

How to Make Snape Happy in Ten Steps

by Lorraine Bluestar

Making Severus happy is simpler than anyone expects. Hermione achieves it in ten steps, but no one can say they were easy.

This story is a present for Melanie on her birthday; I hope you like it, Mel.

Step One. Achieve the Higher Score in His Potions N.E.W.T

Chapter 1 of 5

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"Ron, can you just stop it? I can't concentrate if you keep on muttering under your breath so close to me."

"I'm studying, right? N.E.W.T.s start next week, and I need to be prepared."

"If you had started studying months ago as I told you, you just wouldn't be in so much trouble now."

"Well, forgive me if I wanted to spend time training so Gryffindor could win the Quidditch Cup and surely the House Cup in our last year at Hogwarts."

"Ronald, I'm not questioning about your training. I just want you to let me study in peace."

"Hermione, if you want peace then go to the library. This," he said, gesturing around the room with his hands, "is the common room, and here everyone has the right to do what they please. I want to mutter whilst I study."

She couldn't believe it; he was actually suggesting that she might be better leaving the common room. Why did he have to be so rude? He had been inconsiderate with her since they had broken up a few weeks after they came back from Christmas break. It was the right thing to do; it wasn't working out for them, and he just acted as if he was offended. There were more important things to worry about -- like their N.E.W.T.s.

VolDEMORT was now history, just a bad memory for the Wizarding world. Harry defeated him on New Year's Eve when they faced each other in Godric's Hollow for the last time. Harry wanted to spend his holidays there with his friends near his parents' home and tombs. He wanted to do it before having to confront He-Who-Is-Nothing-Now. No

After that final battle, the dynamics between the trio changed. Harry looked more mature, more focused now that he didn't have that heavy burden over his shoulders. He also became closer to Hermione; they talked a lot and started sharing a new type of relationship, seeing in each other the sibling neither of them had. Harry and Ron remained as good friends as always, but for Hermione, it wasn't the same. Now that everything was over, she didn't feel the need to grasp onto their relationship as an anchor to her sense of normality. She started seeing beyond their need for each other and realised with a heavy heart that they were not meant for each other; they were so different, and they would never make a good match.

Harry watched her leave knowing why she was leaving instead of staying there with the rest of her house. He had tried hard to stay away from their complicated relationship, but there were times like this when he just couldn't bear to see her like that.

"I don't know, mate. When I think about it, I know that I have to be more considerate with her, but when I look at her, at her eyes, it still hurts. It hurts that it didn't work out, because I love her, because I wanted to be with her, and it didn't bloody work out. I know that I'm mean for treating her like that, but I just can't cope with it in any other way. Can you understand, Harry?"

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"Miss Granger, I would recommend that you start paying attention to your surroundings so you can avoid causing an accident," he lectured her in silky but still dangerous tones.

"Indeed, Miss Granger. It seems to me that you are just lurking in the corridors looking for someone to hex to make you feel better about something. So tell me, Miss Granger, who made our always polite Head Girl mad enough to do that?"

'Just a little more to make her lose her temper and cross the line.'

He smirked knowing that he had just hit the right mark. *'Almost there.'*

'Touché...' he thought.

He turned and left her there, trying to digest how it had happened, why she was out of her common room, and why she managed to lose so many points. Definitely, it wasn't her day.

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"My dear boy, how can I say this to you? You have discouraged every student that has placed a foot in Hogwarts in the last sixteen years from pursuing a career in Potions. The British Wizarding world has not had a Potions master since you got your degree."

"I am afraid not, Severus, unless we call someone foreign, and you know I do not like hiring non-British professors. I think it is time that you take an apprentice; that way you would be able to prepare your own replacement."

"There is no one worth the effort." But without thinking about it consciously, his mind formed Hermione's image in his head. He discarded it immediately; the girl hated him, and there was no way she would accept. Besides, he was sure that she'd join Potter and Weasley in the Auror program.

"Severus, I already have the N.E.W.T.s results here, and I think I should tell you that someone achieved an 'O' in Potions."

