt if it had been a test, she would have received a big, fat "T" for her lack of ability. She was also angry for feeling so low about herself. This wasn't her! Hermione Granger was a very smart, capable, and resourceful young witch! But, that wasn't it. Until now, sex hadn't been a component in her self-esteem. Sure, she had felt bad at times when she had been younger for not being as buxom as Lavender Brown, or as at ease with being flirtatious as Pavarti; but she had been far too busy being adored by Ron before the final battle (although she didn't feel the same way), and had been cared for so unconditionally by Harry, that she had not thought about these issues. Now, she was married, and she had pushed herself into sex before she was emotionally ready because she had been scared of three blonde women that her husband didn't give two figs about!

Later that night as she brushed out her hair, Severus came in from finishing his paperwork for the day and stood leaning against the doorjamb watching her plait her hair absent-mindedly.

"Hermione, why have you been so quiet today? Is there a problem you need to discuss?" he asked quietly.

"N-No," she quaked. "I mean, I have a lot on my mind, and I am feeling confused about things."

He looked worried. "Are you in pain?" he asked nervously.

"A little," she whispered as she focused on her hands in her lap, "but it's almost gone now. It was just an achy feeling, not real pain."

"Hermione," Severus began as he crossed the room and sat on the edge of the bed. "I think we were hasty last night, and I feel very responsible,"

She turned around in her chair to face him and shrugged her shoulders. "I just feel like I failed. It's just—complicated and new and—I don't know," she whispered.

"Hermione, I will understand if you don't wish to be married to me anymore. You deserve to be with someone that you want to make love with. I obviously am not the one that can give you what you need." His hair was falling forward and hid his face from her.

She walked over and knelt in front of him. She took his face in her hands. "No, Severus. I love you. I guess I'm just not good at sex. I want to be!" She took his hands into hers. "I guess we will have to work on it."

He smiled weakly, and she stood up and straddled his lap. "Please come to bed and hold me?" she asked sweetly.

Severus looked into his wife's face. She was so beautiful. He felt like a complete arse for how things ended last night. He was so glad she wanted to try again. He didn't think he could bear it if he lost her now, not after all they had gone through together. He took off his clothes and climbed into bed with his wife. He held her warm body next to his, her small, lovely breasts pressed against him and her wild hair draped over him.

"I don't think you are bad at sex. I think you are wonderful," he whispered shyly as he kissed her hair. Severus counted himself a lucky wizard. Finally, he had a woman who wanted him inside her, to taste her, and to love her in return. Yes, Severus loved her. This was heaven...

Husband and wife stood together as a witch walked determinedly towards them from the Apparition point at the Hogwarts boundary line. Hermione was very excited and curious about meeting the witch from America, especially since she was to be the new Transfiguration Professor and had a stellar reputation amongst her American colleagues. She was very career oriented and was considered to be the best in her field. She was very ambitious, but fair-minded and got along well with her colleagues. Severus and Hermione counted themselves fortunate that she had offered to come help Hogwarts in her time of desperate need. She was going to have large shoes to fill, though. Minerva McGonagall had been more than just a Transfiguration professor; she had been an institution in her own right. And Hermione Snape was going to make sure she lived up to McGonagall's standards.

As Professor Samantha Holden came closer, Hermione's stomach began to slowly plummet. It was plain as she walked closer how pretty she was. She had wavy brown hair, a fresh, happy face not trussed up with make-up, and wore very flattering robes that showed an ample figure. Ample, meaning where it counted, all the other parts of her seemed trim and fit. She was, in fact, pretty much everything that Hermione might have looked like if her body had done what she had wanted and had developed. It was a living nightmare.

Oh, she is nice enough, Hermione thought coolly as she observed her. She was chatty and polite. She drew everyone into conversation and seemed interested in everyone sitting at the Head Table. The three Frenchwomen, as Hermione silently called them in her head, were not so impressed. They looked at her the same way they looked at Hermione. She was affable, professional, and just plain nice. *Damn it!*

Hermione was scared. Each time Professor Holden even so much as looked at Severus, Hermione wanted to throttle her. She kept thinking about how lovely her figure was and glanced down at her own figure and sighed. What was she going to do?

Husband and wife sat in his office, working silently on their separate teaching plans. Every once in a while, Hermione would glance at Severus as he sat hunched over his desk, writing furiously as he was wont to do. After an hour, she was finished for the day, and she stretched out on the couch, waiting for her husband to finish. She lay there watching him, studying the wizard who had become her husband.

"Hermione, you're staring," he said in an annoyed tone.

"Sorry, I just like watching you work," she admitted.

"Whatever for?" he asked, shocked, but still not looking at her.

"I don't know," she said uncomfortably.

"Severus, what do you think of Professor Holden?" she finally asked.

"I don't think of her. I don't know the woman. She's a fine professor from what her references and credentials say. Other than that, time will tell," he said sharply, not looking up at her even once.

Suddenly, he frowned and jerked his head up from his writing. "Why did you ask me that?"

"No reason," she mumbled.

"Hermione," he said as he rubbed his forehead. "I don't have time for this. What is it? And don't lie to me—you are terrible at it!" he warned.

"She's pretty," she whispered.

"Yes, I noticed."

Hermione bolted upright and looked shocked into the eyes of her husband. Her own eyes were tearing up, and she knew she was going to cry at any moment.

He bent his head back over the desk. "You, though, are lovely and beautiful, whereas, she is just merely pretty," he said firmly as he scribbled furiously again.

Hermione smiled. She got up and slinked her way into their private chambers. She was going to wear that get-up she got from The Witch's Wardrobe and have sex with her husband! She showered and primped in the bathroom, taking her time to make herself as attractive as she could. She looked at the finished product and was nervous. She liked how she looked, and she felt sexy—now to see how Severus would react!

She walked out to find her husband sitting on the bed. He had been waiting patiently, well, not *completely* patient, but he *had* waited quite a while to get into the bathroom. When his wife emerged, he sucked in a breath, and the image of her burned a path straight to his loins. *Great Merlin*, he thought, *she's not wearing any knickers!*

Everything else was forgotten as he stalked over to his wife and stroked his hands all over the lace of her outfit. He walked behind her and saw her bum peek out from underneath the lace fringe. *Oh my God!* he groaned inwardly.

"I do hope you were expecting me to do some very naughty things tonight," he said in his most silky voice as he stalked a predatory circle around her. He looked very much like the evil Potions master inspecting a delicate brew as he stared at her. She loved it. He had the most amazing eyes! She could literally feel each part of her body burn and tingle as his dark and unfathomable orbs passed over her. Finally, he sat back on the bed and crossed his arms.

"Walk to me," he commanded.

She did, feeling a bit silly in silk stockings with no shoes, but he obviously couldn't have cared less! She reached him, and he slid his hands up the backside of her thighs, pulling her closer. He maneuvered his knees between her legs, and she stood there spread, tingling and burning as he looked at the dark thatch between her legs. He took his hand and cupped her sex, watching her face as he massaged and rubbed his palm over it. He slipped a finger inside, and Hermione gave a murmur of approval.

"Already so needy?" he asked darkly.

He pulled her to him, and she straddled him. Her toes could almost touch the ground.

"Oh, no!" he teased as he spread his legs farther apart, making it impossible for her to touch the floor. He drank in the sight of her face while she watched him roughly open the fly of his trousers. He pulled her to him and kissed her madly. She wrapped her arms around his neck and pushed her breasts against his chest as he ground his naked erection against her laced-covered stomach.

"I'm going to make love to you, Hermione," he whispered in her ear. "Just like this. With. All. Our. Clothes. On. That's what you wanted, right?" he said slow and seductively as he made his way down her neck.

"Uh-huh," was all she managed to say.

He lifted her by her bum and lowered her onto him. She felt the same full feeling, but the burning was less. She was very aroused by this position, and he insinuated his thumb between his pelvis and her clit and swirled it around and around as he rocked her back and forth on his cock. Soon she was feeling the building pleasure, and she was bucking wildly against him. *My God, what this man can do with just his thumb!* she thought as she moaned and panted. Soon, she was keening and shouting her husband's name as she came. He began to pump wildly into her, muttering her name and grunting things she couldn't quite understand. She felt the strangeness again and the urge to urinate. All the freeing sensations were gone, and she tensed all her pelvic muscles, desperately wanting him to finish before she lost control and peed all over him. Again, it was all Severus needed to send him over the edge. He convulsed and shouted, emptying himself into her.

That had been a marvelous feeling. Hermione had loved how Severus had felt inside her during those precious seconds before he came and then as he had released into her. She could feel the iron hardening of his penis and his desperate need for release. It had been primal, feral, and it had thrilled her. She also loved how his seed had felt shooting into her, warm and soothing. She felt marked, claimed, and desired. All of this because of no knickers! She snuggled against her naked husband feeling triumphant. She was desired. She was lovely and beautiful. Miss Holden from America with her big breasts was only pretty.

A/N: I hope some of that was worth waiting for. Yes, I do understand not all is well with Hermione. That will be a problem as her jealousy spirals out-of-control.

Next up: The lads from Durmstrang come and all is not well.

Sturm and Drang

Chapter 12 of 23

The Durmstrang lads arrive from Bulgaria, and immediately, personalities conflict and two different types of jealousies arise.

A/N: Here begins the clashing of personalities that always come when people who do not know one another are quickly placed into a close-knit community like Hogwarts. Here we will see it isn't only the witches who can't get along! As always, much love to MadBrilliant, and please review!

The two wizards from Durmstrang from Bulgaria came next to Hogwarts: Roman Selinski, the new Defense Against the Dark Arts professor, and Ivan Domansk, the new Herbology professor. Severus was understandably wary of the young Mr. Selinski. He had been preparing to have a very serious chat with the wizard about how he wanted the class to be run. But first...the sorting.

Severus and Hermione stood in the Headmaster's office as the three were sorted into their houses. Hermione placed the hat on Professor Holden's head. It paused for a

moment before hollering,

"SLYTHERIN!"

Hermione looked at her husband, and he remained passive and unreadable as ever. As Hermione continued to Mr. Selinski, she was seething. She knew he was going to make that witch Head of Slytherin house. She just knew it! He would rather take the post himself than give to a Durmstrang fellow! Now, his problems were solved. However, Hermione felt hers had just begun.

Professor Selinski shocked everyone by being named a Gryffindor, but then, true to Severus' prejudice of a Durmstrang having to be a Slytherin, Professor Domansk was sorted into that house.

Later that evening, when all were gathered for dinner, Severus gave a speech for his new staff.

"Professors," Severus began, "I am most pleased that we now have our staff complete. Now, of course, we are only starting with a skeleton crew, as it were. Normally, we would have Divination, Astronomy, and Quidditch instructors, as well. I shall continue my search for a reputable Seer to teach Divination; however, until that time, we shall forgo Divination from the Hogwarts Curriculum.

"The absence of an Astronomy teacher is our greatest loss. Unfortunately, a teacher will not be available until next year. As it is, our graduating class of seventh years has been diminished significantly; the lowering of the Astronomy testing for the N.E.W.T. level shall only consist of first through sixth year. This shall be our only true deficiency in our curriculum since I do not hold Divination nor Quidditch to be foundational for a witch or wizard's education. Nevertheless, I have appointed Professor Belfort as our Flying instructor since it is essential for our charges to learn to ride their brooms.

"I am aware of the decision to not have Quidditch will upset the returning students, especially the older ones. However, since we are beginning a new era here at Hogwarts and I have received more than enough owls from parents concerning the stability of the school, I believe it imperative that we take this first year to focus on the education of our charges. The traditional Hogsmeade weekend visits, for example, shall continue. I will be drawing up a list of which weekends you will be chaperoning.

"Now, I ask that each of you take these next two days to bring to me your class schedules and teaching plans for the semester for my approval. We are going to have 369 students this year. I am eagerly awaiting their arrival and to begin the healing process for all. That being said, there will be certainly many of our sixth and seventh years in deep mourning for the friends they have lost. I expect the Heads of each house to care for their own and if any help is needed, please feel free to speak with me or with Hogwarts Deputy Headmistress, Madam Snape.

"The Heads of Houses are: Madam Hermione Snape for Gryffindor House, Professor Toulouse for Hufflepuff House, Professor Beauharnis for Ravenclaw House, and Professor Holden for Slytherin House. Congratulations, Ladies."

Hermione was seething by the time dinner was over, but she wasn't the only one. Professor Domansk did not seem too happy about not being placed as Head of Slytherin house. Immediately after dinner, there was a heated discussion between the Domansk and Snape over the matter in the Headmaster's office.

As Deputy Headmistress, Hermione was entitled to be present at such a meeting, but the discussion grew quite nasty when Professor Domansk declared that Hermione's title of Deputy Headmistress seemed to be very well put since it seemed the Headmaster was determined to have his own "harem." At that point, Severus asked Hermione to leave and assured her that he would speak with her later. It had been a very wise move on Severus' part. Hermione was already halfway to hexing off the new Bulgarian Professor's bollocks!

She left, but glowered at Domansk as she walked past him. She didn't give fuck-all who he was or where he was from! He had best mind his p's and q's if he wanted to live to see the end of the first semester! She wished to God she had thought to save a pair of extendable ears from Fred and George's shop before it had closed down and the patents sold to Zonko's. She made a mental note to herself as she stood with her ear to a glass at the door to get herself back to Hogsmeade as soon as possible to get one of those damn things! She tried hard to hear what Severus was saying, but damn the man, the more angry he got, the softer his voice and the calmer his demeanor became. She couldn't hear a blasted thing! She half-heartedly hoped he hadn't killed the wizard.

"*Shite!*" she hissed as she gave up trying to spy. Until Domansk had assaulted her character, she had been on his side! In fact, she was going to give Severus holy hell tonight over giving that position to that thrice-damned American! Now Professor Holden and Severus would be spending time alone together, talking about their precious Slytherins and practicing their secret handshake for all she knew! Slytherins had always been separate and apart from the rest of the houses. And to think she had thought all that house rivalry rubbish was over!

She fell backwards onto their bed. Her headknew that Severus loved her and he would never cheat on her, but in her heart she felt so...so inadequate. She knew there was something wrong with her. She couldn't have normal orgasms during sex like she had read in all those books. She had just taken it for granted that everything would just *work* when the time came. Sure, she had the regular clitoral orgasms, but why couldn't she have the big one? There was one that was supposed to happen when they were having intercourse. She had read about them. Why wasn't it happening for her?

I bet Samantha Holden never had problems in that area! She thought childishly. She knew she was being petty and suspicious, but she didn't care *He could have picked that little tosser, but, NO, he had to pick that big-titted Yank!*

She heard raised voices and lightly dashed to the door to listen.

"...if you want to stay on here at this school, you will never, and I repeat NEVER, speak that way in front of my wife! She has the most impressive educational record that this institution has seen for nigh on to fifty years! Everything she has, she has EARNED! Being a Muggle-born made things more difficult than they should have been, but she endured, and she survived the final battle. You do recall Lord Voldemort, do you not? You do realize she was the only survivor when that Killing Curse Blast extinguished all life around the half-mile perimeter where the battle ended? She is an exceptionally gifted and powerful witch, and you had best be thankful to Merlin I saved you from her wrath!"

She heard mumbling and then heard a door slam. She then scurried over to the bedroom when she heard him approaching the door to their quarters.

"WHY did you have to make *her* Head of Slytherin?" she yelled as he walked in the door.

He jerked his hand backward and around again. "Is it my imagination, or am I going to be forced to have the same asinine conversation twice in one evening?" he snarked.

Hermione crossed her arms and looked at him sullenly. "Why not Domansk? He's a Herbology professor! Surely, you don't think he will be spending his free time in the greenhouse plotting to turn all his little Slytherins into Death Eaters?" she said sarcastically.

"Hermione, that wizard is from the place where they practically *breed* dark wizards. I don't care if he turned up here trussed up like a poofster in a tutu, I'm not having any Durmstrang dunderhead as Head of Slytherin house!" he hollered.

He started taking off his robes, muttering under his breath. Hermione still wasn't relenting. She didn't like it one bit!

"If you are so concerned, Severus, why not just be the Head of Slytherin? You've done it before. Why not again? Then you'll have nothing to worry about!" she said with as much lightness in her voice as she could summon.

In the meantime, Severus had stepped into the bathroom to finish getting ready for bed while Hermione had continued to argue with him.

"I am Headmaster and also Potions master! I am too damn busy to be running after all those sniveling idiots on top of that!" he hollered from the bathroom.

Hermione huffed and started pacing back and forth in front of their bed. He came out slowly with a curious look on his face.

"You just don't want Professor Holden to be Head of Slytherin, do you?" he surmised calculatingly.

"I'm sure I don't know what you're on about," she snapped as she got into bed. She turned on her side so she wouldn't have to face him. He started to laugh softly. Hermione bolted upright and glared at him.

"And just what is so funny?" she demanded.

"You're jealous!" he announced. He looked positively triumphant.

Smug Bastard! And just *why* would I be jealous of her?" she said snidely.

Severus slowly advanced towards the bed. "I'm sure I don't know. Although, I would be lying if I didn't say I am intrigued to find out the answer," he drawled.

Hermione continued to glare at him until she realized she couldn't get out of this with her dignity and ego intact. So she lay back down and said harshly, "Goodnight!"

Severus got into bed. He was fascinated. His beautiful wife was jealous over him *She must love me*, he thought. He went to sleep though with mixed feelings. Hermione was angry enough to spit tacks. He would love to shag her just to see if she was into angry sex, but on the other hand, she was obviously too upset to tell him why she was jealous! He thought about his past conduct with the American witch. He had done nothing untoward...nor had she...as far as he knew. But what did he know? No, he knew when a witch was interested in him. Not many had been, until now, and although their approaches varied, one thing was always the same: the look in their eyes. Whenever he had spoken to Professor Holden, she was professional through and through. So, why? He'd have to let this play out.

Up Next: All the witches have a Girls' Night Out! What could *possibly* go wrong? ;)

Witch's Night Out

Chapter 13 of 23

The female staff of Hogwarts go out for a night out of drinking and fun. What could possibly go wrong?

A/N: I hope you all enjoy this chapter and let me know what you think! As always, much love to MadBrilliant.

The next day was the day before the students' arrival. All the staff was excited and anxious. Professor Holden walked into Hermione's classroom and greeted her.

"Hey! Here you are! I've been lookin' for you!" she said excitedly.

"Why?" Hermione asked suspiciously.

"Well, I finally talked some sense into the blonde triplets and Pomfrey, and we are goin' out to have ourselves some fun before the kiddos arrive!"

She's in a right good humor! Hermione noted.

"Just the girls?" she asked.

"Just the gals!" Samantha replied with a big smile. "Shake it, sister! Let's get our drink on!"

Hermione giggled. Maybe she wasn't so bad. They walked instead of Apparating. Samantha said she wanted to get to know her better. She was from the Midwest; a state called "Ohio." She talked really fast, something about Buckeyes, Ohio State, and a rival team called "Michigan." Hermione was a bit lost.

She studied the witch while she spoke. Samantha was built the same, just more "developed." Her hair was light brown, more towards the blonde side, not like Hermione's, which was more on the red. Samantha's hair was wavy, not wavy, AND curly, like hers, plus her face was shaped differently. It was rounder and wider, where hers was longer and thinner. Hermione noticed she had tattoos on her right ankle and left wrist. She was strident, forceful, and determined. She was definitely a strong-minded witch. She had pale, creamy skin, but close up you could tell she was older. *She must be in her thirties!* Hermione thought. At first, it made her feel better, but then, no, Severus was in his late thirties.

Samantha was also Muggle-born. She was so excited to have another "gal" on staff that was a Muggle-born as well. Hermione told her about her growing up, her parents who were dentists, traveling to France, and how she found out she was a witch.

"Gosh, Hermione, you were so lucky! My folks were traumatized. I had to go all the way to Massachusetts to go to my school! There are three separate schools in and around Salem. I went to the Salem Academy for Witchcraft and Wizardry. It was an awesome school. I loved it! You see, in the States, you're tested before you even start school. I showed aptitude for Transfiguration at an early age, and the Salem Academy specializes in Transfiguration, Charms, and Defense...you know, stuff that has to do with using your wand. You know, I didn't realize until I left school and started my apprenticeship, but there are a lot of wizards and witches out there that think wands are very overrated and silly!"

Hermione laughed at that. *Oh, if she only knew about Severus' beliefs on "foolish wand-waving"!*

Samantha just laughed with her. "I know...that's out-of-control! I mean, I realize that if a witch or wizard has a talent for wandless magic, that's great. That's their thing. Or your husband...he probably isn't into wands either, being a Potions master."

Hermione was getting riled again. She didn't like her even mentioning Severus. She started to tune the woman out. In a strange way, she reminded Hermione of Tonks. Tonks had a carefree, fun, open way about her. However, Hermione kept reminding herself that Samantha was a Slytherin. As they went into the Three Broomsticks, Hermione decided she was going to start listening closer and learn what she could about this witch and remember what old Mad-Eye Moody used to say about "Constant Vigilance"!

Poppy and the "Blonde Triplets," as Samantha called them, were already there. They had already started drinking. Poppy told them not to worry; she declared she had plenty of hangover potion back at the school so no one had to worry about being sick tomorrow. So they drank and they drank.

Rosmerta joined in the fun a bit between customers. Her cousin, Sally, was working with her now that the village coming back to life and the students returning. Sally was put to work, and Rosmerta decided to join in the fun. She went and got Rosie to come and have a pint. They all were starting to get right pissed when the conversation turned south.

Satine said, "You know, I don't know 'ow I am going to get through 'eez semester. There air no men 'ere!"

Rosemerta interjected, "Wait, wait a minute! Now don't you have those two blokes from Durmstrang and also that nice British boy, Alun?"

"Zat es zee problem!" said Christine. "Boyz! Not men!"

Samantha started giggling in her lager. "Hermione doesn't have to worry nuthin' about that," she said in a teasing manner.

All the women began to whoop and laugh when Samantha said that. Hermione snickered and smiled in her drunken haze.

Emilie spoke up. "It has been so long since I've had good sex!"

Samantha piped up in agreement, "Preach it, sister!"

"You know the good kind?" Emilie said.

"Where he's hittin' all the right places?" said Samantha laughing.

Rosemerta was cracking up laughing. "I remember this bloke, oh, it must have been five years ago. I swear he would have me going in a minute. He really knew how to pound!"

Samantha snorted in her drink. "There's nothing like it when a guy can get that sweet spot. I don't even care if he touches my clit. I just want it in me!"

Hermione started to choke on her drink. *What is she talking about?*

Rosmerta was very well into her cups now. She staggered to Hermione, pounded on her back to stop her choking, and said, "Come on, love. We all want to know, and we swear, we'll dish if we bag one of the other lads, but come on, what's it like shaggin' ole Snape?"

Christine and Satine were crying, they were laughing so hard. Poppy was red as a beet. The only one that seemed to still have her wits about her was Rosie, and she was looking at Hermione very carefully.

"I-I don't know what you mean," Hermione said groggily.

Christine said, "Everyone knows that the size of a man's nose..."

"...Is in direct proportion to his penis size!" finished Samantha.

Hermione was way in over her head. But they all wanted to know. She gathered all the wits she had left about her and said, "Severus would kill me if I told tales. I'll just say everything is the way it should be!" she said with a stupid grin on her face. *There, let them think I'm normal like they all are!*

She sat and listened as the talking continued. They all were so knowledgeable, and clearly they knew something she didn't. Sex was incredible, penis size was very important, positions, sex toys, fetishes, they knew so much about men and what they liked and how they knew men liked it. Hermione started to feel very, very low and proceeded to get very, very drunk!

Hermione was watching Samantha as she talked about her sex life; she was very open and visual in her descriptions of the encounters she'd had. All of a sudden, in her drunken haze, Hermione got a mental picture of Severus taking Samantha against a wall and him doing all the things she was talking about. Hermione felt like her heart was being ripped out of her. She burst out crying, and before the others could say a word, Rosie was there and intercepted the questions that were thrown.

She wrapped an arm around her and stood her up quickly from the table. "Oh, this poor thing, bless her! She's just too young to know how to hold her drink! She's probably never had anything more than a glass of elf-made wine!" she said sympathetically.

The other girls were sad for her. Choruses of "Are you gonna be alright?" and "We should get her back home!" rang through Hermione's head.

"No," said Rosie as she smiled. "You girls have fun! I'll take care of her," she said sweetly as she ushered the upset girl out of the Three Broomsticks.

Hermione had worked hard to calm herself as they had walked out the front door, but once they were outside, she burst into tears again.

"I want my mum!" she cried as she slid to the ground.

Poppy came out. She was tipsy, but could still talk somewhat normally. "Oh, Rosie, I feel s-so bad. I s-should get her back to the Headmaster!"

Rosie stood in her shawl and regarded the crying girl on the ground. Finally, she said, "No, Poppy, you watch out for those girls in there. I'll see to Madam Snape."

Poppy went back inside while Rosie picked Hermione up from the ground. They walked a bit out of way and Rosie led them to a bench where they could talk privately. Hermione curled up into a ball, put her head on Rosie's lap, and sobbed. Rosie stroked her hair and rubbed her back. A few minutes passed, and Hermione grew quiet.

