

The Headmaster

by Hanagasume

Five years after the defeat of Voldemort, Severus Snape is still at Hogwarts - and is the Headmaster too. His deputy, Professor Hermione Granger, is the best thing that has ever happened to him. With all of the intrigue and miscommunication, can they fall in love? HG/SS - set postHBP ignoring all that occurred in DH. OOC alert also.

The Headmaster

Chapter 1 of 32

Five years after the defeat of Voldemort, Severus Snape is still at Hogwarts - and is the Headmaster too. His deputy, Professor Hermione Granger, is the best thing that has ever happened to him. With all of the intrigue and miscommunication, can they fall in love? HG/SS - set postHBP ignoring all that occurred in DH. OOC alert also.

Disclaimer: All publicly recognizable characters, settings, etc. are the property of their respective owners. The original characters and plot are the property of the author.

Many thanks to Madbrilliant, without whom this chapter would not be beta'd.

Chapter 1 - The Headmaster

He was the Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

It had taken quite a long time for it to come about; that added with the fact that he was still unpopular with many for Albus Dumbledore's murder, even after he had been found innocent on that account. The final battle had taken place almost five years ago, and Minerva McGonagall had remained at Hogwarts to act as Headmistress for two years before Severus was offered the job. His name had long been cleared, and the Order had been behind him the entire time, assisting him in returning to his post at Hogwarts as their esteemed Potions master.

While Severus was quite content to remain at Hogwarts, there was still something wanting in his life despite his good fortune. He was miserable without Albus there to take tea with him and talk at him for hours on end even if the portrait of the late Headmaster was hanging on the wall in his office and chattered constantly. It wasn't the same as the real deal. Minerva still visited sometimes though. That was good for him because, although they had often been rivals, they were friends.

Most of the other professors before the war had remained at Hogwarts, including Filius Flitwick, Pomona Sprout, Sylia Vector, Juliet Sinistra, and Rolanda Hooch. There had been the addition of Angelina Johnston as the Transfiguration professor two years before, the installment of Remus Lupin and his wife Nymphadora Tonks-Lupin as the DADA professors, as well as Hermione Granger his elected Deputy and current Potions master.

Hermione Granger puzzled him.

She had been the brightest student in her age group and had scored the highest NEWT since Severus himself had graduated from Hogwarts. She had battled like a warrior in the war and had been fearless and compassionate with the less fortunate. She was the most understanding person one could ever ask for, despite her being an only child, and selflessly gave up her time for anyone in need. But somehow, despite all of her intelligence and potential for greatness elsewhere, she had gone to college and graduated a Potions and Arithmancy master before applying for a job at Hogwarts and immediately settled into her life at the school.

That had all been five years ago. She was 20 when she had begun teaching and was currently 25 and content with her position. Severus had given her the job as his Deputy only three years ago. Hermione Granger was the most organized and useful deputy that had ever seen Hogwarts. Minerva had done a fair job, but she was nothing compared to Granger and her unique ability to be more efficient than required by the job she was working. It was uncanny really.

Sighing, Severus leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes, feeling a headache beginning at the back of his head from all his pondering. This was quite a frequent occurrence, for when he thought of Hermione, he would get headaches, and because she was often at the forefront of his thoughts, he got many of them. He rubbed his head and summoned a house-elf to find Hermione for him she would surely not have a class then.

"Winky, please get Professor Granger for me," he said when the elf appeared.

"Yes sir," she squeaked, disappearing with a pop.

Two minutes later the flames of the fireplace turned green, and Hermione stepped out of it, holding a vial of clear green liquid in one hand. Severus sat up properly and opened his eyes when he heard her arrive and held out his hand. She sighed and placed the vial in his outstretched hand, crossing her arms as she waited for him to take his headache potion so she could get back to her class.

"Thank you, Hermione," he said once he had swallowed the disgusting liquid down luckily without expelling the contents of his stomach everywhere.

"No problem, though if you're done, I actually do have a class at present," she said in a slightly exasperated voice. This was the third time he had summoned her in two days, and she was getting a little worried for him. "If this continues, you may want to go and see Poppy about it."

"I don't need a nanny, Granger," he said curtly at her suggestion.

Hermione shook her head and took the empty vial from him. He did that every time she tried to suggest that he might have a medical condition. "Very well, now may I leave?" she asked.

He dismissed her with a wave, and she left wordlessly. Severus watched her depart with a contemplative expression. Maybe she was right, and he should see someone about it. He realized that he was getting worse as the days drew on, though he was sure it tied in with the little sleeping that he actually did. But that was why he snapped at her he was afraid that she might be correct.

Severus felt old. He was only in his prime 43 years was young in the Wizarding world. But he felt older than that, and was tired of life. It wasn't really his fault although he supposed it was, in a way. He shouldn't have joined Voldemort to begin with, and he would never have had to spy. It was those years spying that had left him drained, and he could never get those twenty years back.

He looked around the office, now bare of all of the other portraits of Headmasters save Albus. He had moved them to a new room that he had constructed in order to display them next to the trophy room. They were bothersome, and the last thing he wanted was the portrait of Armando Dippet reporting messages from the current Minister for Magic, Arthur Weasley. He didn't have anything against the man; it was merely that he liked to do his job without being disturbed. If the Ministry wanted to contact him, they could bloody well do it the normal way.

"Severus," said a soft familiar voice.

He spun in his chair around to face the singular portrait that remained in the room. "What is it, Albus?" he answered wearily.

"You are troubled. What is it this time, my boy?"

"Nothing of concern, Albus," he lied poorly. He knew very well that, even in his portrait form, Albus could see through him. "I feel terribly old beyond my years. I know you've probably heard it before."

"Not from you," Albus replied. "You've always hated Christmas. The season is getting to you."

Severus didn't reply to that. Albus knew why he hated Christmas. Christmas was two short weeks away, and he had to plan the Yule ball for this year as the tradition had begun. They held a ball every three years, and the students would return home for the holidays the following day for two weeks. This year, four students could not go home because they did not have homes to return to another casualty of the war: students that became orphaned.

"There are four orphaned students remaining this year," Severus said with a heavy sigh. "All of the others have accommodation with the families of friends."

"You feel bad because the remaining are the only ones that don't have an escape?" Albus questioned.

"Of course I do, you old coot," he bit out tersely.

"The staff is remaining at Hogwarts this holiday then?"

"Yes, the most of them are remaining. I believe Hermione may be going to the Weasleys' on Christmas day as per usual, but the rest of them are staying here," he answered automatically. "I was invited to the Weasley gathering."

"Why are you not going then?"

"Because of the remaining students how would it look if the Headmaster of a school left his students on Christmas day?" he demanded.

"Filius and the others are all very capable. Take a couple of days off, and enjoy yourself for once, Severus. They wouldn't mind. Bring it up at the next staff meeting," Albus insisted.

"I'll give it some thought," he agreed reluctantly.

Albus nodded and quieted, leaving Severus to his thoughts. Being unable to concentrate now, Severus left his office and wandered around the castle while all of the students were still in class or in their common rooms or the library studying. Somehow, he managed to end up in the Astronomy tower and found a comfortable position leaned up against a pillar as he looked out over the school grounds, vaguely recognizing what was actually there underneath all of the snow. The lake had completely frozen over, and for the last two weekends, it had been deemed safe to skate on by Filius, who took the liberty of offering to monitor the lake at certain times so that the students could ice skate with supervision.

He had to remember to thank Filius for that at the next meeting too. In fact, he had to enlist some help in planning the Yule ball, and he imagined that Hermione would be the most ideal to fill the position of ball coordinator. She was his assistant, really, and was obviously the most organized person on his staff at present. He would have to remember to give her a raise or extra weekends off or holidays or something to make up for all of her help though.

He sighed when he realized the list of people he had to thank for certain things was growing and demanding more from him. He had a hard time as it was saying thanks, and now he was required to dish them out constantly. He supposed that one day he would grow accustomed to it; but he had all the time in the Wizarding world to master that skill, so why hurry? He turned to leave the tower then, when he saw Hermione standing in the doorway watching him with her arms crossed over her chest.

"How did you find me?" he asked, and then he almost kicked himself for asking such a stupid question.

She chuckled at this and unfolded her arms. "Well, I should think that answer was obvious. However, if you are having difficulties, I suggest you see Poppy about it," she replied.

"Did you want something?"

"Just to see if you were feeling any better since you interrupted my class earlier," she answered. "You did read the timetable I gave you of which professor had classes and when, didn't you?"

He shook his head simply with a scowl and walked to the doorway. They left the tower together and returned to his office. Just before she was about to Floo back to her office, he called out to her. "Schedule a staff meeting for Thursday," he said simply.

Professor Granger

Chapter 2 of 32

A staff meeting, and Severus talks to Hermione about the upcoming holidays.

A big thank you to Madbrilliant as usual, for being an excellent beta, and thanks to WriterMerrin, who picked up on all the mistakes we overlooked in chapter one!

.....

Chapter 2 - Professor Granger

She was the Potions master at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Unlike other Potions mistresses, Hermione had been given the choice to take up the title of master, and she had taken that title to secure her position as an equal with male Potions masters. At first it had been about equality and rights, but then it had been about making a difference and being recognized for it properly. A Potions mistress was rarely given credit when it was due. She adored her job teaching. Most people had figured that after she graduated from Hogwarts she would go on to become an Auror or some other form of Ministry of Magic worker, but she hadn't.

The Wizarding world had expected her to follow Harry or Ron wherever they went, that she would marry Ron and make many Weasley children. How wrong they had been. Her last wish in life would have been to marry him. He was like a brother to her, and so was Harry besides having tried at a relationship and failing at it miserably. They were too ill-suited to be lovers. Ron had married a witch he had met in America named Julia Clark, whom he had encountered when the English National Quidditch team had gone on tour there. She was originally from Wales, and they had "fallen in love" instantly.

Besides she was an adoring wife who gave him all the attention he had ever wanted in the short time they had been married. Harry had married Ginny just as everyone had expected, and he had joined the Auror's office after two years of training. Ginny had given birth to their first child, a daughter named Lily, just three months earlier. Hermione was twenty-five years old, single, and content to remain so until she met the right man. Nobody had successfully stirred her interest, but then again, she had been searching in all of the wrong places by even contemplating someone of a similar age.

She needed an older man an intelligent and mature man.

Outside of her thoughts, the Thursday morning staff meeting was beginning, which caused her to snap out of her reverie. Everyone was gathered in the main staffroom, and Severus had just arrived. Honestly, Hermione could say that now that they were colleagues, Severus was nicer. She hadn't actually known him all that well to begin with, but after five years of teaching with him, she discovered that he was not the horrible man that he projected to his students.

Oh sure, he was still sarcastic, snarky, and downright mean at times, but he had another side that he rarely showed to anyone even his own colleagues. She had only seen it a few times, and they had been mere coincidences. Sighing, she thought back to the meeting and realized that everyone was looking at her expectantly. She opened her mouth and closed it wordlessly she had missed something.

'Ummm... I didn't quite catch that what was the question again?' she asked.

"Well, Hermione Severus was just asking if you had any ideas for the Yule Ball," Filius replied with a warm smile.

Hermione smiled back in thanks and cleared her throat softly. "Actually, I did have a few ideas nothing too garish, just simple and elegant," she said opening the folder in front of her and passing around a spreadsheet. "I won't be able to orchestrate the entire thing by myself, but this is a general overview."

Severus smirked when he got a page of the plan and looked over at her with a strange glint in his eyes. "My, my, aren't we ambitious," he said smoothly. "I don't suppose anyone would like to volunteer to assist Hermione with this incredible feat?"

"Oh, I will!" Filius piped.

The rest of the staff was quite quick to agree after that, and so it was that Hermione was the Yule Ball coordinator and everyone would be putting in an effort to decorate the Hall when the time came. Severus even acquiesced to enchant the ceiling differently to suit the theme that year. Hermione was thrilled when he had agreed and gave him a warm smile, which he returned with a small one of his own momentarily before he switched back into his usual mode.

"Now, back to business," he announced, clearing his throat a little uncomfortably at his slip of character. "There are four students remaining at Hogwarts this Christmas, and it seemed last week that only Hermione would be leaving the castle for a few days. Now, it seems, I may not be here either."

"Whatever do you mean, Severus?" asked Sinistra.

"As it is, I do not generally leave the castle on the holiday, but this year I for personal reasons, I have accepted an invitation to the Weasleys' for a few days also, and shall be returning to the castle before New Years," he explained. "I hope this does not inconvenience anyone..."

"Good for you, Severus," Pomona Sprout interrupted. "It's about time you got out of the castle, I say."

There was a murmur of agreement through the staff. Hermione was the only who hadn't said anything. She was in shock. Severus was leaving the castle and joining the Weasleys? She would be there also, and while it was no problem for her, she had not expected it. The staff meeting was concluded some time in between his announcement and her coming out of her thoughts again. She realized that she was the only staff member left in the staff room besides Severus.

"Are you unhappy with my decision?" Severus asked stiffly.

"Not at all just surprised," she replied, standing and seeking out the Floo powder to return to her office. "I never thought it possible that you would ever spend a Christmas with us there you've always declined."

"I've decided a change was in order," he said bluntly.

"We have changed the location to Harry and Ginny's house," she said.

"Grimmauld Place?"

She nodded in affirmation and he frowned. "I have not been there in years," he said under his breath. "Not since the war."

Hermione nodded understandingly, seeing his eyes become misty and confused. He honestly didn't know how he felt about returning there in any capacity. She supposed he would rather it be under these circumstances than the ones many years ago during the war and his days as a spy. She forgot about the Floo powder and went to him, touching his forearm gently to get his attention.

"We could leave Hogwarts together, you know," she offered.

He nodded, and she backed away, giving him some space to think. Returning to the fireplace, she took some Floo powder and, in a swirl of green flames, spun away and reappeared in her office. They had once been Snape's old chambers and office in the Dungeons, but since arriving at Hogwarts, they had been hers. She levitated more logs onto the fire, and it emitted more light and warmth, which she appreciated on this particularly cold winter.

She ended up marking third-year essays for the remainder of the time between the staff meeting and morning classes. Five minutes before her first class was due, she began setting up the classroom for their practical lesson that day. She set up the ingredients bench and ensured that all of the cauldrons were clear and free from things that might contaminate the potion. The class arrived not long after, and she ushered them inside before flicking her wand at the board where the directions appeared.

"There are notes on the board for you to copy. Once you have finished that, go and collect a cauldron in your pairs and gather the ingredients for the Headache Potions on page 468 of your textbooks," she instructed firmly.

The students hurried to comply, armed with the knowledge that if they did as they were told, Professor Granger was quite a nice teacher; but if they got in her way, she could be as horrid as Professor Snape was rumored to have been when he was teaching Potions to some of the older students. Hermione sat down at the desk at the front of the classroom and began doing some planning for the Yule Ball as her class worked silently. It wasn't until she heard the scraping of their chairs against the stone of the floors that she looked up to see how they were going.

Her first-year Ravenclaw-Hufflepuff class was her favourite class of them all especially first in the morning. They did all of their work, followed instructions without hesitation, and worked hard for and deserved the House Points she gave them. During the rest of class, she wandered around, examining their potions and giving out a few points for students that were particularly talented. When class was over, they all brought up labeled samples of their potions and cleaned up their work stations before filing out of the room while chatting to each other quietly.

The moment the last student walked through the door, she moved to close it before going back to her office and was surprised to see Severus there. "Severus what are you doing down here?" she exclaimed.

"I came to speak to you, Hermione," he replied gruffly.

She walked out of the classroom and to her office, letting him go in before closing the door behind him. He was a very private person, and fair enough he had lived the life of a spy. She offered him tea, which he accepted, and sat down on the other side of her desk with a cup for herself before either of them spoke again.

"What did you wish to speak to me about?" she asked as she supped the hot liquid slightly.

"I didn't answer you before when you offered for me to go with you to Grimmauld Place, and I felt that I should correct that rudeness on my part," he replied sincerely. "I would be honored to accompany you to the Weasley gathering."

Hermione laughed at that, and his eyebrows raised a fraction. "Severus, you make it sound as though they were some sort of cult or shady business on the side," she answered to his unspoken question.

"Perhaps it is," he murmured just loud enough for her to hear.

She laughed again, and Severus was struck suddenly by how gentle it was. Her laughter was neither high-pitched nor inelegant. She sounded like a bell, or like spring as her voice floated softly to his ears. He decided that he liked it. She also had rather a pretty smile and flush to her cheeks now that he couldn't help but to notice. Cursing himself for such ludicrous thoughts, he focused back on the conversation.

"Honestly, Severus, they're not all that bad," Hermione reasoned.

"Perhaps you are right," he said, surprising her before he opened his mouth to speak again. "It is just that buffoon Ronald that is a waste of the air we breathe."

Hermione shot him a look of mock hurt, but smiled prettily at him again anyway. "I'll have you know that buffoon is one of my friends," she said warmly, sipping her tea again.

The Burrow

Chapter 3 of 32

The Weasley's at the Burrow are making preparations for the upcoming Christmas celebrations.

A big thank you to Madbrilliant for her brilliant beta skills!

.....

Chapter 3 The Burrow

The Weasley household was bustling with excitement in the week that led up to Christmas...

Everyone had been frantically trying to organize the big Order Christmas party for that year which was being held at Grimmauld Place because there were more spare rooms there to accommodate guests. Luckily, Harry and Ginny Potter had thought to renovate it in the first few months of their marriage so that it was quite livable and clean, free of the pests that had once inhabited it. Molly had been the main organizer, and everyone in the Order of the Phoenix had been invited. All of the guests had communicated their RSVP and were intending to come this year.