"Well, just believe in the impossible," Dumbledore said that whilst passing him a parchment with a list of N.E.W.T.s scores on it. All the grades were 'O's,' simply perfection. He knew whose grades these were, and when he saw the name at the top of the parchment, he smiled. *'Hermione Jane Granger.'*

Hermione was beside herself; waiting for her N.E.W.T.s results was even worse than waiting for her O.W.L.s, and that time she had been pretty desperate. And, just like the last time she waited, she was sure she had done something wrong, something incredibly wrong, in all her exams. Some things just never change...

'I'm sure I stirred that potion in the incorrect stage; it had to be a perfect golden colour, and it had a yellow shade at the end. She sighed and plopped in the couch of her living room, still whirling around the same idea in her mind since she left Hogwarts. 'There goes my chance of becoming a Potions mistress; I needed the perfect mark to do it, to try to convince him to accept me as his apprentice. There's no way Snape would agree to it if I don't achieve the 'O.' I'll have to start looking to see if there's a Potions master at Beauxbatons or Durmstrang willing to take an apprentice.'

She was trembling when she opened it; she wanted to know but felt scared about what she'd see on the parchment. Grabbing all her courage, she looked at the results just below the grading scale and her name. Seven 'O's,' seven perfect grades in all her subjects including Potions.

She had to sit on the couch suddenly, as her knees wouldn't support her any longer, and looked at the parchment again to be sure that she had read it correctly. She had indeed done it: she had gotten perfect grades.

Life couldn't be better...

A/N: This story is a gift for Melanie, and its intention is to be a light and sweet story, simply fluffy. It might not be something very different from what you have seen, but it's something special and I'm really pleased with it. I hope you like it

I also want to thank Magic (Barb) who helped me with the first version of this chapter, and thanks to LariLee, Vaughn, NotSoSaintly, and Southern_Witch_69 for helping me by betaing this story. Thank you.

Chapter 2 of 5

Making Severus happy is simpler than anyone expects. Hermione achieves it in ten steps, but no one can say they were easy.

Step Two. Become his apprentice

"Thank you, Professor McGonagall. It's good to see you, too." The older witch hugged Hermione. She had always been proud of this brilliant, centred, brave girl. "So, this is how Hogwarts looks during vacations?"

"Yes, a little sad, don't you think?"

It was indeed sad; seeing the castle, usually so full of life, now in complete silence was shocking. It seemed as if it was in a deep sleep.

"So, what brings you here, Miss Granger?" Minerva McGonagall brought her out of her reverie.

"I have a meeting with Professor Dumbledore. I have a proposal I want to discuss with him." *Better to start with Dumbledore than with Snape. He would close his door on my nose before listening to me.*

"I imagine you want to talk with him as soon as possible. Let me escort you to his office. That way we can talk about how you are spending your summer and your plans for the future."

What is she doing here? Would it be the chance I have been looking for? Severus had tried to figure out how he would talk and convince the girl into accepting an apprenticeship with him. He wouldn't find a chance better than this one, and certainly, he would take advantage of it.

"Hermione, it is such a pleasure. Please sit down. Would you like a lemon drop?"

"What brings you here so soon after graduation? One would think that you would be off enjoying yourself. Are you enjoying your summer?"

"That sounds like a good plan, my dear. I am quite pleased that you have the chance to do so." He eyed her, smiling lightly. "I can give you some advice about some Wizarding places you can visit there." He eyed her expectantly, apparently wondering if she'd soon tell him what the meeting was all about.

Dumbledore smiled in encouragement. He felt that he knew what she wanted to discuss, and if that was the case, he felt particularly pleased about it. "Yes, I recall you mentioned a proposal when you owed me asking for this meeting." When she didn't speak, he prompted her by asking, "What would you like to propose?"

"Indeed, I am. Quite impressive. Hogwarts has not seen marks like those in decades." He smiled kindly.

"I see." He leant forward slightly and peered at her over his half-moon glasses. "Tell me what I can do for you then."

Dumbledore smiled triumphantly and leant back. If he had plotted this, it couldn't have turned out better. The fact that she had come to him made all the difference. "I do believe that would be an excellent beginning for your career choice, Hermione. However, I am afraid you should be making this offer to Professor Snape, not to me."

"I could force him or coerce him to take on an apprentice, but I think, in this instance, I'll let Severus make his own decision without any meddling on my part. He's been working hard for many years, and I've imposed on him greatly in the past." He popped a candy into his mouth, studying her for a moment. "Why don't you go down and have a word with him about this?"

"I'll do that, sir. I'm sorry for... taking up your time for nothing."