"You've had a good cry," Rosie said firmly. "Now sit up! You tell me what is wrong," she said as she crossed her arms.

Hermione had sobered up a little after her crying jag ended, so she started to tell Rosie about everything. How much she missed Harry and Ron, how much she wanted her mum and dad, how confusing everything was now she was married, and how scared she was that she wasn't going to be a good teacher.

"So much for a young girl," said Rosie sadly as she shook her head.

Hermione sniffed and sat up straighter. "I'm no girl, I'm almost nineteen!"

"Oh, well, then," said Rosie with a shrug of her shoulders. "I suppose you have it all figured out! I mean, you are nineteen, you're an old married lady now with husband twice your age, life experience, and you're taking on the same responsibilities he has, not to mention you've lost all your dearest friends and have no parents...but you're nineteen. You're fine!" she finished with a mocking look on her face.

Hermione smiled faintly, understanding her mistake. "Sometimes, I just don't know what I'm doing," she said with a sigh. She looked back towards the Three Broomsticks and said, "They all know so much, and I didn't know half of what they were saying!" She turned to face Rosie, and the older witch took her hand and gestured for them to get up and start walking towards the castle.

"Well, they probably don't either," she said off-handedly. "Look, when people get into the drink, they say a lot of silly things. Experiences get blown way out of proportion,"

Hermione lowered her head and the tears came back. She stopped walking, lifted her head and sobbed, "Rosie, I'm a failure!" as she shook her head sadly.

"Come on," Rosie said as she put her arm around the young woman, "Let's walk. Why are you a failure?"

"It's humiliating," Hermione whispered.

"Let me guess," the older witch whispered in return as she gave her arm a squeeze, "you aren't having those 'experiences' like the other girls were talking about, right?"

Hermione went pale as she turned to look into Rosie's eyes. "Please, don't tell Severus, he'll be so angry! He is a very private..."

Rosie raised a hand to stop her. "Shush! I won't say anything to anybody. I don't talk about what people buy in my stores, I don't talk about the bodies of the women who come into my store looking for that perfect piece of lingerie, and I don't talk about my clients' sex lives. And you would be amazed at just how much I've heard," she confided.

Hermione shook her head sadly. "I don't know what is wrong with me. I'm not normal. He knows what he's doing, but I don't. I know it's me. The things they were saying, I've read about it in books! There's supposed to be a huge thing with sex, and I'm not getting it. I mean, I get you know...*the regular orgasms*," she whispered. "It's just when it's happening, there's just, I'm sorry...I can't talk about it!" She silently cried as she walked on towards the castle. Rosie walked beside her.

Rosie patted the young witch on her back. "It's okay, Hermione. You'll talk when you are ready," she said.

When they reached the castle, Rosie helped Hermione up to her quarters. Severus was working at his desk and jumped up at the sight of his wife with Rosie.

"Rosie? Hermione? What the hell is going on?" he demanded angrily.

Rosie brushed off his anger expertly while she settled Hermione on the couch. "Shut your gob, Severus! Oh, the girls gave her too much drink, and she was overwhelmed by it. She had a good cry, said she misses her family and her friends." She gave him a stern look, and he softened.

"Thank you, Rosie, for helping her," he said sourly.

"Anytime, Severus. May I use your Floo? Is it still connected?"

"Of course, go right ahead. I won't be closing it until the morning," he said absent-mindedly as he walked over to his sleeping wife. He looked down at her. She was passed out cold.

"Do you need help?" Rosie whispered as she watched Severus watch his wife with deep concern.

"No, I can manage," he said as he picked her up in his arms.

"Severus, my Floo is open. Remember that when you are finished putting her to bed."

Together for a Purpose

Chapter 14 of 23

The school year begins at Hogwarts.

A/N: I hope you all enjoy this chapter! It was a little emotional to write. Please read and review! Thanks to my beta, MadBrilliant.

"Rosie?"

"Severus? Come back here," the woman called.

Severus walked into a sitting room that was connected to the shop through a door.

"So, you still live in the back of your shop?" he asked.

"Yes, I've done quite well for myself. I could live more opulently, but I like my little life with my clients. They trust me, and I care for each one that comes in my shop. Although, I must say since the war ended business has been low."

"Yes, it is strange how our world is so archaic compared to the Muggle world," Severus mused as he sat down in a cozy chair by the fire.

"And yet, how many Death Eaters' wives have come into my store? I have served them more than any other kind of witch. The purer the blood, the stranger the taste for the obscene...just like Muggles. And they professed to think they were better, pah!" she exclaimed.

Severus smiled at her knowingly.

"I'm glad you are alive, Severus. You were the only decent wizard in the whole tribe of that madman!" she said as she smiled at him.

"Thank you, I appreciate that. I also appreciate how you helped me during the war when I needed a quick escape, a hiding place. I should have paid my respects sooner. I have to say I was most impressed and intrigued when my wife told me she had come here to purchase lingerie from you," Severus replied.

"Tell me, Severus, was I right?" She smiled smugly at him as she leaned forward to anticipate his answer.

"Your gift is intact. You haven't lost your edge," he offered.

Rosie leaned back into her chair and studied the wizard across from her. "You are a gentleman, Severus. Either out of shyness, inexperience, or because of what you've

been forced to see. I was very happy to meet your wife. She is a good girl. She will become a good wife for you."

Severus frowned, "Rosie, she *is* a good wife. I love her very much."

"I know, Severus. I know you try to make her happy. She wants to make you happy as well, but she's young and feels very insecure. She needs to talk about it. But she won't because she feels ashamed," she said sadly.

Severus stood up. He felt embarrassed by her frankness. "Thank you, Rosie. I appreciate you watching over Hermione."

"Of course, Severus, you are like a son to me. Promise me you will speak with your wife," she pleaded as she clasped her hands together as she looked up at him.

"Rosie," he said sternly. "She is my wife and you are breaching a private issue. Her happiness means a lot to me. Please do not interfere," he warned.

"Fine, Severus!" She raised her hands in surrender. "You young people think you have all the answers to love and living. You remember that the fates spared you both, and now you have been brought together for a purpose larger than only yourselves. Nonetheless, even those who must be strong for others still need to tend to their own garden. You are a *husband*, Severus. I trust you to be smart enough to understand what that word means!" she said with a glaring eye.

He stood there silently, weighing her words. Rosie had been a bulwark during many a dark day after Albus' death. She always had a way to understand and see past the immediacy of the problem. He would take her words to heart.

"I will speak with her, Rosie," he answered softly.

"Good! Now, go and be happy with your bride!" she said as she shooed him out of her house.

Morning came with a splitting headache that made Hermione feel like her skull had been split open. Severus was there with a potion and some water. He helped her drink it all down and let her rest for another hour. She woke again refreshed and clear-headed.

Today was the day they had all been working hard towards! A new day and a new era of Hogwarts was beginning! Last minute plans were being finished, and the Charms teacher, Madam Snape, charmed the candles to hover overhead the coming students. She kept remembering dear Professor Flitwick. She hoped she would do him proud.

As Deputy Headmistress, she was in charge of greeting the new first years and getting them Sorted in their houses. She watched as the first years came in the boats, led by Stanley Shunpike. She felt the tears slip down her cheeks as she remembered the beloved Hagrid eight years ago when he had said "Firs' years! Firs' years over here!" She recalled fondly going to his hut and trying to eat his horrible rock cakes! She remembered the day Ron's spell backfired and they were in his hut as he was vomiting slugs. Hagrid was such a comfort that day. He had always thought she was special. She had thought he was too.

She dried her eyes and fixed her pointed hat on her head. She wanted to do Professor McGonagall proud. There would be no nonsense, no messing about. Hers would be the first impression of a Hogwarts professor. She would not let the ones who came before her down.

As she waited alone at the top of the stairs, she caught the poltergeist, Peeves, out of the corner of her eye. She saw him with a water balloon, and she fixed her hands on her hips.

"PEEVES!" she screeched. "What the hell is this?"

"Oh! Good evening, Deputy Headmistress. Peevsey just wants to have some fun with the ickle firsties!" he said with syrupy sweetness.

"Peeves," she ground out. "You do one thing...you make a mockery of this, and I swear, I shall sic the Bloody Baron on you!" she hollered. "Now go away!"

"In a snit! Such a fussbudget! McGonagall used to enjoy my little romps, even if she had to put on a sour puss!" he exclaimed. He went to go away quietly, but Hermione wasn't going to be fooled. She had her wand at the ready. He turned around suddenly and hurled the water balloon at her.

She flicked her wand with a non-verbal *Protego* and the balloon burst into bits, water splashing everywhere before it could hit her. Peeves gave her an extra-loud raspberry as he took off. Soon, Hermione looked over the banister and watched the "ickle firsties" make their way through the watery mess. One unfortunate lad slipped and fell. Hermione was still a ways off from detection and found she had to suppress an urge to laugh. She looked up and Peeves was smiling at her only his head was peeking out from around the corner.

She should have hexed him, the naughty thing! Instead, she decided to let the moment be.

"Welcome back, Peeves."

With a raucous laugh, he floated away. Hermione steadied herself as she faced her first group of first years. The first class of students who would never experience the feeling of dread and war that had colored her life since the first day she stepped into this castle. All they would know of Harry Potter and Voldemort would be through schoolbooks.

One by one, they came to be Sorted. They were fresh-faced and young, full of happiness and hope. No one stood out, save for one. Colleen Creevey. She looked so much like her brother, Colin, who had perished. She was sorted into Gryffindor, and Hermione saw her older brother Dennis wrap his arm around her protectively as she sat next to him.

She sat as her husband welcomed them back to Hogwarts. She could not help but notice the huge emptiness of the Gryffindor and Hufflepuff tables. The Slytherin table was packed full, but the smug expressions they normally wore had been wiped clean off. Hermione was glad. They should be ashamed they did not join their classmates in the battle.

She barely registered what Severus was saying. She was just ready for this day to end and to have them all safely tucked away in their beds, but she knew there would be questions and tears back in the common room.

Hermione returned to her chambers and found her husband waiting for her. She took off her clothes and slipped into bed. Severus kissed her passionately. He ran his hand down the length of her, finally lowering his mouth between her legs. Hermione arched her back and gave in to the sensations she was feeling. She came fast and hard. Severus rose up and held her close to him as he hovered over her.

"Tell me, Hermione," he whispered.

"W-what?" she asked softly.

She looked into his eyes. He looked so passionate and lustful; it was almost overwhelming.

"Tell me what is hurting you so much?" he prodded.

"Now?"

"Yes, now," he urged. "Do you like making love with me?"

"Yes, it feels good...most of the time," she replied shyly.

"Hermione, what is it?" he asked. He was sitting on his knees, his hands on his parted thighs. She raked her eyes over him. His body was flushed and his erection was looking painful. She grabbed a part of the sheet and covered herself.

"When you do that," she began nervously.

"Do what?" he asked, looking confused.

"It's fine, and then I feel this urge to pee and it makes me feel uncomfortable. Then I get tense and just want it to be over," she whispered.

"Hermione, a lot of women feel that when their g-spot is stimulated," he said in his lecture voice. "You do know about the g-spot, do you not?" he asked impatiently.

"Yes! Of course I do. You needn't be so snappish about it though!" she retorted, offended by his insensitivity.

"Hermione, I apologize for my tone. What if you just ignored the feeling and went with it?" he suggested.

She looked at him in horror. "What? Urinate on the bed? On you? I don't think so! That ~~is~~*disgusting!*"

"Hermione, you will not urinate! Good Lord, woman! Didn't your mother...well, no, of course not! Didn't your Gryffindor schoolmates talk about these things? Isn't that what girls do?" he blurted out, exasperated with the entire discussion.

Hermione felt the tears well up at the mention of her mum and her friends.

"I'm no longer in the mood, Severus," she whispered as she turned away to slip under the covers.

"Well, that's just fucking perfect!" he roared. He got up to go cool off. But he couldn't help himself. "I have absolutely no idea why you insist on behaving like a silly, little girl! Even if you did end up urinating on me, it wouldn't be the end of the world!"

Hermione sat up and looked at him in shock.

He continued. "I know what this is about! Do not concern yourself, Madam. I shall not bring my affections where they aren't wanted. You can keep your prudish ways, wife. I won't touch you again!"

Hermione was hurt. She was more hurt than she could comprehend. She lay on her right side and cried. She was so confused. Now ~~he~~*was* going to find someone else. There were probably hundreds of witches who weren't defective that would love the chance to shag the Headmaster of Hogwarts. The thought of him in the arms of another woman broke her heart. She sobbed hysterically, not knowing her husband was watching in confusion and concern.

He waited until she had sobbed herself to sleep before he carried on into the bathroom. Why on earth should she react so? He had to get to the bottom of this!

Jealousy

Chapter 15 of 23

Hermione overhears two Slytherin students talk about Professor Snape having an affair with Professor Holden. Later, Hermione discovers another affair that has been happening under everyone's nose.

A/N: An extra long update for everyone. This fic has broken 300 reviews and I am honored. I am so happy this story is being enjoyed so much! Special thanks to Southern Witch who pointed out a few beta errors to me, and hugs to my faithful beta, MadBrilliant, who worked on this while very sick with a head cold. You're the greatest!

Severus sat alone in his office when there was a rap on the door.

"Enter," he muttered.

Professor Holden walked inside.

Severus glanced up from his paperwork. "May I be of assistance, Professor Holden? Has one of my Slytherins run amuck?"

She smiled. "No, Headmaster. I wanted to plan a time to discuss with you the rules and various things you wanted me to know about your house."

Severus smirked. "Come now, Miss Holden, it is your house now! You are in charge, not I."

"Please, Headmaster, can you call me Samantha in private? I understand the need for decorum in front of the students, but when it is just the staff, can you just call me by my given name?" she asked.

He frowned, but then relented. "Fine, but there shall be no reciprocity! You shall refer to me as Professor Snape or Headmaster. I shall meet you in the Slytherin common room tonight and go over some things with you. Now, Miss...uh, Samantha, you weren't here living in our country during Voldemort's reign of terror or the war. There is much for you to learn about the various prejudices of the Wizarding world here. Yet, from what I've heard about Americans, your Muggle society has their own issues with prejudice." He motioned her to take a seat.

"True," she admitted. "Yet, I have to admit, I don't know much about this whole "pure-blood, Muggle-thing."

He studied her for a bit and then spoke with reserve. "I must say I was very shocked to see you sorted into Slytherin, being that you are Muggle-born. It is unheard of! But

perhaps it is a sign that things are changing."

"Well, Headmaster, I honestly don't know if I am truly a 'Muggle-born' or not. I was raised in a group home for orphans until I was adopted when I was five. So, I could be anything, I suppose," she confided.

"Interesting," Severus mused as he traced one finger around the sides of his mouth. He stared off for a bit, but came back into focus. "Well, I shall see you at seven o'clock in the common room, then."

"Fine," she replied as she stood up and walked out. As she did, Hermione was coming up the stairs.

Hermione walked in Severus' office as Samantha walked out. Samantha gave a nod and a polite "Hello." Hermione started to get riled.

"What did Professor Holden want?" she asked innocently, trying to keep her rancor under control.

He was back to work behind his desk and did not hear his wife speaking to him. He was so busy these days it was unbelievable that he wasn't killing himself from all the responsibility.

He dropped his quill and rubbed his eyes. "I really have to hire a Potions master," he sighed. "I just can't keep up with all of this anymore."

"Severus, did you even hear me?" she asked again angrily.

"What? I'm sorry, Hermione. I just don't have the time," he apologized hastily.

"But you have all the time in the world for Professor Holden!" she snapped.

He looked up at her as if she were insane. Then the realization that had dawned upon him from their previous argument crept across his face.

"Aha, so are you finally going to tell me what this is all about?" he asked smugly as he rested his hands behind his head.

Hermione narrowed her eyes at him. *Bastard!* "This has nothing to do with anything other than the fact you seem to have all the time in the world for your newest Slytherin, yet you can't spare a moment for your wife!"

"I'd like to think of you as the Charms instructor during the day, my dear. It makes things less complicated. If you are having a problem with the brats in your classroom, I have all the time you need. However, after hours, you are my wife and you know as well as I do, I do not like to bring work into our bed. So, I would appreciate you not bringing our bed into our work," he replied smoothly.

Hermione was at a loss. She felt so out of her league at times with him! And why shouldn't she? He was after all twenty years her senior, and although an attraction existed before they were forced into marriage, still the fact that it was a marriage that was orchestrated by the Ministry and necessitated by Hogwarts magnified all of Hermione's insecurities about being Snape's wife.

He regarded her, standing there looking lost, when she only wanted to look calm and in control. He waited for her to rail at him, to scream or just blurt out what the problem was, but she seemed still unable to articulate it. He sighed and picked up his pen. She slowly turned around to leave.

"Hermione," he called out to her.

She turned around, hopeful that he would say something to assuage her mind.

"Obviously, you came here for something. What is it?" he asked softly.

"I just decided to come up here for my free hour instead of my office. I thought perhaps there was something you might want to say to me or discuss..." Her voice trailed off.

"Hermione, I know that you cried yourself to sleep last night, and it bothered me a great deal. I am willing and ready to hear anything you have to say to me. Let's talk tonight, after the day's work is done," he offered.

"Okay," she agreed as she nodded. She slowly turned and made her way towards the door. As soon as she placed her hand on the knob, he was there, his hand on hers. She jerked away and turned around, her back to the door and her husband looming over her. He was looking at her suggestively, and she blushed.

He placed his hand under her chin and raised it up to face him. She looked sad and frightened. He couldn't understand why! After all the physical and emotional intimacy they had shared, why did it seem they were back at the beginning? *Damn!*

He leaned in and whispered, "May I give my wife a kiss?"

"Won't that disrupt your need to compartmentalize your life? I'm the Charms instructor, after all, not your wife!" she retorted coolly.

He smirked. "Yes, but perhaps I feel like kissing the Charms instructor. She is, after all, the most delectable witch around," he said huskily.

She wanted nothing more than to point out all the flaws in his reasoning, but she loved that he had complimented her so highly. She smiled in spite of herself, and he grasped her body, holding her firmly to him. He gave her a searing kiss that he hoped would leave no doubt in his wife's mind that she was the only witch for him. She responded eagerly to his kiss, and when they broke apart, she was glassy-eyed and had a very dreamy look on her face.

"Oh, dear," he murmured as he gazed at her.

"What?" she asked, snapping a bit out of her dream-like state.

"Well, that's better. But you should clear your mind, Hermione. It would not do for your next class to be sniggering behind their textbooks about how their teacher looks like she has been snogged senseless!" he warned her.

She slipped out, unable to retort. She was fast becoming an idiot! What happened to the Hermione that had no qualms whatsoever about calling him an "evil bat"? She knew the answer of course! It all came down to her deep insecurities about sex. She went to her office and dove into her work. She would talk to him tonight after curfew. That's what she would do!

It was 9:30pm and Hermione was fuming! It was not Severus' night for rounds; she had already checked her Gryffindors for the night and had even talked with little Colleen Creevey about her brother Colin's death. She was having quite the time about it. It was better now that she was here with Dennis, but she had been such a pet of her eldest brother, she cried nearly every day over her loss of him.

After getting her in bed, she had rushed back to their quarters, thinking that Severus would be fuming at her tardiness. He was such a stickler for punctuality! Instead, the rooms were empty. He wasn't here! She decided to go to the dungeons. Perhaps there was some urgent need for a potion that had come up. Maybe he got caught up with

all the work he had juggling the two roles of being Headmaster *and* Potions master.

The classroom and his office he used to meet his students specifically for classroom problems were empty. She had absolutely no idea where he could be. Then she heard voices from outside the classroom. She extinguished the lights and cast a Disillusionment spell over her and followed the sounds of the voices. There was Astoria Greengrass, a seventh-year Slytherin, with another younger Slytherin girl whose name she could not recall. They were heading from the Slytherin common room to somewhere.

"...don't understand how we got that Mudblood as Head of our house!" Astoria was saying.

"They seemed to be rather chummy!" sneered the other girl.

"Well, Snape does have a thing for Mudbloods, doesn't he? After all, he married one! Oh, I wish I could see the look on that slag's face if she caught the two of them there!" She laughed at the thought.

"Granger thinks she's got old Snape wrapped around her finger! I wonder if someone *should* tell her he's shagging that Mudblood Yank on the side!" Astoria jeered.

Hermione was incensed. *Where in the bloody hell were they? In the common room?* She would kill him and then her. She was blind with jealous rage. She didn't know the password, but being Deputy Headmistress had its perks. She walked through the door and scanned the room. There in a corner of the room sat her husband with that-that *whore*! She Dissoluted herself and walked in carefully, listening into their conversation.

"I'm confused, what are you trying to say?" Professor Holden was asking him.

"It doesn't matter," he said absently. "The point is that she needs to leave. She needs to go, and then things will be the way they should be. Don't concern yourself about the other evening. I will speak with her. Just don't say anything, I don't want her suspecting."

"Alright," she answered.

At that moment, Hermione whispered a "*Finite Incantatum*" and marched over to them. They stood up quickly as Hermione went right into a full-blown pique of rage.

"What don't you want me suspecting?" Hermione yelled at the two.

"Oh, shit!" Professor Holden breathed as she shielded her eyes from the two. She tried to ease her way out of the room and was greeted with a wand to her throat.

"How dare you fuck my husband, you bitch!" Hermione screeched.

"Hermione!" bellowed Severus. "Enough! Professor Holden, you may leave." He summoned Hermione's wand from her hand, and she stood there shaking and glowering at her husband. Samantha maneuvered her way past the irate witch and fled the scene.

"Give me back my wand, Severus!" she warned as she walked slowly towards him.

"Why? So you can go about the castle hexing innocent women at will?"

"That...that *witch* is not innocent!" Hermione thundered. "How could you? How could you after everything we've been through and the..." She stopped, unable to say what she wanted. She burst into tears and ran out of the common room. Severus strode after her into the hallway. "Hermione, you will not act this way!" he hissed at her through clenched teeth.

"NO!" she screamed at him furiously.

He was taken aback by her rage. She was seething with anger and jealousy.

He came to himself and grabbed her roughly by the arm. She tried to free herself from his grip, but he had an iron hold on her arm that was painful. He dragged her out of the dungeons and back to their quarters. She tried to say something, and he turned viciously on her.

"Don't you say one word!" he growled dangerously.

When they reached the privacy of their quarters, Severus rounded on her.

"What the hell did you think you were doing? You realize don't you that every Slytherin heard that disgusting display! It will be all over the school and probably will be in the *Daily Prophet* before next week's end! Damn it!" he raged.

"Don't you make this out to be my fault, Severus Snape!" Hermione screeched. "I heard Astoria Greengrass and another girl talking about how you're shagging that slag behind my back! Your *precious* Slytherins already know about you and her and are laughing their heads off!"

"Hermione," Severus began angrily, "you must listen..."

"NO!" she hollered. "You are going to listen to me! Do you have any idea how difficult it's been for me since we've been married? I'm constantly wondering if I measure up or if all of the witches who are fawning all over you will finally catch your eye. I'm surrounded by more 'experienced' witches who, by the by, can have vaginal orgasms at the drop of a hat! Not to mention that I find you canoodling with that *American*...in the Slytherin common room?"

Her voice grew quiet. "How could you do it?" she heard herself whisper. "How could you humiliate me in front of my students? I know I shouldn't blame you, it's me! I am aware that I'm defective. Breasts too small, hips too narrow, not pretty or sexy. I guess it was just a matter of time before you got tired of me and went after a woman who has a body for days!"

Hermione's eyes started to tear up and voice began to shake. "It's j-just that w-we did things, i-intimate things, and I can't believe you would do them with another woman!" She burst out crying at the end and slumped down on their bed.

Severus walked over to his wife and knelt down at her knee. This was serious, far more serious than he'd realized. *God, I'm no good at this shite! I'm going to have to speak with Rosie. Why do women have to be so bleeding emotional?*

He steeled his voice. "Hermione, listen to me. I am your husband, and although it wasn't our intention to marry under such circumstances, we did it anyway, for Hogwarts. However, *loving you* has nothing to do with this school, and as for defective, I don't think you are defective. You're just new at this, and we have a lot of things to figure out. People just don't normally start having sex when they are virgins and have the same experiences as those who have been at it for years." He sighed in frustration and confusion. There was so much to untangle, he didn't have the time or the energy to deal with her insecurities. *I should be the offended one! She accused me of cheating!* He stood up and began to pace the room. He tried to check his temper, but finally lost it.

He rounded on her and roared, "I am not having an affair, damn it! Miss Holden and I were meeting about things she needed to be aware of, now that she is Head of Slytherin!"

"What was all that talk about her not worrying about things, and that you'd take care of it, and I need to leave?" she shot back at him.

"Hermione, I was going to suggest you go to Australia and recover your parents! You miss them. Your life has been ripped to shreds, and you've been frantically trying to put the pieces back together!" he snapped. "Your old life is gone. It's time for you to grieve it and get on with things. Having your parents back, I think, might help you. There is only so much I can do," he said crossly.