There was only one week left for her to finish organizing everything, and there was simply too much chaos in the house for her to be able to concentrate. Ginny had been over every day for the last two weeks helping with planning, but was currently upstairs putting baby Lily down for a nap. Arthur was still needed at the Ministry for another few days before he could help, and all she had was Fred, George, Percy, and Ron to help with the work and they were too busy either lazing about or stuffing around.

Becoming frustrated with the childishness that she could hear in the other room, Molly's patience finally snapped. "Ronald, Frederick, George, and Percival get your behinds into this room immediately!" she shouted.

The four of them appeared looking rather sheepish only moments later. It was Percy, however, who spoke first. "Honestly, Mother, you can't really say that you think I was cavorting around with this lot," he said with an exaggerated sigh. "I was cleaning the shelves."

"Oooh! Perfect little Percy never does anything wrong," George or Fred teased, causing Percy's ears to flush pink.

"Don't be so immature, Fred," he snapped.

"How did you know I was Fred?" he asked, mouth hanging open.

"You have a crescent-shaped scar above your eyebrow tiny, but definitely a giveaway if I ever saw one," he said plainly.

"Well, mate," Fred said to his twin, putting an arm around his shoulders and smiling broadly. "We'll just have to come up with something harder for next time maybe a make-up charm."

"Nah that's way too obvious," George replied, the two of the walking off together plotting as Molly, Ron and Percy stood and gawked after them.

"Did they just...?" Molly asked.

"Yep," Ron said with a swallow. "I honestly don't know what that's all about. Those two have been plotting things all day. I hope they aren't playing Christmas pranks."

"They will. Deducing from previous experiences with those two, it is quite obvious that they are attempting to ruin our lovely Christmas," Molly stated as she moved around the kitchen in a tizzy.

"Well, I have to head home to see to Penelope. She has been irritable from her pregnancy these past few days," Percy announced.

"Henpecked," Ron teased lightly.

Scowling, Percy left the kitchen, leaving Molly and Ron to sort out all of the silverware together as Ron waited for Julia. She had been shopping for Christmas presents with Ginny and his niece Lily, and he and Harry had volunteered to organize the Christmas party with Molly. Harry was currently at Grimmauld Place, ensuring that the numerous guest rooms in the overly large house were suitable to housing people.

"I'm almost done with the silverware, Ron," his mother said patiently. "When I'm finished, you can take it over to Grimmauld Place and check up on Harry while you're there."

"Alright, Mum," Ron grumbled.

"And make sure that you're father is decorating the house appropriately nothing too garish and extreme, you hear?" she added.

Ron snorted. As if he would know what was garish to his mother he was male. Shaking his head, he picked up the silverware case and walked outside with it before Apparating into the park and walking over the road to the house that was still under the Fidelius charm, despite the war being long over.

"Harry, are you in?" Ron called up the halls.

"Yeah, I'm up here, mate!" was Harry's muted reply.

Ron deposited the silverware in the large dining room and went up two flights of stairs in the huge house. This was Harry and Ginny's second house. The two, along with their daughter, preferred to live in the house they had built in Godric's Hollow where Harry's parents had once lived. He found Harry in the last room on that floor instructing his house-elf on the state of the bed sheets.

"How are things on this front?" Ron asked.

"Bloody boring," Harry muttered. "Although, it's a good sight better than shopping with the girls all day," he added dryly. "Have you heard from Hermione?"

"Not since she told us she was coming," Ron replied. "I was going to stop in at Hogwarts before the end of the day, but I Percy said that it was around Mid-Year exams, so she probably has a lot on her plate, and I would just serve as a distraction."

"Git," Harry muttered.

"True, but he's right I think, mate. I don't want to annoy Hermione when she stressed like that," Ron said, remembering their schooling years together, and Hermione's reaction to being annoyed while she was stressed. There were some mistakes that even Ron had learned when it came to their best friend.

"Yeah," Harry said with a shiver.

"I'll write to her," Ron said with finality, although both he and Harry knew that he would do nothing of the sort.

They left the upstairs rooms and went to the kitchen to grab butterbeer before going in search of Arthur, who was doing an exceptional job of decorating the house without the instruction of a woman. Actually, he was doing better without the pressure of having Molly nag him the entire time. There was the Minister for Magic, hanging tinsel, baubles, and various other Christmas decorations around a house. But then again he had done it before he was Minister and would likely continue to despite his significant rise in position.

"How is it going there, Dad?" Ron asked, fulfilling Molly's wishes.

"Better than it would be with your mother around," he replied as he added the star to the decorated Christmas tree in the large sitting room. "I thought she'd have gone shopping with the girls."

"She was too busy bossing around Fred and George," Ron grumbled. "Not to mention me and Percy."

"Percy does what your mother wants without complaint," Arthur reminded him with a smile as he stepped back to admire his handiwork.

"Goody-two-shoes," Ron said under his breath, with Harry nodding in agreement beside him with a grin.

"Did you boys hear that Severus will be joining us this year?" Arthur asked nonchalantly, looking around at them.

Ron scowled for a moment at the mention of his least favourite professor while at Hogwarts. He still had no idea how the man had become the Headmaster, or how Hermione could stand working for him. "No, and I think I would have preferred not to have heard," he said with a pout.

Harry chuckled at his best friend's immaturity. He had long gotten over hating Snape, and had come to respect the man, mutually agreeing to remain neutral with him. "Oh, come on, Ron he's not that bad," he insisted.

"You always say that," he huffed. "Everyone always says that, but good guy or not, he will always be a git."

"He probably feels the same way about you," Arthur said dryly, making Harry snigger at his reddening best friend.

Ron decided to make a hasty exit of the room then and went to the kitchen, disposing of his empty bottle. Just as he sat down at the table, an owl flew in and deposited a letter in front of him before flying away without waiting for a response. He cracked the seal and opened it, a smile appearing on his face when he saw the familiar, precise cursive, penned neatly by Hermione's own hand.

Dear Ron and Harry,

I would like to invite you to the Yule Ball with both Ginny and Julia, and if you like, bring along Arthur and Molly. I am sure that we can get a few of the house-elves to babysit Lily in my chambers for a while so that you can enjoy yourselves. I will be marking exams all this week and figured that I had best send you a letter while I have time to remember. I hope everyone is alright, and I look forward to seeing you in about a week hopefully.

Much Love,

Hermione

Ron folded the letter back up and headed upstairs to tell Harry and his dad about the Yule Ball invitation. He was sure that his father would have already received an invitation, but to be sure, he wanted to double check. They weren't in the sitting room, but after a little while searching, he did find them up about three flights of stairs in the rooms checking on the house-elf.

"I got a letter from Hermione," he explained.

Harry grinned. "Well, that explains why you're all happy again," he teased, making Ron blush a deep shade of red.

The Yule Ball: Part One

Chapter 4 of 32

The planning for the Yule Ball begins, and everyone in the castle is busy.

Many thanks to the awesome Madbrilliant, who has continued to beta for me, and WriterMerrin, who continues to be awesome at picking up our leftover mistakes.

.....

Chapter 4 - The Yule Ball: Part One

It had been one of the longest weeks of her life, but it was finally ready, and everything would go smoothly.

Hermione had been marking exams, planning the Yule Ball, as well as assigning different tasks to all of her fellow colleagues in accordance with their skill. Hagrid, Argus Filch, and Filius had been assigned the task of decorating the castle with Christmas trees and decorations. Rolanda Hootch had been given the task of acquiring and setting up the fireworks display for the Ball to be lit from the Quidditch Pitch. Remus and Tonks were going to help with the decoration of the Great Hall; Angelina was organizing the entertainment for the night; while Sprout, Vector, and Sinistra were doing odd jobs with everyone else.

She and Severus, being the Heads of the school, obviously had the most important task of charming the ceiling together. She had seen very little of Severus this past week. Arthur had been constantly summoning him to the Ministry on business with other countries, and he had been leaving early and returning very late. She had to admit that she missed him, in a way she had grown used to his company due to their close working proximity to one another. Some days she was positive that he felt the same way.

Hermione had been left in charge while he was away, and together, she and Filius had been helping to ease the buildup of work Severus would have missed due to his business in London. It was with that thought that she returned her mind to the task.

"Filius, I can't thank you enough for all of this," she said as they began tidying the mess they had made in the school registry.

"It isn't a problem, my dear," Filius replied as they moved the files back into the cabinets and chests. "I think this is all that can be done for today, don't you?"

"Hmmm, Severus should be pleased that we managed to do half of this for him," she answered, locking everything with a charm.

"Arthur does have him busy, yes?" Filius agreed, nodding his head as he hobbled out the registry with Hermione following him.

"I doubt he's too happy about it," she mused.

They headed to dinner then, taking their usual seats, and soon the students entered, filing inside normally. Hermione announced dinner that night as she had the last five and then began eating hungrily herself. She had been so busy all day with classes and planning and jobs for Severus that she had managed to skip all of her meals unintentionally. Remus pulled up a chair between her and Filius from behind and smiled.

"Good evening, Hermione," he said pleasantly.

"How was your day, Remus?" she asked with more than just a hint of a smile.

"Eventless. Dora and I have marked all of our exams, and the classes have been quite slow and tired. I think we're all ready for a break," Remus said with a sigh. "So, is everything set for the Ball tomorrow night?"

"Yes, and I will meet you and Tonks in the Great Hall straight after classes and decorate while the students are getting ready and packing for the holiday," she answered promptly. "I assume all of the guest invitations were sent?"

"Yes, Pomona and Sinistra wrote them and Sylia sent them," Remus nodded.

"Excellent," Hermione said, relief filling her. She was so glad that everything was on track and that the Ball would finally come and go, and then she could enjoy her few days of Holiday freedom. It was the time of year she looked forward to the most when she could spend time with her friends. "Ron wrote me and said that he, Harry, Ginny, and Julia were coming. Fred and George are going to baby-sit."

"Now that I would pay to see," Remus said with a chuckle.

"Hmmm... Severus was laughing when I told him too," Hermione said which made Remus sober and give her a questioning look. "What?"

"I have never once seen him truly laugh," he commented plainly. "You've done something to him, Hermione. Hiring you was one of the best decisions he has ever made for this school, and for himself."

"I doubt he was thinking about himself when he hired me, Remus," Hermione said, feeling her pulse quicken a little at the possibility.

"He may not have been, but you have been good for him. I have not seen him so open and relaxed in a long time; although I am not saying that he is even that open right now," he replied.

"Remus is right, Hermione. You have changed him," Filius squeaked. "Never once, in my time as his colleague, had I seen him tease someone in a friendly way, or smile until you came here."

Hermione blushed a little, clearing her throat uncomfortably. She cared about Severus, as one cares about a friend, but over the last few months, as they became more comfortable with each other, her pulse would speed up whenever he said something complimentary or if someone mentioned them together favorably. She liked the thought of people accepting that they were friends and equals. Perhaps she liked him a little more than she had thought?

"I'd like to think that maybe my being here would make his life easier," she said, willing away the blush.

Filius smiled and tucked into his dinner while Remus nodded at her with a knowing twinkle in his eyes. "We may have to have a talk some time, Hermione," he said in a low voice before getting up, replacing the chair, and going back to eat dinner beside his loving wife.

Am I that transparent? she thought, absently picking at her own food.

After dinner, she headed down to her office and walked inside, shrugging out of her teaching robes and casting a wandless charm to lock and ward the door behind her. She was so relieved that she didn't have hall duty that night, so she could take a nice long bath and go to sleep before all of her work the next day.

"If I had been a student, you would be dressed improperly right about now," drawled a voice from behind her an all-too-familiar silky voice.

Hermione spun around and faced where it came from just in time to see Severus step out from the shadows with his arms folded across his chest. "What I am wearing is perfectly proper," she replied tartly in defense of her grey slacks, white blouse, and navy-coloured sweater.

He chuckled darkly with his wonderfully plummy voice. "How was your day?" he asked, sitting down on the corner of her desk smoothly.

"Exhausting, although Filius and I did manage to get halfway through the Registry for you after classes today," she answered.

"Thank you for that, although it was not necessary," he replied.

"We figured you'd be quite tired and sick of work by the time you finished at the Ministry this week, so we took it upon ourselves to do some for you," she said tiredly. "But you do the rest yourself tomorrow."

"Am I keeping you from something?" he asked her.

"My bath and sleep, but who needs to sleep?" she teased gently, making one side of his mouth quirk up in a slightly lopsided smile.

She felt her lungs expand as she sucked in a breath when he smiled like that. He was quite dashing when he did that. He stood back up straight and brushed some invisible dust from his robes. That was obviously his cue to leave, and he was beginning to get hungry. He would stop by the kitchens and get a meal before returning to his own rooms for a shower, shave, and sleep.

"Well, I should be going," he said, making his way across the office. "Would you be so kind?" he asked, pointing at the door.

Hermione smiled gratefully and unlocked the door for him. "Goodnight, Severus," she said as he walked out.

"Goodnight," he said, before the door closed and locked behind him as he went out into the cold dungeon hallway.

Severus breathed out the breath that he had not even realized he had been holding and leaned his back against the wall for a moment to steady himself. That had been quite an experience for him. Hermione, although no different to how she usually looked, seemed different to him just then. She often saw him on weekends or late at night while she was not wearing her teaching robes, and he had seen them all before. Tonight, in the dim lighting of her office, her smile had been beautiful. He had always thought that she was uniquely attractive, but had never contemplated on that beauty before.

He sighed and began to head towards the portrait that concealed the kitchens, tickling the pear and stepping through the archway that it revealed. He was still startled by this revelation and frowned when a house elf bumped into him as he walked along to find Dobby the reliable, yet totally crazy one.

"Headmaster Snape, sir. What is you doing down here?" Dobby asked with a wide grin, blinking up with his golf ball-sized eyes.

"I missed dinner while I was in London. Could I trouble you for something to eat?" he asked with a certain amount of courtesy towards the creature.

"Wait right here Winky will help Dobby get you something!" he exclaimed excitedly, scampering through the kitchens to find his "assistant" and wife elf.

Severus had initially thought that the marriage between house elves was absurd, but after a while, he warmed up to the idea and didn't grimace every time the two elves were mentioned in his presence. Not long after, Dobby returned with Winky in tow, holding out a basket of food for the Headmaster to take with him up to his office from there. Nodding, he accepted it.

"Thank you," he said pleasantly.

"It is an honor to be of service to you, Headmaster Sir," Winky said reverently with a small bow as Dobby did the same beside her.

"Goodnight," Severus said, grabbing some Floo Powder and Flooing to his office from the kitchen fire.

.....
Please review! I am a junkie!

The Yule Ball: Part Two

Chapter 5 of 32

It's the night of the Yule Ball, and both Hermione and Severus' friends find they need to play matchmaker.

Thanks again to Madbrilliant, who continues to be an awesome beta!

.....
Chapter 5 -- The Yule Ball: Part Two

The Great Hall was spectacular, and the Ball was set to begin in approximately two hours' time, where the students would be free to celebrate, dance, and socialize.

There were some important Ministry officials, and of course, the Minister himself, invited to the celebrations, as well as a few others esteemed ex-professor's. Minerva had written, expressing her delight at having been invited, and Severus had certainly been pleased that she was coming. He personally hated Christmas, but he loved Minerva like family and did miss her in her absence. His one major contribution to the Ball was to enchant the ceiling of the Great Hall with Hermione.

She understood that he hated Christmas, and she respected him by allowing him to exclude himself from the organizations. He had seen her once that entire day and found that when he did not see her, he imagined her showing up to talk to him but alas, she was preoccupied with teaching. Besides he had been sorting out the second half of the Registry that morning and afternoon. Despite this, he had time to make his routine visit to the astronomy tower, and the library to see Irma Pince as well as lounge around his totally boring office still filled with Albus' knick-knacks, just as the former Headmaster would have wanted.

Sighing, he left the office and went to his chambers to get cleaned-up, find appropriate attire for the occasion, and perhaps get in an hour of sleep keeping in mind that men were far more relaxed in their habits. He was organized enough that if he did this, he would still arrive at the Ball on time wearing robes that Hermione would approve of. He especially wanted her approval that evening, if not for his vanity, than perhaps as an appeal to hers.

An hour later, he was just waking up from his brief nap and walked into the office to retrieve his book of Tennyson before someone saw it lying around and thought he had gone soft. Fawkes greeted him with a soft crooning sound.

"Hello, Fawkes," he said, stroking the fine feathers around bird's head and beak as the creature playfully nipped.

Fawkes made a soft noise, pointing his wing towards the portrait of Albus, indicating that the Headmaster's image had returned for a while. He patted the bird in thanks, went to his chair, and spun it around to look at Albus. "What do you want this time, old man?" he demanded.

"You should be getting ready for the Ball, Severus," he teased, blue eyes twinkling madly still, even as a portrait.

"I was, until this interruption," he murmured back.

"By all means, don't let me stop you. I'm sure you will want to look your best for Hermione now," Albus said, taunting him further.

Severus frowned at Albus and got up, heading to his room. He was dressed in finest tailored dress robes, with the dark green waistcoat instead of black, and his hair neatly pulled back and secured at the nape of his neck with hair elastic. His hair had grown significantly longer, and he liked the length it was now better than before, so he had kept in that way. He cleaned his teeth, which were straight and unstained, due to hours spent on developing potions to make them that way.

He had been unhappy with the report that the Muggle dentist had given him and was in no way going to accept the Muggle torture device they called braces, and accordingly, took steps to ensure he would never had to see a dentist again. Pleased with his appearance, he left his chambers and headed for the Great Hall, arriving at the Staff door and walking in. He was pleased to find most of the staff already there including Hermione.

He was lucky enough to be the one sitting beside her during the dinner side of things. She was radiant that night, in a lovely set of cream-coloured dress robes, with the inner piece a darker shade, and the outer piece had sleeves that only went to her elbows and had been embroidered with gold along with the bottom of the robe. Her hair was pulled back in a complicated braid, with curls left to frame her glowing features.