"Thanks, I'd love to."

"That's a good idea, sir. I'll see you later."

Severus raced through the stairs that led to Dumbledore's office. She must be still there. It had only been a few minutes. They couldn't have finished yet.

"Do not bother me with your candies now. Where is she? I saw her coming to your office."

"For Merlin's sake, you know perfectly well whom I'm talking about. Now, tell me where she is."

Severus was starting to feel exasperated. "Of course I am talking about her."

"What?"

"Bloody hell." Severus was about to leave the office when Dumbledore spoke again.

That statement stopped the Potions master. He turned to face his mentor who was making an effort to stop himself from smiling and sat in front of his desk. "May I ask what did you discuss?"

"It seems that she is finding 'difficulties' deciding about her future and how to obtain what she wants. Fortunately, I think I had advised her correctly."

Severus let three weeks pass before answering her. He hadn't wanted to seem desperate. However, a month had passed since then, and she hadn't answered his message. Maybe he shouldn't have waited so long. Maybe she regretted making her proposal. Maybe the Potions master of a far away country had made her a proposal. *I should not have waited so long. She has never liked me, and I am sure she thinks I do not like her either, not that I do like her, mind you, but she is a brilliant girl. The only one who can be my successor. What am I going to do now?*

He entered the Three Broomsticks and immediately regretted his decision. Sitting near the back corner of the place, he saw a couple that made something twist inside of him. The only thing he couldn't abide about Hermione was her relationship with Viktor Krum. He was about to leave when he saw the young wizard grabbing her arm in a tight grip and pulling her to him. Just when he was about to go hex him, the boy lessened his grip. Severus realised they were in the middle of something important. He stood there, considering leaving again when he saw her face...the tears forming in her eyes and the sadness she reflected. He never cared about others' feelings; they were not of his business, but something about Hermione made him feel her distress deep within him and prompted a foreign feeling of protectiveness. He wanted to cross the room, take her into his arms, and keep the pain at bay. He stayed to watch her closely and to be assured that she was fine.

She was walking distractedly on shaky legs; her mind had shut down to block the pain of it all and refused to function correctly. When she felt strong arms holding her, preventing her from almost falling, the realisation of what had just happened hit her full force, and she started crying.

"Miss Granger, are you all right?"

"Miss Granger, listen to me. I am going to Apparate us to the gate at Hogwarts; you are too weak to walk there by yourself. Do you understand me?"

"Eat something. You are in this state because you are experiencing very strong feelings on an empty stomach, and that only aggravates your shocked state."

"Drink this; it will help you to sleep peacefully. You will feel better tomorrow with a clearer mind."

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"Hermione, I am sorry, but we cannot go to dinner this Friday. I have to attend other business that will keep me out for the weekend. I am sorry, but I will compensate you next week."

"Oh, I have gotten so used to our regular dates that I will certainly miss it."

"Dates? What dates? What are you talking about? We are just having dinner out so we can talk more freely."

"Severus, we go to have dinner every Friday away from Hogwarts to talk about our personal lives and to get to know each other in a different and more comfortable environment, and it seems to me that we are moving towards something more. That is called dating..."

Now, Severus has to face a completely foreign concept for him. It will be interesting to see how he'll react to Hermione's affirmation about dating.

I want to thank Magic who helped me with the first version of this chapter. Also thanks to Ginny W for her advice about the break up scene. And finally, but more importantly, thanks to the best beta any writer could have, Southern Witch.

Southern's Notes: I felt sorry for Viktor, but I am quite happy that Snape was there for her.

Chapter 4 of 5

Making Severus happy is simpler than anyone expects. Hermione achieves it in ten steps, but no one can say they were easy.

Step Four. Love Him in Every Single Way

Disclaimer: All characters and concepts of Harry Potter's universe belong to J.K. Rowling; I just borrowed them for a little while.

This chapter was slightly inspired by three songs I love: "Salvation" by Roxette, "She's Like the Wind" from Dirty Dancing's soundtrack, and "I Don't Know How to Love Him" from Andrew Lloyd Weber's Jesus Christ Superstar. Anything you recognise from those songs, or looks familiar, belongs to the authors.

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"Severus, stop it. I know exactly how to stir the brew and when to add the ingredient. This potion is *my* creation, remember?"