She stood up and confronted him. "Why the bloody hell were you talking to *her* about me? About things she knows nothing about. Things that are personal and private for me...for *us*!"

He turned in frustration to leave and decided to turn back and confront her. *Why* didn't you tell me about that night at Rosmerta's? *Why* did I have to hear about *my wife* not feeling...*satisfied*...in bed from other people! Why haven't you been honest with *me*?

She looked up at him sorrowfully. "Severus, I'm sorry. I just feel so insecure around these women. They know things I don't...they are able to do things I can't, things I know a man wants."

"When have you ever heard me complain? Have I ever told you I didn't want you? Have I ever once rejected your affections? NO! Why? Because I love you. YOU. Miss Granger. I fell in love with you *before* I married you, and I waited patiently for you." He took her face in his hands and kissed her tenderly on the mouth. "Each time you've let me touch you is heaven itself," he whispered. "I love you, Hermione!" he said firmly.

She pulled back and asked, "I'm not as developed as other women are. Are you sure I'm enough?"

He sighed and closed his eyes. "Hermione, you're more than enough."

She wanted to believe him, she really did, but as she thought about it, she just couldn't see why he would not want someone more enticing and sexual. The days went on, and Hermione watched over the women with an eagle eye. Whispers from the students made her feelings of being not good enough worse. She found herself staring at Samantha and the others, envying their bodies and charm. They moved so gracefully, and their robes were so attractive and showed their figures beautifully.

One day, she went out walking to clear her head when she heard strange noises from the direction of the forest. She was curious but didn't want to spy on anyone. Her curiosity won out, and she walked cautiously towards the noises she was hearing. She was shocked! There was Professors Holden and Selinski having sex! She watched as he took her against a tree, her naked legs were wrapped around him and she was screaming like he was killing her. *Maybe, he's raping her!* she thought desperately. But just then, Samantha grabbed his face and was kissing him passionately. Whatever he was doing, she was approving! Hermione was fascinated. He was really being rough with her, and she loved it.

She was so mesmerized by the sight that she didn't hear Professor Beauharnis sneak up behind her and whisper,

"It looks like he's giving her the high, hard one, eh?"

Hermione jumped two feet and landed on her arse, screeching, "*What the hell?*"

"Quiet!" Emilie shushed her as she helped her up from the ground. "Don't interrupt!"

"We should leave," Hermione said, suddenly feeling ashamed that she had been caught watching another couple having sex. She hung her head and averted her eyes.

"Oh, Hermione!" Emilie said soothingly. "Watch and learn! Maybe you'll see something you can use on your husband!"

She was unabashedly unashamed. Hermione looked at Emilie and saw she was intently scrutinizing their technique. She started looking again, and it seemed that Samantha was having orgasms in waves.

"What is he doing?" she whispered.

Emilie was smiling.

"*Putain de Merde!*" she breathed. She noticed Hermione and said, "She is one lucky witch! That wizard can really lay wand! She's having multiple orgasms. Hmm, perhaps I should try up against a tree!" she mused. "It would probably be easier to hit the spot that way."

"The spot?" Hermione asked in confusion.

"Oh! They're done! *Dépêchez-vous!*" she ordered.

They took off and let the couple retreat in peace.

As soon as it was safe to talk, Hermione asked Emilie again, "What spot?"

Emilie looked at Hermione curiously. "You mean the Headmaster hasn't been doing it right?" she teased.

Hermione was affronted. "My husband is a satisfactory lover!" she announced protectively.

Emilie could sense she had hurt the young witch's feelings. She considered her face and saw it: the frustration, the anger, and the hopelessness. She decided the young witch might need a woman-to-woman talk.

"You know, Hermione, sometimes I think we forget how young you are," she said, trying to feel out the situation.

Hermione nodded as she walked on. "I'm nineteen," she offered.

Emilie nodded. "I'm twenty-five, and I've been having sexual relations since I was sixteen. I remember how it was with my first lovers! I didn't know anything!" she laughed as she reminisced.

Hermione stopped walking and looked at her intently. Emilie took the young witch's hand in her own and urged her to walk with her.

She continued with her recollections. "Phillipe, my first, was okay. He was kind and loving, but we were both virgins and didn't know anything except what our bodies were screaming for. He was considerate and was very open-minded. He loved pleasuring me with his mouth, and he knew about the wonderful orgasms a woman could have by manipulating the clitoris. He was fortunate that I that discovered it on my own and showed him where it was and how I liked to be touched. Yet, sex was not as explosive as I had heard other women talk about it. I suppose our discussion at the Three Broomsticks must have been strange for you, being newly married."

Hermione acquiesced. "Well, it was *confusing*. I mean, I never did anything before I was married except kiss one boy. It took time for us to get comfortable that way. We were married so fast, but we were attracted to each other. It's just we didn't have the usual courting and all that," she confided nervously.

"I knew you and the Headmaster had married on the insistence of the Ministry. I felt so sad for you. The Headmaster is twenty years older, an ex-Death Eater, and you were so young. Has it been difficult for you?" she asked.

Hermione stiffened. She didn't know if she could trust the young woman. The last thing she wanted to do was to let the buxom, blonde bombshell know about her deficiencies. She could see it now, *Oh, poor Professor Snape! He needs a real woman to take care of him!*

Emilie was smarter than what Hermione credited her. She saw through the young woman's façade.

She decided to continue with her story. "Well, there was Jean-Marc. He was a selfish ~~to~~*cochon*! Yet, he was insatiable in bed,*non*? He knew how to take every part of my vagina. He awoke feelings I didn't even know existed!"

She laughed suddenly and took Hermione's hand into the crook of her arm and leaned into her.

"I remember we were fucking and I thought I was going to urinate everywhere! I started to tense up and he would have none of it. He was such a selfish bastard! He just drove me into the mattress, and I came like a fountain!"

Hermione turned and gaped at the woman. She had just described her problem.

"You are fortunate, Madam Snape, that your husband respects you. I would bet that he stops when you say 'no,*bui*?"

"Of course! He is very respectful. Um, Emilie, was what you said true? Did you feel like you were going to urinate?"

"Of course! It is simple anatomy. A woman's sweet spot connects somehow to the nerves that connect to the bladder. It is a false feeling. At first it is strange and uncomfortable, but after enough time, it can be overridden and then...*Oh là là*" she said saucily.

Hermione decided to trust the Frenchwoman. "It's really good with Severus, but then he starts going so fast and deep. I feel I have to go to the bathroom, and I tense up. I just want it to be over. I'm scared I'll actually *pee* on him!" she whispered.

Emilie smiled and nodded. "And how does your husband respond? Does he get angry...make you continue when you don't want to?"

"No, no!" she replied fervently. "He is very understanding. I was a virgin, and it took time to get to the point of consummating the marriage. It is good, but I just feel there should be more. When you were talking about your experiences, I thought, there must be something wrong with me. I mean, I want what I saw Samantha was experiencing!" Hermione stopped, ashamed that she had revealed so much. She didn't want anyone to think Severus wasn't good in bed. It was her.

"Emilie, it's not his fault. It's me. There is something wrong with me...I know it. I wish...I wish I were more buxom and filled out like you are," she admitted sadly.

Emilie stopped and looked at the young witch. "Hermione, bigger is not always better. Men are not all the same. Some men love small breasts and large nipples. Some like large breasts and small nipples. Some like small breasts *and* small nipples! There is nothing wrong with you, Hermione. You just are feeling inadequate because you have an ideal of what you 'should' be. But, don't worry, every woman has been there."

"Even you?" she asked timidly.

"*Oui*! It took years before I found a lover who could bring out the wildness inside me. It wasn't so much the man though, Hermione. I had to be comfortable with myself. I hated my breasts! I would have rather had smaller ones like yours. They are pert and lovely. I bet Severus can take your whole breast in his mouth, yes?"

Hermione flushed beet red.

Emilie laughed. "Do you know how erotic that can be? I can see how a wizard like the Headmaster would enjoy taking you. He is a very sensual man. You just have to let it happen, stop thinking so much about what you aren't. He is enthralled with you. He loves you, Hermione." She paused for a moment. "Do you fantasize?"

Hermione was shocked. "I-I don't know," she stuttered.

"Sure, you do. Do you fantasize about your husband?"

"Yes," she mumbled, clearly embarrassed over it.

"Write down your fantasies and slip them to your husband. It will drive him wild! Let him know you want him to make you feel how it can be: sex with abandon. Tell him you want him to dominate you, drive you into a puddle of lust. Whatever scenario or positions...just tell him! Trust me, he *wants* to know. It was so long before I experienced vaginal orgasms, Hermione. It takes time and you are a healthy, young woman. You just need practice."

She left her then, and Hermione thought long and hard about what Emilie had told her. She did have fantasies about Severus. Many had to do with the snarky Potions master she had known all her life taking her mercilessly in the potions lab, growling filthy words in her ear. She wanted him to make her scream as she saw Samantha screaming. Well, at least she knew Severus wasn't giving Samantha the "high, hard one!" Professor Selinski was doing a decent job of it from what she could tell!

Putain de Merde: roughly, as Ron would say, "Bloody hell!" It could also be even more vulgar.

Dépêchez-vous!: Hurry up!

Cochon: Pig

Heiresses and Husbandry

Chapter 16 of 23

Severus and Hermione go and investigate the property left to her at Grimmauld Place. Later, Severus has an interesting talk with Rosie and begins his plan of husbandry towards his wife. The moment we've all been waiting for has arrived.
Major Lemon Alert!

A/N: Here is an extra long chapter for you all to enjoy. Hermione will finally find her groove, but of course, I have to turn up the angst factor beforehand. Enjoy! As always, thanks to MadBrilliant.

It was around Halloween when Severus and Hermione took a part of their weekend to go sort out the old Order Headquarters. She was not thrilled that the place had become her property upon Harry's death. She would rather deal with the problems going on in her own house, but there were responsibilities to be maintained.

"Honestly, Severus, I think it should just go to Andromeda. After all, it is her family home!" she argued as they walked to the Apparition point.

"Hermione, Andromeda has had enough to worry about, with raising her grandson and dealing with the Malfoy and Lestrage estates," Severus pointed out. "Besides, it became more of a home for the Order than her old family home. She was more than relieved to not have yet another household on her hands."

Hermione was a jumbled bundle of nerves. She didn't know how she felt about returning to Grimmauld Place. The last time she had been there was when she, Harry, and Ron were on the run from the Death Eaters. The very last person she ever thought she'd be returning with was Severus Snape!

She halted her gate and froze in worry. "Oh, no!" she exclaimed.

Severus stopped and frowned. "What is it?"

"You can't get in! Moody...he placed a ward on the door, and there are jinxes on the house against you. If you enter, you will be killed!" she raved.

Severus narrowed his eyes. "Explain exactly what this 'ward' is. Is it a ghost? A poltergeist?" he questioned.

Hermione swallowed and closed her eyes in remembrance. "We walked in and a voice...a disembodied voice called out saying, "Severus Snape?" as in a question. It was Moody's voice. We all were frightened and yelled out that we weren't Severus Snape. We experienced an inability to speak clearly. I believe it was a Tongue-Tying Curse."

Severus grunted in agreement. She continued.

"As we went further, a gray figure was gliding towards us. It was terrible. It was Dumbledore. A Dumbledore who had been dead quite a long time...it was gruesome. Then Harry started yelling, "We didn't kill you!" and the figure burst into dust, but it was going to attack us all! After a while, we got used to it. Each time we had to leave the house, upon returning we had to go through the whole dust bowl attack. However, that was what we had experienced! What will it do to you?" She looked at him with barely disguised fear.

Severus took her hand in his and they walked on. "I want you to stay outside, Hermione, until I fetch you. I will deal with this," he told her calmly.

"You know what it is?"

"I do," he said grudgingly.

"What is it?" she breathed.

"Hermione, Alastor Moody was one of the greatest Aurors the wizarding world had ever known. I respected him greatly. He also, unfortunately, because of his many near-death encounters with dark wizards, became very unstable as he aged. He also was very drawn to the Dark Arts. It was something I know he had to fight against all of his life. I know this because I am the same. He and I were much alike. It was his greatest shame. Yet, he was a fanatic. He was not above using some dark magic to further his means. When Moody wanted to get a wizard, he got him," he said angrily. "Dumbledore knew Moody had it in for me; that was why he argued and fought so tenaciously with Moody about me being in the Order, even being on staff at Hogwarts."

"So, Moody conjured up dark magic as a snare to attack you?" she asked, completely shocked.

He nodded. A vein on his temple twitched and pulsed angrily. "I don't judge the wizard for doing what he felt he needed to do, but this, to use Albus that way, is low. Very low," he growled.

They Apparated to Grimmauld Place and Hermione waited while Severus went inside. He was gone longer than she had anticipated, and she grew nervous waiting, thinking something might have happened to him. When he finally fetched her, Hermione was relieved, but she noticed he was pale and angry as she took his outstretched hand. They walked in and Hermione screamed at the sight.

The house had been virtually gutted. It looked as though a tornado had ripped through the house and all that remained was debris and filth.

"It was as I surmised," Severus mumbled as he slid a comforting arm around his wife's shoulders.

She burst into tears. The furniture, books, valuables, everything of value had been taken away. Even the heads of the dead house-elves had been removed as well as Mrs. Black's portrait.

Dazed, Hermione stumbled into the library and gazed upon the empty bookcases. Oh, the hours upon hours she had stayed here, reading, laughing, and talking with Ron, Ginny, and Harry...even Sirius. She sank to her knees and burst into tears. Severus knelt down on the floor next to her and held her to him. She glanced at a pile of papers across the room. She pushed away from her husband and dashed across the room. She sifted through the papers. They were nothing. All that remained were scraps of paper, torn pages from books...trash!

"That's all that's left! Why, Severus? Who did this?" she fairly screamed at him.

He stood up and drew upon his icy demeanor to deal with what was becoming an uncomfortable confrontation.

"When the Ministry breached the Unplottable houses, I figured Grimmauld Place would be among the first to be searched. There were a great number of dark artifacts kept here. The Dark Lord did not want Potter or any of the Order to have anything that belonged to a pure-blood family. At first, all he wanted were the dark objects, but Bellatrix was incensed that Potter now held the title to the property. He must have allowed her to do whatever she wanted to the property, as long as the important pieces of worth were brought to him.

"I had the odious task of assisting in some of his perusals. I did not know until I came across some figurines I had seen with the Black Family Crest on it that Grimmauld Place had indeed been searched, however I did not know it had been gutted. Hermione, I am truly sorry. There is nothing here of any value. All the papers, letters, correspondences, it has all been destroyed. I'm sorry for deceiving you, Hermione. I didn't know how to tell you I already knew what you were telling me."

Hermione burst again into tears. "Just as soon as I thought that bastard could take nothing else from me...now this!" she sobbed.

She stood up and wandered from room to room, reliving old memories, at times laughing, and then crying. She took with her only her memories when they left.

"What shall we do with the property, Severus?" she asked as they Apparated to Diagon Alley.

"I thought we could hand it over to the Ministry to use as they see fit. Would you want to live there?" he asked.

"Oh, no!" She fairly shuddered at the thought. As much as she loved what the house represented to her, the fact remained that she never really *liked* the house. It was eerie and ugly. It was as if the pure-blood sentiments of Most Ancient and Noble House of Black permeated the very walls, acting as a repellent to her Muggleborn identity. She felt hated in that house. No, she was more than happy to be rid of number twelve Grimmauld Place. What hurt was there were no books, furniture, nothing of the Weasley's or of theirs that had been left behind to take as a remembrance. It was as if Sirius had been eradicated from the earth or all the work Mrs. Weasley did to make

the house into a home was all for naught. There was nothing to show for all the happy meals, late-night talks...nothing.

She wanted nothing more than to snuggle and bury her hand into the crook of her husband's shoulder, to be petted and loved, but they had another stop: Gringotts.

Kingsley had been struggling for months with a precarious situation on his hands. There was the matter of the money in Harry's vault, which included the Black fortune, which had been a part of Regulus' inheritance. Hermione's view was that all money belonging to the Black family should be given to Andromeda Tonks. After all, she was a widowed grandmother with a baby to raise and had been a Black before she'd married Ted Tonks.

Wizarding Law, on the other hand, stipulated that since Sirius Black bequeathed all his worldly goods, which included what he inherited from his younger brother, Regulus, to Harry Potter, there was no separating the three inheritances. The transfer of Kreacher made Sirius' will absolute and indivisible. Now, Harry Potter had no will and had no *wizarding* family. The goblins in Gringotts were in an uproar over Hermione's suggestion of separating the wealth. They were not about to just hand over the key to a vault overflowing with money to a Muggleborn to rifle through who had not even been related to the deceased!

After a full Wizengamot inquiry, which took the better part of a month for testimonies, no one could rightfully ascertain as to which of the fortune was *originally* Harry Potter's and which had been Sirius Black's fortune. Hermione could not have imagined such a nightmare! She told Kingsley on a number of occasions that she would gladly give back all of the money if only she could have Harry and Ron back!

Now, the decision had been made, and the verdict had carried out in Hermione's favor. She was an extremely wealthy woman. She had acquired the vast fortunes of both the Potters and the Blacks, well at least Sirius and Regulus' branch, which was a great deal of money since Regulus had not been disowned from his family. There were responsibilities that went with acquiring such wealth. There was an obscene amount of paperwork to be signed to begin the transfer of all the money into her own name.

Severus had warned her beforehand that becoming an heiress would now bring in all sorts of riff-raff. There would be wizards and witches alike of dubious character trying to weasel money out of her. She would also be judged as to how she spent her money. To which charities would she donate? Would she be helping the less fortunate? Would she now try to buy her way into the Ministry to have her ideas for a better wizarding society gain a foothold? Severus spoke plainly, and Hermione found herself almost feeling sorry for the Malfoys. There was a lot of criticism it seemed to go around for the wealthy. Well, she would not use any of Harry's money to buy her way into politics! If anything, she would give the money to help the families who had lost so much during the war. First on her list would be those who had been orphaned. Harry would have wanted it that way.

Severus agreed, and they spent the evening of the Wizengamot's verdict discussing how she would go about executing her plan. She would have to hire a reputable accountant, a reliable assistant, who would gather information on who needed money, and then as the requests poured in, the needs would have to be catalogued. "There was more to consider than just going willy-nilly to people and giving them a sack of Galleons and wishing them well!" Severus said sardonically. That was when they had decided to go and see the state of Grimmauld Place for themselves and had received the shock of their lives.

They both went to bed mentally and emotionally exhausted that night. After a while, Hermione got up from bed and sat at the window, looking up into the sky. There was a full moon out. *Remus will never need to take Wolfsbane again*, she thought sadly. She thought about Harry and Ron, all the silly misadventures they had stumbled upon and gone into eyes-wide-open alike. She had yet to open her purse, which had all their shrunken belongings inside it. It was just too painful to consider. All she had was the picture she had nicked from Ginny's footlocker and Luna's butterbeer cap necklace. She didn't have any pictures of Harry and Ron. She knew they were there in that purse. She went and retrieved it from her dresser. It was still bloodstained and worn from the battle. She took her wand and took out all their possessions, one by one, Ron's footlocker, Harry's backpack, and then her own footlocker. She went through Harry's first.

She found his picture album, the one he'd loved so much. It had the pictures Hagrid had given him of his parents. Then were the pictures that Sirius had given him of their school days. Later, she came upon the pictures of the three of them over the six years of school. Their smiles and eyes were so bright. She sat laughing and crying as she stroked the pictures.

It was all she had left of them: just pictures, old clothes, and a broken mirror. She felt there should be more, so much more to show for all the times they had risked their lives and all the fighting to keep their friendship alive. She looked over at her slumbering husband. How odd Harry and Ron would find it all! Their Hermione married to Snape? Impossible! She snorted as she thought of Ron's reaction. He would be mortified! Harry would be more open, if she explained it thoroughly. She wanted so much to have them with her it hurt.

She tried to think of the last time she saw them both. They had arrived for the battle and were still running around silly, trying to destroy Horcruxes. By the time they had reached Nagini's hiding place and killed her, they had spared a moment to look at one another. It was as if they'd known it was the end of the road for them. They had kissed each other and held onto each other before taking their wands firmly in hand and walking out into the blazing night sky. It had been so dark, so dark, they couldn't even see except for the flashes and explosions from the fighting around them. Harry had walked behind them, as they had decided to protect him until he could reach Voldemort. The battle had already begun shifting towards the east. Hermione remembered fighting without thought or reservation. She had just hexed and cursed her way through until she had been faced with the evil Bellatrix. She had seen Ron cut down by Lucius Malfoy, but she had kept going. Then there was Harry, dueling Voldemort like a vicious animal. He had been so brave! The professors had swarmed around him to protect him. She remembered being worn down by the taller witch. Bellatrix had been about to kill her. She had fallen, tripping over a dead body. She had scrambled to regain her footing when the green light erupted, and all she saw was the green halo of fire light up Bellatrix's body from behind as she lay safely in her shadow. Then, the woman had fallen on her as the wind blew like a torrent. There had been an almighty explosion. She had thought it had to be the end of the world. Well, it had been as far as she was concerned.

She had been sitting so immersed in her thoughts that she had not realized her husband was awake and watching her intently from their bed. She looked at him, and they shared the moment together. She whimpered and scrambled onto the bed, diving into her husband's outstretched arms.

"I can't believe all that is left are such insignificant items!" she said angrily. "There should be more! More to show for seven years of fighting, loving, and scraping by to stay alive, year after year!" She cried anew at the loss. Severus could only hold her and give her warmth and comfort.

"Severus, how can we do this? Are we just fooling ourselves that we can actually rebuild this school? I'm barely even able to teach my NEWT classes, the Slytherins despise me; you are killing yourself pulling double duty as Headmaster and Potions master! How can we continue? I am so tired and overwhelmed!" she complained.

Then, she felt ashamed of her outburst. "I'm sorry, I should be stronger," she apologized.

"Hermione," Severus said finally, "a lot has been placed on your young shoulders, and you've done a brilliant job. When you look at it from a distance, as Kingsley does, what can be seen here is, on one side, a seasoned teacher with years of experience behind him to forge ahead. On the other side stands a vibrant, strong, youthful witch who is exceptionally powerful in her magic. You and I are symbiotic, Hermione, like two sides of the same coin. With your energy and my knowledge, together we will make this school what it once was and even better because we will eradicate the old ways of thinking, that blood status means anything. You and I are proof of that. We are among the most powerful witches and wizards in Britain. We are also a half-blood and a Muggleborn. We defy all the old prejudices, and together we will create a new world where Muggleborns and pure-bloods will live side by side with all the rights and respect due to magical people. We will do this. You will hold up from your end and I will from mine. We will push these bastards upright and force them to tow the line like bookends. You have never stepped down from a challenge before, Hermione, and neither have I! Therefore, you need to deal with your mourning and place it away where it can be managed. You will never stop hurting over losing Potter and Weasley. You must accept that. Accept it, mourn it, and move forward. We have work to do!"

"Are you giving me permission to openly mourn Harry and Ron with you?" she asked nervously.

"Hell, yes! I am your husband. You loved them. Too damn much has been lost to hang on to stupid hurts from the past. You can talk to me about them as much or as little as you wish. However, I warn you, wife, don't become stuck in your grief. Grief can have the same affect on a person like the Mirror of Erised. You can lose your mind; go

mad, and waste away in it. It does not do well to dwell on dreams of what might have been, Hermione," he warned wisely.

"I love you, husband," she whispered as she snuggled in the crook of his arm.

Husband, he thought. "I love you, wife," he answered. He thought of what Rosie had said to him.

I trust you to know the meaning of that word.

He had some work to do.

He went the next day to see Rosie. She was surprised to see him during the day.

"Severus, my dear! What do I owe such a visit? Perhaps you would like something for your bride?" she teased him.

"Perhaps," he said noncommittally. "What I would like is to speak privately with you, if I might?"

"Certainly! Sabine will watch for me. Come into my sitting room and take tea with me."

He allowed himself to be led by the witch into her quarters. After being settled with his favorite tea, Lady Grey, he was ready to talk.

"Have no fear, Severus. I shall never reveal your true weakness for Lady Grey," she teased him again. She loved to banter with the wizard. He had been her pet since the day she had met him. Poor founding he was, without love or true friendship. He had always been able to come and speak freely to her. Although she was only six years his senior, she loved him as much as she would her own flesh and blood.

"Tell me, Severus, what is so heavy on your heart?" she asked.

"I wanted to ask you about something you mentioned to me about being a 'husband' to my wife; that I needed to be a husband in the truest sense of the word. You assumed I would know, but to be honest, I am out of my league. Hermione is like no woman I have ever known. She is passionate and loving, yet she is logical and highly cerebral. I have no idea how to begin loving and caring for her the way she needs. In addition, to top it off, she has endured loss upon loss. I would love to take her over the Christmas hols to retrieve her parents from Australia, but so much is unresolved between us. Rosie, I am not a man to grovel. However, when it comes to Hermione, I am finding myself not caring about my pride. She is my life. I would die without her love. She has wrapped herself around my heart, and she is more than welcome to stay. What do I do?"