"Hermione, you look lovely," he murmured quietly for only her to hear as he sat down beside her.

"You don't look too bad yourself," she replied with a beaming smile.

Two minutes later, the doors opened and both the students and guests filled in the hall, taking their places. Minerva was seated on Severus' other side, and Harry, Ginny, Ron, Julia, Arthur, and Molly all had appropriate places at the extended Head Table, while the students claimed their seat at round tables set for twenty.

"Hermione, it's so lovely to see you!" Minerva said as she hugged her on her way to the seat on the other side. "You look positively radiant, and you did a wonderful job organizing this Ball."

"Thank you, Minerva," she replied.

She smiled at the younger witch, moving around to sit in her seat beside Severus. "She has done well, my boy," she whispered to him.

Severus glanced at Hermione, who was chatting with Ginny Potter, and looked back to Minerva with a slight smile. "I am proud of how far she has come," he admitted quietly, falling over his words.

Minerva watched his eyes as they had moved over Hermione and felt her mouth turn up with a twinkle in her eyes that would have done Albus proud. She knew that look. It was the one Albus used to give her when they were younger before he became the Headmaster of the school. She couldn't blame Severus. Hermione was an exceptional woman with brilliance to match his and was quite pleasing to look at.

"Don't think for one moment that I can not see the way you are looking at her, Severus," she said under her breath.

He blanched and turned to look at her sharply. "I have no idea what you mean," he said curtly as diner appeared at the tables, and he stabbed at his moodily.

"Oh, come off it, you prude I can remember a time when I was getting looks like that from men, and I can read your face as plain as day," Minerva said dismissively. "Do not hurt her. I'm quite fond of her, you know."

"Apparently, so am I," Severus growled, causing Minerva to laugh.

"Don't be sour, Severus. There is nothing wrong with having feelings. Actually, most people embrace them," Minerva replied tartly. "Don't think for one moment that just because I don't see you every day, that I don't know you treat her as an equal because you have feelings of some description for her."

"Minerva, must we discuss this at dinner?" he snapped, scowling.

"Now, now, it isn't fitting for a Headmaster to look so upset," Minerva teased. "We wouldn't want the students to think you were always this grumpy."

"I am, now be quiet and eat your dinner," Severus instructed, making her smile like the cat she was.

Dinner went on pleasantly, without too many more disruptions, and after a while, Severus managed to train the scowl off his features and replace it with something akin to indifference or disinterest. After dinner, the tables were swept to the sides of the hall, a huge dance floor was created in the centre, and an orchestra appeared and struck up a fine tune to dance to.

"Minerva, would you care to dance?" Severus asked stiffly.

"I would love to, my dear," she said, beaming.

Severus stiffly offered his arm and led Minerva to the floor with him, placing a hand on her waist and gracefully pulling them into a sensible waltz. As far as dance partners went, he was lucky to get Minerva not too many of the other female professors could dance too well least of all Rolanda. She wasn't the best, but then again, he had taken dancing lessons for many years just because his mother had wanted him to as a child. It was only just paying off in his older years, even if when he was younger, he thought it was a stupid thing to learn.

The song had yet to draw to a close, but Severus suddenly felt Minerva moving them towards the edge of the floor as if to leave off. He was content to follow, until he spotted Hermione in the direction they were heading, and began to protest. He was cut short when they came to a halt before her, and Minerva released him and thrust Hermione in his direction.

"I am far too old to be dancing quite so much, Severus," Minerva said dramatically. "Hermione, be a dear and dance with him. We wouldn't want to allow his skill on the dance floor to go to waste, would we?"

"Of course not, Minerva," Hermione said with a polite smile.

Severus could only bite his tongue and take Hermione in his arms, even while scowling at Minerva, who was apparently trying to play matchmaker that evening. He moved them out into the dance Minerva had abandoned, although this time he felt timid and had to catch himself a couple of times as he almost stood on her foot. Hermione simply had smiled when he did that and urged him to continue their dance.

"I must apologize for my clumsiness, Hermione," he said with a heavy sigh. "I am not usually so club-footed."

"It's alright, Severus Minerva did rather throw you into the deep end," Hermione said dismissively. "I understand you may not have wanted to dance with me..."

"That's not it at all," he cut across.

Hermione contemplated what he just said and felt a surge of gratification flow through her. She liked him, and for whatever reason, he was trying to open up to her a little more every time they were together. She knew it would be a long time before he would truly trust her, but she was determined to try and encourage him. She looked up and flashed him a brilliant smile and was warmed when he quirked up one side of his mouth in response to that.

"It doesn't hurt you to smile, does it?" she teased.

"Not as much as you believe it to hurt," he said bluntly.

"It's nice when you do smile," she said, looking back down and letting herself get swept back into the dance once more.

Severus allowed the other side of his mouth to quirk up to for a moment before he simply relaxed it into a content expression. He liked her in his arms. Something about her felt just like she belonged there something just like home...

Grimmauld Place

Chapter 6 of 32

The holiday's have begun, and Grimmauld Place is filled with Christmas cheer, and Severus and Hermione have a discussion.

Eternal thanks to my beta, Madbrilliant, for the editing of this chapter, as well as WriterMerrin for picking up on what we missed once again!

.....

Chapter 6 - Grimmauld Place

To say that Grimmauld Place was brimming with energy and the joy of the season would have been a serious understatement indeed.

Severus thought, as he held the Potter child at arm's length, that this was going to be one of the biggest mistakes of his life; agreeing to attend the party, that was. The child gurgled with delight, reaching her arms out to him as if to cling to his person, which made Severus cringe and hold her out to Luna Lovegood, who was currently seated nearest him in the sitting room. He had been there a total of one day and three hours and had already been handed the job of holding Lily Potter as both parents of said

child were busy attending to guests that were arriving.

As he and Hermione had made their way to the house the day before, he had told her that he was sure some child would be passed to him. It was the Potter brat but at least it was better than Ronald Weasley's child any day. He hated that particular redhead. He didn't mind the others, but thought that Ginevra would have had better sense than to marry the dunderhead boy who lived. Apparently she didn't.

"Professor," Luna spoke from beside him.

He turned to look at her. "What is it, Miss Lovegood?" he asked drolly.

"Lily really likes you, I think," she replied as said child struggled in her arms in an effort to get back to Severus. "Please, will you take her back? I feel that she is in need of your inner energy today."

Severus snorted inwardly. Inner energy indeed! The Lovegood girl, although not quite as dreamy, was still as scatterbrained as ever, spouting that Divination rubbish to him. In the end though, he nodded and took the girl back, who immediately calmed and crawled up his torso, bracing herself in a standing position with her little hands on his chest. He put his large hands on her back to steady her a little and almost jumped out of the chair when she embraced him.

It was then that Hermione walked into the room, arm-in-arm with Ginny Potter, smiling and laughing as they walked. They both stopped in front of him, Hermione looking surprised, and Ginny grinning like a cat. He didn't like that grin, and scowled up at her because of it.

"Would you like to take your child back?" he asked a little bit tersely.

Ginny smiled and reached for Lily, who apparently didn't want to go and clung to Snape like he was her security blanket. "Apparently she likes where she is for now, so if you don't mind, Professor, I think I'll leave her with you," she replied merrily.

With that, Ginny dragged Hermione across the room with her to sit down on a vacant couch where she could still see Snape, but it was unlikely that he would hear them. She then turned immediately on Hermione with a determined, yet predatory look in her gleaming brown eyes.

"Hermione, I want you to be completely honest with me now, okay?" she asked, grasping her friends' hand in both of hers.

"Okay..." Hermione agreed hesitantly.

"Harry and I have been talking over the last couple of days, and Minerva has been saying some things as well," she began slowly. "I want you to tell me, honestly do you have a thing for Professor Snape?"

Hermione's jaw dropped slightly before she could catch herself, but she closed it again just as quickly. "I What brought that question about?" she stammered a little helplessly.

"Well, you have always defended him whenever Harry or Ron insulted him or called him names behind his back, and ever since you went back to Hogwarts to teach, you've spent a lot of time with him, especially when you became his Deputy," Ginny explained quickly. "And the other night at the Yule Ball, when you were dancing with him, you were smiling, and it wasn't the way you smiled at Ron when you two had a thing back in your sixth year, it was you were smiling with him the way that I smile when I'm with Harry, or the way that Julia smiles at Ron."

"You think I fancy Severus?" Hermione asked softly.

"I don't think, Hermione I bloody well know you fancy the arse off the man," Ginny answered in a whisper.

Hermione blushed and looked across the room at him, holding Lily and seeming a little less worried than he had when the girl had first been passed to him by Harry. It was sweet seeing the way that the little girl was naturally drawn to him. She wondered if but that was a ridiculous thought.

"Lily really likes him, and I think when he becomes more comfortable, he might open up to the idea of having his own kids one day," Ginny said, wiggling her eyebrows suggestively at her.

Hermione went even redder. "Ginny, don't be silly. He doesn't like me that way, so don't even try to get my hopes up," she whispered seriously. "I have fallen for him alright but I really don't want to talk about it right now."

"Oh, come off it, 'Mione. It'll make you feel better to get it off your chest. I'm your best friend you can trust me," Ginny insisted.

Hermione sighed and took another peek across the room at the dour man. Contrary to his usual dress, he was wearing a white button-down under his black waistcoat, tucked into his customary black trousers. She liked this look on him. He was so repressive with his full teaching robes on, and she wondered how he remained in them in summer, especially with all the heat.

She glanced back and saw Ginny smirking at her. "Ginny, I know what you're thinking, but please, please don't try and interfere this time," she pleaded quietly. "Last time it was a total disaster, and it was someone that I didn't even know. Imagine how much worse it would be with someone that I work for and know well."

Hermione remembered back to almost three years before when Ginny had tried to set her up with a guy that she used to work with. It had been awkward, and Hermione had left before the main meals had arrived, simply because he had been coerced into the date just as she had been. Both had apologized and left without feeling any regrets, and Hermione had written Ginny a howler the next day. Hermione did not want Severus to be coerced into something he did not want.

"If and only if he was amenable to a relationship with me, and arranged something with me himself, would I truly accept," Hermione said finally.

Ginny nodded understandingly, but crossed her fingers behind her back. She wouldn't set up a blind date, obviously because they knew each other already, but gentle nudges in the right direction never hurt anyone. Severus just needed a little bit of encouragement. It was Christmas Eve tomorrow, and if she didn't have them heading in the right direction by then, she wasn't a Weasley.

"I won't try anything, Hermione," Ginny said with a bright smile.

She looked up and saw Severus approaching them with Lily, who was whining by then and obviously was either hungry or in need of a nap. Ginny took her wordlessly and left the room, knowing just what she needed. Severus then dropped into the vacated spot beside her and released a heavy sigh.

"How I ever got talked into watching that girl is unknown to me," he said wearily, looking at her through the slits of his eyes.

"She's darling," Hermione said, thinking of the girl's black hair and bright green eyes from her father. "But I suppose being her Godmother makes me biased."

"Please she is as troublesome as her father," Severus said dramatically, rolling his eyes even as he smirked.

Hermione felt her breath catch a little, but smiled at him. He was joking now, she could tell, but she still felt as though something wasn't right. "Do you think you might ever consider having children one day?" she asked.

Severus looked at her stunned. "I I have never considered children as a possibility before," he stammered nervously under her questioning gaze. "But perhaps..."

Hermione nodded. "I felt the same way once but now when I look at all of my friends with their children, I feel a little bit jealous," she admitted. "But before, I had seriously

thought that I was going to die in the war, and then I was too busy studying to think about it, but now I have all the time in the world, when I am not too busy with teaching or running your errands."

Severus looked at her in surprise. He had no idea when they had become so comfortable with each other as to be speaking of such personal things, but inwardly he was glad that she was. "You surprise me," he said quietly.

"Why?"

"Because you are still unmarried, and I have no knowledge of you having any sort of relationship with a male," Severus answered. "I don't mean to offend you or make you uncomfortable by saying this."

Hermione waved him off dismissively. "I don't mind really. It's true that everyone expected me to marry Ron or someone by now so that the Gryffindor Trio would be able to raise a whole new Quidditch team for Gryffindor," she said dryly, rolling her eyes from the irony of it.

"But you went off and made your own life instead of conforming to the expectations of everyone else around you," Severus finished for her. "Honestly, I understand your dilemma, and I am pleased that you did not listen to the dunderheads that tried to plan out your life for you. Could you honestly see yourself happily married to Potter or, god help us, Weasley?"

Hermione laughed a little at that. "No, I couldn't. They are both like brothers to me, and I am glad to have figured it out for myself," she answered.

Severus nodded and looked back out across the room to where Ginny Potter was reentering with Lily in her arms, who was gurgling and pointing towards him once more. Apparently the girl was going to be hard to get rid of, at least for that afternoon, he thought as Ginny walked towards them. Hermione smiled at the scowl on his features, and as soon as Lily was back on his lap, she played with and talked to the girl as a favor to him.

When she looked back up at Severus afterwards, she could see that he was grateful.

Christmas Eve

Chapter 7 of 32

It is Christmas Eve at Grimmauld Place, and there is more than a little misunderstanding in the air.

A huge thanks to Madbrilliant for doing an excellent job as my beta! And also to Southern_Witch_69 for the pain she went through to validate this chapter!

.....

Chapter 7 - Christmas Eve

There was an annoying amount of mistletoe up in almost every single doorway of Grimmauld Place, save for the bedroom doors.

When Severus had first arrived there almost three days ago, he had questioned Molly on the necessity of it and then demanded that she at least remove it from the library doorway. So, for the sake of peace, she had it removed, but instead, cast charms on all of the rest of the pieces, so that the two caught beneath it would be stuck unless they completed the kiss. After all, it was a practically harmless holiday tradition, and it didn't have to be a serious kiss just a peck.

Hermione had thought it was silly also, but did not want to be singled out by Ginny or Harry for having defended or sided with Severus yet again. She supposed that she hated mistletoe for different reasons from him. He hated Christmas in its entirety. Hermione was sad around Christmas because she had no family, and it was always lonely to be kissed beneath the mistletoe by someone she didn't care much for, or who didn't care much for her.

She had managed to only get caught once beneath it with Fred Weasley, who blew a wet raspberry on her cheek, instantly releasing her. It was funny then, when George passed under just moments later and repeated the exercise. It had been the first time she had laughed that day, and likely the last. She was miserable because everyone else had a family to share the holiday with.

She had no one, just like Severus.

Hermione had rather hoped that with Severus there, she would not be lonely. But he had been hiding away in the library most of the day, as well as in his room, or in a room full of people where she would never get him alone. He seemed rather down that day too, and Hermione would have loved his company.

Fortunately for her, Molly chose then to give her a job. "Hermione, be a dear and help me take these out to the dinning room for dinner," she instructed, pointing at a row of large dishes.

Hermione whipped out her wand and levitated everything with her to the big dining room, which was filled with people. She set everything down and then went to the library to fetch Severus. She found him sitting in a seat with his eyes closed. Moving quietly, she stood beside him and touched his shoulder lightly.

"I am awake," he said tersely.

"Sorry you looked like you were sleeping," she replied calmly.

He blinked a few times and hauled himself out of his seat so he could follow her to the dining room for dinner. It was roast turkey that night. Severus' favourite holiday dish. The one thing he enjoyed about Christmas were the special dishes that came along with it that people rarely ate during normal months. Molly's cooking was better than any house-elf he had known.

Hermione sighed inwardly as she followed him up the hallway towards the dining room, grabbing a seat beside Ginny and Minerva. She wanted to sit beside him as she had grown accustomed to and talk to him about something intelligent. Hermione loved talking to him because he was so knowledgeable about nearly everything. But she was stuck between the two Gryffindor gossip queens.

"Hermione, look at him," Ginny whispered. "He's so forlorn. One would think he was love sick," she drawled.

"Ginny!" Hermione exclaimed.

Minerva chuckled warmly. "I see Ginny has yet to learn the art of Gryffindor subtlety," she commented wryly. "There aren't many of us who are blessed with that talent."

Hermione laughed softly at that and ate a bite of the delicious turkey. Nobody in Gryffindor had ever possessed any type of subtlety in their lives. Minerva certainly was not one of those ladies. She was fairly unapproachable and stern while at school, but outside, and after she had finished at Hogwarts, Minerva had been friendly and quite good to confide in at times.

"I am certain you are correct," Hermione told the older witch.

"Hermione, have you seen the way he looks at you?" Minerva asked, and Hermione shook her head. "Then you would not see the look he gets in his eyes when he's around you. Surely you have feelings for him too."

Hermione sighed and nodded, swallowing her food. "Not that it is anyone's concern, but I have rather strong feelings for him."

Minerva's eyes lit up with some sort of obscure glee. Ginny beamed and returned to eating her food; Lily was throwing carrots at Harry, who was chuckling at her on the other side of the room. Hermione felt a pang of jealousy when she saw how content he was with his child and a wife who loved him.

"You want children, and Severus doesn't like children much," Minerva noted. "But I am sure he will open up to the idea once you are married."

"You are delusional and planning ahead too far," Hermione murmured.

Minerva chuckled. "I don't mean to interfere," she said. "But I just can't believe you don't see it."

"Often people are unable to see the same things that others can," Hermione said firmly. "And that is one of the reasons why we should have this conversation another time. Please, just don't interfere."

Minerva crossed her fingers behind her back and smiled at Hermione before she nodded in ascent. She could not make that promise just yet. She had a few plans to gently urge the two towards each other. Just as she thought that, Severus looked over at her from the other side of the table and gave her a quelling look, as if he knew she was plotting something. Smiling, she returned to eating her dinner silently.

Dessert followed shortly after, and then most of the house guests retired to the sitting room for some peace and quiet. It was then that Minerva stood with an orange in her hand, smiling in a most mischievous way. Out of the corner of her eye, Hermione could also see that Harry and Ginny were smirking. Molly bustled into the room after setting the house-elves to cleaning up the dining room and sat beside Arthur so they could all listen in.