"I am perfectly aware of it, Hermione, but your *creation* is an extremely dangerous potion: if something is done incorrectly, the result will be disastrous."

"Enough. I will not have this conversation with you or anyone else. If I have feelings for her, it is a matter that only concerns me, and rest assured that fact will never be

"I can't stay here. Don't you see it? Are you so blind that you can't see why?" Hermione's voice was strong and determined; only someone who knew her well enough would have heard the hint of sadness threatening to seep in. She couldn't stay if he couldn't love her back. It would be torture.

She'd thought that there was something there; she had hoped for it desperately. But he was always on guard around her, never letting her truly know him as a lover should. She'd started falling in love with him a few months after breaking up with Viktor, and when he'd kissed her, she'd fully realised her feelings. After that, she believed that he could come to love her despite the fact that he'd continued to withdraw from her. She believed that he would eventually let her in and that they would discover that he too shared that feeling she craved. However, people rarely changed, and her desires were nothing but dreams.

"What are you talking about, Hermione? What am I supposed to see?" He was starting to feel uneasy. If he was right, he knew exactly what she was talking about, and he had to admit that it scared him.

Her eyes widened at his questions. He even had the nerve to ask it, the bastard. She had been pretty obvious about her feelings for him, trying to get closer to him, trying to treat him tenderly. Gods, she had even flirted with him a few times. Severus was an intelligent man; he should have noticed, and if he was asking her these questions, it was clear that he was feigning ignorance in an attempt to not hurt her feelings.

"It really doesn't matter at all. I have spoken with the Headmaster to let him know my thoughts about this, and he understands my reasons. He is considering hiring a foreign Potions master, so you don't have to worry about the Defence post. You'll get it anyway."

Severus was speechless. She had even spoken with Dumbledore before telling him about her decision to make sure that nothing could stop her from leaving Hogwarts, from leaving him. He would certainly hex the bloody man for accepting her plan.

He was sitting there, looking at her with his cold gaze and not saying a word. In her mind, that could only mean that it was over, that he had nothing to say or didn't object. Hermione took advantage of his silence to say her farewell. "I can never thank you enough for the opportunity you gave me and for everything you have taught me during all these years. I would have loved to teach here, but I just can't stay, not like this." She walked to the door before addressing him again, not daring to face him, knowing that if she looked into his eyes all her resolve would waver. "I still have packing to do, so I'm leaving now. I'm not sure if I'll see you tomorrow. That's why I wanted to say goodbye right now. Take care of yourself, Severus."

She had wanted to say more, wanted to tell him that she loved him like she had never loved anyone before, but her tears were threatening to spill. She didn't want to break down in front of him. When she reached the door, knowing that it was over, something happened. She barely heard it, but it wasn't her imagination. There was a barely audible whisper from the man she loved.

"Hermione, please, don't leave me. Stay."

Hermione turned to face him, no longer battling with the tears in her eyes and letting them run down her cheeks freely. She struggled to find her voice and asked him, hoarse with emotion, "Why?"

He didn't answer her. What could he tell her? That he loved her? He didn't even know if he did. He grimly watched her while trying to find the right words.

"Severus, give me a reason to stay."

Silence. He remained there paralysed, not knowing what to do. He wasn't prepared for this, never having to confess his feelings before.

"Damn it! Talk to me. Open yourself to me."

"I cannot. I don't know how to do it, how to cope with it." He rose from his chair behind the desk and walked around to stand in front of her, his emotions threatening to unleash. "Do you know how much it scares me to be unable to recognise myself? To know that my fate lies in your hands and that I am at your mercy? Do you know how overwhelming it is?" He turned to walk away from her, realising that he had lost all control and said too much.

She looked at him incredulously. She never expected that reaction from him, and it was too much. He might feel the same for her, and he was fighting it because he couldn't bear her rejection. She had to do something, and the best course of action was to be completely honest.

"I know how you feel." He turned to face her in disbelief. "I know it because I feel the same for you. It's supposed to be that way, overwhelming." She walked to him hesitantly. "Severus, you'll never know love unless you surrender to it."

"I cannot open myself to something I do not know."

"Just tell me; tell me how you feel."