Rosie drew a breath and said, "You ask of mysteries, my boy. How does a man satisfy a woman? It varies. However, I have had the privilege of learning about your Hermione. She is not as complicated as you make her out to be. She is very passionate, but afraid of her passion. Her urges are normal, yet she feels badly about them. She needs to learn that her passions and urges are normal and are wanted." She settled back further into her chair. "The word '*husband*' is an ancient word. In Biblical times, a 'husbandman' was one who had a responsibility over a vineyard. He cultivated the vines, trimmed them, and helped them to grow into strong fruit that would be ready for consumption. In our country, a husbandman was a man in charge of cultivating land and sustaining animals. It comes down to this: you are responsible for her various needs and to make sure she thrives. That means all areas of her life, not merely the physical.

"You need to 'tend' to your wife. Find out what she needs. Ask her about her desires. Lay yourself at her mercy and let her know you will do anything she asks of you. Once she knows your motives are to tend and cultivate her, she will give herself to you fully and will trust you with all her being. Women are built like that, Severus. It is not difficult for a woman to love. The question is: are you worthy of her love? Will you sacrifice your pride and take the lead to draw her to you so you can tend her? Remember, she is still young. Be patient and cautious, take your time, and draw her out. Explain what needs explaining, for she is still so virginal and is susceptible to feelings of inadequacy. Remember this as well, my dear, men are not the only creatures with egos. You have a school full of nubile witches who have shared their sexual experiences with your wife. They think because she is married she knows all there is to sex. Rubbish! I know; I see the truth. You have yet to touch her most intimate places. It takes time. It will go easier for you and her if you 'husband' her. Think of it this way, you are not a 'husband', a noun. You are *to* husband, a verb. Think on that."

"Now, I must return before Sabine goes mad with worry." She kissed Severus on the cheek. "Thank you for seeing me, my dear, I do miss seeing your face."

He snorted at that comment.

"Always the charmer, Severus!" Rosie chided sweetly.

The headmaster left her then and went back to Hogwarts. He had some "husbanding" to do.

Hermione was fuming in her classroom. Another disastrous class with her N.E.W.T. level class had left her angry and frustrated. She was still stewing when Severus came to see why she had not come to his office so they could go to dinner together.

"Hermione," he called as he walked into her classroom. "What's wrong?"

She turned her red puffy eyes and defiant chin to him and said, "I have had it with your damn Slytherins! They don't respect me. Astoria Greengrass has them all considering mutiny. If I can't get in control of them, I'm lost. I don't know what to do," she said defeated.

Snape grew angry and lashed out to her. "You, Madam Snape, will get control of your classroom. You possess more magical ability in your little finger than Miss Greengrass has in her entire body! If she insists on being the ringleader of this motley crew, then you must break her. Break her and you break the rebellion. Hermione, you are a warrior, and you need to tap into your ability to withstand this type of pressure. I had to do the exact same thing when I first started on here. Teaching students who had been my classmates, it was horrid, yet I persevered! I admit I was a right bastard, and I still am. And yet, it works. There must be order, Hermione! You are the only one who can do it! So, do it! Stop your sniveling this instant!" he snapped.

She hated that he spoke to her as if she was a first-year, but he was right. She had Astoria making her feel like an inept, undeserving usurper who had only gained her post by spreading her legs for Professor Snape. Well, she would put Miss Astoria in her place. She was the brightest witch of her age, and she would prove it by teaching them all just how powerful she was. Then no one would defy her in her class again. She would have to plan.

It was refreshing to watch Hermione that weekend devising her plan of attack. Severus watched his wife study and write furiously, as if nothing in the world mattered. She had a mad gleam of determination in her eye. God, it made him hard watching her exercise her brilliant mind like that.

By Sunday, he had had enough. It had been too long since he had lost himself in her. He needed to feel her straining against him, working to relieve herself. He wanted to taste her again, pleasure her breasts until she cried from frustration. However, he had to wait. He had his own research to do.

He thought long and hard about what Rosie said. He had to learn how to "husband" his wife. He knew that she felt supported with her academic and career pursuits. She knew he wanted her to excel in what interested her. He told her often how much he appreciated her mind.

Perhaps the problem was that he was not encouraging her enough physically. Did she know that he found her more enticing than any woman, regardless of what she did or did not know about sex? He had to find out more.

"Severus," she asked as they read in bed.

"Yes," he asked as he continued reading.

"Are you interested in my sexual fantasies?"

That got his full attention. He put down his book. "You have fantasies?" he asked seductively.

"Yes. I just don't want you laughing at me," She said shyly.

"Hermione, I will NOT laugh at you!" he said seriously. In all actuality, he was excited. This could be the opportunity for him to reassure her of his love.

She fiddled with her plait and looked at her lap as she spoke softly. "I always wanted to have you take advantage of me in the potions lab. You always would swoop down and would be so close as you checked my work. During my fifth year, I always felt so aroused. Then when you would rage and yell, I thought how it would be if you took me right there, hard and ferociously, saying dirty things to me and m-making me scream in-in...pleasure." She closed her eyes, waiting for him to snark at her words.

Instead, he smiled and turned her blushing face to his. "I would love to make that fantasy a reality. I've been extremely tender and reserved with you, Hermione, because of your innocence and grief. I could make you scream in pleasure, believe me. I just don't know if you are ready for it."

"Well, can we work on it and build up to it?" she asked hopefully as she scooted closer to her husband, deliberately pressing her left breast against his right arm.

Her effort was not lost on him. He swiftly stripped her naked and took her left breast into his greedy mouth *He is so good at this!* she thought as she moaned.

He laid her down and made love to her. She felt the familiar, uncomfortable feeling, and Severus urged her to stay with it as he continued to thrust inside her.

"Hermione," he panted, "don't think, *feel* your way through it. Let go, and let it happen." He nuzzled her ear and whispered to her, "Do you know how enticing you are? Every day I wait and hope you will let me inside you. Your body is so lovely. I think about it all the time. When I should be concentrating in class, all I can think of are your breasts, how perfectly they fill my mouth. Your whole body is so perfect." He started to shudder and had to control his pace.

She blew out a breath and closed her eyes. His words had calmed her and aroused her. Finally, she felt something else...a deep longing and desire that gnawed at her from the inside. Severus was continuing to pace himself with long, deliberate strokes. She looked up at him and watched his eyes as he raked them over her, drinking in her lips, skin, and breasts. She could see he had been honest. He really did want her! A thrill shot through her, and she moaned. Severus began to move faster and deeper. He gasped in pleasure. She felt delicious! A tingling and rushing sensation spread throughout her body.

"*Oh, Severus, that's sooooo good!*" she moaned as she threw her head back and wrapped her legs around his waist.

She looked up at his face as he stared at her. He captured her lips in a searing kiss as he lost all control. She felt the sound of his release on her lips. It was exquisite.

He was panting and breathing hard as he clung to her. She settled into the crook of his arm as he lay on his back.

I'm sorry," he breathed. "I should have waited. I got too excited and forgot myself."

"Don't be sorry. I'm not," she said, half-awake, half-asleep.

He looked down at his wife, curled up content next to him. He toyed with her hair. It was so soft. She was so tough and strong in mind and body, yet she was a fragile soul. *It will be okay, he told himself. We just need time to get it right.* He eased back more comfortably into his pillow, and the memories rushed back into his mind. He remembered the days back when they had started meeting for the Order at Grimmauld Place. Molly was always begging him to stay for dinner. He wished now he had stayed. He remembered walking in on Hermione as she read in the library there. She was just a bother then, as he had no inkling of what was to come. He never would have dreamt that Hermione Granger would be his wife! But more than a wife, she had become something more precious than a lover. She was his partner, his helper, and he hers. They had done well getting this school put back to rights. She had worked beside him and supported him. What he had said was true. He loved her, so much, for more important reasons than bodies and sex; he loved her because she was a true friend and companion.

He held her closer to him and fell into the waiting arms of Morpheus. He noted how he never slept so well than when she was with him.

He woke early the next morning and watched her while she slept. He carefully pulled away the duvet and feasted his eyes on her naked body. He began to caress and tease her tenderly. He took his time to arouse her as much as he could before she woke up. He fastened his mouth on one breast and rolled her nipple around with his tongue. He loved her breasts. They were so perfect. He could easily fit her breast in the palm of his hand, and he could take it entirely in his mouth. He had liked bigger-breasted women, but this was Hermione, and his Hermione was perfection. She started moaning in her sleep. He lightly stroked her thighs, and she slowly opened them more and more. He stroked the insides of her thighs and finally reached between her nest of curls. He gently stroked and rolled her clit between his fingers as he suckled eagerly on her breast, fitting the entire white mound into his mouth. She was stirring and seemed so close to release. He stopped his ministrations and mounted her, eagerly kissing her, delving into her mouth and taking possession of her. She was drowsy and still trying to awaken, but he was making her feel so light-headed, she couldn't think.

She was being filled by him and was carried along on that familiar wave of pleasure. It was so nice being close to him, feeling him inside her. She closed her eyes and was drifting in the feeling of contentment when he suddenly lifted her thighs higher and started to drive into her. She was fully awake now and the easy lovemaking she was used to was over. He was pounding into her furiously, and she was overwhelmed by the primal feelings he was emitting. She could feel his desire to dominate her and possess her fully. He didn't speak, but she could hear panting and growling sounds emanating from deep inside him.

"Open your eyes," he demanded harshly as he continued to pummel into her.

She did and his black eyes bore into hers. He was creating that feeling that made her tense up and want for it all to be over. She started to tell him to stop, but he claimed her mouth again and refused to let her speak. She tried to push him back, it was too much, and she was losing control. He grabbed her hands and pinned them above her head. He continued to pound into her relentlessly as she shook with fear and exhilaration at the same time. He released her mouth and was leering at her jiggling breasts lustfully. Her stomach was fluttering from the look in her husband's eye and the way he held her down. She couldn't hold it back anymore, she couldn't think except that her husband wanted *her*, desired *her*, and now possessed *her*.

He was groaning against her mouth as he crushed her lips with his. She felt a wonderful explosion that made her rip her mouth from his bruising kiss, and she began to wail and scream with abandon. She bucked her hips and ground herself against him. He slammed into her without quarter, and she felt a huge warm gush pour out from her. Severus moaned and speed up his movements erratically. He was grunting and panting in her ear, and she peaked again. She was only aware of the sound of his voice, but couldn't understand what he was saying. He started to growl her name and thrust into her so hard he drove them both into the headboard as he came inside her. He collapsed on her and with a groan, lifted himself up, and slid off her.

Hermione lay there, her legs still spread open, and she was glistening with sweat and their mingled juices creating a puddle down around her arse. She slipped back into sleep and was woken up a couple hours later by her husband. He had pushed her legs together and pulled the duvet over her while she had slept. He was now dressed and sitting beside her on the bed in his usual formidable black robes. He had a very superior, smug look of triumph on his face, and his black eyes were glittering.

Hermione was blushing. "I don't rightly remember all that happened," she confessed to his unanswered question.

"What do you recall?" he asked smugly.

"I remember I was loving what was happening, and I felt something I have never felt before," she admitted shyly.

"Tut, tut. I never knew you were so *wanton*, Madam Snape," he said in his most intimidating voice.

"Neither did I," she confessed with a grin.

The Bargain and Veritaserum

Chapter 17 of 23

Severus and Hermione discover new ways to enjoy their love life. Major Lemon Alert!

A/N: Well, here is some serious smut for y'all. Nothing better than two committed people learning to get their freak on! As always, thanks to MadBrillaint, my beta, and please review!

Hermione spent the day with her head in the clouds. She never knew sex could be so satisfying! She replayed the juicier moments in her head between classes. It would not do for the Charms instructor to be less than on the ball! Besides, she had a certain class of Slytherins with which to contend!

The N.E.W.T. level Charms for seventh years came at the end of the day. It was her very last class. She was prepared and ready to challenge them. So far, she had gone by the book, and her students were bored and defiant. She was going to kick it up a notch to let them know Hermione Snape did know a thing or two that they didn't! She had worked long and hard and decided to draw upon her experiences on the run last year with Harry and Ron. As much as it pained her to relive the memories, she knew she had to do it. She had performed the most difficult and complex charms during their time in the forest. She was now going to use her expertise and experience to humble a few who thought she was just a Mudblood who could teach them nothing.

The class started with the usual rumbling, but Hermione took care of that when she started taking house points for rude behavior and talking out of turn in class. Soon, they were silent but looking at her mutinously. Astoria had a sinister smile on her face. Hermione could tell by her smirk that she wanted nothing more than to take down the Mudblood!

Hermione began to write on the board with her wand the following: *Cave Inimicum Charm, Repello Muggletum Charm, Fidelius Charm, and Revulsion Jinx*

She turned to face the class and asked, "How many of you can identify all of these charms and also demonstrate how these charms work?"

At first, a couple of Slytherins started to raise their hands, but once Madam Snape asked for *ademonstration*, they all were at a loss.

"How disappointing," she said in her best imitation of her husband's sarcastic tone as she crossed her arms and prowled around the room.

"According to how our last class went, I was under the assumption that I could not teach any of you a thing! Not only do I know each of these charms, I have used them in real life, under *duress*, and some cases in a moment's notice."

"It seems you lot do not know everything about Charms after all. Now, I realize this is difficult for most of you to see me here in a position of authority. However, I would not be in this position if I were not qualified to do so. So, allow me to show you some of the Charm work that I am familiar with producing."

The rest of the class went smoothly. She had won most of the class over by her demonstrations of the Revulsion Jinx and the Cave Inimicum Charm. Her explanations of the Fidelius Charm and how she created it wowed the entire class. Her knowledge and expertise was flawless, and at the end of class, she had won the respect of over half the Slytherins and, of course, every Gryffindor in attendance. Astoria Greengrass was still as nasty as ever, but she had lost her grip on her fellow housemates, for they had seen first hand how powerful Madam Snape's magical abilities were. Hermione knew that the rest of the year wouldn't be easy, but at least she now had the respect and control of her classroom. She couldn't wait to tell Severus about her victory.

She walked briskly to his office and found him finishing up his work for the afternoon. She knew how much Severus liked to have a large chunk of his work squared away before dinner so he didn't have to spend all his time in the evenings working on papers. She was bursting with happiness, and Severus saw the look of triumph on his wife's face.

He sat in his chair while he listened and watched his wife retell the story of how she had stumped her seventh years with the experiences she'd had in the Forest of Dean with Harry and Ron. He knew the story from when she had told him before, so he watched her as she talked. She was flushed with happiness and accomplishment. Her eyes were dilated. Her breathing was labored as she spoke a blue streak. He loved her so much. This was why she was so special. She was positively invincible. No one could break her down. She was made of tougher stuff than most. Yet, she was so delicate in other areas. Like himself.

Snape realized how alike they truly were. Hermione was a dedicated scholar, a lover of knowledge, and enjoyed learning. She, like himself, hated accepting the status quo and wanted to see if there could be a way to make a better charm or potion. They both had a drive to succeed and be successful at whatever they focused their sights. Yet, when it came to matters of the heart, they were shy and full of doubt: he, because of his looks, and she, because of her idea that she was "lacking" in womanly curves. Snape surmised that she probably wanted to eradicate his insecurity as much as he wanted to eradicate hers, but it wasn't easy. Each would have to deal with their own insecurities. The best way to handle the issue would be to take the time and let the trust build. In the meantime, Severus was determined to continue "husbanding" his wife.

He needed to make sure she thrived, so he needed to feed her emotions. She needed to be tended to delicately and without reservation. Therefore, he did something he thought he would never do for any woman: he looked through a poetry book. He didn't even know for sure if Hermione was a poetry lover, but he remembered from his school days how much girls loved a wizard who would recite poetry to them or write a poem themselves. Writing a poem was out of the question! However, reading poetry didn't seem to be too painful or embarrassing.

That evening, when Hermione came to bed, Severus was waiting for her. He pulled out a piece of parchment and nervously held it in his hand.

"What is that?" Hermione asked as she tried to take it from him.

He kept it from her reach and cleared his throat, while keeping his eyes averted from hers. "I wanted to reach you, Hermione, in a way that I think I still haven't. I don't know what all I can do...although I'm still working on the fantasy you told me, I just wanted to try this to see if you liked it. I read this, and I thought of you and I."

He turned and pulled her close to him, cupping her cheek with his hand. "I don't think that just because the circumstances in which we married weren't ideal diminishes what we have. I have grown to appreciate you more as time passes, and I can honestly say that I am happy that you are my wife. I enjoy our life and I love you. All the beliefs I ever held about love, sex, and desire have changed because of you."

He kissed her softly and whispered in her mouth, "Without you there is no love, no desire, no lust. You are the only woman who can bring those feelings out of me. I adore you, Hermione."

By now, tears were flowing down her face as he began to read the poem he had found:

My true love hath my heart, and I have his,

By just exchange one for another given:

I hold his dear, and mine he cannot miss,

There was never a better bargain driven:

My true love hath my heart, and I have his.

His heart keeps me and he in one,

My heart in him his thoughts and senses guides:

He loves my heart, for once it was his own,

I cherish his because me it bides:

My true love hath my heart and I have his.

He paused and folded the parchment to put it away, but Hermione snatched it from his hands and said, "I want it. I want to keep it close to me. For whenever I doubt, I can be reassured."

He cleared his throat. "It's entitled 'The Bargain.' I know the pronouns are reversed. A woman should read it, but I liked it because this marriage started as a bargain, a deal for Hogwarts to stay open. Yet, we are becoming more and more, Hermione. I don't think I tell you enough that I love you and you are the only woman for me. Could I be the only man for you?" he asked as he slid his hand into hers.

She looked at him in surprise. "Yes!" she exclaimed. "I do love you, and I love that you did this for me. It was so romantic! Can I repay the favor?" she asked shyly.

"What do you mean?" he asked, suspiciously.

"I would like to do something I think know you would like." She climbed on top of him and slid down. Severus inhaled sharply as he figured her plan. She took his manhood in her hands and examined him. In no time, it was hard as a rock. She danced her fingers over it, trying to test its sensitivity. Her husband's breathing was becoming labored, and his face was flushed.

"Hermione, please do *something*," he said in a strangled voice.

She decided to lick the length of the shaft with the tip of her tongue. A low growl sounded from deep within his chest. His eyes were smoky, and his stare was so intense, she started to feel nervous about him watching.

"I really don't know what to do," she admitted.

"Put your mouth on the tip and suck," he said deeply.

She did, and he tipped his head back and moaned. Hermione decided to get braver, and she took as much as she could in his mouth and began to move up and down. His breath hitched and his hips bucked.

"Yes, just like that...*oh God!*" he shouted.

He grabbed her by her hair and forced her head down further along the shaft. She tried to remember all she was supposed to do, but everything was going so fast. Her husband was very blessed in the endowment area. She focused on sucking while he bucked and held her head.

He swore a torrent of obscenities and tried to withdraw, but she had a suction hold on him. Withdrawing only made her suck harder. It was a sensation that he had never experienced before. He exploded in her mouth and watched in fascination as she swallowed it all down and proceeded to lick him clean. He watched in awe as his young, innocent wife gave him head like a world-class whore, and what blew his mind was that she'd figured it all out on her own. It was the most erotic thing he had ever experienced. Once she was done, he held her close to him and sang her praises. He couldn't wait to get hard again. He had great plans to pile-drive her into the mattress!

However, until then, there was always the option of going down under...

Christmas was fast approaching, and Hermione was nervous. Professor Flitwick had always been responsible for the myriad decorations for the season. It was going to be a true test of her Charms knowledge and expertise. She headed down early to begin her work. She left her husband snoring lightly and in a deep sleep. She smiled as she walked towards the Great Hall. Her husband had been so romantic last night. She was so touched by his sensitivity to her feelings. Poetry reading was something she had never expected, but she had appreciated his forethought and openness. She also had not been expecting his reaction to her gesture. After he had given her oral sex, she had collapsed into a deep sleep. When she'd awoken, Severus was asleep. She knew when he woke and found her gone, he was going to be irritated and surly. On Saturdays, he liked having his lie-in followed by some sort of intimacy. After last night, he probably would want relations on a regular basis, she surmised. She felt a thrill rush through her. She secretly hoped he would come after her in one of his dark moods and demand she return to bed at once or suffer his wrath.

As she charmed the fairy lights, she wondered when Severus would surprise her with fulfilling her fantasy. If enough time went by without any indications he would do something about it, she might have to take matters into her own hands. She could get her hands on a Hogwarts robe and shock him by seducing him right in his own classroom...after hours, of course. A very naughty smile crept on her lips as she imagined how it would play out. She had thought during her sixth year some very (what she had considered then) sick and twisted fantasies about Severus. However, he was always her Potions professor in her imagination. She thought about him grabbing her and fucking her in front of everyone...*okay that is still sick and twisted*...after yelling at her for being a "know-it-all." He was always clothed in her fantasies. She wondered why that was. Perhaps, it was because his clothes were so much a part of his persona. She had several deviations on the same fantasy, all involving various degrees of nakedness on her part.

Her favorite by far was the one where she was lying on her back on her lab table as he stripped her naked from the waist down and hiked her robe around the tops of her thighs. He wouldn't expose her sex to all and sundry, only to himself as he slid his hands up and down her milky thighs. He would inform the class this was what happened to "know-it-alls." Then he would fuck her with hard, deliberate strokes, keeping that scowl on his face the whole time until the end when he came undone and climaxed, moaning her name. He would delicately pull her robe down and kiss her forehead. Then he would return to his desk and resume his grading as usual. Then for the rest of the year, he would always have a look of respect whenever he glanced her way. He would never degrade her or think lowly of her again. He would respect her for giving herself to him.

I guess that was always what I wanted from him: respect and admiration for my work ethic and talents. I worked my tail off for him and he had never given me so much as a well done! she groused.

She was so engrossed in her thoughts and her work that she did not notice her husband leaning against the doorway of the Great Hall probing her mind. He had seen the fantasy scenario clear as day and then had sensed her anger towards him. He delicately pushed deeper into her mind and found the source. He smiled to himself. *She has no idea. She has never realized she had been the most challenging student I have ever taught!* The truth was that she had intimidated him since she had been a fifth year. Her magical abilities had been growing at an alarming rate. She had still been a know-it-all, but her prowess during her sixth- year Defense classes had floored him. He had never been able to tell her how much he had prided himself on her abilities. He had felt blessed to have been her teacher. He had hated that he had to show favoritism to his own house and disregard the others. Well, those days were over. It was time to show *Miss Granger* how much he thought of her.

Hermione couldn't help herself as she slipped back into her old, depraved fantasy from her fifth year.

She was sixteen and underage, out-of-bounds, and not even liked by the temperamental wizard. He was stalking as usual and stopped behind her. Unbeknownst to her and Neville, whom she had been covertly helping, Snape was listening as she whispered directions to the poor boy. Suddenly, a large white hand slammed on the table next to her cauldron.

"Miss Granger, I am beginning to wonder if you are as stupid as Longbottom here! How many times must I continue to warn you against cheating?" he whispered coldly.

His eyes were blazing with anger and rage. He was towering over her, and she knew she would be receiving detention while doing something horrible or at least humiliating.

Instead, he grabbed her by the upper arm and made her stand in front of the room behind his desk.

"Perhaps this will finally get my point across!" he sneered.

Hermione was beet red as he forced her down onto his table and stripped her from the waist down and began to slowly undo his trousers. She could hear the clanging of his belt buckle and the rustling of his robes. The class looked on in horror as they watched her being taken by Professor Snape. He tore into her, ignoring the class's protests and the scream that came from her after his forceful rending of her hymen. Then, he flipped her onto her back and pounded into her. She was loving it, and her moans were drowning out the gasps and shrieks of horror from the class.

She knew she should be feeling humiliated. Her mum had told her only bad girls did things like that. She continued to spread her legs wantonly, begging for him to fuck her harder.

"Please, Professor! I need to feel you deep inside me, please!" she screamed as the class looked on with shock.

He growled and fucked her viciously, cursing at her, telling her what an annoying girl she was and how she irritated him to no end.

"I'm going to take it out on you, Miss Granger! I'm going to fuck you for five years worth of your never-ending running of your mouth, you insufferable-know-it-all!"

Oh, and he did! He fucked her into conniptions, and still she had begged for more.

The fantasy always varied from that point; some were silly endings of him proposing marriage, telling her he wanted her to be his apprentice after she graduated, or just shocking the whole school and being known as the Girl-Who-Lived-After-Fucking-Snape, getting some respect for once. She also had one scenario where she received the Order of Merlin, First Class for giving her virginity and her all to Severus Snape, the wizard whom everyone knew was in desperate need of a good, hard shag!

Hermione giggled at her young, hormonal, virginal fantasies. *How silly to think that just because a man you desire puts his penis inside you, no matter what, you would experience an earth-shattering orgasm?*

Hermione had stayed up late working on a pop quiz for her seventh years. Ever since she had asserted herself and regained control of her classroom, she was not about to lose her edge. She kept telling herself that Christmas was right around the corner and she would have a nice calm break. She was exhausted when she finally called it a night and retired to her quarters. It was one in the morning, and she was sure Severus was fast asleep.