"It's Christmas Eve and, as you well know, there are a few traditions that come with the season that people indulge in on occasion," Minerva began. "Our dearest friend, Albus, used to have one favourite little game that his family had played on Christmas Eve, and he passed it on to me."

Hermione looked over at Harry and shot him a glare, just as Severus narrowed his eyes at Minerva. He knew what she was getting at and he really didn't like it one bit.

"It involves an orange with cloves pierced into the rind," Minerva said, holding the fruit up in the air with cloves magically appearing all over it, the juice glistening. "Then, the person holding the orange may remove a single clove from the orange and chew on it before passing it to the person of their choice," she explained. "And the final thing is to give that person a kiss in the place they designate, before the game is repeated; harmless, but as with all games that Albus loved, it is embarrassing."

Minerva then removed a clove, chewed on it for a bit, then passed the orange to Ron, who flushed a bright red, and accepted the fruit, offering his cheek to her. Minerva gave him a swift peck there, and then it was Ron's turn. Severus took this as his cue to leave and walked out of the room with a scowl on his face and his body held stiff. Hermione watched him leave with a sad expression before she controlled it when Harry held the orange out to her.

"Don't let it bother you," Harry whispered. "He'll be alright."

She took the orange and held out her hand to him, which he pecked lightly, giving her a smile. Hermione passed the orange quickly to Fred, and kissed the cheek he offered, and the game continued on with much laughter. The orange then found its way back to her, and Percy kissed forehead in a friendly fashion. She looked down at the orange and saw that there was only one clove left on it. Looking over at Minerva, she saw the older witch nod, and she then stood, leaving the room and taking the orange with her.

She walked towards the library and opened the door as quietly and calmly as she could, slipping into the room and locking the door with an unspoken spell. She stood as still as stone, staring across the room at Severus who was sitting in a chair with his arms crossed over his chest and an open book in his lap. He looked up at her in surprise, which gave her the confidence to walk across to him.

She held the orange out to him after she had plucked out the clove and began chewing on it carefully. "Where?" she asked breathlessly.

He looked up at her dumbly, swallowing thickly when he saw the warmth crackling in her eyes that glowed amber. He could see something there that he was sure was reflected in his own dark eyes. Could it be that she had feelings for him also? It wasn't impossible, but he had never had high hopes, and now she was standing there, asking him where he would like to be kissed. Everywhere, was his first thought.

Without waiting for a response, she leaned forwards and placed a warm, gentle kiss to his cheek before pulling away, looking disheartened. With a smile, she dropped the clove that was in her hand, banished it wordlessly, and then walked out of the room. Severus could not say a word through the entire exchange, but now, as she was walking away from him, he wanted to say so many things.

He stood and made to follow her, but changed his mind in the last second, standing alone in the library, clutching the orange that was weeping sticky juices and oils from the cloves onto his hand. He murmured a spell that split the orange into eight even pieces in his palm, and brought one to his lips, biting into the sweet, spicy flesh. As he chewed thoughtfully, Hermione came to mind.

She was not so different to the sweetness of the orange, yet at other times, she was alike to the spice of the cloves. Sighing, he sat back down on the chair and stared into the fireplace, the flames licking the air gently. He was disrupted by the sound of a male clearing his throat.

"Professor Snape?" Harry asked.

"What is it, Mr. Potter?" Severus replied warily.

"If you're in love with my friend, do something about it," Harry said seriously, cradling a sleeping Lily in his arms.

"Give me time, Potter," Severus grouched. "Just a little more time..."

His Happy Christmas

Chapter 8 of 32

Things are looking up at Grimmauld Place...

I would like to give a big hug and kiss to Madbrilliant for the beta-ing of this Fic!

.....

Chapter 8 His Happy Christmas

The house was filled with general merriment and everything was splendid everything except for the mood of a certain Headmaster and his Deputy.

It pained Minerva and Ginny to see the two of them so quiet that morning while everyone was excitedly ripping open presents and chatting. Ron even seemed to notice that both of them were forlorn, and he had tried to cheer Hermione up. By then, he had caught on and realized that Hermione was in love with the greasy git, and even though he didn't like it, he loved her like his own family and would do anything to see her happy and smiling.

For Hermione, it didn't really seem to excite her too much that it was Christmas day. All of the joy had been lost when Severus had not said a word to her the night before or ran after as she had walked away. She had been totally disheartened and just figured that he could never be interested in her romantically. Unfortunately, Minerva had managed to get her hopes up, and she now saw what a mistake it had been, if the silence of Severus that morning was an indicator.

Meanwhile, Severus was wondering how he should approach Hermione to apologise for rejecting her the night before with his silence. He wanted to go to her, but he wanted to give her space before he executed his plan to seduce her and make her his own. Somehow, Severus had come to the realisation that he was actually in love with her. He had open consent from Potter, Minerva, and everyone else who was even remotely close to her, to claim her.

He just needed a little longer.

Sighing, he looked across at her sad expression and felt his heart ache. Severus knew that he couldn't just leave her like that all day. He stood resolutely and came to sit beside her, noting the surprised expression on her face when he settled in comfortably.

'Happy Christmas,' he said softly.

She smiled sadly and nodded. 'Happy Christmas to you, Severus,' she replied.

'Have you received everything you wished for this holiday?' he teased lightly, searching her face for a reaction.

She laughed softly at that. 'Not quite, but I did get a lot of books, as per usual,' she answered, gesturing at the growing pile of them.

'I understand,' he murmured. 'I, too, always receive books; mostly because people are unaware that I have other interests than simply reading.'

Hermione's eyes widened and she stuck her hand in the direction of the doorway and muttered something under her breath. A wrapped parcel soon flew into her hand, and she turned it over nervously for a moment before holding it towards him.

'I knew you get books all of the time from people, and I went looking for something a bit different, and this was what I came up with,' she said nervously. 'I hope you like it. You're quite difficult to shop for, you know.'

Severus stared at the gift, wrapped in silver and gold paper and tied with a green and red ribbon. He smirked inwardly at the Gryffindorishness of the wrapping. It was just like a Gryffindor to wrap their own house colour with another. He carefully removed the ribbon and then peeled away the paper, focusing on preserving it to remember at a later date when he felt the need to. Inside was a box made of a dark mahogany wood, with Celtic symbols burnt into it intricately. The latch on it was silver and elaborate.

He opened it and inside was a glass vial embedded in dark green velvet. The vial was beautiful, stained a deep green at the bottom, and had a silver stopper with a serpent twisted into an intricate knot on it, a green jewel embedded into each of the eyes, as well as a larger one which the snake was wrapped around. He looked up at her and saw her smiling at how enraptured he had been by it.

'It's beautiful, thank you,' he said quietly.

'I'm glad you like it,' she replied. 'I saw it and thought of you. It is shatterproof, and has a stasis charm built in, so you can store pretty much anything in it.'

'This is a very thoughtful gift. I am sure that I will find a purpose for it when we return to Hogwarts,' he said sincerely.

Feeling disheartened, Hermione nodded, and then she stood and brushed out the imagined wrinkles in her clothes, before summoning her gifts into her arms and walking towards the door without so much as another word. Severus watched with a slight scowl marring his features for a moment before he stood to follow her this time. He was about to pass through the doors when Ronald Weasley stopped him with a hand on his shoulder.

'You're going after Hermione, aren't you?' he asked seriously.

Severus was about to snap something at the younger man, but held his tongue, figuring that if he just answered, he would be able to go after Hermione sooner. 'Yes, and I do not expect you to approve of that either,' he answered.

'Just treat her right, and I won't hex you into the next millennium,' Ron said, releasing him and walking back to join his family in the unwrapping of gifts.

Severus continued until he reached the stairs, and then, taking a deep breath, he mounted them, taking two at a time to get to his destination faster. He reached the third floor and walked briskly to the end of it, straightening his frock coat before he knocked on the door, grabbing the small wrapped gift from his pocket as he waited. The door opened and Hermione's face appeared in the crack she had allowed.

'Hermione... can I please come in?' he asked.

She opened her mouth to speak, and then closed it again, shaking her head. 'I I don't think that's such a good idea,' she replied, tears welling up in her eyes.

She moved to close the door, but Severus was quicker, and he jammed a foot in the gap to stop her from closing him out completely. He knew she was upset with him, and she had every right. He just wanted to make sure that she got his gift for her, and that she knew he did care for her.

'Please I know you don't want to see me at the moment, but at least take this,' he said, holding the gift out to her. 'I was I was too scared to give it to you earlier.'

Hermione looked at the gift, just as tears began to slip from her eyes. Her bottom lip trembled a little, and Severus reached a hand towards her, brushing a fresh tear from her face tenderly. She was startled by this action and withdrew from him, letting go of the door and walking away from him into the room. Unwilling to disrupt her any more, he walked a few steps in, placed the gift on the vanity in the room, and left without another word.

When Hermione heard the door close, she turned to glance at it and saw that Severus had left, and that his gift was sitting on the vanity. She itched to pick it up and open it, but resisted, sitting on her bed and letting the tears come. It had been so long since she had cried, and she had been bottling for too long. After a few minutes, she stopped crying and blew her nose on a handkerchief that she recognized as the one Severus had handed to her the day a student in her class had exploded a cauldron and the contents had caused everyone in class to get severe nosebleeds.

She had kept it by accident and now was gazing at the embroidered initials on it in silent reflection. Sighing, she scourgified it clean and set it aside, before going to the vanity and picking up the present. She sat at the stool there and tugged the gold ribbon loose, followed by the action of carefully unwrapping the red paper and preserving it just as Severus had earlier.

Inside was a small ivory-coloured box, which reminded her of something she had seen once before. She opened it and gasped when she saw a pendant resting inside it. This had been the one she had seen that one time in the Jewelers in Diagon Alley, when she had gone there with Severus just before the new school year had begun. She had loved it, because it was a singular drop diamond, with silver twisted around it and hung from a thin silver chain.

Her eyes filled with tears once more at the thoughtfulness of his gift, and she felt a pang of regret for sending him away from her door. She lifted the pendant and chain from the box and put it on, standing and looking at it in the mirror. It was perfect the perfect Christmas present. And he was perfect...

She gazed at the door and felt her heart ache. She made her way across the room and opened the door, looking across the hall at the door to his room. Hermione walked across to his room and lifted her hand up to knock on the door, but it opened before she even got the chance.

'Severus...' she said breathlessly, her cheeks still pink from crying, and the tears still wet on her face.

'Hermione...' he replied, and then his eyes fell on the pendant hanging around her neck and dipping down to just above the swell of her breasts.

She touched her hand to the pendant and smiled sadly at him. 'I love it, thank you,' she said softly.

Severus took the hand that was resting over the pendant and brought it to his mouth carefully, pressing his warm, thin lips in a meaningful kiss over her knuckles. She smiled at this. The day had looked like it was going to be a bad one, but this twist had certainly made it a wonderful one. The smile he returned was warmer than any smile she had ever seen on him. They mutually agreed to return to the happy party downstairs, wordlessly putting another little misunderstanding behind them.

As they descended the stairs, hands occasionally brushing, Severus handed her a pristine white handkerchief from his pocket for her to dry her tear-stained face with. 'Thank you,' she said when they had reached the bottom. 'I think I'll just nip into the bathroom quickly to freshen up, and then I'll join you.'

'Very well,' he replied with a nod, heading back to the gathering on his own.

On entering the room, he received pointed looks from about four people in there. Namely the Potters and Minerva, and even Ronald Weasley seemed to be interested in what had transpired. Severus nodded and waved them off and saw the smile that lit up Ginny Potter's face at this. He sat down where he and Hermione had been before while opening gifts and waited.

Soon enough, she re-entered the room looking just as fresh and beautiful as she had ever looked that morning and smiled brightly and nodded at her friends also. Severus found that there were far too many people aware of their regard for each other for his liking, but because he loved Hermione, he was going to let it pass. At least now, he was fairly certain that Minerva had been right when she had told him that Hermione had feelings for him. She would not have been so upset if she didn't.

She lowered herself comfortably onto the lounge right beside him. 'I hope that the Gryffindors aren't bothering you too much,' she said with a sheepish grin.

'No not too much,' he replied, holding a hand to her, which she took readily with her own and twined their fingers together. He was pleased at her actions; however, he kept a decidedly neutral expression on his face.

'This has been a good Christmas,' she said, and he only nodded fervently in agreement.

A New Year

Chapter 9 of 32

With Christmas over, Grimmauld Place is once more restored as simply the Potter's home, and Severus returns to Hogwarts... without Hermione.

Hugs and chocolate go to Madbrilliant for the beta-ing of this fic.

Chapter 9 A New Year

Following Christmas day, many of the guests of Grimmauld Place began to slowly drift away and back to their own homes and lives.

Hermione had been quite unwilling to return to Hogwarts so soon and had been delighted when Severus had suggested that she stay at Grimmauld Place with Harry and Ginny until after New Year's. The only catch had been that Severus had already promised to return to Hogwarts for New Year's so that Filius Flitwick and the other staff that had stayed could take a short break during the holidays. As disappointed as he was that he would not be able to ring in the New Year with the woman he had come to love, he wanted her to be with her family because her friends were her family.

Hermione, meanwhile, was extremely put out that Severus was going back without her, but she would never tell him that. She just wanted to spend the evening with him.

But for the sake of harmony, she was going to stay with the Potters. Merlin knew she loved Harry, Ginny, and little Lily. But she had spent the past few New Years with them already, and she wanted to share one with him the man that she had come to love with her whole heart.

So when Severus descended the stairs with his black formal teaching robes back in place, ready to head back to Hogwarts, Hermione stood silently in the front hall waiting. Harry and Ginny had gone down to the kitchen to give them a little privacy. She clutched her hands behind her back a little awkwardly, looking at her shoes as if there was something suddenly interesting about them. Severus watched the witch as she did this. She was very beautiful that morning, dressed in a nice floral skirt and a white blouse, with a clingy red sweater to complete the outfit, her curls clipped back out of her face. But even then, she was trying to hide behind them.

'Hermione,' he said in a low, even voice.

She looked up at him then, flashing him a small, unsure smile. 'You're ready to go back then?' she asked, knowing the answer already.

'I'm afraid I must,' he replied, walking to stand right in front of her.

'Yes, I suppose you do have to,' she said with a small sigh. 'Well, are you going to Floo back or Apparate?'

'I will Apparate back,' he answered, hesitantly touching her shoulder. She smiled at that, which emboldened him to let his hand slide down her arm, ending at her hand, which he took lightly in his own.

Hermione looked down at their joined hands and felt a wave of sadness sweep over her at his touch. She wasn't going to see him again until the end of the holiday. He had insisted she take a long break from the castle for all of the hard work she had done in the weeks before the Yule Ball. Severus saw her downcast eyes and saw her sad expression. Surely she was just a little upset, but it would pass when he was gone, and she would have a good time with her friends. Using his free hand, he coaxed her to look up at him with the hand on her chin.

'I will see you the day before term resumes, yes?' he asked, trying to comfort her in his own, awkward way.

Hermione nodded. 'I will be back bright and early the day before term starts,' she replied, having won that argument with him.

He lifted the hand he was holding up to his mouth and kissed her knuckles gently, before letting her hand fall between them, and stepped back. He Apparated with a pop, leaving Hermione standing in the hall by herself. She wrapped her arms around herself and walked to the kitchen door, heading downstairs to join Harry, Ginny, and Lily. They were all at the table: Harry with a mug of coffee, and Ginny with Lily in her lap, trying to feed the little one her breakfast.

'Is the coffee good this morning?' she asked, having not gone down to the kitchen that morning yet.

Harry nodded. 'Yes, Professor Snape made it this morning,' he answered, letting a small smile creep onto his handsome features, knowing it would throw Hermione.

She walked over to the counter and poured herself a cup of strong black before joining Harry at the table, sipping it. 'It is good,' she said with an almost-sigh. Who was she trying to fool?

'You know, Hermione, you don't have to stay here with us just because you think you have to,' Harry said slowly, trying to see if she would take the bait.

'Don't be silly, Harry. Of course I want to spend time with you,' Hermione snapped, but even then, her voice was a little absent and there was no sting behind it.

Ginny and Harry both observed her behavior, watching as she idly stirred a spoon around in her coffee, leaning her head on one hand, her elbow propped-up on the table. She really had it bad for the former Potions master. They were both very happy that she was in love, and that the stoic man, snarky as he was, seemed to love her back. They both had feelings for each other, and were both now aware of it, and yet they were not really doing anything about it. If ever there was a pair that went around the process of starting a relationship slower than a turtle race, it had to be them.

But after Christmas they had all promised to back down and not push any more. They may have planted the seed, but it was their turn to take the reins and see if their tentative friendship and relationship would bear fruit. Ginny fed another spoonful of mashed pumpkin to Lily, who was gurgling and trying to suck on her hand at the same time, getting herself a little messy. She decided to put Hermione to work as a distraction. If they were going to ring in the New Year that night at Midnight, they were going to have to cheer Hermione up a little beforehand.

'Hermione?' she asked gently.

The brunette looked over at one of her best friends. 'Yeah, Gin?' she answered, removing the spoon from her coffee and drinking the last of it.

'Lily is a little messy,' she began, indicating the messy young thing on her lap. 'I was wondering if you could give her a bath for me while Harry and I nip out to the store to buy some groceries.'

She smiled, knowing exactly what they were trying to do. Well, she had to be honest; it might even work for a little while. 'I'd love to give her a bath,' she said, standing and going over to pluck Lily out of her mother's arms. 'Come on, messy; let's get you all fresh smelling for mummy and daddy.'