He turned away from her again, trying to hide. She came to stand beside him and placed her hand carefully on his arm. He reluctantly turned to face her and barely suppressed a gasp. She looked so vulnerable and so open that he could see her feelings plainly on her face. Their eyes locked; her brown ones bright with emotion and unshed tears, his black eyes dark and full of passion. When she whispered with a choked voice, "Severus, please," that was his undoing. He embraced her, knowing it was right and that there was nowhere else he wanted to be or anyone else he wanted to be with.

"I cannot do that. I cannot open for you and let you see who I am. You will loathe me, loathe the man I was and the terrible things I have done in my past. I was one of the Dark Lord's favourites. He asked me to do so many things, and I had to do them to avoid raising suspicions. You deserve better than me." He stepped back and eyed her. In that instant, he felt something snap. Why deny what he felt? He held her close again, talking softly into her hair, "I know you should have someone better, but selfish as I am right now, I do not care. I want you. Every time I look into your eyes, the horrors of my past diminish. If I'd allow it, you could bring out the best in me even though no one, including myself, believes there is still something good left."

"I could never loathe you. I'm not fool. I know what you have done in your past, but I can't put all the blame on you. You did what you had to do." She pulled herself from his embrace to look directly into his eyes and placed a finger on his lips to prevent him from answering. "Don't try to push me away, not again." With that, she removed her finger and raised her head, brushing his lips with hers in a tender kiss. She pulled back only to look into his eyes again, trying to convey how she felt. "I love you, Severus, the good and the bad."

It was enough for him; the last little thread of control he held broke instantly. He knew she was honest, and he decided to not allow the worry of his dark past to force him to push her away. He tightened his embrace and pulled her closer before starting to kiss her deeply, desperately. Something was set free inside him, and he gave himself willingly to his emotions and his desires. He wanted her more than anything he'd ever wanted in his life. His hands started moving; one moved through her brown hair while the other moved along her side and through her robes until it rested on her waist. Her hands were also exploring his body, one tracing the contours of his face while the other slid over his chest.

She pulled back again and looked at him, breathless from their passionate kiss. Without thinking, just feeling, she said, "I want you. I need you."

Without waiting for further invitation, he lifted her into his arms and kissed her again while carrying her to his chambers. He entered and deposited her on the edge of his bed and sat beside her. Before resuming their kissing, he confessed to her, "I have wanted this, dreamed about this for so long."

"I have wanted this also. You can't imagine how much." And with that admission, she pulled him down with her as they kissed, lying against the mattress of his bed. A part of her wanted this more than anything, but another part wondered if it was too soon. After all, she had *just* admitted her feelings aloud for the first time, and he had kind of admitted the same, though he hadn't repeated the words. In the end, the only thing that mattered was that this felt right to her, that she belonged to him, and that there was no better place for her than his arms.

He gently caressed her body, knowing what he wanted, knowing that this was no illusion and that she was there with him. What amazed him most was the woman in his arms. She was actually giving herself willingly to him after confessing that she loved him. He slowly started undoing the clasps of her robes, exposing her shirt beneath. He moved his hands to slowly caress her breasts through the fabric while she fumbled with his countless buttons.

She broke the kiss to whisper in a husky and slightly annoyed voice, "Honestly, am I a witch or what?" With that stated, she grabbed her wand from the robes beneath her, and with a whispered spell, his robe disappeared revealing a white linen shirt. He couldn't help but to laugh at her remark, finding it amusing the way she'd admonished herself. "Much better," she mumbled, smiling at him briefly before resuming her kissing and attacking the buttons of his shirt.

They worked with the buttons of their respective clothing until both shirts were completely open. Deftly, he unfastened her bra, caressing her breasts again, and this time it was skin against skin. They didn't break their kiss until it was necessary for them to breathe. He looked into her eyes, pinning her with the intensity of his gaze, and caressed her face while moving a strand of hair from her face. "Are you sure about this, Hermione? If we continue, I will not let you go away from me...ever."

"And people say I talk too much." She laughed at his startled expression and answered his question. "Yes, Severus, I'm sure about this. I have never been surer about anything in my life. And know this: I'm not planning to go anywhere or letting you go by any means."