She quietly maneuvered her way around in the dark, taking off her clothes and performing her evening toilette. She decided to forgo plaiting her hair as she normally did; she was just too exhausted. She padded naked back into the bedroom and quietly opened her bureau to get her nightgown. She slipped into bed and noticed there was no warmth coming from her husband's side. She gingerly stretched out her hand and did not find him. She grabbed her wand, lit up the room, and saw she had been alone the whole time. Just as she was about to worry over where he might be, she saw a Hogwarts uniform folded neatly on the bed.

She jumped out of bed and went to examine the uniform. It was a regular Gryffindor robe with a skirt, shirt, and tie. She looked on the floor and saw the regulation knee-hi socks and shoes. There was a note hidden in the clothing on the bed.

Miss Granger,

Your repeated absences from your seventh-year N.E.W.T. classes have not gone unnoticed. I am insisting on your presence in my classroom to make a seventh-year potion of MY choosing. If you fail, I shall revoke your N.E.W.T. test score for Potions.

I await your arrival.

Professor Severus Snape

Potions master

Hermione stared at the letter. Surely, he would not make her try to brew now! Suddenly, she felt a rush of adrenaline and expectation and giggled. She quickly dressed in the uniform. She was nervous and excited. She checked her hair in the mirror and was shocked at how young she looked. She had gotten so used to her teaching robes and her turned up hair that she was gobsmacked at her reflection.

A fleeting image flickered in her mind, and she smiled. She decided to remove her underclothes to see if she could shock her husband...no, he ~~was~~ *Professor*. She made her way to the dungeons feeling very self-conscious. Running about the castle without her knickers or bra made her feel naked and exposed. She would feel safer once she was safely locked away in her husband's classroom.

She rapped on the door, and a curt, "Enter," rang from inside. She walked in and saw her husband sitting behind his desk as she had many times in the past as a student.

"Ah, Miss Granger," he said silkily. "Please come over to my desk. We have many issues to discuss this evening."

She obediently walked to his desk and faced him.

His cold look dissolved as he held her soft brown eyes in his black ones.

"Hermione," he began lovingly, "I do this for you since you were so brave to invite me into your heart and reveal your desires. This does not hold any fulfillment for me. I have never had any desire to seduce a student. Yet, tonight I will seduce you. I will treat you as I had treated you when you had been my student and will do my utmost to make your fantasy a reality. If at any time you wish for me to stop, all you have to say is 'husband,' and I will revert back into the man you married. Nevertheless, I warn you that I will have you tonight, either way, Hermione. You have kept me waiting far too long. I will leave the choice to you as how you want this scenario to play out. Is this agreeable?" he asked.

"Yes," she whispered.

"Fine," he snapped as he stood up from his chair. "I have laid out spare instruments for you to use since I know you do not own any of your own anymore. You will be, however, responsible for gathering your own ingredients. You shall complete a batch of Veritas serum for me, and I shall test it on you. If you fail, you will suffer the consequences. Have I made myself clear?" he said icily.

"Yes, sir," she answered clearly.

"Begin!" he bellowed.

Hermione took note of the directions on the blackboard and began to walk to the storeroom for her ingredients. She could feel the professor's eyes on her, and she truly felt like a student again. She had worked successfully under his scrutinizing eye before, and although her work was always impeccable, he had never praised her. She wondered how he would treat her tonight.

As the minutes flew by, she worked fast and efficiently, calculating and carefully rechecking each step to make sure of her progress. She noticed Professor Snape gliding down the aisle way to observe her work. The steam from the potion made her face flush, and she loosened her tie. She felt him behind her as she stirred, but he did not speak, he just watched her work. She could feel the heat of his body soak into hers, and she felt damp between her thighs. She was tingling with anticipation and wished he would just touch her.

Finally, he leaned in closer over her shoulder and stared intently into the cauldron to ascertain the color of the potion. His hand rested lightly on her back. His eyebrows furrowed, and she felt his thumb slide down the length of her back.

He leaned into her and whispered into her ear, "Miss Granger, are you wearing ~~all~~ of your school uniform tonight?"

"Yes, sir," she answered with a hint of cheekiness in her tone.

"You are lying!" he hissed. "You have come into my classroom without any underclothes, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir. However, underclothes are not an official part of the uniform," she said haughtily as she continued to work.

A strangled sound came from his throat, and he walked back to his desk. "Points would be taken, Miss Granger, if I were able. Your behavior is inexcusable, and trust me, *shan't forget it*," he whispered softly.

She forced her face to remain neutral as she finished her potion. She announced she was finished, and Professor Snape came and examined it.

"Color and consistency seem to be acceptable. Now, for the real test: open your mouth, Miss Granger," he ordered.

She opened her mouth, and he placed three drops on her tongue.

"Come and sit, Miss Granger," he said politely.

She sat across from his desk, and he said, "We shall see soon if your potion was successful. Tell me, what is your name?"

"Hermione Snape," she answered quickly.

"Are you nervous about this interrogation?"

"Yes."

"Why?" he asked with narrowed eyes.

"I'm afraid you may ask me to reveal things I may not be ready to admit."

"Are you feeling insecure about our marriage?"

Hermione was angered by his question. "Yes," she ground out.

"Do you think I am lying when I say I love you?"

"No."

"Why do you feel insecure?"

"I don't measure up to your standards. I never have. I fear you will eventually find me lacking and throw me away." Her eyes were swimming in tears.

Severus had had enough. He got up, took his wife by the hand, and led her to her old desk. He stood behind her and told her to look at the potion she had made. She watched him take the dropper and administer the Veritas serum to himself.

He took her face into his hands and looked intently into her face as the potion took effect. Finally, he spoke. "I love you so very much. You were the brightest student I have ever taught. You will never know how much it pained me to never give you the acknowledgment you deserved. So, now you know. I cannot lie. You are the most intelligent and lovely witch I have ever known, and I shall never tire of you," he said softly.

He led her to an empty table and laid her down on it. He took one leg at a time, carefully removing each shoe and stocking. He hiked up her robe and skirt to her waist and

took in the sight of his beautiful wife's nakedness. He inserted himself between her creamy, white legs and stroked them with his hands. The paleness of her long legs was accentuated by the blackness of his robes. He began to undo her buttons and spread her shirt open to reveal her naked breasts to him.

"Miss Granger, I would normally not do this to another student, but since you have brewed such an exceptional potion, I feel a reward is due you," he said seductively.

He leaned over her and kissed her passionately as he ran his fingers down from her throat to her nipples.

"Your nipples are exquisite," he breathed. "Your breasts are so soft. Each time I see even a glimpse of them, I feel they are aching to be touched and kissed," he confessed. Then he proceeded to kiss and lick them, one at a time, in an excruciatingly slow and erotic manner. She was squirming and felt her inner thighs wet with her juices.

He went down to her hips and placed his hands firmly on them, pulling her closer against the hardness in his trousers. She felt the heat radiate, and a whimper escaped from her.

"I'm going to fuck you, Miss Granger. You have earned it. You've been such a good girl all these years, working hard, trying to impress me. It hasn't gone unnoticed. Your mind is as enticing as your body, and I am captivated by both."

He opened the fly of his trousers slowly, one button at a time as she felt the cool air around her wetness. Severus slid his fingers into her to test her arousal. She closed her eyes in pleasure...she was ready. He plunged into her, and she moaned. He watched his hands stroke her naked legs as he eased himself in and out of her.

"You feel so good, Hermione. I love you," he whispered softly.

Hermione was overcome by his passion. He descended on her and ravished her mouth as he continued to thrust deeply into her. Finally, she broke from him and asked, "Are you sorry you married me?"

He smiled at her Slytherin tactics. "No, Hermione."

He made her gasp again as she tried to ask another question. "Please, I need to know, do you want to have sex with any other woman here?"

"No," he answered firmly. "Hermione, I want you. Your body is a delight to me. I think about being with you all the time. Hermione, I can't continue this way. I need to let go!" he groaned as her wetness overwhelmed him.

She was taken along on a violent storm of lust and greed. He furiously ground into her, cursing and grunting amazingly dirty things that made her blush and feel excited at the same time. Soon, she was spiraling along with him, and together they were clawing and grabbing for the other, screaming each other's name as they came. Hermione was exhausted. She felt as if her insides had been battered and a dull ache crept throughout her. *It feels delicious, though*, she thought wantonly. She loved that her husband had dragged her over the edge with him. She felt every part of her had been touched.

After Severus cleaned up the lab, he picked up his wife and carried her to their rooms. She was no longer under the effects of the Veritaserum, but she had to tell him what was truthful in her heart.

"Severus, it means so much to me that you took the time to praise and acknowledge all my hard work," she said as she snuggled into his shoulder.

"We are so very happy, aren't we, wife?" he asked as they made their way to their rooms.

"Yes, husband. We are. I do love you so," she replied just before falling asleep in his arms. He gently carried his wife to their quarters and felt a surge of pride and accomplishment. He had definitely "husbanded" his wife this night!

A/N: The poem read by Severus to Hermione is called, *The Bargain*, written by Sir Philip Sydney. I also want to thank WriterMerrin for her help on this chapter. Thank you!

Rita Skeeter Strikes Again

Chapter 18 of 23

Rita Skeeter's latest article threatens to destroy everything the Snapes have built.

A/N: Thanks to my beta, MadBrilliant. Also, thanks to all who continue to read and review!

"Good morning," Hermione heard a deep voice float over her. She opened her eyes and saw Severus leaning over her.

"I trust you slept well?" he asked.

"Mmm," she replied as she burrowed into his shoulder. He was deliciously warm. She wished they could stay in bed all day.

"It's Sunday," he whispered into the mass of curls covering her head.

"Can we just have a lie-in...all day?" she asked softly.

Severus wrapped his arms around her. "Is that what you want?" he murmured.

She brushed the hair from her face as she turned to face him. "I just want to stay with you all day, cozy, and warm," she replied.

He nuzzled her neck, and she suddenly realized they both were naked. She saw the school uniform from the night before strewn across the floor. She smiled and trailed her hands down her husband's chest and stomach.

"*Hermione*," he breathed.

She kissed the trail her hands had made. Severus watched his wife descend on him, her wild curly hair in tangles. He couldn't believe the rightness of it all.

"I saw you during the battle," he said suddenly.

Hermione lifted her head from her husband's stomach and said, "You did?"

His face was inscrutable. Finally, his eyes shone as he spoke. "I don't especially like to think of you in certain ways when I consider my life before the battle. I saw you grow up. It makes me uncomfortable. Therefore, I've had to split my life into 'before' and 'after'. However, during the battle I saw you, and I remember thinking, 'How remarkable!'

He played with her hair tenderly as he continued. "It's been difficult, coming to terms with all of this. Life has always led me down one road with which I felt familiar and was fully aware of the burdens that would come along. This life with you is a road that keeps shocking me at every turn. Nevertheless, I would be a liar if I didn't say I love every moment. I never thought I would be a man to enjoy surprises and the unknown behind every turn, but with you it makes it all exciting and intriguing," he said softly.

"I was so unbelievably jealous, you can't imagine!" she said laughing. "How could a little know-it-all like me barely out of school keep the interest of a hardened spy and ex-Death Eater who used to sneer and scowl at me! I was so sure after a few tumbles, you'd say, 'She's boring!' and look for greener pastures."

"No, Hermione. I'm yours, and you are mine."

She looked into the open and vulnerable face of her husband and sighed contently. He leaned down and kissed her slowly and sweetly on her lips. He moved over on top of her and kissed her neck, collarbone, and moved to her breasts. She closed her eyes and felt the sensations wash over her. Soon, she was feeling her legs nudged apart, the heat radiating from him trapped under the covers making her sweaty. He rubbed his erection lightly over her clit, and she arched her back in pleasure. She opened her eyes and saw her husband grasp her legs and enter her. His breath caught as he shifted inside her. His black hair brushed against her face as he watched her body move in time with his thrusts. He rested on his elbows and cupped her face in his hands. He kissed her as he continued to thrust into her. It was slow...excruciatingly slow.

"Please," she moaned.

He drove into her deeper and harder, but no faster. She could smell his scent, look into his face, and see all the lines and imperfections that came with age and worry. She contemplated his facial reactions as she clenched and unclenched her walls around him. He started losing his ability to breathe normally. Hermione loved that she had this vision to herself. No other woman would know Severus Snape, the man, as she did. She finally accepted that he was hers, and she was his...forever.

He was panting, and his face was flushed. "Tell me you love me, Hermione," he breathed.

"I love you," she whispered.

"With my name, Hermione, tell me with my name!" he urged.

"I love you, Severus," she whispered into his ear.

He shuddered as he emptied inside her. He lingered over her to catch his breath and then shifted to her side. Hermione kicked off the covers to cool down. She was sweaty and exhausted. Her husband was asleep. She lay there feeling his essence seep out from her.

Was it only two years ago that he had been her teacher? She thought. She never would have known then that in two years she would be laying in a bed she shared with Professor Snape, making love to him, telling him she loved him and that he loved her. How odd that things changed. Just seven months ago, she was with Harry and Ron, destroying Horcruxes and planning to defend the castle. How so much had changed in such a short period of time!

She recalled her Defense classes with Professor Snape. He had seemed so annoyed with her. He had cut her down so badly, but last night he had made up for it in spades. His Veritaserum induced confession of his pride in her had made her feel more secure than she had felt since their wedding.

The staff could not help but notice a shift in the demeanor of their Headmaster and the Charms Instructor. It was apparent to all that calmness had settled between them, an understanding of sorts. Everyone was very happy for the newlyweds.

Hermione stayed grounded in her faith. She willingly relinquished her time to Severus so he could help Professor Holden with her duties as Head of House. She did not feel any jealousy, for she knew from first-hand experience that Samantha Holden was shagging Professor Selenski. So each Monday evening, Severus spent a couple of hours in the common room or in his office to mentor and assist Professor Holden as she waded her way through dealing with her Slytherins. Hermione also kept the parchment Severus had written the poem he had read to her on her person at all times. Whenever she felt the stirrings of insecurities, she would take it out and read it or at least finger it in her pocket when others were around. It was becoming a personal talisman to ward off ill will against her marriage.

Hermione took the time to visit with the "gals" during this time. Monday nights became hen nights, where the blonde triplets, Hermione, Rosmerta, and Rosie, if she could make it, would gather and blow off steam. Mondays were always hard. Students were lethargic and spacey during classes while the teachers were trying to gear up for another week. These 'hen nights' became more than just an excuse to get pissed and rowdy. They became a time of reflection and airing out problems. Hermione had really gotten to know the blonde triplets as real people. Emilie, Christine, and Satine were interesting young women in their own right. Their previous frostiness towards Hogwarts had started to melt, and they were coming round. They were very intelligent witches, eager to excel in their field, and they were all new in their careers. Rosmerta and Rosie came to listen and give moral support. Poppy was also a calming and light-hearted presence. She had so many stories of the old days when Vector, Sinistra, and Trelawney had begun at Hogwarts. She reminded them to not push or judge themselves too harshly.

"The school is doing incredibly well!" Poppy reported. "Mafalda, Amos, and Robards have had nothing but the nicest things to say about what they have heard the parents mention the school."

That made Hermione's heart glad. Things were really coming together. Hogwarts was becoming a family again as the staff grew to learn and respect each other.

"You know, I think we should invite the Durmstrang lads to join us. I did ask Miss Pince to join us, but she just stuck her nose in the air!" said Emilie.

"Don't forget Mr. Ketsall, if you are going to do this. It would not be nice to snub anyone. Also, Mr. Shunpike is a most agreeable fellow," mused Poppy. "He's quite harmless and a lonely soul. He'd be pleased as punch to join us."

"Why not?" mused Hermione. "After all, they are probably lonely and bored to sobs after hours."

The women murmured their thoughts amongst themselves. Hermione leaned into Emilie and whispered, "I'm sure Professor Selenski is lonely on these nights as I am with Severus in conference with Professor Holden!" She giggled at the thought of the memory of watching the two of them making love.

Emilie's face grew nervous and uncomfortable.

"What's wrong?" asked Hermione.

"Well, I talked to Professor Domask last night. He and I have been getting friendly, and he told me that Selenski called it quits with Samantha! Just about broke her heart, bless her," she said sadly. "So she may really need comforting."

Hermione felt a familiar stab of fear and jealousy run through her veins. She reminded herself of her husband's words under Veritaserum. He loved her. He wanted her...*only* her. She had nothing to fear.

She returned to her quarters and waited until eleven o'clock before Severus returned. She spent her time dawdling over her evening toilette and then sat and read her

poem over and over, running her fingers over Severus' cramped, scrawling handwriting. When Severus returned, he was agitated and put out.

"What's wrong, Severus?" she asked concerned.

"Oh, I spent two hours on educating Professor Holden on being head of Slytherin house, and then as we were packing up for the night, she started to tell me about her romantic woes. Hermione, how does one tell a witch he does not want to be a 'girlfriend'?" She was so emotional and confused. I sat there like a trapped animal for an eternity!

"Finally, Professor Domask came in, seeing that my office was open, and saved me! Do you think you could speak with her, Hermione? God, I wish I could just be mean, cold and run her off! But, I promised Kingsley I'd be the 'caring' Headmaster...*damn it all to hell!*" he muttered.

Hermione laughed. "I'll speak with her, darling. Now come here and snuggle with me. I missed you so much!"

Severus came to bed quickly and wrapped his arms around his wife. She smelled like lavender and clean cotton. She was fast becoming a drug to him. She was intoxicating. He thought just before he slept, *I could get used to sleeping normally. This is perfect!*

The holidays came and went. The Snapes attended several Ministry parties and in between spent their days wrapped in each others arms and limbs, not caring whose was whose. They were deep in their honeymoon phase and loving every minute of it. The staff seemed to understand and went about their own business.

The new semester came without incident. Mondays remained the standard weekly staff get together. Hermione noticed that Domask was not as friendly as the others. Although he was seeing Emilie, he did not care to socialize with the other staff members. It didn't bother Hermione much. She was married to a man who was the same in demeanor and temperament. What did concern her, though, was the way he looked at her, as if he knew something she didn't. He was smug, and she didn't like it. Not one bit.

Two weeks after the students had returned, the owls came in during breakfast as usual. Severus unwrapped his *Daily Prophet*, and as he gazed on the front page, his normally pale face became even paler. The nerve on the side of his mouth was twitching madly, and the vein that signaled a major outburst was pulsating so badly it threatened to burst! Hermione was in the middle of biting into her toast with marmalade when she saw her husband's reaction. She hastily removed the toast from her hands and wiped her face. She gazed among the students. It was quiet, too quiet. Then there were sniggers and tittering coming from the Slytherin Table. Hermione didn't make any quick, sharp movements. Severus looked as if he was going to Vesuvius all over the Great Hall, his rage and ire was so potent. Then on her extreme left, she heard a woman shriek with anger.

"That fucking bitch! That fucking piece of shit!" screamed Professor Holden as she jumped up from her seat and walked out of the Great Hall through the Staff Entrance.

Severus jumped up when the tittering among the students suddenly broke out into laughter. He didn't need to cast a Sonorous Charm. His voice could boom across the Hall with ease.

"There will be absolute silence!" His voice ripped through the laughter and there was immediate quiet. Hermione had never seen Severus so angry. Even during her third year when he had caught her, Harry, and Ron in the Shrieking Shack with Lupin and Sirius, he had been murderously angry. This made that experience seem like a holiday at Brighton!

"There will be NO discussion of today's article in the *Prophet*. Any student seen with it or heard discussing it will be expelled! *Accio Prophet!*" he roared. Each copy in the Great Hall soared onto the High Table. The copies spilled over onto the floor, there were so many! Hermione was shocked...utterly shocked! When each paper had made its way to the High Table, Severus incinerated each copy with an explosion so fearsome, it sounded like the beginning blasts of the final battle. He cast a Muffliato spell over the table and spoke to the teachers in a calm voice.

"There shall be a staff meeting this evening after dinner. If you are not there, consider yourself sacked! I will be requiring answers, and we shall not end the meeting until I am satisfied. Is that clear?" he whispered.

Each teacher nodded cautiously. He removed the spell and turned to his wife. "Madam Snape, we need to return to my office immediately. We shall breakfast there." He grabbed her hand and marched her out of the Great Hall. You could have heard a pin drop. Hermione was afraid. She didn't want to be alone with him. What if he were angry with her? She grew increasingly anxious the closer they got to his office.

Once they were safely inside, Severus let out a ferocious stream of obscenities that frankly, made Hermione want to laugh. She suppressed a giggle and Severus glowered at her.

"Oh, amused are we? Here, wife, please read for yourself!" he snarled.

He thrust his copy of the paper at her, and she took it slowly from him and began to read.

Adulterous Sex Scandal Revealed at Hogwarts!

It has come to the attention of the Daily Prophet that there indeed exists a horrible den of iniquity inside the Serpents' Lair. Headmaster Snape, not satisfied with seducing his student, Hermione Granger, into marriage, (or perhaps it was the other way around?) now the Headmaster has been carrying on an illicit affair with the Head of Slytherin House, Professor Samantha Holden.

Astoria Greengrass, a seventh-year, said, "I saw them snuggling in the common room of all places! They were quite cozy and looked very at ease with one another. Professor Holden is a American and is very loose in her demeanor. She flirts constantly with the Slytherin boys during Transfiguration Class, and everyone knows, including Headmaster Snape's wife, that they spend every Monday night together in his Potions office...alone...for hours!"

Malcom Baddock, another seventh-year, spoke of an embarrassing confrontation he witnessed in the Slytherin common room earlier in the school year. "It was unbelievable! Madam Snape was screaming at Professor Holden about sleeping with her husband and that she wasn't going to stand by and let it continue. If the Headmaster had not taken her wand away, she would have hexed her into oblivion! Then, the Headmaster dragged Madam Snape out of the common room as if she were in the wrong!"

Another Slytherin first-year, who wishes to remain anonymous, stated that "he heard the Headmaster and Professor Holden planning to run off together. With tears in his eyes, he said he found the experience "highly disturbing and confusing."

What is happening at Hogwarts? Was it not enough to place an ex-Death Eater at the helm, now we must face the shame as the other Wizarding schools pronounce judgment on the Minister of Magic's decision and faith in a wizard who has continued to parade the fact he has no scruples or self-restraint.

One must think of the wronged wife. Madam Snape has lost her husband's heart to an American, who obviously only wanted to come to Hogwarts to gain recognition for herself! She is described as a very open-minded and free spirited witch, who drinks heavily and is often seen drunk by the students in Slytherin House.

Another source claimed that Holden is no more than a scarlet woman who first seduced the Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor, Roman Selinski, before breaking his

heart by moving on to Headmaster Snape.

Again, the question must be raised, what kind of institution is Hogwarts? It does not seem to be the same reputable school that once taught an impeccable curriculum, appointed only the very best instructors with spotless reputations, save a few incidents, and high moral values. The Ministry must call Headmaster Snape and Professor Holden into account. I urge any and all concerned parents to insist on the resignation of both parties.

As for Madam Snape, one can only say that it is a fact that a person's past will eventually catch up with them. We all have seen and witnessed Madam Snape's lack of moral judgment over the years. Now it has come home to roost. Nonetheless, it is a sad day for Britain's Wizarding Community.

Hermione was blind with rage. She was pale white and shaking like a leaf. Severus had been patiently waiting for her to blow-up and rage, but instead, she looked as if she were going to collapse.

"Hermione?" he whispered as he went to touch her shoulder.

"Why?" she whispered.

"I don't know, Hermione. That woman has it in for you, me, and for this school, obviously!" he said angrily.

"No," she said, her voice shaking, "what I mean is how could you do this to us?"

He drew himself up to his full height. 'I did nothing to us. That miserable woman did this to us...and to Professor Holden!' he hollered.

"You just HAD to spend every Monday night with her! You just HAD to listen to her sob stories. You just HAD to put yourself in a position to be judged!" she screamed as she took the tea tray and hurled it across the room. Severus' face was dumbstruck by the force of how it crashed into the opposite wall.

She burst into tears. "It's just too hard. I have to keep fighting everything and everybody for every bit of happiness, and I can't do it anymore!" she sobbed.

Hermione wanted him to hold her and tell her he was firing that bitch and then was going to poison Rita Skeeter that would result in an agonizing death. She wanted him to scream and curse that he had been a damn fool to be alone with that stupid witch and beg her forgiveness.

Instead, he just stood there, doing nothing.

"Are you quite finished?" he said coldly.

She looked up at him in horror. Perhaps she had overreacted, but didn't she deserve to? Hadn't she been holding up her end of this school, this 'New Era' of Hogwarts? She was starting to feel she had reached her limit. It was too much...too hard. She turned and walked out.

"Hermione?" Severus called. He followed her and called her name. She didn't care anymore. They all had won. Her students had conspired against her, the *Daily Prophet* wanted to break her, and hell, even among her so-called friends, her colleagues, there was a traitor in their midst. She just couldn't fight anymore. She couldn't live her life with the Wizarding world not wanting her marriage to succeed, her career to flourish, and her efforts to secure Hogwarts as a school of excellence take root. She had fought for her place in this world since her very first day when she had been teased about knowing how to levitate a feather better than anyone else, fighting Voldemort, being called a Mudblood every other day, and targeted for being one...to now...a less than worthy witch married above her station, forced to take on responsibilities far beyond her nineteen years. It was just enough. She was tired and didn't want to do it anymore.