About an hour later, Harry and Ginny returned with bags full of shopping. Hermione was sprawled out on the rug in the sitting room with Lily and an assortment of her stuffed animals and picture books. The fire was stoked and warming them, sending a lovely glow around the room. Hermione was a real natural with their daughter, and they hoped that she would one day know the joy of holding her own baby against her chest, to teach how to walk, talk, and read books.

'We're back,' Ginny announced as Harry hung their coats on the stand.

He picked up the shopping bag and took everything down to the kitchen, giving Ginny a pointed look on the way. While they were out, they had a little discussion about what they were going to do with Hermione. Harry had suggested that they let her do what she wanted to all day without trying to distract her. Then they would send her back to Hogwarts that night to make sure that she got to be with Severus on New Year's. Not just for Hermione, but for both of them.

'You're a natural, 'Mione,' the redhead told her.

Hermione looked up at her friend and smiled. 'It's easy, I guess,' she replied. 'You just sort of let them do their thing, and learn for themselves when they are like Lil. I used to babysit a lot of the neighborhood kids in the summer while we were at Hogwarts when I wasn't staying with your family at the Burrow.'

'I didn't know that,' Ginny replied.

'Mum and Dad always regretted that they couldn't give me any other siblings to play with when I was young. So they tried their best to make up for it, and encouraged me to be friends with the other children in my street, and even tried to encourage me to keep friends with people from school,' Hermione answered with a wry smile. 'But it was kind of hard to try and have conversations with people who only knew that you went to some sort of boarding school in Scotland.'

Ginny nodded. The pair of them sat in front of the fire until midday, just talking and swapping stories about their childhood that they had not had the time to share before. It was fun, and simple, and it had made Hermione feel a whole lot better than she had that morning. At lunch time, Harry finally popped in to tell them that lunch was served, and all three females had given him a kiss on the cheek for being lovely, and they headed down to the kitchen to eat.

After lunch, Hermione retreated to her room for a short nap as she had hardly slept the night before, tossing and turning because she had known that Severus was leaving. She slept the afternoon away without interruption, and when she awoke, she went for a long, hot shower to soothe her muscles and joints a little. Dressing in comfy jeans and a loose, dark green sweater, she went downstairs to find Harry and Ginny alone in the sitting room, snuggling together on the couch. Once she was fully in the room,

she could see that Lily was there too; asleep and curled up in a ball on the armchair, with a pillow under her little head and a blanket draped over her.

Later on still, dinner was a quiet affair. Everyone seemed to have very little to say, and they all just ate in peace. Lily was looking around, grinning with chubby pink cheeks, making the occasional gleeful gurgling sound, making everyone smile in spite of themselves. By eleven-thirty, Lily was up tucked in her bed, and Harry and Ginny were standing in the doorway to the sitting room, watching their friend stare sullenly into the fire from her armchair.

'Hermione, please go to him,' Harry said to her seriously.

'I said that I would stay here,' she replied quietly, barely even whispering.

'We'll send your things back to you tomorrow. Please just go to see him right now and be happy,' Ginny said, patting her friend on the shoulder.

Hermione looked up at them and saw the seriousness of their expressions. Stunned as she was, she still nodded and stood from the armchair, hugging them tightly. Wordlessly, she went to the fireplace and Flooed back to her chambers at Hogwarts. She stepped into her rooms there, cold from lack of use, and its location. Squaring her shoulders, she then decided to Floo to Severus' office and check if he was there. She stepped into the green flames, called her destination, and stepped out of the fireplace, dusting off imaginary soot when she got there.

'Hermione, what are you doing here?' asked a voice from an armchair near the fireplace in the office.

'Ringing in the New Year with you, of course,' she replied, walking up to him and giving him the most loving smile he had ever seen.

He stood up then, and without waiting another minute, pulled her into a fierce embrace, holding her to his body closely. The grandfather clock in the room began to chime then too, and he pulled back from her so that he could see her beloved face. She smiled and wrapped her arms around his neck and, as the clock struck its last chord, he lowered his lips to hers and kissed her.

'Happy New Year, Severus,' she whispered into his ear when they parted.

'Happy New Year to you,' he said before kissing her lips chastely again.

A Beautiful Day

Chapter 10 of 32

Back at Hogwarts, Hermione and Severus spend a pleasant day together before classes resume.

Thanks to Madbrilliant for lending me her beta skills!

.....

Chapter 10 - A Beautiful Day

The sun shone down on the balcony and reflected off the glasses on the wrought iron table in the centre.

Severus glanced across at the beautiful woman in the wrought iron chair across from where he sat. She was hugging her legs to her chest and staring out silently over the castle grounds before them, her silky curls cascading over her right shoulder. She looked so peaceful with a small smile on her lips, wearing a ruby sweater and comfortable long house pants. He had never seen such a beautiful woman in his entire life. Hermione Granger was one in a million, and he was certain that he was in love with her.

Hermione looked over to him and smiled at him brightly. His breath left his chest, and he returned the smile briefly before standing up and walking over to her, holding his hand out to her. She placed her hand in his and unfolded herself from the chair, standing and wrapping her arms around his neck, placing a peck on his lips.

'The students will be returning tomorrow,' she said softly, pressing her lips against his again lightly.

'Mmmhmm... I know they are,' he replied, wrapping his arms around her waist and brushing his lips against hers, closing his eyes.

'We won't be able to sit around like this any more,' she said with a small sigh. 'I'm going to miss this you know just you and me alone here.'

Severus felt a smile curve his mouth before he leaned in and claimed a deep kiss from her, allowing his tongue to creep past his lips, brushing across hers. She parted her lips willingly and let her own tongue wander out for a taste. This was the most intimate kiss that they had shared thus far, and Hermione was quite surprised that he was being this open with her. They kissed languidly for several minutes before they pulled back for some air.

'I'll miss this too,' he said a tad breathlessly.

Hermione gently brushed her lips against his again and pressed her forehead against his, cuddling up close to him. Severus smiled, closing his eyes once more and surrendering to the closeness. He breathed in deeply, reveling in the honeysuckle smell on her silky brown curls, letting one of his hands wander up to her hair and twirl a curl around a long, pale finger. He felt his insides melt when he felt her hand slide into the hair at the back of his head.

'Let's go down to Hogsmeade,' she suggested softly. 'We can take the few students left down with us and let them do a little shopping before school resumes.'

'Anything you want to do,' he agreed with a nod.

Hermione pulled away and smiled happily at him, holding one of his hands in her smaller one. 'I'm going to go and get changed quickly so we can leave,' she said, placing a kiss on his cheek. 'Would you please go and tell the students?'

He nodded. 'Go and make yourself glamorous,' he teased, stroking a thumb over her hand. 'I'm sure it won't take very much.'

She grinned at him as she walked into his office and Flooed to her rooms. Butterflies were rioting within her stomach. She had never felt like that before. Just being around Severus made her feel like she was floating and like she was the most beautiful woman in the world. She was definitely in love with that man. Grinning like a fool, she skipped into her bedroom and opened the wardrobe, grabbing a white blouse from a hanger and placing it on the bed. She flitted back to the drawers and pulled out a pair

of charcoal grey trousers to match, and a beige sweater to wear over the shirt.

Once she stripped out of her slouchy clothes, she re-dressed in what she had taken out of her wardrobe and then went to the bathroom. She tried to tame her hair into something, but with a sigh, walked out, unsuccessful. She grabbed her long black coat from the hook near the door to her chambers and pulled it on along with her shoes, and went back to the fireplace in her sitting room. She tossed in some Floo powder and stepped in, calling the out for Snape's office and walking out casually at the other end.

She saw the students all standing around in a circle, chatting to each other quietly. They looked up at her as she entered. 'Are you ready to go to Hogsmeade?' she asked them cheerfully.

The smallest girl walked away from the group and stood before her, reaching out and taking her hand. 'Can I walk with you?' she asked, tugging her hand and smiling up at her. She was smaller than most of the students at Hogwarts and was cute with big blue eyes and her blonde hair tied in pig-tail braids.

'Certainly you can,' Hermione replied, giving her hand a squeeze. 'What's your name?' she asked curiously.

'Megan Cabot. I am a first year in Gryffindor,' she answered immediately, offering the other information voluntarily.

'I was a Gryffindor too,' Hermione said with a smile.

Megan nodded with a grin. 'I know, and now you're our Head of House too,' she said enthusiastically.

'And I suppose you think she is a wonderful Head of House and Professor, am I correct Miss Cabot?' asked a deep, silky voice from behind them.

Hermione looked over her shoulder and saw Severus closing the door that led to his chambers, wearing his usual black, but a long black winter coat instead of his usual robes for the trip. His silky black hair hung around his face and shoulders, and the look in his eyes as they looked over her made her stomach do a back-flip. She was still amazed that she could make Severus Snape look at her that way.

'Professor Granger is the best,' she said simply, which made Hermione grin a little, and Severus smirk.

'Are you all ready to leave?' Severus asked, addressing the other students.

There was a murmur of agreement, and they all left the office and walked down to the Entrance Hall. Leaving the Hall, they all walked down on the pathway to Hogsmeade, Megan clinging tightly to Hermione's side. Severus walked along on her other side, not touching her except for the casual brush of his hand against her every now and then. She smiled, catching his hand the next time it brushed hers.

He looked over at her in shock, but did not release her hand. The three students ahead of them seemed totally oblivious to anything going on, so he didn't feel that he needed to let go of her hand. In any case, he was pleased to be able to hold her hand and walk with her in that way. She seemed to be genuinely happy about holding his hand, and so he decided to let her set the pace of their relationship.

'Sev?' she asked quietly.

He leaned closer to her to listen to what she had to say. 'Yes?' he whispered back, letting his thumb stroke over the back of her hand.

'Please don't let go of my hand even when we get to Hogsmeade, okay?' she asked in as quiet a voice as she could.

'I promise I won't,' he agreed, lifting their joined hands to his mouth and placing a gentle kiss over her knuckles.

They continued walking until they all finally reached Hogsmeade and the two older students ran off together, promising to meet their professors at the Three Broomsticks at two in the afternoon. Then Megan Cabot went off with the third-year girl that was there also, leaving Hermione and Severus alone together once more. She maintained her hold on his hand and tugged him in the direction that she wanted to walk in. He followed willingly, wondering when he had become such a simpering, love-sick school boy, when he had never been anything like that when he was at school.

'Where are we going?' he asked as she pulled him along.

'When I was still at Hogwarts, Harry, Ron, and I used to come here all of the time whenever there was a Hogsmeade weekend,' she replied as they approached a clearing in the woody area just outside of the town.

'You and your miscreant friends,' he grumbled, wrapping his arms around her from behind and leaning his chin on her shoulder, moving her hair and pressing a kiss against the back of her neck. 'Always getting into trouble and breaking the rules.'

Hermione smiled and leaned backwards into his embrace, reaching up a hand and threading it into his hair momentarily before stroking his cheek. Warmth was radiating and spreading between them, melting the ice around Severus' heart more and more as time passed. She turned her head and pulled his down to meet his mouth in a lush kiss. Once she had a taste of him, she found that she couldn't get enough. The taste of spice, tea, and mint was still on his tongue from breakfast and performing his dental hygiene routine.

'This is a nice place,' he murmured when she pulled away for a breath. 'We should come here more often, don't you think?'

She smiled and nodded in agreement, her lips slightly swollen from all of the kisses that they had shared that day. Turning around to face him, she could see that his cheeks were flushed and his lips were a little fuller after their activities. She liked the way that he looked and wondered how he would look in the throes of passion. She felt herself get warm just thinking about doing that to him.

'Yes, we should come here more often,' she agreed, stroking his cheek and smiling at him in the way that he loved so much.

'Let's get back to Hogsmeade, sweet,' he said softly, taking her hand in his. 'We can order your supplies for the Potions stores while we are there.'

She nodded in agreement, and the pair walked hand in hand back into the village, ignoring the strange looks that they got every now and then from people they passed in the street. If Hermione noticed, she certainly didn't seem to care, so Severus decided to ignore it also. He was not ashamed to be seen with a strong, brilliant, beautiful woman like Hermione. On the contrary, he had never been more proud or happier about anything in his entire life.

'Did you need to do anything while we are in Hogsmeade?' she asked as they approached the Apothecary.

He shook his head and led the way inside, letting go of her hand to take a basket and head straight to the ingredient shelves. Once they had finished collecting everything they needed, they ordered what the shop didn't have. Afterwards, they walked out and went straight to the Three Broomsticks to have lunch and await their students.

Hermione had never been happier.

.....
A/N - Please leave a review! We writers really appreciate them!

Resuming Duties

Chapter 11 of 32

Classes have resumed, and after a long week, Hermione and Severus manage to find some time together.

Many thanks to Madbrilliant for her beta skills, and to all of those who continue to read and review!

Chapter 11 - Resuming Duties

The school term had started again, and the students' return to Hogwarts had more or less signaled the end of Severus and Hermione's personal time.

On their return, the majority of students spent the first few days trying their luck with breaking a few harmless school rules, but around the middle of the week, the professors managed to tame them again. Hermione had been especially busy rushing around and dealing out punishments in order to maintain control. Severus had been called to the Ministry again, so that kept him from being able to have any decent conversations with any of his colleagues during the week.

However, Friday evening had finally arrived, the school had settled back down, and with it being already eleven at night, the students were supposed to be in their dormitories sleeping. Hermione had taken the earlier patrol shift, so it left her free to go and pay a visit to the man whom she loved and had missed all week. So once she had bathed and dressed in comfortably loose jeans and a dark green sweater that Molly Weasley had made for her, she Flooed to the Headmaster's office.

She walked through and brushed a tiny bit of soot from her shoulder, surveying the room in order to find him. She saw him standing over near the window, wearing only his trousers, white linen shirt, and waistcoat, leaning his head against the glass. He seemed to be lost in concentration and hadn't noticed her. With a small smile, she walked over to him and wrapped her arms around him from behind. His posture immediately stiffened and then relaxed when his hands covered hers.

'Hi there,' she murmured, pressing her cheek against his strong back.

He chuckled softly, turning in her arms to embrace her. 'I've missed you so much all week,' he said in a totally uncharacteristic moment. 'You look a little tired, love.'

She looked up at him and smiled brightly, leaning up to kiss his lips chastely. 'You look at little worn out yourself,' she replied. 'Maybe I should go back to my rooms and let you get some rest.'

He shook his head and pulled her a little closer, giving her a squeeze before letting go and taking her hand, leading her towards the entrance to his chambers. He traced a long finger down a discolored panel of wood on the wall besides a tall painting of a landscape, which swung open to let them inside. He led her into the room, bypassed his sitting room, and opened the door to another room which Hermione had never entered. When he finally stopped, she realised that she was in Severus Snape's bedroom.

At first, she was a little shocked, but after a moment, she calmed her pulse enough to take a good look around. The room held a large four-poster bed that had a sumptuous looking black spread over Egyptian cotton sheets; ornate, matching nightstands on either side, and a large dresser and wardrobe over one side. Another door was on the other side, which she just assumed was the door that led to the bathroom. She looked at Severus beside her and saw that there was nothing but weariness and affection in his eyes that night, for which she was grateful.

'Stay and sleep here tonight,' he asked, tugging her hand towards him a little. 'Just to sleep I know you're not ready for that.'

Hermione smiled. 'Okay,' she said, kicking off her shoes and walking over to sit on one side of the bed.

Severus followed, shedding his waistcoat and draping it over a chair before kicking his shoes off and sitting on the other side of the bed. He rolled his socks off his feet and swung his legs onto the bed properly. Hermione took her socks off as well, and together they wriggled under the covers, and towards the centre and each other. Severus took her into his arms, and with a murmured charm, he extinguished the lights in the room and snuggled closer to the woman he loved.

Hermione grinned and pulled his shirt out of the waistband of his pants, reaching up to unbutton it. She wasn't trying to strip him, but she just wanted him to be a little more comfortable with her. Sliding a hand over his firm, lightly-haired chest, she felt his skin intimately for the first time since they had admitted their feelings to each other. His sharp intake of breath was the only thing that alerted her to a reaction. He didn't move, simply allowing her to trace patterns on his flesh.

'Your skin is so smooth,' she murmured, leaning forward and pressing her lips to his chest hesitantly.

'Hermione,' he gasped out as her fingers grazed his nipple. 'You should stop. You don't know what you're starting.'

She laughed softly. 'Relax, Sev,' she said softly, undoing the last few buttons, and pushing the shirt off his shoulders. 'Shift your arms a bit. Take the shirt off for me, Severus.'

'I don't know if that's a good idea,' Severus replied, even as he was complying with her request, tossing the shirt over his side of the bed. 'If you start this, I am going to be very hard-pressed to stop it, Hermione.'

'I was a little apprehensive but I really want to be with you, Severus,' she said simply, stroking his cheek and kissing his chest again. 'I want to be with you in every way possible. I think now is as good a time as any.'

Severus moaned softly as she traced a finger down from his nipple to his navel, which she circled. 'Don't say I didn't warn you,' he said with a gasp.

Before she knew what was happening, Hermione was rolled over onto her back, and a shirtless Severus was looming over her; almost menacingly. With a smirk, he leaned down and pressed his lips firmly to her own, meanwhile pushing her sweater up to pull it over her head once the kiss broke. They tossed it aside, and then he began to wrestle with the button of her jeans, pulling down the zip, and disposing of them as well. She was then left beneath him in her simple cotton undergarments.

He was blown away. She was so beautiful and unassuming, her choice in underwear giving credit to that. She was not a seductress or loose woman who threw herself at men. She was something else entirely, and he loved it. He leaned down and captured her lips in another steamy kiss, suckling on her tongue. She needed no encouragement to return the favor, and gladly devoured his mouth with equal fervor.

'You are so bloody beautiful,' he said huskily, pulling back to push the covers off and sitting up so he could take her in.