It was all he needed to know before he started kissing her again, this time more urgently and nearly ripping her skirt in an attempt to get it off. She helped him by unzipping her skirt and raising her hips, letting him slip down to where he pulled it from her legs and tossed it to the floor. She did a better job opening his trousers, and with a little help from him, they were quickly wearing only their lower underwear. He spread her legs slightly while settling between her thighs and kissed his way down from her mouth to her neck and to her breasts. He continued kissing, laving, and sucking her nipples while she buried her hands in his hair and arched her body to rub it against his. His hands moved down, tracing the soft skin of her abdomen, the contour of her belly button, and her knickers. She was so beautiful and so perfect, and it wasn't only because of her body, it was that courage and intelligence she possessed that made her completely delectable. She had an air of confidence that made her completely irresistible to him.

If Hermione thought she had felt strong and overwhelming emotions before, nothing could be compared to what she felt in his arms with his body pressed against hers. She wanted to give him everything: her body, her mind, and her feelings. Even after that, it would not be enough. His tongue kissing her breasts, his fingers teasing her entrance...it was too much for her. She pulled him up for a kiss just after he removed her knickers. Between kisses and with a breathy voice, she told him what she wanted. "I need you now."

Severus thought there was nothing more enticing than her voice full of passion, her eyes dark with desire, and her love reflecting in her expression. "You are so beautiful." He moved to comply with her desires and removed his boxers before positioning himself to enter her. Her legs wrapped around his waist, and when he was fully sheathed inside her, they looked at each other for a long moment. In silent agreement, they began moving rhythmically in a perfect synchrony that made it seem as though they had done it forever and that they were meant for each other. They caressed each other, not daring to break their gaze, his hand squeezing her breasts, teasing her nipples as he thrust into her. He started slowly while their bodies moulded together, but with every passing moment, he quickened his pace, deepening his penetration, wanting to fill her and make her feel complete.

She clung to his back, tracing its muscles while she moved her hips upward to meet his thrusts. When the emotions and the sensations he elicited from her were too much, she laid her head against his pillow, moaning incoherently, feeling her building orgasm. He moved down to kiss her neck, her shoulder, and her collarbone while feeling the same tension building in his own body. When her body started convulsing and tightening with pleasure, she came and called his name. He kissed her lips, still pounding into her, knowing that he would follow her soon. After some frantic strokes, he also came, collapsing over her, holding her tightly, and never wanting to let her go.

Their lovemaking was so intense that sleep rapidly claimed both. He watched her through tired eyes, taking in her beautiful sleeping face, the peaceful rise and fall of her chest while breathing, and realised in that instant that he finally knew what love was.

Lorraine's Notes: It could seem that Hermione was giving up or that it was a trick to force him into taking the next step. She's not that cunning, and I don't consider her as someone who would give ultimatums. But I also don't see her as a passive woman who is willing to wait unconditionally for what she wants. She was fighting for him and trying, but after seeing no response, she just decided to stop hurting herself.

I really wanted to hex Snape until he got some good sense and realised what he was doing. He was so bloody stubborn and gave me a hard time, but at the end he did the right thing.

I want to thank Southern Witch, who did a great job beta reading this chapter.

Southern's Notes: It's about time he gets his head out of his arse, eh? Hehe.

Step Five. Give him his dreams back and fulfil them with him

Chapter 5 of 5

Making Severus happy is simpler than anyone expects. Hermione achieves it in ten steps, but no one can say they were easy.

Step Five. Give him his dreams back and fulfil them with him

Disclaimer: All characters and concepts of Harry Potter's universe belong to J.K. Rowling; I just borrowed them for a little while.

Harry Potter was laughing so hard that every witch and wizard near their table, and those who weren't, were staring at them. They didn't need such an outburst to be noticed; the Golden Trio still dragged attention to themselves just for being there.

"You're kidding, right? Hermione, that was a nice try, even for you, but you have never been good with jokes. Who do you expect to believe that you're in a relationship with Snape?"

Ginny looked nervously between her fiancé and her best friend. Harry was still laughing like mad, and Hermione looked as if she would hex him until he learned to keep his mouth shut. If she didn't do something, things would end in a nasty way.

"Eh, Harry, darling, maybe you should stop laughing, and listen to Hermione."

"Come on, Ginny. You can't tell me you believe this nonsense, unless... Oh, I can see it now; you're also part of the joke. It's a really bad one, love. You two should have asked Fred and George for some ideas."

"Why didn't you tell her, Ron?"