She reached the main door that led out of the Headmaster's office when Severus stopped her and barred her way.

"Hermione, what are you doing?" he asked in a voice she had never heard before.

She looked up at him, and he sighed. He saw the defeat in her eyes and couldn't blame her. Anyone else would have broken a long time ago.

"Please, don't do this, Hermione. Please don't leave me," he whispered softly.

"Don't make me fight you, Professor," she whispered. "Just let me go."

"Professor? NO!" he raged. "I WILL NOT LET YOU GO!" he hollered wildly. He sounded as if he was going to lose his mind.

"Hermione," he begged as he fell to his knees. "Don't do this...I can't bear it. You can't leave me. You can't! You have to love me. You have to love me!" he demanded sadly as he held on to her hands.

"Don't make this about loving or not loving you, Severus. It's just too hard! No one wants me to be here but you. I have no place in this world. I'm going to go get my parents and break my wand. I'm done with this world and this life."

"And of us? I love you!" he choked out. "I'll break my wand as well, Hermione. I can't live without you."

A glimmer of light came over her eyes. She slid to the floor next to her husband. "You'd do that? You'd break your wand just to be with me?" she asked unbelievably.

He grabbed her arms and pulled her to him. "There is nothing without you. If you go, this will be empty, no life, no reason for living. I would die without you. Therefore, yes, I'll go wherever you go. We'll go to Australia, I'll live wherever you wish, I'd do whatever you say, Hermione. Don't you understand? I can't do anything if you aren't with me. If you'll stay, I'll kill that slag, I'll fire the whole lot of them and start from scratch, I'll expel every Slytherin here. I'll do it, Hermione, I'd go to Azkaban happily, if you'd just swear you will never abandon me!"

She grabbed him and held him fiercely. "I never knew I held that much weight with you," she whispered.

He wrenched himself from her and bore into her eyes. "You are precious, so precious to me. You are my standard, my hope; there is nothing without you. It's meaningless if you aren't here! Without you, everything falls apart."

She looked at his anguished face and knew she had more power than she had ever realized. Her mum had told her that once, that a great and powerful man would only be great and powerful because of a woman, whether wife, sister, mother, whatever. She had told her to wield her power carefully over the man who loved her. She would have the ability to raise him up or tear him down. Hermione had always believed that was only for certain women who were incredibly beautiful or sexy. Not her, plain old Hermione, yet here was the most powerful wizard in Britain, probably in the world, and he would happily spend his days as a Muggle if she said it had to be.

It didn't seem so heavy now. She didn't have to fight it alone. Any battle she would face she would have him to face it as well. She would never fall as she would never let him fall. They would hold the ends of this school up and refuse to allow it to topple to the ground.

She took her husband by the hands and said, "You are right, Severus. We will fight this together. But, from now on, you and I must have synchronization. No more Professor Holden. Get rid of her. She is a liability and a sore spot between us. None of the other women professors has caused such insecurity deep inside me. She also has acted inappropriately with you, using you to cry over about her poor choices in lovers! In addition, if ANY woman tries to pull a stunt like that, you send her to me, post haste! I'll fix that shit. You're MINE! Have I made myself clear?" she said ferociously.

Severus was impressed. His lovely lioness was ready to show her claws, and he decided he wasn't going to stop her. If they were going to do this together, she had to

assert her self and not be held back by him. Hell, this could even be highly entertaining! The thought of his wife hexing another woman because of her need to protect her territory was highly arousing. He didn't mind being the territory, as long as he got sex out of it. However, he wasn't going to admit that.

"You have made yourself quite clear, wife. I await this evening staff meeting with relish! You may do whatever you deem is appropriate."

"No interfering?" she said with narrowed eyes.

"Absolutely not. I wouldn't dream of it!" he said smoothly.

She got up and he followed suit. She was far from mollified. "You seem a bit smug! Trying to condescend your wife?" she challenged.

"Hell, no!" he said with a chuckle. "I honestly can say I would not like to find myself on the business end of your wand!"

"Fine!" she said. "Now that we are agreed on the particulars, we have things to plan before tonight. And a few students to expel... but first things first!" she said as she sauntered to her husband.

"You, Headmaster, are going to get your arse in our quarters and await your punishment! I've been made to be the wife of an adulterer. True or not, you have acted foolishly, and I need to reassert my territory!"

Severus was in quite a predicament. He knew every past Headmaster and Headmistress was listening to every word spoken. Moreover, what burned him was that she knew it too!

She dared for him to defy her. Well, if had to place his balls in someone's hand, he couldn't think of anyone he rather have them.

He heard that old codger, Phineas Black, hiss in the corner, "You'd best get your arse where it's told to go, boy! You've been a right dunderhead, and you'd best take your punishment like a man!" he growled.

He glared at the old Slytherin and heard a familiar chuckle. He averted his eyes to Albus, who was smiling with that damn twinkle in his eye.

"I agree, Severus! You have acted rather recklessly, and now you have to face the consequences."

A bunch of sniggers and catcalls came from the various portraits. Hermione beamed at all of them.

"As you wish, Madam," Severus said humbly and then departed into their quarters with his usual billowing of robes trailing behind him.

Hermione sat in her husband's chair and turned to Albus. "Was I too hard on him?" she asked.

"That remains to be...heard, I believe, Madam Snape," he chuckled.

She laughed wickedly. She felt better than she had in years. She was going to clean house and kick ass. She was going to start with her own house, and then she was going to deal with that little nuisance of a bug. And this time, there would be no air holes!

Hermione Snape Strikes Back

Chapter 19 of 23

Hermione begins to 'clean house', but is nearly derailed after a standoff at Rita Skeeter's office.

A/N: Okay, I hope you all enjoy this chapter. It's a big one. Please review! Thanks to MadBrilliant for her hard work!

Severus Snape decided once and for all that the Dark Lord himself would have quaked in fear in the presence of Hermione Snape. She was truly a scary witch. She had bound him to their bed after she had ordered him to strip naked. He wasn't happy about being bound, but she was determined to have her way. She teased him and tortured him with the promise of release, only to be brought back from the edge several times. He was getting angry and was convinced he was going to have a royal case of blue-balls if she didn't stop the tension and let him come.

She was incredible in her rage. Hermione knew how to have angry sex. He knew she was taking all the frustrations of the past months and taking it out on his cock, and honestly, he didn't mind...if only she'd let him climax!

"Hermione, I swear to God, if you don't stop this, I will make you pay! I will fuck you so hard you won't walk right for a month!" he growled.

"Oh!" she pouted. "Is that supposed to scare me?" she said seductively as she continued to ride him ruthlessly, peaking in orgasm after orgasm, only to reach down and squeeze the base of his cock when she felt the telltale sign of his impending ejaculation.

He scowled at her and said through gritted teeth, "Did I mention you won't be able to sit properly either for two months?"

She blinked and tilted her head to the side. Then her eyes grew wide. "You wouldn't!" she breathed.

He glared at her and said in a dead calm, "I do not make idle threats, Hermione. Now either release me from these bonds or start learning to sleep with one eye open."

"If I release you, will you promise not to hurt me?" she said fearfully.

He almost felt sorry for her. She could really put a hurt on a man, but had no idea of how to go about getting away from a sticky situation. *Well, she'll learn*, he thought.

"I promise," he said silkily.

She released him after she had already had herself halfway out the bedroom door. She made a run for it, but he caught her with a Tripping Jinx just before she made it to the door to his office. He quickly pounced on her and forced her robe open.

"You said you wouldn't hurt me!" she shrieked.

"I won't, my pet. I won't," he ground out softly as he spread himself on top of her.

She looked at his hooded eyes, full of unbridled lust. She didn't fight as he pushed her knees to her chest and mounted her right on the floor next to the door. *Damn him!* she cursed. *He didn't place a Silencing Charm or cast Mufflato.*

He was pounding so hard into her and groaning so loudly, she was shrieking and screaming for him to quiet down while trying to ride out her own orgasm. He covered her mouth as he still kept thrusting into her and said, "You have only yourself to blame. You kept me hard for so long, it's going to take a while for me to finish!"

She must have looked horrified, for he laughed and said deeply, "Don't worry. You are going to like this."

He had her spread open and kept reaming her until she began to cry out with the beginnings of an overpowering orgasm. She still wasn't used to the overwhelming feeling of it, and he forced it out of her violently as she cried out and swore from the intensity of it. He was sweating profusely, as was she, but he didn't stop. He flipped her over, forced her on her hands and knees, and fucked her from behind. At first, she thought he was going to do *that*, but thankfully, he didn't.

He forced her head down to the ground as he continued to ride her from behind. He teased her clit as she came again. She was screaming so loudly, surely the whole castle must think he was killing her. Finally, he turned her over and fucked her so he could see her face.

"HERMIONE... OH... GOD...!" he shouted loudly.

She was beyond mortified. She was never going to look at another painting again!

"Oh shit! Your pussy is so good, Hermione, fuck me... AHHHH!" he roared.

He came so violently, it looked like it hurt. He was exhausted and soaking with perspiration.

He rose up from her and summoned a blanket and pillow for her.

"Would you like the pillow for your head or your..." he trailed off, smiling wickedly.

"*How could you?*" she hissed quietly as she hit him with the pillow. "You know those old busybodies heard everything we did and said!"

"That was for giving me blue-balls, wife. And if you ever try a stunt like that again, I will ream your sweet ass until you cry!" he whispered viciously.

She looked petrified. "Oh, don't worry, it'll only hurt a lot...at first." He smiled as he got up and helped her off the floor. She got up and winced with every step they took. He whisked her up from the floor and put her in bed, summoning some healing oils to his side.

He lovingly massaged her sex gently until she sighed in delight. He kissed her on her nose and tucked her in.

"I will cancel your morning classes, love," he whispered. "I also know I'll pay later for taking over my own punishment. I just couldn't let what you said in front of the portraits slide."

"Do you feel all right?" he asked seriously as he looked into her face. "Any pain?"

"I'm fine," she purred sleepily. "Those oils made everything tingle and feel so warm and nice."

He smirked as she fell asleep. He kissed her lips. He loved how they naturally pouted in her sleep.

When he stepped into his office, showered, dressed, and ready to face his first class of dunderheads for the day, he couldn't help but hear the guffaws and sounds of shock coming from the portraits. He turned around to address them.

"Have any of you anything *constructive* to say?" he asked smoothly.

Dumbledore spoke for the group. "No, my boy, I daresay none of us have anything constructive to say in the least. But we still have a lot we'd like to say," he said amusedly.

Severus raised his hand. "I do not wish to hear it, and as Headmaster, you all are forbidden to speak of anything you witness or hear in this office or my personal chambers to anyone. Is that clear?"

"Of course!" chided Headmistress Derwett. "But, Headmaster, did you have to hurt Madam Snape so?"

"Trust me, she is not hurt," he said absent-mindedly as he gathered his papers from his desk.

"But, she cannot teach her morning classes! This is most unseemly!" she said in a huff.

"Madam Snape is not hurt. She is merely resting. She is quite...*worn out*," he drawled.

More snickers came from the portraits. Hell, even Snape's mouth twitched.

"As long as you both are happy, Severus," said Dumbledore quietly.

"I assure you, Madam Snape is most serene and agreeable. Good day."

Mortified two hours later, Hermione showered and dressed for the day. The first thing she did was to have the house-elves send her up an early lunch; she was ravenous. Then she entered her husband's office in her dressing gown and made a to-do list. She had a column of student's names she wanted expelled. That was going to be her first task. She wrote each letter by hand and left them blank for her husband's signature. When she met with her seventh-years in the afternoon, she would dismiss them in front of the others and order them to their common rooms to remain until their parents could collect them.

As she ate her lunch, she made a list of all the things she wanted to discuss with Miss Rita Skeeter. First, she was going to see Kingsley and see if he would accompany her. However, she had to make sure he was going to play along with her bluff. Perhaps, Robards would come to give credence to her scheme.

She looked up when she heard a titter from one of the portraits and blushed as she lowered her head to her work. She was so humiliated. The portraits were silent for the most part except for a snort here and there. She had then glared at the offenders so viciously; the others had remained in complete silence for the duration.

When Severus returned to his office, he noticed her anger and came to her side to kiss her cheek.

She tensed as his lips touched her cheek, and she rose imperiously, thrusting her letters into his hands. "Sign these so I can have them owled immediately!" she barked at him.

He sat down and relaxed in his chair, studying her annoyed expression.

Finally, she burst. "I don't know how you have the nerve to look at me, let alone kiss me, after *after what you did!*" she whispered angrily.

He laughed richly and stood to embrace her. "I love you, Hermione. You have to admit I just finished something you started. Now, you're angry with me because I beat you at your own game!"

"Alright, no more dirty pool! But you still have to keep your word to me!" she chided.

"Yes, my dear, I shall expel all these nasty students, each and every one of the blighters. I will also sit back happily and watch you have my entire staff for your dinner," he confirmed sarcastically.

"I'm going to the Ministry and then to the *Daily Prophet*," she said.

"Going to have a little beetle for brunch?" he asked with a smirk.

She sniffed her nose as she tucked her wand in her pocket. "No, I've already eaten, but I'll make sure I take a jar with me, in case I get peckish later," she said maliciously.

After she'd left, Dumbledore spoke up. "Amazing, isn't she?"

"Absolutely," Severus said with a lusty grin.

Kingsley chuckled with laughter as Hermione told him of her plan.

"Of course, Hermione, I would love to help you with your ruse; however, it really doesn't have to be. Defamation of character, especially accusations of infidelity, is taken rather seriously in our world," he said soberly.

Hermione sighed. "Well, we have enough problems at Hogwarts than adding this to the list. If I could scare her or intimidate her into leaving us alone, it would be all for the better," she admitted.

"Well, if it's an Auror you want, I'm sure I can get old Gawain to accompany us. He's in today, lucky for you," he said smiling.

Hermione was nearly jumping up and down with glee. As the three of them planned for their visit to Rita Skeeter, the laughter rose high and poured through the Auror Department. The other Aurors thought how good it was to hear laughter again.

Rita Skeeter saw Hermione walking towards her office. "I'll be buggered!" she muttered to herself as a smile crept across her powered face. She checked her face and hair in the mirror, making sure her short blonde curls were perfect and her red lipstick was in place. "Lovely, all right then!" she said to herself. She turned around in time for the three visitors to walk in uninvited.

"My, my! Minister, Auror Robards, Madam Snape! What a pleasure to have you here in my humble workplace!" she smiled falsely.

Hermione smiled saccharine-sweet in return. "Rita, how tedious this has become! I thought you and I had finished with all this nastiness years back!"

"Well, when a story is actually *thrown* in one's lap, one does have a responsibility to the readers to keep them aware!" she explained.

"It's interesting, Rita, that you seem to know so much about the goings on at Hogwarts. You haven't been *flitting* about, have you?" Hermione pushed.

"You can stop with the veiled threats, Hermione," she said snidely. "I am now a registered Animagus, but, no, I have not been anywhere near Hogwarts. It's like I said. When one is practically thrown such information..."

Hermione interrupted. "Information from whom? Students? How have you reached them? And then there is something that has bothered me about your article. You claim information that Professor Holden seduced Professor Selinski and then broke his heart. Have you been speaking with the teaching staff?"

Rita smiled smugly. "I know all about your contracts, Hermione. It isn't my fault if some of them decide to just throw away their careers. It isn't as if I went tracking them down!" she said defensively.

"What *have* you been doing, pray tell?" asked Hermione softly.

"I have been in Hogsmeade, speaking with students who have *freely* given me information without so much as a question thrown at them! I would look to your own house for treachery, Madam, not here," she said cryptically.

"Listen, you shrew!" Hermione spat as she leaned over the reporter's desk. "I have the Minister of Magic and the Head Auror here to take you in under a complaint of defamation of character! You have falsely accused my husband of adultery and may have single-handedly ruined the career of a very talented Transfiguration Professor, one who has come to Hogwarts with excellent references and reputation!"

Rita Skeeter stood up tall and leaned over to match Hermione's stance. "Madam Snape, I can only say to you that you need to look towards your own people for your traitor. You have invited a viper into your cozy love nest. I have actually done you a grand favor by writing as I have. Nothing else would have brought your attention to what is occurring right under your very nose if I hadn't ruffled your feathers!" she said in a sinister voice.

Auror Robards spoke up, "Ms. Skeeter, if a crime is being committed you are under obligation of the law to bring it to the attention of the Auror Department!"

"You want me to give up my sources?" she screeched.

"No, Ms. Skeeter," said Kingsley diplomatically as he remained calmly seated. "However, what of the *situation*? You surely can tell of facts without revealing your sources. I must reiterate what Madam Snape has said. I do not bluff. We will haul you in this minute and throw you in Azkaban if you do not comply!" he threatened.

"Fine!" she spat. She sat hard in her chair and folded her hands on her desk. "You and the Headmaster have been very foolish! I bring the two of you together so you would be ready to face the future calamity you've placed upon yourselves, and *this* is the thanks I get!"

"Whatever are you on about?" Hermione said impatiently.

Rita rolled her eyes in irritation. "Your husband should not have placed his ego over his better judgment! He placed that Muggle-born as Head of Slytherin House. Do you even realize the kind of trouble that stirred up? And you accuse me of slander!" She laughed heartily now.

"Stop it!" Hermione yelled. "What trouble?"

"You and your husband have been so wrapped up in each another, it's just been bordering on the precious!" she said sourly. "You have fallen for every line, every action, every set-up. You want a real victim? Look at that American witch. She's the *real* victim, poor cow, getting friendly with people she didn't know. How could Snape have been so stupid? An ex-Death Eater to boot! Hah! He's lost his touch, he has!"

Hermione was getting furious. She grabbed her wand pointed it at the witch. "I want answers right now! If you don't start talking, I'm going to force you into your Animagus form and put you in my jar." She produced a small jar for her to see. "Look, no air holes!"

Rita Skeeter jumped up and screamed at Kingsley and Robards. "Did you hear that? She is threatening me! That has to be against the law!"

"Well, I can't say I really heard that," said Robards vaguely. "Did you hear something, Kingsley?"

"Can't say as I did. Must be my hearing," he said with mock concern.

"See, Rita, your vacillating ways are at an end. You are going to tell me what I need to know right now, or so help me!" she warned.

"Fine!" she yelled. "You have a Death Eater in your midst. You'd best hope the damage done hasn't been permanent! Not only one Death Eater, but his mistress, to boot!" she said with a satisfied smile.

"Death Eaters!" growled Kingsley. "Who? I demand you reveal the name of this Death Eater at once!" he roared.

"No need, Minister," said Hermione. "I have a suspicion. Tell me Rita, is it Domask?"

Rita smiled proudly. "Right in one, Hermione. I would have thought you of all people would have learned not to trust the dashing lads of Durmstrang after learning Victor Krum had been a Death Eater."

"Hermione," interrupted Kingsley. "How did you know?"

Hermione kept a wary eye on Rita while her mind began to reel. "Severus told me Domask walked in on one of his meetings with Professor Holden. She had been trying to talk to Severus about her breakup with Selinski. He mentioned Domask saved him from her trying to turn him into a 'girlfriend,'" she said with a confused tone.

Hermione turned back to Rita Skeeter, her sensed sharp again. "But that's why Severus refused Domask the post! He didn't want *any* Durmstrang teacher in charge of Slytherin House!" she yelled.

Rita laughed raucously. "Oh, and it just gets better! You played right into his hands. Sowing seeds of magical plants isn't the only thing he knows, my lovely. He knows how to sow the seeds of discontent. He has been using his Herbology classes as a cover for his more *darker* activities: converting your precious pure-bloods into reviving an Old Cause!"

Hermione felt ill. How could they have been so deluded! "Wait!" she said as she forced herself not to vomit. "You said he has a mistress. Please, you have to tell me!"

Rita lit a cigarette and pondered her options. "Oh, my dear, it's much worse than you could even imagine!"

Hermione sat down shakily. "What is it?" she asked fearfully.

"Your dear Miss Emilie Beauharnis. She is with Domask. But you knew that, didn't you?" she said with a wink and a smirk.

"Yes, she told me. Why would she tell me?" asked Hermione confused.

"Well, it was vital to the plan to get you all worried and upset that your husband was shagging that American bint, you know, cause doubting and worries that would serve to distract you both from what was happening under your very noses. Of course, then after a fashion, they had to get you sufficiently secure in your knowledge that she wasn't interested in old Snape so that the next part of the plan could be executed: getting you to leave and ruining Severus Snape."

Hermione's mind whirled. She couldn't breathe. Her face turned beet red. *That day in the woods! Oh My God!*

Rita called her out of her stupor. "Oh, Hermione, the fact of our mutual dislike of one another was probably the best thing to come out of this mess," she mused.

Kingsley had finally stood, and he and Robards were confused. "What is she talking about?" prodded Kingsley.

Hermione's eyes darted around as she tried to piece it all together. "I don't know for sure, but I was in the woods one day, and I stumbled upon Professors Holden and Selinski...*shagging!* I came across Emilie in the woods as well, and she and I talked and... watched. She told me I could learn...things..." she mumbled.

Rita laughed heartily. "You want to know what was happening? Do you really want to know?" she asked viciously.

"Your dear Herbology and Muggle Studies professors had them under the Imperius Curse with a Modified Memory Charm. The idea just 'happened' upon Holden and Selinski to start shagging, and then suddenly, after you had let your guard down and trusted your dear husband, Emilie let it slip that the American bitch had dumped her lover and was at that moment...*alone*...as she had been for many a Monday nights *with your husband!*" she said dramatically.

Hermione thought she was losing her mind. "How do you know these things?" she practically screamed.

Rita shook her head sadly. "Oh, Hermione, haven't you learned anything? I do what I do best. I get information, and I am not above eavesdropping," she said as she spread her hands. "Being an Animagus such as I has its benefits. Although, once I overheard a couple of very stupid Slytherin girls gossiping about the plot to overthrow the Headmaster by discrediting him, I felt a responsibility to go to Miss Beauharnis and *extract* whatever information I could."

Hermione's eyes narrowed. "You mean you blackmailed her!" she shouted.

Rita sighed as she played with her curls on the side of her head. "Blackmail is such an ugly term. I like *extract* much better," she said as she smiled viciously.

Hermione steeled herself and walked closer to the witch. "It doesn't matter. You deliberately and with intent withheld knowledge of criminal activities on the grounds of my school. You are finished, Rita," she said with a glint in her eye.

Rita turned pale. "But I helped!" she shrieked. "I wrote an article that would force you to come here and interrogate me. I don't want to be on any Death Eater's hit list!"

Hermione was in a rage. She looked at Robards who excused himself and Disapparated.

Kingsley spoke up. "Miss Skeeter, you are not to leave London, nor are you to transform yourself into your Animagus form. You will report first thing to my office in the morning." He mumbled a spell, and a glow came over the reporter, which then vanished.

Hermione looked at him incredulously.

"It is a charm to ensure she does not leave the city and is unable to transform," he explained.

He gathered Hermione and helped to escort her out. Rita called after them nervously, "We'll talk about a deal, right? I was helpful! I don't keep alliances with Death Eaters!"

Hermione left with Kingsley, her legs shaking and her voice unsteady. "Why, why? This is insane! We brought these people into our lives, our school...to teach our children!"

Kingsley kept his lips firm, holding Hermione close to him as they Disapparated to Hogsmeade.

He led her into the Witch's Wardrobe.

Treachery

Chapter 20 of 23

Severus and Hermione deal with the fallout from Rita Skeeter's revelation.

A/N: For all that clamored for Hermione's "house cleaning," this is for you! Thanks to my beta, MadBrilliant.

Kingsley led Hermione into the back way of the store, where Rosie lived.

"Kingsley! I got a Patronus from Gawain. I had to send Sabine home. What is happening?" Rosie said as she closed the door and locked it. She walked towards them as Kingsley spoke.

"It's as we all feared, Rosie. Actually, it's worse than what we feared. There is a Death Eater at Hogwarts," he said solemnly.

Rosie's face was one of pure horror. She quickly ushered them into her quarters. She took Hermione and sat her on the couch. And placed a protective arm around her.

"Oh, Severus!" Hermione cried out. "He's in danger! Oh, Rosie! I thought this was all over!" She broke down sobbing on the witch's lap.

"There, now. It's going to be all right! What makes you think Rosmerta and I were so eager to watch over you? We knew there could be trouble the moment we heard there were Durmstrang lads coming to Hogwarts! We thought how crafty it would be to cause dissention between you and Severus, destroy all that you have built and have held up with the strength of your love and devotion to each other. You and Severus are the ones that hold Hogwarts together. All those children would be lost if you were chased out by shameless people who want to use the school for their own ends, or worse, if you left and gave up."

Hermione sat up and covered her face in her hands. "I nearly did today, Rosie. I was on my way to walk out on Severus, our marriage, Hogwarts, everything. I couldn't take it anymore. But, then Severus, he just fell to pieces and begged me not to leave him. We were ready to break our wands and leave it all behind!" she said in horror.