She was slender and her milky skin was smooth and perfect. Her waist was very small, and she had slender hips, a flat stomach, long slim legs, and her breasts beneath the bra would easily be covered by his large hands. All in all, she was tall and slender for a woman in her age group, but he thought that she was perfection. He traced his

finger down from her collarbone to her sternum between her breasts, and then to her navel, which he circled. She giggled a little, trying to slap his hands away, but then he went into attack mode and began tickling her on purpose.

'Stop! Please, Severus! I'm ticklish!' she shrieked in between bouts of laughter.

He chuckled and tickled her a little more, but soon tired of it and slumped over, his lips pressing to her stomach softly. 'That was entirely too much fun,' he murmured against her skin.

She bucked her hips slightly to get him moving, and he shimmied back up the length of her body, planting small kisses along the way. He reached her lips and kissed her chastely there, and she reached behind her back and unfastened the clasp of her bra, shrugging it off, and tossing it over her side of the bed. He was surprised for a moment, but then pulled back a little so that he could admire her lovely breasts. They would have been a little on the smaller side to any other man but him. He found them to be just round enough, with dusky pink nipples in the centre.

'Lovely,' he murmured, pressing a kiss just to the side of the nipple of her left breast. 'Absolutely perfect.'

Hermione giggled. 'They're just breasts, Severus,' she said with a smile. 'The others complained about them not being big enough.'

'They were fools,' he growled, feeling a little possessive and jealous at the mention of other men. 'You are beautiful, and they are perfect.'

'Well, they're feeling a little neglected,' she teased, letting her own hands drift up to cup them, flicking her thumbs over the tips of her nipples. 'Maybe I should just take care of myself tonight.'

'Not a chance,' Severus growled before ravishing her mouth with kisses.

About an hour later, Severus lay on his back with Hermione draped over him, nestling her head in the crook of his neck, both of them a little sweaty. Both of them were thoroughly sated. They had yet to catch their breath from it. Hermione pressed a kiss to his Adam's apple, and then licked it, making him groan in pleasure anew. He stroked her shoulder lightly, closing his eyes, weary from the week and their lovemaking.

'That was just what I needed,' Hermione said, letting out a heavy sigh.

'Yes, I agree,' Severus replied, turning over and facing her, pulling her closer to him with one strong arm. 'You are very, very good. If I weren't afraid of the answer, I would likely ask you from whom you gained your wealth of experience.'

She chuckled. 'I've only ever been with one other man before, love,' she replied. 'And you'll be glad to know it was neither Harry nor Ron. He wasn't even from this school or country even.'

'Not Krum?' he asked curiously.

Hermione shook her head fervently. 'No, definitely not him. We lost contact after my seventh year here, and I never bothered to try and renew anything with him,' she answered. 'Actually, to be honest, he was lousy and most of anything I know, I read in the books I found in a warded cupboard in the library at Grimmauld Place.'

Severus tried to keep a straight face, but lost the battle and broke out in peals of laughter, curling up and holding himself as he did. After a few minutes, he managed to control himself and wiped the tears of mirth from his face. He took a few deep breaths and turned to see Hermione looking at him peculiarly, an amused smirk firmly plastered on her lips.

'What's so funny?' she demanded.

Severus smiled broadly, pulling her into his arms and charming the covers off the floor and back over them. 'Oh, it just figures that you would have to research and read about sex,' he replied, kissing her forehead affectionately.

She smiled back. 'I like to know as much as I can about everything,' she replied, running her hand down his chest and flat stomach, stopping at his arousal. 'How about we practice some more? You always were a very good teacher.'

He groaned as her hand wrapped around him and stroked. 'Oh, Merlin!' he moaned. 'Good idea, love...'

She rolled over on top of him and smiled as she leaned down to kiss him again in the way that they both loved so much. 'I always have good ideas,' she said before they surrendered to their passion once more.

Diagon Alley

Chapter 12 of 32

It's Saturday, and Hermione goes on a visit to St. Mungo's and bumps into Ginny.

To Madbrilliant, my eternal thanks. And to all of those who read and review, a big hug and a kiss.

.....

Chapter 12 - Diagon Alley

The new term at Hogwarts was well and truly started, and before anyone knew it, it was nearing February.

Although it was still cold and snowy, the occupants of the castle were much better able to go outside and enjoy the weather, rather than freeze in it the moment they stepped out. It meant that, on weekends, the castle was very nearly empty of students, who instead chose to play in the snow most of the day. For Severus, this had come as a great relief. As much as he had become more accepting in the past couple of years, he still couldn't stand the screaming and running in the hallways.

Hermione thought that it was great that the students were able to enjoy being outside, even if the weather was less than favorable. She had not been able to spend much time outdoors at all. This, however, was due to more personal circumstances than anything else. For over a week, she had been feeling very ill and had spent a lot of time in her chambers throwing up, swaying on her feet from dizziness, or feeling like she was going to be sick. Poppy Pomfrey had given her some potion for her stomach, but

when it proved useless, she set up an appointment for her at St. Mungo's.

Decidedly, she kept Severus in the dark about the whole ordeal. Every time she saw him, she put on a smile and acted as though nothing was awry. She hadn't slept in his rooms that entire week and had simply insisted that she had a lot of marking to do for students' assignments. He seemed to have accepted her excuses, but towards the end of the week, he had been asking her if she was feeling all right. She told him she was a little tired, and he told her she should be resting.

After all of that, however, Saturday finally came around, and she left the castle early that morning after stopping by to see Severus and let him know she was going out for the day to see the Potters. He smiled at her, pleased that she was planning on spending some time with her friends. He hadn't wanted any relationship to come between her friendships after all. She left him after kissing him soundly on the lips and walked to the front gates of the school before Apparating.

She arrived at St. Mungo's shortly afterwards and checked in at the reception. 'I have an appointment,' Hermione said to the receptionist.

The blonde witch behind the desk nodded and scanned a clipboard folder. 'Name, please?' she questioned.

'Hermione Granger,' she answered a little hesitantly.

The witch scanned the pages a few more times before nodding and standing. 'Follow me and I'll take you to the Healer's office,' she said, walking out from behind the desk and leading her down a hallway.

Hermione followed obediently, they stopped in front of a bright blue door, and the receptionist knocked. 'Hermione Granger is here for her appointment,' she said before turning and walking away.

The door opened and a smiling older woman opened the door and ushered her inside. 'It is a pleasure to meet you, Hermione Granger,' she said cheerfully. 'Poppy asked that I take special care with you.'

Hermione smiled. That sounded exactly like something Poppy would do. 'Thank you,' she replied politely. 'I've been feeling really under the weather lately, and I wanted to get it out of the way as soon as possible.'

'Have a seat on the bed over there,' the Healer said, pointing over to one side as she rummaged through a desk drawer. 'Good, now can you tell me what symptoms you have been experiencing?'

Hermione nodded, glad that she had sat down. She was starting to feel a little dizzy and nauseous, so it helped to sit down. 'I have been getting really dizzy and nauseous, and tired to the point that I don't even want to get out of bed,' she answered with a heavy sigh. 'I get sick all of the time like I have the stomach flu, but no potions have worked to fix it. I feel miserable and sad, and I've been crying myself to sleep for no reason whatsoever.'

The older woman's eyebrow raised a fraction, and she nodded. She knew exactly what was wrong with Hermione Granger. She just needed to do a quick charm to test her theory. She pulled her wand out and murmured a charm, flicking it in a particular pattern to produce the result she wanted. Just as she had suspected, the end of her wand glowed purple and she smiled.

'There is a very simple answer to what you have been suffering, Hermione,' the Healer said with a grin.

'May I ask what that is?' Hermione asked.

'You have been experiencing what we in the medical field commonly refer to as morning sickness,' the Healer said, a broad smile forming as Hermione's eyes widened in realisation.

'Are you sure about that?' she asked, looking down at her stomach, which was still as flat as it had ever been. She knew the answer, but she just needed to hear it again.

'The charm that we use here is never incorrect,' the older witch replied. 'You are about three weeks along and so far your twins look to be rather healthy.'

'Twins?' Hermione asked softly.

'Indeed, congratulations,' the Healer replied, going to her desk and pulling out a small pile of books, and another separate sheet of paper. 'Now, these books look rather silly, but I think that they will be very helpful for you. You are a first time parent, I assume?'

Hermione nodded and accepted the books, and saw the sheet of paper on top with a potion recipe written on it. 'What is the recipe for?' she asked.

'That is the Prenatal Potion that you should take. It helps to soothe the nausea and all of the other symptoms,' she answered. 'I was told that you are a Potions mistress, so you should be able to make it yourself without having to pay excessive amounts of money to buy it at the apothecary.'

Hermione nodded and put everything into her bag, holding her hand out to the Healer to shake her hand. 'Thank you very much for everything,' she said.

The older woman smiled and patted her hand. 'Good luck,' she said. 'I wish you and the father of your children very happy.'

Hermione walked out of the room in a slight daze. What was she going to tell Severus? There was no way she was going to abort the children. That was simply out of the question. She really needed to think, and fast, because as soon as she got back to the castle, she would need to say something to him. And there was no question about hiding it. Severus was not an idiot who would overlook her growing shape as the months would pass by.

She was nearly back at the waiting room, when she ran into someone from her lack of attention. 'I'm so sorry, I should have been looking where I was going,' she stammered out.

'Hermione?' asked a familiar voice.

Hermione looked properly and saw the shorter redhead standing in front of her. 'Ginny, what are you doing here?' she asked.

'I just had an appointment,' Ginny said with an excited grin. 'I was going to wait until this weekend to tell everyone, but seeing as you are here, I might as well tell you.'

'What is it then?' Hermione asked.

'I'm pregnant again! Isn't that wonderful? Harry always wanted more kids, and now we are going to have a boy!' she exclaimed, hugging Hermione in her excitement.

'That is wonderful, Gin. I am so happy for you,' she said, her daze still lingering. Now Ginny was pregnant too? Well at least she wasn't on her own now.

'Which reminds me, what are you doing here? Did you stop by the house to see Harry?' Ginny asked. 'Did he tell you I was here?'

'No, not at all,' Hermione said softly. 'I was here for a Healer's appointment too.'

'Oh! Is everything all right? Are you sick?' Ginny asked, beginning to fuss over her in the same manner Molly Weasley did.'

Hermione shook her head 'no' and led Ginny out of St. Mungo's with her. Together they Apparated to Diagon Alley and found themselves out front of Florian Fortescue's. 'Let's order and sit down, and I will explain,' she suggested.

Ginny nodded in agreement, and soon the two of them were seated outside the shop at a wrought iron table with matching chairs and had sundaes in front of them. Ginny sat back and ate a spoonful of her dessert, watching Hermione pensively from beneath her lashes.

'Now, explain,' she demanded.

Hermione sighed heavily and pinched the bridge of her nose with her forefinger and thumb in order to chase away the headache that was approaching. 'I was feeling really sick all week, and Poppy didn't have anything that would work, so she booked an appointment at St. Mungo's for me,' the older witch explained quietly. 'I went in, and the Healer cast a charm after I had explained my symptoms, and then she told me that I was pregnant and having twins.'

Ginny's eyes were as wide as saucers by that point, and her mouth was agape. 'You're pregnant?' she asked in disbelief.

'Yes, I am, and I am pretty sure that you know exactly who the father is, so don't ask who,' Hermione said a little snappishly and then sighed again. 'I'm sorry I don't know which way is up these days. I've been emotional and sick and miserable.'

Ginny reached over and patted her hand, smiling at her. 'Don't be sorry. I was just the same when I was first pregnant with Lily. Once you've taken the potion, you'll be right as rain again,' she said soothingly. 'When are you going to tell Severus?'

'I will have to tell him some time in the next week I think,' Hermione admitted. 'He was beginning to get a little suspicious when I didn't want to sleep in his chambers this week, and he is bound to find out sooner or later, whether I tell him or not.'

'You're in love with him, aren't you?' Ginny asked.

'I am deliriously in love with that man,' Hermione replied with a small laugh. 'I just hope he doesn't take the twins badly. The wand glowed purple, you know. So that means a girl and a boy, right?'

Ginny nodded and grinned at her best friend. 'You are going to be a great mother, Hermione,' she said encouragingly. 'I think that the professor will be thrilled.'

'He didn't seem so thrilled about children at Christmas,' Hermione said quietly, looking at her hands in her lap.

Ginny gave her hand a squeeze. 'Don't you worry about that Hermione -- all men are like that until they have their own children. The professor will be the happiest man alive when you tell him,' she said, sounding so sure about it.

Hermione nodded and ate a spoonful of her ice cream. 'I hope you're right about that, Gin. I really do,' she answered.

Otherwise, she was going to have a very hard time remaining at Hogwarts.

Decision Making

Chapter 13 of 32

After waiting a few days, Hermione decides to tell Severus all about the trip to St. Mungo's, and a few other things are revealed in the process.

A big thank you to Madbrilliant, for the beta of this chapter!

.....

Chapter 13 - Decision Making

It was always easier to make decisions for other people, but unfortunately, less so for one's self.

It had been three days since Hermione had gone to St. Mungo's and discovered that she was pregnant. The night before, she had been unable to sleep, and had Floored Ginny Potter in the middle of the night, distraught and crying her eyes out to her younger best friend. Ginny had encouraged her to tell Severus, but she had lost her nerve at the last minute every time and simply kissed him until the questioning look in his eyes had disappeared. Since she had been on her prenatal Potion, the symptoms had cleared-up just as the Healer had said.

She had resumed sleeping in his arms at night, and had made love to him just the night before so that he was reassured that she still wanted him, but he was still suspicious of her. She hated keeping things from him, and seeing the slight hurt in his eyes that told her he knew something was going on. Running a hand through her bedraggled curls, she sighed and sat up from his bed, walking into the bathroom and standing in front of the basin and mirror. She washed her face and dried it with a hand towel. She sighed, looking at the dark circles beneath her eyes from being unable to sleep properly.

'Hermione?' asked a voice from the doorway.

Hermione saw Severus in the mirror standing behind her, and she turned to smile at him and walked over to him. Wrapping her arms around his neck, she leaned up and gave him a kiss on the cheek. He returned the embrace and led them both back to the bedroom, scooping her up and placing her on the bed. She was wearing a cotton nightie, and he was in silky sleep pants. He climbed back in beside her and wrapped his arms around her waist, snuggling up to her.

'Are you alright, Hermione?' he asked softly, pressing a kiss to the nape of her neck.

She nodded. 'I'm fine. Just having a bit of trouble getting to sleep is all,' she lied smoothly, feeling bad for doing it. She wanted to tell him, but she was afraid of the rejection.

'Are you sure about that?' he pressed, giving her a light squeeze and stroking her side outside of her nightie.

'Yes, I'm sure. Go back to sleep, Sev,' she insisted, turning in his arms and embracing him back, pecking him on the lips and snuggling her face into his neck, breathing in the spicy scent of his skin.

Soon after, Hermione heard his breathing even out, and she closed her eyes, listening to the sound of his breathing. If anything could soothe her frazzled nerves, it would be the sound of his breathing or heartbeat. Eventually, she too found respite and slept with him until the morning light began to filter through a small gap in the curtains.

When she opened her eyes and looked around, she realised that she was alone in bed, and the shower was going in the bathroom. She smiled and got up, heading into the bathroom, all the while, shrugging out of her nightie. She slid the door open and stepped into the long, firm body already in there.

'Good morning, sweet,' Severus greeted, turning to face her and pull her into him, sliding the door closed behind her.

Hermione moved under the spray a little more and she moved closer to him, letting the water beat down on her. 'Good morning, love,' she replied, wrapping her arms around his neck and kissing him.

Needless to say, the kisses turned increasingly more passionate, and half an hour later, they emerged from the bathroom, slightly waterlogged, wrapped in towels, but very, very much sated. Hermione cast a drying charm over her body and wrapped the towel back around her, tucking the loose end in under her arm. Severus emerged and saw Hermione sitting on his bed, looking a little tired still, and although she was smiling, he could see the guilt in her eyes. He knew she would talk to him when she was ready, but it was really killing him not to know.

'You look like an angel,' he murmured, walking over to her with a black towel wrapped around his hips. 'Albeit a fallen one with that black towel on.'

She grinned and pulled him over to her, using his towel as leverage, and made him sit next to her on the bed. He fell onto his back and tugged her to lie down beside him. He kissed her and hugged her close to him, breathing in the smell of berries and vanilla, letting her scent soothe him. He pressed his ear to her chest and listened to the beating of her heart, feeling a little silly. He had never been so affectionate with anyone in his life. But he loved Hermione, and even if he hadn't said it, he still thought he should at the very least treat her like he did.

'Severus?' she asked, gently running her fingers through his hair.

'Yes, my sweet?' he murmured against her chest.

'I have something to talk to you about, and please listen to me first, because it is very important that you do,' Hermione started, and at feeling him nod against her, she took a deep breath to continue. 'Well, when I went out on Saturday, I did see Ginny, but it was more or less accidental. I actually ran into her at St. Mungo's because I had an appointment there, and she did too.'

Severus sat up abruptly and looked down at her curiously, a frown of confusion creasing his brow. 'What do you mean, St. Mungo's?' he demanded, his panic beginning to escalate slowly. 'Are you sick? What happened?'

Hermione sat up and put her fingers to his mouth to still his lips, making shushing noises to calm him down. 'No, no, it's nothing like that,' she said automatically, and he seemed to relax a little bit after that. 'I was feeling very sick all of last week, which was why I was sticking to my own chambers. I'm sorry to have kept that from you, but I wanted to deal with it myself.'

Severus nodded. 'I understand, but I wish you would have told me,' he said, clicking his tongue in disapproval. 'I don't want you to be unwell and think that I would not care for you.'

Hermione nodded in acceptance. 'Next time I won't keep it from you,' she promised. 'But that isn't the whole story. I got there, and a Healer asked me my symptoms. She cast a charm over me, and then...' Her voice caught in her throat, and her bottom lip began to tremble a little as tears formed in her eyes.