Saying that, Ron Disappeared from Diagon Alley, leaving Harry standing there in the middle of the street. A couple of hours later, when the dark-haired wizard went back to their flat, he noticed that his best friend hadn't come back. And he didn't return for a long time...

Hermione should have known better and should have refrained from telling Severus about what happened with Ron. Now, he was pacing furiously in front of her in his chambers. He had such a terrible temper, and she noticed that it was worse if he was angry about something that concerned her. He was kind of possessive with her and ferociously protective. At the beginning, she was surprised with the extent of his passion, never having experienced something like that from Viktor. Then, she felt a little flattered by it, knowing that she was the one causing such a powerful surge of emotion in the man who always appeared so in control and detached. But at the moment, she didn't appreciate his attitude about how she should handle the situation.

"Severus, stop right now. You will not do any such thing. I'm not a damsel in distress who needs to be saved or protected from evil Ron. I told you about what happened because we are a couple now, and I want to share everything that happens with you. But this matter with Ron is only between us. I will not even let Harry interfere, no matter what he says about friendship and brotherhood."

"You are being stubborn again. If I am treating you like a girl it is because you are behaving like one. I have the right to expect him to answer to me for the way he treated you and for lusting after my witch."

Voice dripping with sarcasm, he said, "Of course, he is your beloved friend...one of the 'Golden Trio.' Ronald Weasley would never have improper thoughts about his best friend. Do not be so naïve, Hermione. He thinks about you in that way, I assure you."

"I understand your need to solve things your way, but it infuriates me the way that friend of yours treats you. It seems like you let him get away with it! I refuse to allow anyone to mistreat you in any way, and I will always look for a way to prevent it. I apologise if I reacted in an unsuitable way, but it is how I feel."

The brunette turned to face the man behind her eyeing him suspiciously. It was really rare when he gave details about his past. "Really? Are you telling me you have never been in a relationship at all?"

When she understood the implications of his confession, she felt her heart tighten, knowing it was quite possible that she was the first woman he had let into his life. She loved this man, and this new revelation made her feel special about what they had. "I love you, Severus. Forever."

Sleep quickly claimed Hermione, sated and happy. Tomorrow would be the first day of the school year, and she would be introduced as the new Potions mistress of Hogwarts and him as the new DADA professor. They needed their rest, but as on many nights before, Severus didn't succumb to sleep. Instead, he spent several minutes watching her.

His study of her body began again. He always started running his fingers slowly through her hair, her unruly curls that she hated and that he had learned to appreciate when the locks twisted around his fingers. He thought that Hermione had a beautiful face; her brown eyes were the reflection of her clear soul and her brilliance. He could just make out the start of slight traces of wrinkles, the price she would have to pay for the way she laughed open-heartedly. Her nose and her cheeks had some freckles, which gave her face a still youthful look of a girl, and her lips were irresistible to him, full and soft, always saving a kiss for him.

No matter how gentle or how rough their coupling had been, she always fell asleep with a quiet demeanour. Her arms were always open when she slept, just like her heart and her mind, waiting to embrace him when she felt him near her body. Severus lightly traced the curves of her breasts while her chest rose and fell with the slow rhythm of her breathing. He couldn't stop himself, and he moved his hand lower to place it on her belly. It was common knowledge that he didn't tolerate children despite being a professor, which forced him to spend hours amongst them. But sometimes when he looked at her like this, something primal lurked in his mind, the thought of seeing Hermione with a swelled abdomen, pregnant with his child. He rubbed her belly softly, the promise of life there waiting for its time. Her legs were already tangling in the covers while she moved in the bed, trying to get into a comfortable position. He always wondered how they managed to sleep, considering how much she moved about. She was always active...even in her sleep.

Severus smiled at her form; he liked being the guardian of her sleep, wondering what she was dreaming and if she shared his dreams. Did he say dreams? He hadn't acknowledged the meaning of the word for a long time. When he was a child, he used to have dreams, but they were trashed under the bitterness of his loveless home. His soul became even more bitter during his childhood and adolescence, causing him to forget about his dreams and acknowledge only a desire for things that brought power, money, or better standing. When he looked for redemption, putting his life in Dumbledore hands, the only thing left for him was a feeling slightly similar to hope. He had hoped to mend the error of his ways, and if it was possible, to survive a war. He'd wanted to see a world free of the darkness he'd once helped build. He had craved and