Rosie sighed. "They came so close to winning, Hermione, dear. Now, I know Severus, and he is not going to take this well at all! He's going to blame himself and say something very stupid, like, 'this is what he deserves for letting love into his heart' or some rot like that."

Rosie looked up at the Minister. "Kingsley, you must bring Severus here when the Aurors come. Perhaps between Hermione and I, we can help him to see reason," the older witch asked.

"I shall, Rosie. Thank you so much for keeping faith with the Order, not that there was much left after the war, but you have been invaluable to Severus and Hermione," he said to her.

"I shall take my leave now, ladies," said Kingsley. "I need to meet up with Gawain."

After he had Disapparated, Hermione got up and began to pace. "Oh, Rosie, I was so jealous of Professor Holden. I was so sure she was going to take Severus from me. I was so afraid and insecure. This has been a nightmare. A complete nightmare!"

Rosie smiled. "Yet, here you are. And here you will remain. Why? Because you and Severus belong together. You are exactly what the other needs and what Hogwarts needs to hold it up and keep it steady until it can on its own," she said confidently.

Hermione stood and returned the smile. *It's true*, she thought. *We have to see it all through. There is more than just dealing with these troubles. Severus and I have to stay and keep Hogwarts from going under.*

Severus came a couple of hours later. He was fuming and in a vicious mood. He was as Rosie anticipated: full of anger and doubt. He said horrible things that nearly broke Hermione's heart and could have utterly destroyed their already strained marriage. However, Rosie was there to keep Hermione calm and to confront Severus about his words.

"You can't say such things, Severus! She's so young and vulnerable; those words are things a young wife may never forget. Don't ruin what you've worked so hard to keep!" she pleaded.

"Rosie, I should have seen, I should have known! I was played for a damn fool!" he raged as he looked out a window.

Hermione walked to him, and he saw the pain in her eyes. She looked so small, so fragile; he wanted to hold her and comfort her. She placed her small hands against his teaching robes and rested her forehead on his chest. He closed his eyes and gave in to her.

"Do you want me to go?" she whispered.

"No," he said deeply. "Never." He cupped her face and raised it to look at his own. "If I've been a fool, then I don't care. There is nothing without you."

She wrapped her arms around his waist, and he rested his cheek on the top of her head.

"Come, you two, rest here and eat. The Aurors will be here soon enough, and there shall be trouble to go around in the days to come," Rosie said quietly.

She left them to rest and eat some sandwiches she brought in for them. They sat in companionable silence for a while. Finally, once they had eaten and rested in the safety of each other's arms, Hermione said softly, "We have to think about the long term, Severus. It's more than just losing a couple of professors. How do we regain the trust of the parents? How are we going to keep the school open after such a scandal?"

He tightened his embrace and replied, "Hermione, we began with just the two of us. I'm confident the remaining teachers will continue at least until the end of term. You will have to take over the Muggle Studies classes. Perhaps Mr. Ketsall can do something with the Herbology classes. Damn! I'll figure it out, Hermione," he said worriedly.

Hermione sat up and looked at him straight in the eyes. "No, Severus. WE will figure this out. It's our problem: yours and mine. Together, remember?" she reminded him.

"Of course," he murmured as he held her close.

They returned back to Hogwarts to stand witness as the Aurors dragged their treacherous professors from the grounds. Ivan Domask remained cold and unrepentant. Emilie, however, was crying and wanted badly to speak with Hermione and apologize. Severus refused her to approach them.

"Get on with it, Gawain," he whispered dangerously, "before I forget myself and start casting Unforgivables!"

Satine and Christine stood by watching Emilie dragged off in magical bonds, looking shocked and horrified. Selinski remained aloof and withdrawn. He spoke with Severus in private, confessing he felt like a damn fool and wanted nothing more to resign, but the idea of returning to Durmstrang made him ill.

"I never thought I would want to stay away from my country," he said sadly.

Severus was kind to the young man. Selinski had allowed himself to be Legilimized by the Headmaster and was found to be without malice intentions. Later that night, whilst the couple sat in bed, reading, Severus confessed to Hermione that it was the fact he had been sorted into Gryffindor that made him want to trust the young wizard.

"If a Durmstrang lad can be a bloody Gryffindor, he must truly be noble and good," he said as he turned a page.

Hermione smiled as she glanced up at her husband from her own book. "I think Harry must have turned in his grave, Severus Snape!" she said as she laughed.

"You know that's the first time you've spoken to me about Potter without sadness," he observed as he put down his book and looked down at her.

She snuggled into her husband's arms. "I think I'm healing. I am able to think more about Harry and Ron without crying these days. I'll always miss them, but I can remember the good times and smile."

He held her close to him. "Now, wife, we have a very upset and angry witch waiting to see us in the morning. Are you quite prepared?" he asked cautiously.

"I am," she said confidently as Severus put out the light.

The next morning, Headmaster Snape spoke to the entire school and staff. Orla Quirke the eldest Ravenclaw female and a sixth-year prefect were given temporary status as Head of house.

Severus stood tall and forbidding in his dress green Slytherin robes. He wanted to make an impression of being in complete control over his school and to announce the reclaiming of his own house that had tried to discredit and ruin him.

"As you all are aware, those responsible for attempting to tear down what we have built have been sent to Azkaban. Hogwarts has been shaken by they who would see it fall into darkness and evil; however, we who love this institution and all that it stands for refused to lie down and allow it to crumble. It shall take more than they who would live to see the rise of another Dark Lord or the resurrection of the ideology of one dead to destroy what we have wrought.

"Although, it pains my sensibilities as a Slytherin to do this, I am resolute," he said firmly as his black eyes glowered at the young witches and wizards sitting at Slytherin's table.

"We have always kept the secrets of Slytherin house, its traditions, rules, and punishments safe amongst our own. However, in this situation, my hand has been forced, and I must turn away from the shame that so many of you have brought upon Salazar's name. Those who have turned and have tried to thwart me, I give you over to one who can only make your humiliation complete." He turned and sat down in the Headmaster's chair, and his wife, Madam Snape, Head of Gryffindor house, stood her dress robes of magnificent red and gold.

"It does not pain me to mete out just punishment," she said clearly. "Your actions have merited this, and now the Headmaster and I, his Deputy Headmistress, will now call your names where you shall be placed under the house arrest until your parents can come and collect you.

"Astoria Greengrass."

Astoria stood and glared at Hermione as if she were filth. Hermione allowed a sly smile to creep on her face as she returned her stare. She made to leave the hall, and the doors of the Great Hall opened. Two Aurors came through the door and stripped Astoria of her wand.

Hermione continued. "Malcolm Braddock, Sebastian Capper, Emma Dobbs, June Dornby, Derek Flint, Percival Harper, and Graham Pritchard."

Each student called stood and walked towards the Aurors now holding Astoria at wandpoint. They all were stripped of their wands and made to stand in front of their classmates. When Pritchard had joined them and his wand stripped, Hermione spoke again to the assembly.

"These students are hereby expelled from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. According to the decision handed down early this morning from the Wizengamot, these witches and wizards will each be monitored and their case evaluated as to whether or not criminal charges may be brought to bear on those who have already reached Legal Wizarding Age or whose actions have been so heinous as to warrant imprisonment."

The Aurors led the ex-students out of the Great Hall, and Hermione Snape breathed a sigh of relief as the rest of the students watched in wide-eyed disbelief. She turned her head to the side to see the tear-stained face of Professor Holden looking at her.

After the Aurors had their charges in their common room, the remaining Slytherins were placed in the library under the watch of the librarian, Olive Pince, and the caretaker, Mr. Shunpike. The rest of the houses were confined to their common rooms. All classes were cancelled for the day.

Samantha Holden came into the Headmaster's office as soon as the remaining Slytherins were safe in the library. Her face was red and her eyes puffy from crying. She was silent and withdrawn. Hermione felt such guilt over all the wicked thoughts she had held towards the witch. She was really a good person who had been exploited and violated by ruthless people. Samantha expressed her gratitude for the support of the school and the Ministry, but she said she would be leaving at the end of the year.

"I know it would just cause more trouble if I were to quit now, and I do not want to ever be the cause of any trouble for you both. So, I'll stay on for the semester, but I won't be returning. I will write up a list of names for you to look over as possible replacements." She then rose to leave, and Hermione stopped her.

"Please, Samantha, you will receive from us the highest of recommendations. A recommendation from Severus Snape is as good as gold! Your career will not suffer because of them," she insisted.

"As if that were the main cause of my unhappiness!" she barked. "I was abused and raped! I know not in the traditional way, there was no violence, but my heart is broken and my faith in myself shattered. I can't believe I did not see this coming!"

Hermione went to comfort her, but she held her at a distance. "I'll be alright," she said through her anger. "I'm going back to Salem to stay with my best friends and take some time for myself, try to find a new direction for my life. Here I thought I was doing my fellow wizard some good. I guess that just proves 'no good deed goes unpunished,'" she said bitterly.

"Have you spoken with Professor Selinski?" Hermione asked delicately.

She nodded. "Yes," she said uncomfortably. "We both are just so confused and feel violated. He has been decent about it all. He doesn't blame me or try to make me feel badly about it."

"I'm glad for that," Hermione replied.

After Professor Holden left them, Hermione rubbed her shoulder.

"Tired?" asked her husband.

"Exhausted!" she said. "So bloody knackered. What a horrible day this is going to be," she said tiredly.

Severus chuckled as he took her by the waist and made her to sit with him on the couch. He lifted her legs and placed them on his lap. She lay back and let him massage her feet. "We are going to get through this semester, my love, and then once we have finished with the year, we are going to Australia to retrieve your parents," he announced.

Hermione got up upon her elbows. "Oh, Severus, that would be lovely. Thank you," she said happily as their eyes met each other in a knowing look.

The Slytherin Accords

Chapter 21 of 23

Severus and Hermione Snape need to make a compromise about the new teachers for the Fall Term. Who will win?

A/N: I hope you all enjoy this chapter! Please review! Thanks to my beta, MadBrilliant.

Emile Beauharnis was an ideal prisoner. She was forthright about everything that had occurred and told the Wizengamot every detail of Domask's plan. She was not the mastermind, however, it was apparent that she had been wholeheartedly wrapped up in the Neo-Death Eater's treachery. She had been a fool, and she knew it. She had traded her future for a wizard who had promised the world...only to bring her to a cell in Azkaban. She was given ten years for her crimes of conspiracy, aiding and abetting a criminal who cast an Unforgivable, and for the rape of Professors Selinski and Holden.

Ivan Domask was given the Dementor's Kiss. It was to be a standard now. There would be no mercy shown for anyone trying to resurrect Lord Voldemort's cause. This did much to help the public relax and feel safe again. Nevertheless, the damage to the already shaky reputation of Severus Snape was done.

Rita Skeeter was stripped of her title as journalist. She was also sent to Azkaban for five years for withholding criminal information from the Ministry. She had begged and pleaded for her case, but Madam Snape had a long memory and an eye for detail. She had built a strong case to halt any attempts Ms. Skeeter might use to make a deal for herself. Rita Skeeter was finished.

Kingsley Shacklebolt was continuously receiving owls from parents and non-parents alike of Hogwarts students demanding his termination. The Wizarding community at large felt he was unfit for his post, seeing he had let a rogue Death Eater work and live among the children. Whispers continued that perhaps Snape had been a part of the plan all along. The old prejudice and distrust against Professor Snape rose up, and Kingsley was finding it difficult to reason with the demand. People wanted a scapegoat and Snape would do just fine.

Meanwhile, Severus and Hermione were scrambling to fill in the holes left by Domask and Beauharnis' absence. Hermione was pulling double duty like her husband with Charms and Muggle Studies. Professor Grubbly-Plank, who had long since retired as Care of Magical Creatures Professor, offered to come back as a Herbology instructor. She had a lot of expertise in the area, and the Snapes were happy to take her on. Alun Ketsall was informed to be at her disposal if she needed anything, since she was quite elderly.

Despite the overwhelming pressure for Snape to step down as Headmaster, he and Hermione persevered. They needed to start thinking about the next fall term. There was no possible way they could keep working as they were and stay sane. The Astronomy professor's position had already been decided. A new professor, ending his apprenticeship this term at Brazil's Magical Institution in Rio de Janeiro, was taking the post. His name was Paolo Cruz. He also claimed to know a couple of reputable Seers whom he had attended school with, so Severus agreed to speak more about the idea of restoring Divination as a course again once Cruz arrived.

Another American was coming, thanks to the recommendation from Professor Holden, as the new Transfiguration professor. His name was Michael Washington, a nice bloke from a place called Harlem in New York City. He was an amazing teacher and had superb talent and energy to excite his students into learning. Severus and Hermione were excited to meet him and get to know him personally.

One of Hogwarts own, Romilda Vane was taking up the post as Herbology instructor. Professor Grubbly-Plank agreed to stay on to take the young woman on as an apprentice, then after that, would go back to her retirement. Severus and Hermione had been very pleased with that bit of news.

"Well, that's one of our very own!" Hermione said happily after the interview with Miss Vane had ended.

Severus frowned as he traced his mouth with a long, white finger. "Wasn't she the girl that tried to snare Potter with a Love Potion?" he asked his wife.

Hermione laughed. "Instead, Ronald ate almost the entire box of spelled chocolates and went nearly insane when he couldn't find her and declare his love!" She snuggled into the crook of his arm on the couch where he sat thinking. She slipped off her pumps and tucked her stocking feet under her as she burrowed deeper into his side. She

loved the smell of him in his robes. The combination of smoke, potions, and his natural clean smell that to her would always smell like power and strength covered her like a warm blanket. She peered up into his black eyes when she heard him chuckle deeply.

"You look so innocent snuggling up to me like that," he murmured.

"But I am innocent," she said sweetly as she wiggled her body next to his.

Hermione walked into her husband's office one day in February.

"Severus, we really have to discuss these next appointments. We still do not have a Muggle Studies professor, Potions professor, or a Charms instructor that can apprentice me!"

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose. "I don't know, Hermione. I cannot seem to find ~~one~~ reputable Potions master or mistress who has the tenacity required to handle these dunderheads! The very last thing we need here is another scandal involving an explosion in the Potions lab!"

Hermione looked through the papers on his desk. "Severus, don't think you might be a bit too demanding? I know that this inquiry has you upset..." she began.

"Upset?" he whispered. "I would love to feel only *upset*!" he snarled.

"Don't get shirty with me!" she fumed. "I'm not the enemy here."

He jumped up and poured himself a glass of firewhiskey. "I know, I know. It's just that I never thought things would get to this point." He bowed his head and leaned on his desk. "I'm weary, Hermione, I'm just so damn tired. The way I feel right now, I could care less if they threw me out of here on my arse!" He swirled the amber liquid around in the glass before downing it all in one swallow.

"Don't let's be sad, Severus," Hermione said as she sat on his lap. "Look, let's go through these applicants together! I'm sure an 'Acceptable' Potions teacher is better than none at all. Besides, I'm sure between the two of us, we can come to a resolution."

He gave her a smirk. "How do you know how to do that?" he murmured.

"Do what?" she said teasingly as she wound a strand of hair between her fingers.

"Make all my troubles seem little just minor annoyances," he replied.

"Minor annoyances?" she said with mocked panic. "I had better get to work! I'm losing my touch!" She jumped off his lap and started digging into the pile.

Familiar warmth hovered over her back, and two large, pale hands rested on the desk on top on hers.

"*Severus*," she said with a giggle, "we have things to do!"

She was trapped under her husband's very toned body. "No, wife," he whispered in her ear, "I only have ~~you~~ to do."

She giggled again, and he growled deep in his throat. She bit her lip. She knew what that did to him.

"I don't know how you think you are going to accomplish anything hovering over me like this!" she challenged.

"Oh, like this," he said silkily as he hiked up her robes.

"Severus Snape! Don't you dare! The portraits!" she screeched.

"This is my office, Madam Snape, and you are my wife and my partner. You made a vow of fidelity, giving your body to me. I've come to collect!" he said smugly.

She was beyond mortified. "Severus, don't you dare expose me to all and sundry!" she howled.

"I wouldn't dream of it, my dear," he said silkily as he pulled his teaching robes around for better coverage. Then, he tore off her underwear. "Why do you wear such flimsy things?" he asked her in annoyance.

"Because I know you; you aren't happy unless you get to rip off my knickers at least once a week!" she said in her best Little-Miss-Know-It-All Voice.

She felt his cock against her bum as he chuckled. "You know I can't resist when you use that voice, Hermione," he said wickedly. "I'll have to punish you for your cheek, you swot!"

He rubbed himself along her slit, and she gave a little squeal. She felt his hand stroke her arm as he unbuttoned her robes in the front.

"Severus!" she breathed.

"No one can see from this angle unless they walk in the front door, and I am occupied!" he said in his most sexy voice that he knew made her wet.

He deftly opened the front hooks of her bra, letting her breasts free. He kept one hand on hers, intertwining their fingers as he massaged one breast with the other. Hermione was breathing hard now and looked down at their left hands wrapped in each other, their wedding bands touching. She felt a surge of pleasure from seeing her husband's strong hand over hers. She thought, *Oh, what the hell*, and spread her legs wantonly, jutting out her rear like a cat in heat the way he liked it.

"Shit, Hermione," he breathed as he plunged into her. You are incredible!"

He heard the murmurs of the past Headmasters and Headmistresses behind him and grew frustrated.

"I'm trying to accomplish something very important here! So, shut up!" he growled.

Someone gave a snort.

He continued to plow into his petite wife, urging her to tell him how much she loved his rough riding her.

"Severus!" she shouted.

"Fuck!" he shouted as he rammed into her, losing all decorum as he dropped her onto the desk, lifting her by her hips, and rolling his pelvis to hit every inch of her inside. She scrambled to find a niche she could grasp onto, all their paperwork flying off the desk. Finally, she gripped the front of the desk and began to shriek her orgasm as he continued to thrust into her as deep as he could go. Hearing his wife scream in pleasure gave him all the confirmation he needed to give in to his own release that he had been staving off for a while.

As he felt the familiar tightening, he gasped, "You love this, Hermione, you love my cock pounding into you. Such a know-it-all! I've wanted to do this to you ever since the day you left the infirmary with me! *Take it!*"

Knowing that he had wanted her like this for so long made her body go into overdrive. She melted and shuddered as her second orgasm took over her. He grunted as he gave his last hard thrusts and came deep inside her. He leaned on the desk and caught his breath. Then he lifted his wife tenderly off the desk, buttoned her robes, and lowered her skirt. Then he tucked himself back inside his trousers. He snaked an arm protectively around her waist and kissed her tenderly on her cheek as he took her back onto his lap.

"I love you," he whispered in her ear. "You always make me so happy. You're okay, aren't you? I wasn't too hard on you?" he asked concerned.

She turned and rested the back of her head on his shoulder. "Just hard enough, husband," she said softly as she stroked his face with her hand.

He cupped one breast through her clothes. "Care for a repeat performance later?" he asked hopefully.

"If we can agree to hiring a Muggle Studies professor and a Potions teacher," she answered shrewdly.

Another snort came from the portraits. Headmaster Black laughed evilly. "Saw that one coming, m'boy!" he wheezed through his laughter.

Salazar Slytherin chuckled. "That Gryffindor has far too much Slytherin in her!" he said shaking his head.

"What'd you expect with all the wand he lays to her?" Headmaster Dippet said with a chortle. "She's got a bit of Slytherin in her more often than not!"

"We are here, you realize!" Hermione snapped.

"Well, my dear, if you engage in sexual congress in the office, you really have no one to blame but yourself!" sniffed Headmistress Derwent.

"I think it is fine!" said Dumbledore. "Very healthy and adventurous. This will keep your marriage alive, not to mention the possibility of bringing a little Snape into the world!" he said with a twinkle.

Snape whispered to Hermione. "Have you been taking your potions?" he asked fearfully.

"Of course!" she sounded back. "Now if you don't mind, let's go through these applicants!"

In the end, after a couple of broken vases and a nasty Appungo Hex Hermione placed on her husband that proved to be quite hilarious for the Gryffindor as she watched her husband fight off an attack of angry budgies, they were able to come to a swift conclusion. Stewart Ackerley, a Ravenclaw, who was so intelligent as to bypass his final year, took on the post as Muggle Studies teacher. Hermione would as a Muggle-born, make sure his apprenticeship was accredited. After a very short discussion, Severus and Hermione agreed without debate it was best to keep as much of the staff within their own community for now.

Then came the argument over the Potions position. That came with broken china and an embarrassing Engorgement Hex to Snape's penis that he was willing to be more than compliant since Hermione promised once they had decided on a candidate, she would "kiss it and make it all better." He was going to get his relief, he decided, then, when she least expected it, he was going to fuck her so hard, she'd be screaming for mercy!

"Severus, Daphne Greengrass has been all but disowned by her family! You said yourself she was clever in Potions. You could apprentice her while she takes over the first through fourth years, leaving you with only the O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. level students, which would irk you less, correct?"

He sighed. "Hermione, my cock is killing me, and I think it is rather unethical to coerce me into a position like this! She's a Slytherin and a woman! My apprentice! Can you deal with it?" he asked angrily.

When she didn't answer him, he grew frustrated.

"Oh fuck it! You got me by my cock, so if that's the way it needs to be, so be it! And I swear, if you start getting jealous, then you only have yourself to blame! Now get your arse in our bedroom and wrap those lips around my prick this minute!" he growled. Hermione sniggered as she demurely walked past the portraits into her living quarters. The portraits were pleased as punch she had brought the Headmaster to his knees, even if it meant she'd be on her knees next!

The portraits were quiet and snoozed for the most part until the howling and cursing from the headmaster singing his wife's fellating abilities carried out from the headmaster's bedroom.

"How many times have I told you to place a Silencing Spell, you great pillock?" Madam Snape roared.

The portraits all laughed at that one.

The Inquiry

Chapter 22 of 23

Severus and Hermione have to face the Board of Governors to answer for the fallout from Domask and Emilie's treachery.

A/N: Thanks to everyone who has reviewed! This fic has now broken 500! Thanks to MadBrilliant, and an extra special thanks to WriterMerrin for her hard work to make this chapter better.

It was settled. Daphne Greengrass would be coming to take over as Potions teacher and as Headmaster Snape's apprentice. There were going to be more hard times, but progress was being made.

Stuart Ackerley would take over the Muggle Studies post with Hermione Granger being his "mentor." Standards were still lax, but it was getting better. Besides, the new blood was of their own, and they were so eager to teach and make Hogwarts their home, it was hard to be too worried about it.

What remained was getting a Divination instructor and a reputable Charms professor to come and apprentice Hermione so she could be an accredited professor in her own right, and finally, there was the tenuous subject of Quidditch.

"Waste of time!" Severus snapped. "We couldn't possibly think about such a frivolous thing as that!"

"Oh, ye of little faith." Hermione smirked as she flourished a parchment in front of him. "I have acquired a coup that will not only bring Quidditch back to Hogwarts, but will also bring in more enrollments than we could possibly imagine. You will NEVER guess who I got to become our Quidditch Coach/Flying Instructor!" She taunted him.

"Who?" he said bored.

"Gwenog Jones," she said with a squeal.

"No!" he said as he rose from his chair. "THE Gewnog Jones—of the Holyhead Harpies?"

"I met Ms. Jones at a Slug Club Party. She is every bit as tenacious and bull-headed as Madam Hooch ever was, and she said she's a bit tired of being on the road. She wants to get back to her 'roots' and give back to Hogwarts. She will be our ace in the hole, Severus. Even if she stays one semester, we can always say we had her on staff here. It's a mighty coup!"

Severus strode over and grabbed his wife, swinging her around his office. "I love you!" he said wantonly. "Come on, let me fuck you proper on the desk!" he said lustfully as he dipped her.

"No!" she said with a sly smile. "However, I shall make a bargain with you. You speak with Professor Cruz about the Seers he has recommended and hire one even if she's a complete nutter like Trelawney. Then you find me a proper Charms mentor. Once you have done that, my loving husband, I shall let you defile me anywhere you wish. Even in the Gryffindor common room, if that's what you want." Her eyes sparkled, knowing he was just depraved enough to do it.

"Oh, no, my pet. You shall be stripped naked and laid bare on my desk here and allow me to pleasure myself in any way I see fit! Deal?"

"You can pick the Divination teacher. However, the Charms master must meet my requirements. I shall have them on your desk in the morning," she bargained. "Now I'm quite knackered and ready for bed, if you don't mind."

"Not at all, Madam, allow me to retrieve the essential oils and lubrication," he said silkily.

"I never promised anything of the sort!" she said indignantly.

"Ah, well, for the debauchery I have planned requires a bit of preparation. I told you before, I have always wanted to bugger you, wife."

She swallowed hard. "Don't you dare hurt me!" she threatened him.

"I wouldn't dream of it, my love!" he purred as he led her into the bedroom.

"Oh, Severus!" cried out Hermione. "This is the best of all possible news! However did you get her to agree?"

Severus smiled. "Well, my dear, you are considered the brightest witch of your age. Your N.E.W.T.s put even Dumbledore's to shame. How could she not refuse?"