'What is it, love?' he asked seriously, hugging her close and stroking her back. 'You can tell me anything, you know this.'

She just shook her head and sobbed louder, and Severus scooped her up into his lap and rocked her as she cried, stroking her hair and holding her. He was so scared of crying women, as he had never known what to do with them. And yet, there he was, faced with the worst crying woman he had ever seen, and it was like second nature to him; holding her, stroking her and murmuring soothing things into her ear. A little while later she calmed down and stopped sobbing.

'Hermione?' he asked, tipping her chin up to face him. 'You can tell me what is wrong, my pet. I will hear you out.'

She sniffled and burrowed into his chest. 'Impregnantsevimissorry,' she mumbled quickly into his skin.

'What was that?' he asked in confusion. 'Speak up, pet.'

She took a deep breath and sat up on his lap, looking him in the eyes. 'I'm pregnant,' she said clearly. 'I am so sorry, Sev. I can't believe I forgot about contraceptives, and I know it's my fault...'

He pressed a finger to her mouth, stilling her lips. He was stunned, but he still wanted her to stop blaming herself. She was pregnant. He was most definitely the father. She was blaming herself for not thinking about contraception. That last thought snapped him back to reality, and he held her face between his hands.

'Hermione, my sweet, dearest, pet,' he murmured, kissing the end of her nose. 'You are in no way to blame for this at all. You weren't the only one having sex, if I can recall correctly. It is just as much my own fault for forgetting. In fact, more so mine, as I am the older of the two of us.'

She swallowed thickly. 'Then you aren't mad at me?' she asked.

'Darling, I could never be mad at you for this. A baby! I can't even believe it,' he exclaimed, kissing her soundly on the lips. 'I never thought I would be a father.'

She smiled meekly. 'Then you'll probably need to know that we're having twins,' she said quietly.

'Are you serious?' he asked, his eyes growing wide. She nodded. He grinned widely, feeling elation run through him like he had never felt before. He was going to be a father! Hermione was giving him twins! The Snape line would not end with him. And he loved her so much it was possible that his heart might burst from filling up with love. 'I love you, Hermione.'

'What?' she asked in shock, her eyes wide.

'I said, I love you,' he replied, unable to stop the words at his lips. He never thought he would be able to admit it out loud, but apparently he could.

Hermione beamed at him then, hugging him around the neck and kissing him passionately, tangling tongues with him and moving herself to straddle his lap. 'I never imagined you would say that to me,' she said breathlessly when she pulled back. 'I love you too, so very much.'

He smiled one of the truest smiles he had ever smiled and kissed her again, unable to get enough of her. They made love again and it was beautiful, passionate and filled with their shared love. Afterwards, they cleaned up quickly, and got dressed in haste, before heading down from his chambers and office to arrive before everyone else in the Great Hall. He pulled out her seat for her and let her sit, kissing her palm before seating himself in the Headmaster's chair.

'You have made me inordinately happy, pet,' he murmured softly as the other staff members began to walk into the hall.

'You have made me happy too,' she replied so softly that nobody else would be able to hear her. 'I love you.'

Soon enough, the rest of the staff members were seated and the students were beginning to filter into the hall. Breakfast appeared on the table, and Hermione hungrily dug in, scowling at Severus' amused smile. He loved seeing her eat so heartily. She had been picking at her food a little the past few days, and so it was beautiful to see her eating the way she used to again.

Later, as they walked out of the Hall and back up to Hermione's office, Severus took her hand and caressed the back of her hand as they walked. He didn't care if anyone

saw them. He was going to be a father the father of her children. She was the most beautiful woman he had ever known, and if people knew he was with Hermione, he would not be ashamed.

'I love you,' he said when they reached her office door.

'I love you too,' she replied, kissing his lips tenderly.

If anyone had seen or gasped, Severus and Hermione were completely oblivious to it.

Visitation Rights

Chapter 14 of 32

Ginny and Lily stop by Hogwarts for a visit with Hermione, and to talk about a few important details.

A big thank you and many hugs go to Madbrilliant, for the beta of this chapter, and to WriterMerrin, for sorting through the numerous mistakes we left over. Thanks also to everyone who has reviewed!

.....

Chapter 14 - Visitation Rights

Ginny Potter sat in one of the chairs by the fire, sipping tea from a china cup and grinning in that way she did.

When Hermione had woken that morning, Ginny had Flooed and told her that she and Lily were coming by for a visit. Harry was away for work, leaving his two ladies at home, so she decided to see Hermione at Hogwarts. It was Sunday, and she had yet to see Severus, but had no doubt that he would seek her out at some point during the course of the day. He always liked to make sure he saw her every day, especially now with her being a month pregnant.

Lily was sitting on Hermione's lap, playing with a little rabbit that Hermione had transfigured from a toy that the girl had brought with her. She had squealed in excitement at seeing her toy come to life. The older witch smiled down at the child and then looked back across at her best friend. The redhead had that taunting smile curving her mouth, and it made Hermione want to scowl at her.

'Why are you smiling at me like that?' she asked her friend warily.

Ginny grinned even wider. 'Because, Hermione! Your skin is practically glowing already!' she exclaimed happily. 'You are going to be such a great mum. I can just see it now!'

Hermione blushed and looked down at Lily on her lap, playing happily. She knew that Ginny wasn't trying to embarrass her. She was just so worried about everything. She had been worried about Severus, worried about the babies growing slowly within her womb, and worried about what kind of parent she would be. What if she was a bad parent? What if she stuffed up? Hermione Granger had never been too happy about not achieving perfection in anything. Was she going to have to change her viewpoint as far as that was concerned?

Just as she opened her mouth to say something back, the flames of her fireplace turned green and Severus stepped through into the room. He had been away on Ministry business the night before, and so she had stayed in her own chambers. It looked as though he had just gotten back and taken a shower before Flooing to her. She smiled and patted the empty space beside her on the lounge.

'Good morning, Severus,' she said quietly.

'Good morning,' he replied to her before turning to look at Ginny. 'Good morning, Mrs. Potter. I trust you are well?'

'I am very well, thank you,' Ginny replied. 'But please, call me Ginny.'

Severus nodded and offered a small, awkward smile to the red-haired witch. He still had trouble with being open with people other than Hermione. Ginny Potter, however, was not such a bad person in his opinion, and he thought that he might be able to get along with her, and even her husband at some point, very well. They were good to Hermione, and anyone who was good to her had his good opinion well, nearly everyone. He would never quite be able to get over Ronald Weasley.

'Very well, you may call me Severus,' he replied with a nod before looking down at Lily, who was playing on Hermione's lap. 'You're very good with her,' he murmured to Hermione, who blushed even more.

'She's a very easy baby,' Hermione said modestly.

'You know, I was thinking, we will have to decide names and godparents for our children at some point,' he said suddenly and then wondered what had driven him to say that.

'That's a great idea!' Ginny said, looking excited. 'Harry and I have already decided on a name and the godparents. Actually, seeing as I am here, I might as well tell you,' she added more to herself than anyone else. 'We would really like for you two to be the godparents.'

'Severus and me?' Hermione asked in bewilderment.

'Who would be better for the job?' the younger woman said simply. 'You are both the most responsible people we know, so who better to be there to look out for our little boy when he is born?'

Before Hermione could say anything, Severus cut in. 'I can't speak for Hermione, but I would be honored to be the godfather of your child,' he said firmly, offering Ginny a less hesitant smile than the first.

Hermione looked at him in sheer amazement, thinking about how wonderful a man she had come to love. He was so utterly perfect for her. He was pleasant to her friends, whom he had never gotten along with, was fair to the students, was brilliant and kind to her, and made her feel like the most beautiful woman on the face of the planet. Although she was sure that Harry made Ginny feel the same way, and Ron would make Julia feel the same also, it meant that much more to her that it was Severus who made her feel that way.

'I'd love to be your son's godmother, Gin,' Hermione replied, taking Severus' hand and giving it a squeeze.

Just then, Lily decided to speak up and made a shrill squeal as she lifted the rabbit into her arms and hugged it. She then saw Severus and made the slow climb from Hermione's lap to his, all the while holding onto the rabbit. Once seated on his lap, she settled in contentedly and, with a cute little wrinkle of her nose and a yawn, closed her eyes for a nap with her pet.

'That was simply the most adorable thing I have ever seen,' Ginny said softly, eyes wide at the sight of her daughter snuggling into Snape's lap like that for a nap. Usually she would be too energetic or would be cranky when Ginny wanted to put her down for a nap but here she went voluntarily. 'She never goes to sleep like that for Harry or me. She usually kicks up a fuss.'

'I don't know what I did to make her so attached,' Severus huffed with a frown.

Hermione reached up and pressed gentle fingers to his brow, smoothing the frown away and smiling at him. 'Don't be silly, Severus. Nobody asked her to be attached to you. She just really likes you is all. Maybe it's your smell,' she reasoned. 'I happen to like the way you smell too.'

Ginny couldn't help but to giggle at the way that her best friend was teasing the poor, surly man. Not many people could get away with that sort of thing concerning Severus Snape. He was, however, frowning at her in a way that was almost comical. But she just leaned up and kissed him lightly on the lips. Ginny thought it was sweet the way that his frown melted away when she kissed him. It was so obvious to her that he was in love with Hermione.

Then sounded a light tapping at the window, and Hermione looked up to see that it was Harry's snowy owl, Hedwig. She stood up from the lounge and went to the window, letting her fly inside and perch on the arm of Ginny's chair. The owl held her leg out with a note attached to it for Ginny, which she untied as Hermione went to fetch an owl treat for her. She unrolled the parchment, quickly scanned it, and then smiled before ruffling the feathers of Hedwig's head.

'Thank you, Hedwig,' Ginny murmured to the owl.

'What does Harry want?' Hermione asked as she returned and held a treat out in her palm for the owl to nibble on.

'Oh, he just wanted to let me know that he got home from his trip,' Ginny replied with a grin. 'I think I had better get back to see him, or he'll be pouting like a spoiled child by the time I get back.'

'You had better go and see him then,' Hermione said with a laugh.

The two women then looked over to Severus on the lounge, who had been quietly watching the sleeping Lily on his lap. Ginny smiled and shook her head. 'You can leave Lily here for a while, if you like,' he said suddenly, surprising both Hermione and the younger witch.

'Would that be okay with you, Severus?' Ginny asked, just to be sure.

'It's perfectly all right. I am sure Hermione would be thrilled to keep her here for a little longer also,' he replied, looking to Hermione for confirmation.

Hermione nodded and smiled. 'I'd be happy for Lily to stay a while longer. I will bring her back to you later this afternoon if you'd like,' she said.

'Oh, thanks so much you two!' Ginny exclaimed, hugging Hermione and then rushing over to Severus, whom she kissed on the cheek. She looked down at Lily and kissed her forehead lightly. 'Now be a good girl for Aunty Mione and Uncle Severus,' she told her sleeping girl.

Hermione laughed at Severus's look of indignation mixed with shock over what Ginny had both said and done. She shook her head and smiled. 'Are all of Lily's things in the bag?' she asked, indicating the baby bag on the floor by the coffee table.

Ginny nodded. 'Everything you'll need is in there,' she replied, going to the fireplace and tossing in some Floo powder. 'Grimmauld Place!' she called out clearly after stepping into it, and she disappeared.

Hermione sighed and plopped back down beside Severus on the lounge. 'This has been a very interesting morning,' she said wearily.

'You are tired then, my love?' Severus asked, wrapping one of his long arms around her shoulders and pulling her closer to him.

'I am a little bit, but nothing that I can't handle,' she answered with a yawn, curling her legs up underneath her and snuggling into Severus a little more. 'By the way, what are you doing here? I would have thought you had supervising duties this morning?'

'I asked Rolanda to fill in for me,' he replied, dropping a kiss to her forehead. 'To be honest, I'm a little knackered from running around doing work for Arthur.'

'You should tell him to sod off and leave you alone for a while,' Hermione said a little moodily. 'You have a school to run after all, and all of the other professors and myself have been running around and doing that for you while Arthur drags you around the countryside.'

Severus sighed heavily, knowing that it was the pregnancy hormones making her snap at him like that. But it was true; he had been relying rather heavily on his staff to help him run the school while he let Arthur annoy him into doing some jobs for the Ministry. He just couldn't say no. He respected the older man a great deal, and it was just so hard to turn him down when he asked so nicely.

'I'm very sorry about doing that to you, love,' he murmured into Hermione's hair apologetically. 'I will try to stay at Hogwarts a lot more often. After all, with you being pregnant, I don't want to be away from you for too long.'

Hermione smiled and kissed his Adam's apple. 'I love you, Severus,' she murmured against his throat.

He chuckled softly and kissed her lips gently. 'I love you too, so very much,' he replied, hugging her to his side as tightly as he could, with Lily sleeping on his lap without noticing the adults talk. 'She's a good baby,' he added, indicating the little girl curled up on his lap with her pet.

Hermione nodded. She knew that Severus was going to be an amazing father and that she had nothing to worry about. They would work together.

Simple Suggestions

Chapter 15 of 32

Severus has a talk with Dumbledore's portrait, and Hermione comes up with some names.

Madbrilliant is, without a doubt, the awesomest beta ever! And so are my readers and reviewers!

Chapter 15 - Simple Suggestions

In traditional Wizarding families, it was usually seen as unseemly for a child to be born outside of wedlock.

This was a tradition that was very important to the Snape family. And so, Severus had come up with a solution that would hopefully satisfy his family and Hermione. He knew that he would be satisfied if the situation was favoured by all parties. He would love to be married to Hermione, but was unsure if she would be amenable to being his wife. He believed that she loved him, but that did not mean that she wanted a bigger commitment than bearing his children.

He smiled when a sudden thought occurred to him. If she agreed, there would be a Professor Snape teaching Potions at Hogwarts again. That most certainly was an interesting thought to contemplate. But what amused Severus the most was the thought of a Snape being the Head of Gryffindor house.

However, as scared as Severus was about asking Hermione to marry him later that day, he still intended on asking. She, at the present time, was downstairs in the dungeons, teaching class as usual. Afterwards, she would be coming to see him in his office, and then he would either ask or make the suggestion to her. He sucked in a deep breath and released it as a sigh. It was times like these that Severus appreciated having Albus' portrait hanging up in his office.

He spun his chair around to face the painting, only to find the former Headmaster feigning sleep. 'Albus, quit that, will you?' Severus said with a frown. 'I know very well that you aren't actually sleeping, you old coot.'

Albus opened one eye and peeked at Severus, smiling and then opening the other one. 'I suppose there is no fooling you, my boy,' the man in the painting said cheerfully. 'I hear that I should be wishing you happy.'

'Thank you, Albus,' Severus replied with a nod. 'But therein lies the problem.'

'What can I help you with?' Albus offered immediately.

'I'm going to ask Hermione to marry me, but I'm afraid that she will either say no, or she will say yes only because she feels obligated to me because of the children,' he said, a frown crease appearing between his brows.

'Severus, surely by now you have realised that Hermione is both an intelligent and capable woman and witch,' Albus replied patiently to the man who was like a son to him. 'She could easily raise two children on her own. She is not concerned about societal expectations either, and she would not mind having your children out of wedlock,' he continued. 'Surely this means that, if she agrees, it will be because she truly wants to be your wife.'

Severus took in what Albus was saying and sighed heavily. Why did the old man have to be so right all of the time? He knew that Hermione was a singularly amazing woman. She was just so good at everything she did, so raising their children would be like a walk in the park for her. He smiled at that thought.

'I know you're right, Albus,' Severus admitted aloud. 'But there's no need to gloat about that, old man.'

'You ask that lovely young woman to marry you, and live a happy and full life now, my boy,' Albus said simply, sitting back comfortably in the chair of his portrait. 'Now, I am really going to take a nap, so be a good lad and draw the curtain for an old, retiring wizard.'

Severus snorted at Albus' last comment. The man was already dead and yet he was still in no way a retiring wizard. He snapped his fingers and the curtains closed over the painting, leaving the room in complete silence. He was beginning to get a little fidgety from nerves, so he pulled a pile of paperwork towards him and put on his glasses. He hated that his eyesight was not as good as it once was. He picked up his favourite quill, dipped it into the ink well, and began to read and write.

About half an hour later, the door to the office opened, and Hermione slipped inside, closing it softly behind her and smiling at the man she loved. He returned her smile and beckoned her over to him. She went to him willingly and moved around the desk, making him push away from it a little, before plopping down onto his lap and wrapping her arms around his neck.

'Hello, my love,' she said in greeting, kissing him on the lips.

'Hello to you,' he said with a broad smile, kissing her back a little more aggressively. 'How was your class then?'

'Oh, it was average at best. Who would have ever thought that fifth years could be so ridiculously clumsy?' she said with a laugh. 'I had one boy let his potion boil over, but that was the extent of the damage, I think.'

'I know you are not stupid, love, but in your condition, please be a little more careful in the classroom with those dunderheads,' Severus implored, trying to look a little apologetic for asking.

Hermione nodded understandingly. He was just like every man when they were faced with becoming a father: overprotective and worried about every little thing. 'I promise to be careful,' she agreed. 'But I won't stop teaching until a month before the birth, are we agreed?'

Severus sighed, but he nodded in agreement. 'Very well,' he said softly. 'I can see that there won't be any changing your mind.'

Hermione grinned and kissed the end of his nose playfully and then hugged him around the neck and breathed in his wonderful, clean scent. Smelling his scent sparked her arousal a little, and she smiled wickedly, leaning in and nipping his earlobe gently between her teeth. She heard him groan into her neck and bite down, but just as she was about to take it further and engage him in a quickie between classes, he pulled back and pushed her away just enough so that he could look at her properly.

'No, Hermione, we can't just now,' he said a little breathlessly.