"But Madam Marchbanks! She is an institution! You know that she not only began sitting for the Wizarding Examination Authority before she was thirty, she actually tested Dumbledore himself! Furthermore, she authored the Wizard's Ordinary Magic and Basic Aptitude Test. She is the ultimate authority on Transfiguration, Charms, Potions, and Astronomy!" she exclaimed.

Severus sat back and smiled at his little know-it-all. She was so overcome, she could barely think straight. "You forgot Divination," he added with a sneer.

"Whatever! To think, Griselda Marchbanks will be MY mentor! You know she is very sympathetic to the rights of goblins! I wonder of her thoughts on house-elves and other magical creatures? How long did she sign on for? What are her demands?" she asked worriedly.

Snape smiled. *So typical with her questions!* he thought. "Madam Marchbanks is under the impression she has very little to teach you, my dear. Yet I'm sure you will find a way. She will start on with you in September and stay for the year. She will observe your abilities with your first-through fourth-years. However, she will be teaching the O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. level classes. How does that strike you?" he asked smugly.

"Oh, it's perfect! That will free up time to help observe Mr. Ackerley's progress with his apprenticeship!" She took a deep breath. "Well, that leaves only Divination! Have you spoken with Professor Cruz?"

"Indeed," he said tracing his mouth with his index finger. "However, his contacts are just not Hogwarts material. They are far too earthy and obscure. Firenze was the perfect Divination instructor. He was focused, non-emotional, and presented the material without feeling the need to place his own doom and gloom into the mix. If only we could get another centaur, but that is impossible."

"Hermione," he said as he sat next to her on the sofa. "Would it be such a loss if we did not have Divination? After all, we have had to go without Astronomy. I was pulling double duty as Headmaster and Potions master, and you had not been fully accredited as a Professor! We will have so much more next term. What is the loss of one subject that has always been on the shady side of true magical disciplines?"

Hermione leaned back into the sofa. "Well, it's no skin off my nose. However, we are facing the inquiry with the Wizengamot. Do you think we will escape unscathed with what we've accomplished?"

"I do. If it had not been for us, this school would be a ruin, a crumbling abandoned castle that our world would shake their heads at and say, 'Remember when Hogwarts had been the Crown Jewel of Europe's Wizarding Schools?' I don't want that, Hermione. As much as I loathed my life here before the war ended. I feel I have a true purpose beyond myself, and you are with me in that purpose!" he said determinedly.

Hermione squeezed his hand. "I agree, husband. You and I shall face the Board together, and we shall win!"

They kissed and embraced. They did not notice the smiles and nods of approval from the former Headmasters and Headmistresses of Hogwarts from days of old.

The Great Hall was silent. It was a Hogsmeade weekend, so the majority of the students were out of the castle grounds. Whoever stayed was sequestered in the Library for the duration of the Inquiry.

The twelve-member Board of Governors sat at the head table while Headmaster and Madam Snape sat below. It was a very serious occasion that held the future of the Snapes at Hogwarts.

Minister Kingsley Shacklebolt made a special request to be heard before the Board. He gave a rousing and moving speech about the dedication of the Snapes, that they had placed the future of Hogwarts above their own personal goals and wishes for their separate futures. He spoke with a great deal of emotion about their survival from the final battle, to burying loved ones, and facing the impossible task of putting the school back together when all they had between them was a Headmaster, a brilliant student

who had yet to sit for her N.E.W.T.s, and a school Mediwitch.

"With only those tools, Severus and Hermione Snape rebuilt this school together, scouring the Wizarding world for teachers to continue the high standard of education we have boasted of for hundreds of years. It was very trying with gossip and innuendo following them. They chose marriage and a joining of their lives so Hogwarts would succeed without any regard for their own personal feelings. They were handed nothing in light of their sacrifice and have been betrayed heinously. They deserve our guidance and support, not to be censured and condemned for the duplicity of a wicked Dark wizard and his mistress."

The Board, who consisted of wealthy members of society that Hermione did not recognize, but Severus did, were cautious and asked many questions about the appointment of Professors Ivan Domask and Emilie Beauharnis.

They answered all their questions as forthrightly as they could, explaining that they were so very desperate for teachers, they had been ecstatic when Madame Maxime had offered the three Frenchwomen fresh from their apprenticeships. Hermione, ever the perfectionist, showed the Board each teacher's letter of recommendation and references.

"We were not so desperate that we did not look into the work histories and personal lives of the professors we hired. It was rather unfortunate that Ivan Domask slipped through the cracks," admitted Headmaster Snape.

"How can you be sure, Headmaster, that this will never occur again? We need to be assured that Death Eaters will not be terrorizing our charges!" one elderly man challenged heatedly.

Snape kept his cool. "Sir, there can be no reassurances. There shall always be a threat of another Dark Lord or Dark wizard. The lure of the Dark Arts is strong. I do suggest that Hogwarts take a drastic measure. I believe, after a full Auror inquiry, that Professor Selinski, formerly of Durmstrang, who has no such designs on being drawn to the Dark Arts, be allowed to remain on as Defense Professor. However, for now, I think that no more professors from Durmstrang should be allowed to teach at Hogwarts. At least not now while we are still in a vulnerable position," he offered.

Severus then ended on a lighter note. "I am pleased to say that our newest crop of teachers are some of our very own and will be apprenticed by former Hogwarts professors," he reported happily.

"Yes," an elderly witch said. "We were most pleased to hear of Madam Marchbanks mentorship of Madam Snape. It does sound as if Hogwarts is taking a turn for the better, even though this set-back has been most unsettling!"

"Headmaster," said another elderly witch. "I am still so confused as to why you were unaware that you had a Death Eater in your midst. I would think with your history you would have been in tune with his true allegiance."

Snape took a deep breath. "Very true, Madam. I would have thought the very same thing if I were you. However, Ivan Domask did not wear the Dark Mark. If he had, I would have known immediately. Yet, he did not. From what was revealed in his trial, Domask was a part of a Neo-Voldemort Movement. He never met Voldemort, nor was he a part of the Death Eaters who served under him, being an apprentice at Durmstrang during the war.

"Nevertheless, I do take a great deal of responsibility. I am headmaster of this school and am ultimately accountable for what occurs. I was very suspicious of the wrong Durmstrang lad. I was wary of Selinski, being the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. However, I was adamant in my decision to not allow a Durmstrang Alumnus to take over as Head of Slytherin House. I worked very hard to educate and assist Professor Holden in the ways of Slytherin house. I was very distracted, to be sure. However, I have made necessary changes to ensure I shall not be so distracted in the future," he concluded.

"Such as?" another Board member asked.

"I am stepping down as Potions master. Daphne Greengrass shall be taking over my first through fourth year classes and will become Head of Slytherin house. Being a Slytherin herself, she will not need my assistance, as Professor Holden had required. I also feel that I have learned a great deal about human nature through this experience. The war had turned so much upside-down. A new wife, new life, and responsibilities that were overwhelming at times were strange, and it was difficult for me to maintain my sense of balance and equilibrium. For years, I had worked in solitude and shouldered my burdens alone. Now, I have grown to delegate and share my responsibilities with my wife, Madam Snape. As deputy headmistress, she will be helping me more in the decision-making process, a decision I should have made a long time ago. However, now that I have learned about marriage, I'll be in better shape to discern the problems that come along."

"Madam Snape," asked another elderly wizard. "Have you taken more of a load on yourself than you can bear?"

Hermione spoke confidently. "I do not think so, although I have paired down some responsibilities. As an apprentice to Madam Marchbanks, I shall have help in becoming a better Charms professor. I look forward to her direction. I also am stepping down as Head of Gryffindor House. Professor Selinski will be the new Head of Gryffindor. That will relieve me of a lot of responsibility. Our new Muggle Studies teacher needs to be apprenticed. I have taken up that task. As a Muggle-born, the course comes quite natural for me. I won't try to lie to you all. We have had a hard year. However, that year is drawing to a close, and we have survived."

Snape interjected at this point. "Next year, we shall have more classes, better professors, and also Quidditch will be returning to Hogwarts. It is our goal as headmaster and deputy headmistress to continue in our search for excellence. We will never be satisfied until the day comes when the next generation can stand up strong and take over. Until that day, we shall remain steadfast and dedicated to our work."

"So, you are saying you are not adverse to admitting a lack of judgment?" asked another wizard.

Snape answered this question. "We are all magical beings, but none of us are perfect. We did fail. However, our failure was not due to malicious intent or cowardice. It was the culmination of our unfortunate experiences and grief that led us to become vulnerable and weak. But, I do not believe that warrants the removal of our positions," he said firmly. "I can honestly say that this experience has made us stronger and more capable."

"I was so proud of you, Severus!" Hermione said as they waited in the hall as the Board convened.

"Whatever happens, we will stick together and face the future side by side," she said with determination.

Severus leaned over and captured her lips in a kiss. "I love you, Hermione," he whispered. "What would I do without you?"

She smiled and blushed as she squeezed his hand.

The door opened, and Kingsley strode towards them and shook their hands. "Congratulations, Headmaster, Deputy Headmistress! You both shall retain your positions. The Board is confident that Hogwarts will be safe in both your capable hands."

They laughed heartily, and Severus asked him to join them in his office for a celebratory drink. Hermione went to get Poppy, and the four survivors stood together, toasting to their good fortunes and the satisfaction that the school was once again alive and thriving.

A New Day

Chapter 23 of 23

The school year has ended, and the Snapes are honored for their dedication to Hogwarts. A surprise and a trip to Australia signal the dawning of a new adventure.

A/N: Well, I can't believe it, yet here we are. This is the last chapter, and I want to say how humbled and touched I've been by the following this fic has received. It has been so much fun reading all the reviews you've sent, and I want to thank each one of you who took the time to send me your thoughts. Big hugs and chocolate for everyone. Also, a special thanks to MadBrilliant, and all the admins who are so patient with my dyslexic mind!

Hermione returned to her quarters from a long day. It was nearly examination time, and the students were nervous and jittery. She was ready for the year to be finished. She and Severus were due to leave at the end of June to go retrieve her parents from Australia. Only one more month and she would see her parents again. She felt happy and scared at the same time. She desperately hoped they wouldn't be too angry with her for Modifying their minds. She also wanted them to accept Severus as her husband.

As she walked into her husband's office, she grabbed roughly from behind and pulled against a solid form. She screamed, and she was turned forcefully around to find her husband there holding her firmly by the waist.

"I dare say you owe me a debt, my wife!" he said wickedly.

"You're going to hold me to it?" she asked unbelievably. "You know the bargain held that you would hire a Divination teacher. In the end, you failed to fill the position," she said shrewdly.

Severus sneered at his wife. "Don't try to out-Slytherin me, my dear! You know very well when you agreed to drop Divination as a subject for the year, that portion of our bargain became null and void!"

Severus cocked an eyebrow. "Don't play the innocent with me, Hermione. You are as wanton as the next woman—probably even more so!" He smiled nastily at her and leered at her body.

"Strip and lay down on my desk," he ordered as he stood in front of her.

She blanched. Severus narrowed his eyes. "Do not make me strip you, Hermione. I shall then be forced to cruelty!" A thought crossed her mind that she might defy him, just to see how forceful he could be. However, she thought on it and decided not to press her luck.

Hermione took a deep breath and began to strip. She watched as her husband flicked his wand and all the paperwork disappeared from his desk. She sat on the surface with her feet dangling from the edge. He grabbed her thighs and spread her further.

"Lay down, Madam Snape," he commanded.

She did and he took off his robes, frock coat, and shirt. Hermione propped herself on her elbows and watched the vision in front of her from between her spread legs. He unbuttoned his trousers and released his already hardened cock. It was engorged and angry-looking. His face was inscrutable. He grabbed the back of her knees and pulled her sex flush against his hardness. He lowered himself to place a hand behind her back as he plundered her mouth and lifted one leg over his shoulder. She squealed as he pounded into her, twisting and pummeling her without quarter as she gasped and cried out. He continued until she was weak and limp from an explosive orgasm. Then, he withdrew and dragged her to her feet. He turned her around, and she fell forward as he took her from behind, rotating and forcing her to take all of him. He was grunting and cursing profusely. Hermione was too far-gone to give a damn about who might be watching. She was screaming her husband's name, begging him to fuck her harder and harder.

"Whatever Madam wants, Madam shall get!" he growled fiercely as he pulled her upright and flipped her around to face him. He held her upright and took her standing. He slammed her up against the door that led to their quarters, pressing her back to it, and fucked her viciously. He took her screams into his mouth, and she held onto him for dear life. Finally, when they were spent, they looked at each other and laughed as if they were insane. They went into their private rooms and collapsed into sleep.

"Hermione," Severus whispered into the darkness.

"Umm, yes, Severus?" she asked sleepily.

"I do love you. I really do. Not because you are my wife or my deputy headmistress. I love you because you have made me so happy by your presence. I have never slept so well than when I began to sleep next to you. You being by my side is enough to make me so happy, and I love you for staying with me," he murmured softly against her hair.

"I love you, Severus. I loved you before we married. *Yousnarked* your way into my heart," she said with a giggle.

"Hermione," he breathed.

"I know, giggling is such dirty pool!" she teased. "However, I don't care. I love being intimate with you," she confessed as she stroked his chest.

He pulled her closer and held her possessively against him.

There was precious little time to lounge about and celebrate. There were still massive amounts of work, which needed finalization, and then there were goodbyes to say to the staff members leaving. The days blew past, and before they realized it, it was time for the end-of-year feast.

Poor Ravenclaw house had been hit the hardest. Not only had they lost housemates in the war, but they also lost the Head of their House. Mandy Brocklehurst, the only sole surviving member of Hermione's year came to offer her services to the school.

She was very somber and humbled. She told her story that her parents were so afraid she would die that they took her to America to stay with cousins she had there. She was devastated to hear of the deaths of all her friends.

"I wish I had the will and strength to stand up to my parents and tell them what I wanted for my life. On the other hand, I can't help but feel grateful. I would be dead if I had stayed," she said sadly as she twisted her robes in her hands.

"Anyway, I heard about that Death Eater that wormed his way inside and that the Head of Ravenclaw House had been his mistress. I don't know if you have a Head of House for next year, but if you don't, I would be more than happy to offer my assistance. I could also do whatever 'filler' work that needs to be done. I know things are getting better for Hogwarts, and I just want to do my part. That is, if you are agreeable." She looked hopefully at the headmaster and the deputy headmistress.

Hermione looked at her husband, and he asked, "What line of work are you in, Miss Brocklehurst?" he inquired.

"I'm employed at the Ministry in their Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office," she replied.

Hermione happily interjected as she placed a hand on her husband's forearm. "Well, I'm sure you could be a great help with Mr. Ackerley! I'm overseeing his apprenticeship, but you being a Ministry official working with the misuse of Muggle items, you must know a great deal about various Muggle objects and their intended uses. Your expertise could be invaluable, not to mention give me much needed help whilst I work on my own apprenticeship," Hermione offered.

Severus thought purposefully. "I think that would be an ideal solution. Please give your notice to the Ministry and report here in August. We shall take the month to get you settled in, and then you should be ready to begin at the start of term," he said.

"Oh, thank you! I'm so grateful!" she said happily.

"No, we are the grateful ones," Hermione replied gracefully.

After Miss Brocklehurst left, Hermione whirled around to face her husband. "I cannot believe our good fortune! Things are definitely coming together. A hodge-podge group we may be, but we're getting it done! In a couple years, we shall be able to fully relax. You will be just the Headmaster and I shall just be the Charms professor and deputy headmistress!" Her face was beaming with glee.

Finally, the end of the term had arrived. Headmaster and Madam Snape sat at the head table watching all their students enjoy themselves. Graduation had been a somber affair. Many tears were shed for those lost who should have been there. It had been such a tumultuous year. Although Severus and Hermione were happy it was over, a part of them felt sad at the same time. Nevertheless, they could be proud of the work they had accomplished.

The Leaving Feast and Graduation Ceremony was to be like none other in the history of Hogwarts. Dignitaries from every Wizarding School in Europe and the Americas were present. There would be no "giving" away of the House Cup this year. EVERY House would share in the spotlight of all the hard work and sacrifices that had occurred to make Hogwarts come back to life.

Minister Shacklebolt addressed the school during the Leaving Feast. The press was invited to cover the historical moment. Kingsley spoke affectionately about the sacrifices and trials the headmaster and deputy headmistress endured to keep Hogwarts from disappearing into history. He recalled the harrowing first weeks when it had been only the two battle veterans, himself, and the school's mediwitch to shoulder the burden of starting over.

"It was they who stood at the ends of the chasm and lifted this school up from its broken foundations. A seasoned warrior, double agent, and spy of two Wizarding Wars, and a young, brilliant witch, and a fellow veteran of war were left to face the destruction and pain. They could have been no more different from each other even if they had tried. However, they filled the gaps of the brokenness that surrounded them while supporting and nurturing the need for our nation to have its own Wizarding School returned to them. Through so much adversity, Severus Snape and Hermione Granger Snape held to each other and held up this school. Severus and Hermione Snape shall be remembered forever as the saviors of Hogwarts.

"In time, their names will stand alongside the great four who first imagined this school and all its wondrous possibilities. In the same tradition of the Founders Four, Severus and Hermione Snape kept that possibility closer to their hearts, and with their own unique talents and gifts, worked together to rebuild Hogwarts, ushering a new era. We are so grateful for them."

A roar of cheering and applause spread across the crowd. Hermione suddenly burst into tears. Severus placed an arm around her, escorted her off the podium, and back to his office through the teacher's entrance off to the side. Kingsley, true to the politician he was, smoothed over their hasty exit.

When Severus and Hermione entered the headmaster's office, he sat on the couch and placed his wife's head on his lap. "Hermione, you must calm yourself!" Severus pleaded as he held her head in his lap.

"I'm sorry, Severus, I just don't feel well. Everything has been so difficult this past month, I've been so tired these last two days and so emotional! I must just need to relax a bit before we travel to Australia. Can we take a few days before we leave?" she asked.

"Of course," he said as he stroked her hair. "I'm concerned about you. I want you to go straight to bed and rest. I will bring you something to eat later."

"No! I don't want to eat; I'm not hungry. I think I must be starting my cycle soon. I'm so bloated and off-color. Just let me sleep," she pleaded.

Severus watched his wife with a keen eye for the next two days. There was something off about her. She slept for hours on end, and she just wasn't interested in food. Then, the third day, he woke up to the sound of her retching in the bathroom.

He jumped up and ran in. She was on the floor, sobbing between dry heaves. She had eaten precious little; there was nothing but bile to eject. He grabbed a washcloth, ran cool water through it, pressed it against her wrists, back of her neck, and her forehead.

"I'm sick, Severus. So sick. I can't move anymore," she rasped.

He stripped her, carried her to the shower, and washed her off as she leaned on him. Then he drew in her relaxing bath and placed her into it. She fell asleep and he watched her as she breathed shallowly. After a while, he took her out, dried her off, and laid her on their bed as he searched for her favorite cotton nightgown. Lately, she had been wearing more seductive pieces to bed that had been very exciting and erotic. He loved her no matter what she wore, but seeing her in a green and silver corset with her breasts free for him to touch and taste without removing it made him unbelievably hard at the sight. They had been quite active since that day he took her on his table in the office. He smirked as he recalled how wantonly she had responded to him. Then a thought ran across his mind.

He walked over to his naked, sleeping beauty lying supine and relaxed on their bed. He took his wand and ran some diagnostic tests. Soon, a faint glimmer rose from her abdomen. She was having his child.

He smirked, thinking how she must have conceived that day he had brutally taken her on his desk and then against the door. Oh, how she had screamed for him. She had loved every minute of it and had asked him later if he had thought less of her that she had liked his rougher side. He had given a snort and had said, "Absolutely not!"

They had continued their explorations into her deviant little mind. He had a very dirty little witch on his hands, he had concluded, and he had been very pleased. Now, she was having his baby. He looked at her, so rosy and clean from her bath. He stripped off his robe and knelt in front of her. Knowing she was carrying a life because he had taken her and thrust his seed into her made him want her now. He parted her legs and lay on top of her. She sighed and moaned as he shifted his erection against her mound. She was getting wet and her nipples were hardening. Her breathing was growing shallow and still she slept. She arched her back and murmured something. He eased into her and slowly moved inside her. Hermione began to awaken, and she could smell the familiar, calming scent of Severus. She realized he was inside her. She opened her eyes, and he was looking at her so lovingly and adoringly, she practically cooed her approval. She scooted her bottom lower and held her thighs up and apart so he could reach that place that she had come to love so much.

"This is a bit perverted, husband," she teased him. "Taking your wife while she is unconscious."

He stopped and withdrew from her. He looked upset.

Hermione sat up. "I'm sorry, Severus, I was only teasing. I thought it was really sexy!" she exclaimed as she sat up to comfort him.

"Hermione," he whispered. "I performed a diagnostic test on you. I was worried about you being sick. You're pregnant." He looked into her face to see her reaction. Would she be happy or would she be upset?

Hermione's hands flew to her mouth, and her brown eyes watered. "I thought the wife was supposed to tell the husband that," she whispered back.

He held her to him. "I'm sorry, I just wanted you to know how happy I was when I saw you were pregnant. You looked so peaceful and beautiful. Knowing I had placed life inside you made me want to be with you."

She smiled at him. "Never be ashamed to want me, Severus. It's not a terrible way to wake up to, really!" she admitted as she smiled.

"Do we know what we are having?" she asked.

"We'll have to see Poppy about that," he replied.

"I would like to finish what you were starting, my love," she crooned as she lay back on the bed and opened her legs for him.

Severus took his wife into his arms and tenderly made love to her.

Afterward, they lay in bed talking about the past year, playing with each other's hands, intertwining them as they dreamt of the future they saw for themselves.

Hermione snuggled in her husband's embrace as she envisioned getting her parents back from Australia and living a happy life with them and her own little family they were starting.

"Suddenly, the world is beginning to seem larger, fuller somehow," she mused.

"We won't be needed as much to keep everyone in line," he said.

He turned over and faced his wife and the mother of his child. He ran his hands through her hair and brought her face to his, softly kissing her tender lips.

"Remember the first time we kissed?" asked Hermione as she giggled.

Severus stripped the duvet off of them, raised Hermione's nightgown, and lowered his head to Hermione's belly. "Your mother is very naughty. You'd best be careful; she will constantly be two steps ahead of you, even if you become a Slytherin!" he teased.

Hermione smiled as she watched her husband kiss all over her belly. She sighed contentedly and stroked his hair.

"I love this life," she whispered.

Severus and Hermione Snape stood in front of a modest flat in Melbourne. It seemed that Wendall and Monica Wilkins, previously Drs. Granger and Granger, had gone their own way, not wanting to stay where Hermione had first placed them. It had been a very anxious and hand wringing experience for Hermione, tracking them down. Once they had located them, though, Hermione was a nervous wreck. She had no idea how her parents were going to accept the reality of everything she had done for their safety.

The Snapes stood silently in front of the door to the Granger's flat. As Hermione went to knock, Severus stopped her.

"You realize that after this, there will be no more 'Severus and Hermione.' There will be in-laws, baby preparations, intrusions into our private life—"

Hermione started laughing uncontrollably. Severus scowled at her.

"What is so damned funny?" he snarled.

"You!" she whispered. "You—you silly man! When have our lives ever been private? When has our marriage, our relationship, our work NOT been the source of all kinds of gossip and slander for all and sundry?"

Her voice grew soft, and she wrapped her arms around his waist. "And through all the intrusions, we have managed to push it all out of our little world. At the end of the day, it's always been just you and I," she whispered. "Even if many children come our way, it will always be you and I, together, supporting one another, beholding to each other, and working alongside as we have been this past year. I'm not fussed. As long as we have each other, we will be okay," she said confidently.

Severus kissed the end of her pert nose. "I never would have thought the day you first came into my classroom, you would be the one to become my other half," he said incredulously.

Hermione snorted. "I never thought of you as even being remotely human until the day in the infirmary when you told me that you bite!"

He chuckled. "What *did* you think of that?" he asked with great interest.

Hermione blushed. "I just remember feeling really warm between my legs," she murmured.

He kissed her then, passionately, and with all the desire he could muster. They broke apart and regarded the other. Both remembered the first feeling that had brought them together in the first place: respect.

Silently sharing the same fear.

Severus lowered his hand to touch the belly of his wife, companion, and fellow veteran. She was more than a "better half"; she was what kept him up, kept him strong.

Hermione watched her husband caress her. There was no question that she never would have made it on her own. Her grief would have swallowed her whole. Severus had held her up with his strength, and she had done the same for him.

"Well, are you ready?" she asked him.

Severus nodded, and she rang the doorbell.

A very nice looking middle-aged lady answered the door. She had Hermione's face, but not her hair. It was the same color, but long and board straight. She looked inquisitively into her daughter's face.

"Do I know you?" she asked, her brow furrowing.

Hermione smiled at her mother. Severus found his wife's hand to squeeze it with his own. When their fingers touched, they encircled the other as they steadied themselves for their next adventure.

~The End~

A/N: *Silently sharing the same fear* was taken directly from Simon and Garfunkel's song, *Bookends*.