She frowned and pouted at him, crossing her arms petulantly. 'Why ever not?' she asked in a huff.

Severus took a deep breath and let it out slowly, reaching out to cup her face between his hands gently, drawing her close to rest his forehead against hers. 'I asked you to come here because I wanted to talk to you about something very important,' he said in a serious tone of voice.

Hermione's eyes widened with worry. 'What is it?' she asked, panic already a little evident in her voice. In her impregnated state, her emotions had been up and down at the drop of a hat.

'No, no, love it's nothing bad,' he soothed, pulling her close to him for a brief hug and then releasing her. 'It's about our future, love.'

'Okay, I'm listening,' Hermione agreed, calming down slowly.

Severus took another deep breath, and quickly reached a hand into his pocket, pulling out the ring he found there. It was a family heirloom, had been passed down from generation to generation, and was always the engagement ring for the next woman to marry into the Snape line. It was old, rich gold, finely woven in a Celtic pattern and had a dark, almost black, emerald set in the middle of the knot. He had always liked the ring, and he felt that it would be perfect on Hermione's hand.

'What do you think of this ring?' he asked, holding it out on his palm for her to get a good look at it.

Hermione gasped softly, covering her mouth with her hand. 'It's very beautiful,' she mumbled quietly in reply.

Severus nodded and took her left hand in his, kissing her knuckles lightly. 'Hermione, I'm not sure if I'm ever going to work up the courage to do this again,' he said to begin with. 'But it doesn't mean that the offer is worth less. You don't have to decide right now, but I would be much honored, and the happiest man alive, if you would consent to being my wife.'

He gazed into her eyes nervously then, feeling his stomach trying to make the trip up his throat. She was silent, a tear leaking from her right eye and making the trek down her cheek, to be followed soon by others on both sides. A smile curved her lips, and she threw herself at him and hugged him hard, kissing all over his face repeatedly, surprising him completely. When she pulled back, she leaned back in and kissed him full on the lips, tangling her tongue with his. By this point, Severus had rejoined reality and was kissing her back with equal fervor.

'Yes!' she said in between kisses. 'Yes, I'll marry you!'

Once they couldn't maintain the kiss any longer from lack of oxygen, they sat back, and Hermione allowed Severus to slide the ring onto the correct finger of her left hand. It shrunk automatically to fit her finger just right, and they both admired it, sparkling and twinkling up at them. It looked very nice on her, the darkness of the stone a sharp contrast with her milky skin.

'Beautiful,' he murmured, before lifting her hand to his mouth and kissing the tips of her fingers, and her knuckle nearest the ring.

Severus let that memory play through his mind for the rest of the afternoon after Hermione returned to the dungeons to teach her final class for the day. He was acting like a besotted fool, he knew, but he was the happiest besotted fool in the school that day, he was sure. In any case, he told himself that it was okay to be acting so foolish. After all, Hermione, his one true love, had just agreed to marry him.

When the school day was officially at a close, he tidied up his office, summoned a few school owls to deliver the paperwork and mail he had to send off, and then headed into his chambers. Hanging his robes on the coat hooks near the doorway, he began to strip off his frock coat beneath it and dropped it on a chair as he made his way into his bedroom, intent on taking a shower. What he found there was not what he had expected at all. Hermione was sprawled on his bed, lying on her stomach, her chest rising and falling evenly with her breathing.

Severus smiled, kicking his shoes off, climbing onto the bed, holding himself off her with his arms, and leaning his mouth close to her ear. 'Who's this sleeping in my bed?' he asked teasingly.

Hermione stirred and rolled over onto her back, facing him and grinning. 'Sev, I was just thinking...' she began slowly. 'And I have come up with some baby names that I think you will like,' she added.

He nodded a little warily. 'What were you thinking of?' he asked.

'Well... I was thinking maybe Alexander Severus for our little boy, and Luciana Iris for our girl,' she replied hesitantly, unsure if he would approve.

Severus paused for a moment in thought, rolling the names around in his head. 'They are actually quite acceptable,' he answered. 'At least you're not trying to name our son Severus directly.'

Hermione grinned, pleased that he approved of the name choices. 'I thought about naming him after you at first, but then I realised that you wouldn't really like it, so I will settle for his middle name,' she said cheerfully, wrapping her arms around his neck and pulling him close for a kiss. 'And what about the girl name?'

'Perfect I think,' he replied with a smile. 'But we'll wait until they are born before we make any final decisions about names, okay?'

Hermione nodded in agreement without saying another word; mostly because she was more interested in divesting him of his clothing than speaking at that moment.

Gretna Green

Chapter 16 of 32

Severus talks to Hermione and makes a very impulsive decision.

A big hug of thanks must go to Madbrilliant and Alliean for all of their hard work beta-ing this chapter. Also another hug of thanks must go to RobisonRocket for all of her help too. And a hug of thanks to all of those who continue to read and review. You guys rock!

.....

Chapter 16 -- Gretna Green

Mid-morning light shone through the windows and scattered across the room, the pattern created by the strange shapes and textures of the glass.

In the room, Severus sat on his lounge with Hermione seated between his legs, leaning back against his chest comfortably. She was wearing a white cotton t-shirt and loose pants with bed socks on her feet. The way that the shirt was clinging to her allowed for Severus to see the subtle changes her body was going through from the pregnancy. Her breasts, while not huge, were slightly fuller and there were the beginnings of a gentle curve to her usually flat stomach.

Severus was very pleased to see it and thought she looked lush and beautiful. He stared at her stomach, placing his hand flat to it, and traced small circles with his long fingers over the fabric of the shirt. She was so warm and glowing; he could barely keep his hands off of her.

'You are the most beautiful pregnant woman I have ever had the good fortune to see,' he murmured low into her ear, lifting up her left hand and bringing it to his mouth to kiss her palm.

She laughed softly, snuggling further back against him.

'Charmer,' she accused teasingly.

'But you love it,' he insisted.

She nodded and turned to look over her shoulder just a little to see him. 'I do love it,' she agreed, kissing his chin before turning back to rest her head against his shoulder. 'I love you too.'

Severus smiled, kissing the top of her head. 'And I love you,' he replied softly.

They lapsed into silence which then gave them both time to think. They had only been engaged for about two weeks, and thus far, the only other people who knew about it were Harry and Ginny Potter. Hermione had been feeling a little frustrated and impatient in the last few days, wondering if Severus would want to talk about a possible day for their wedding. It wasn't as though she was waiting for him to do all of the work, but she just didn't want to push him. She wanted him to set the pace for their relationship, seeing as he was the one who had the least experience.

Hermione was so lost in her thoughts when Severus next addressed her, she nearly jumped from the lounge in shock.

'Hermione?' he asked.

'Yes?' she replied, turning once again to look at him.

'When do you want to get married?' he asked as though he had read her mind.

She mentally snorted as that thought crossed her mind. Of course, Severus was perfectly capable of reading her mind. He was one of the best Legilimens in the wizarding world. She wouldn't be surprised if he had managed to get in and out of her mind without alerting her to his presence. She quickly brought up her Occlumency walls and pushed him all the way back out of her mind. He chuckled and wrapped both arms around her to hug her tightly. The clever witch had found him out.

'No, really, Hermione,' he said with a sigh. 'When would you like for us to be married? I don't really mind at all when.'

Hermione smiled at him, despite his intrusion. 'Love, if I could marry you today, I would do it in a heartbeat,' she replied, sliding her hands along his thighs.

He pulled his arms away and then turned her to face him properly. 'Do you really mean that? Would you marry me today?' he asked seriously.

'Of course I would marry you today,' she replied, wrapping her arms around his neck and pulling him to her for a kiss. 'I love you. I would be happy to marry you whenever you wanted to.'

Severus sat and contemplated what she was saying to him for a moment and nodded, looking at her and smiling. 'All right, let's do it,' he said firmly, detangling them from the couch and standing her on her feet before him before standing up himself. 'Let's get married today.'

Hermione's mouth fell open in shock. 'W-what do you mean? Are you being serious?' she asked. 'You really want to marry me today?'

He nodded emphatically and held one of her hands between both of his hands. 'I love you, and I would do anything for you,' he answered honestly. 'I want to be married to you as soon as I can. When better than today? We have nothing planned it's a Sunday. Filius could easily cover for us here for a couple of hours. It's not even as though we are doing anything here today anyway. Let's get married.'

'Where will we go then? Can you do that sort of thing legally?' she asked, a little unsure about wizarding marriage customs. Seeing as they had only just gotten engaged, she hadn't really had a lot of time to do any research on the subject and so was totally unprepared.

'Of course we can. We won't even need a witness, but for the sake of harmony with your friends, I suggest we ask the Potters to come along,' he said, taking her hand and drawing her to the fireplace with him. 'Floo to your rooms and bathe and dress in whatever you would like. I will Floo the Potters, and I will Apparate us there when you return.'

Hermione was still stunned as he nudged her towards the fireplace. She turned to look at him and saw that his eyes were alive with excitement and joy. She had no idea that she could cause such a reaction in any person, but was proven wrong by the way he was looking at her. Beaming at him brightly, she walked back to him, wrapped her arms around his neck, and gave him a kiss that he would be unlikely to forget during their bonding ceremony. When they parted, he was gasping for breath, and she winked before disappearing into the green flames of his fireplace.

The fire turned back to red and he tossed some more powder in, turning the flames green again, and sticking his head in to the flames. 'Potter Residence, Grimmauld Place,' he said clearly, and his face appeared in the fireplace of the room the Potters were in. 'I have a favour to ask of you,' he said immediately.

'Hello to you too,' Harry said in reply. 'What can we do for the Headmaster of Hogwarts this fine Sunday morning?'

'I need you and Ginevra to meet Hermione and I in Gretna Green,' he answered hastily, trying to sound calm.

Ginny sat up, suddenly alert. She understood exactly what he meant when he asked that, even if her husband was still pondering it over in his head. 'Are you, and are you?' she asked cryptically.

'Yes, we most certainly are, Ginevra,' he answered politely. 'I wanted Hermione to have people there for her. I'll have to ask Minerva too, I suppose.'

'Yes, you go ask her then. I'll get Harry, Lily, and myself ready and we'll meet you both there,' Ginny said firmly, and Severus withdrew from their fireplace.

He then Flooed Minerva and found himself in the fireplace of the library at Minerva's holiday cottage in Denver. 'Minerva, would you mind doing something for me?' he asked in greeting, gaining her attention over the book she was searching for on the shelves.

'Of course, Severus,' she said immediately. 'What can I do for you?'

'Hermione and I are getting married in Gretna Green today. As soon as we are ready, we and the Potters will be going there,' he explained. 'I would like for you to be there for me. You are the closest thing I have to family.'

Minerva blinked in surprise. 'You're getting married to Hermione?' she said in a shocked voice. 'Since when? When on earth did all of this happen without my knowledge?'

'Yes, yes, I apologize for keeping you out of the loop until now, but I would really appreciate it if you would stand witness at our binding,' he said a little impatiently. 'I am in love with her, she wants to get married today, and she is carrying our children.'

'She's pregnant too?' Minerva exclaimed. 'Severus, I thought you were more responsible than that.'

'I know, I know. But we both want the children, so please just say yes and get dressed in something nice so I can go back and get myself cleaned up,' he said curtly, resting on his last nerve with the woman. She was honestly such a Gryffindor sometimes.

'Alright, now go and get ready for your nuptials,' Minerva said briskly, waving him away dismissively.

Severus was grumbling as he removed himself from the fireplace. He went straight to the bathroom and undressed, tossing his clothes into the laundry hamper and heading into the shower. He washed his hair and body, making sure that it would be clean and presentable for Hermione's sake. He took a little extra time shaving the stubble from his face, wanting to be clean-shaven and smooth for the ceremony. Once he was pleased with the results in the bathroom, he walked to his bedroom and opened the closet, digging into the back where a cover held his finest dress suit. He pulled out the trousers and jacket, casting a charm on them to remove the starchy smell, and lay them out on his bed while searching for an appropriate shirt.

He found a dark green silk shirt and donned that quickly, pulling on his trousers and tucking the shirt in neatly when he was done buttoning them up. He left the top two buttons undone on the shirt and donned the jacket over it. He was pleased by the way it fit and realised that it was really as good as it was going to get. Charming his hair dry, he sat down on the bed and pulled on some socks and his shiny black dancing shoes that went appropriately with his black attire.

'Severus?' Hermione called from the sitting room.

He exited the bedroom and nearly fell backwards at what he saw. Hermione was dressed in a pretty, spaghetti strap, cream dress that fell to her knees. It was embroidered on one side with some slightly darker cream cotton in the pattern of roses and vines. She wore sheer stockings and three-inch pumps that matched the dress. Over the top she wore a white winter coat to ward off the cold and had a black scarf in her hand to wrap around her neck when they were outside. Her hair was simply pinned back from her face neatly, her curls falling beautifully down her back.

'You look ravishing,' he said, going to her and kissing her hand. 'We must get going now, however, if we are to meet the Potters and Minerva on time.'

Hermione nodded, and Severus picked up a small box on the coffee table and then grabbed his long, black winter cloak as they walked out. They walked briskly through the halls and upon reaching outside, hurried along the snow-covered path to the front gates.

He stopped them once they were beyond the gates and put his hands on her shoulders, looking down at her. 'Are you sure about all of this?' he asked seriously, wanting to be certain one last time.

'Let's go now, love,' she insisted, wrapping her arms around his waist.

He smiled and Apparated them both to Greta Green, which was conveniently still green despite the coolness of the weather. He held her hand tightly in his and walked towards a small group of people that he knew. Ginny, Minerva, and Harry were standing to the side of a row of buildings, Lily resting comfortably in the oldest woman's arms. They were clearly dressed in their Muggle best and smiled at the two of them as they approached them.

'Hermione, you are beautiful,' Ginny gushed, hugging her best friend.

'You really are, Hermione,' Harry agreed with a grin, hugging her also. 'So, this is the big day, huh?'

Hermione nodded, and Minerva chuckled and turned to Severus.

'My, don't you clean up well,' she commented. 'I never thought I would see you wearing Muggles clothes again after that incident in '92.'

Severus scowled. 'Let's go,' he said simply, taking Hermione's hand again and leading the way to the anvil. He planned a traditional outdoor ceremony.

They arrived shortly after and were greeted by an elderly gentleman with a strong Scottish brogue that only Minerva could fully understand when he was speaking quickly. Severus stood on one side of the anvil and Hermione on the other, and they clasped both hands over it, with their friends standing behind either of them, and the officiating wizard at one of the points.

'Alright, well ye both picked fine day to be wed,' he started. 'And it looks as though ye are both in love with each other, so this mightn't take too long. Just repeat after me; On this day of all days...'

'On this day of all days...' they said in unison.

'I hereby promise my faithfulness, loyalty, love and soul to my beloved,' he said, and they both repeated firmly. 'I might be unkind, but it is not my intention to harm my love,' he continued and they repeated.

'Now, ye may make ye own vows,' he concluded.

Severus smiled. 'I, Severus Sebastian Snape, hereby take you, Hermione Jane Granger, to be my wife for all of my days on this earth, and for all of our life after we leave the world. I promise you my faithfulness, loyalty, love, warmth, and anything else that I can give to you,' he said with conviction. 'Will you accept these things that I offer to you?'

Hermione felt tears slide down her face and smiled. 'I accept what you offer me freely,' she replied. 'And will you, Severus Sebastian Snape, accept that I, Hermione Jane Granger, will be faithful, honest, loyal, loving, and true to you, for the rest of my life on earth, and all of our lives after we have passed?'

'I accept what you freely offer,' he said, giving her hands a squeeze.

'You may now exchange rings,' the officiating wizard said.

Severus released Hermione's hand and pulled out the box from his pocket, taking from it the simple gold band that he had made for her from it. It had the same Celtic pattern as the engagement ring, except without a jewel as traditional weddings bands went. He slid it on her finger to join the other ring before she pulled out an exact copy of that wedding band and placed it on his ring finger. He was stunned but before he could ask, the officiating wizard announced them officially bound.

Severus grinned and jumped over the anvil to her, kissing her without restraint despite their audience.

Startling Revelations

Chapter 17 of 32

Hermione and Severus break their news to the rest of the staff.

A big thanks to Madbrilliant and Alliean for the beta of this chapter!

.....

Chapter 17 - Startling Revelations

The Hogwarts staff all sat around the long table in the staffroom, looking around at each other in bewilderment, wondering what was going on.

It was Thursday morning, and a staff meeting had been scheduled by the Deputy Headmistress to be held before breakfast in the Great Hall that day. And so they all sat in waiting. Hermione and Severus had yet to arrive, both of them still in his office, squabbling over how they were going to break their news. Hermione wanted to be straightforward and just tell them while Severus still wanted to go about it subtly, giving them only enough to figure it out on their own. She thought he was being a drama queen and a giant prat about it.

.....
'Schedule a staff meeting for tomorrow morning, would you please, love?' Severus requested of Hermione as he went through the paperwork on his desk.

'Hmmm, what for?' she asked from her seat at his desk just across from him.

'Well, it has been a few days since we were married, so we should think about informing the people that need to know, should we not?' he answered, looking up at her then, his glasses choosing at that very moment to slip down his nose a bit. 'Besides, if we are to go on a honeymoon of any sort during the week of break at Easter, we will need to ask if Filius would fill in for us then.'

Hermione smiled at that and nodded. 'I'll Floo and let everyone know a little later,' she conceded. 'I just have the rest of these essays to mark, and then I will be finished for the day.'

'What year level?' he asked.

'Oh, just some fifth-year essays,' she answered. 'Some of them are actually not too bad, considering.'

Severus snorted as if the thought of a student being competent in his craft were ridiculous. 'Give the pile to me,' he said, holding his hand out for them. 'You go and Floo everyone, and let them know. Then go and take a nap. You look like you could use some sleep, pet.'

Hermione nodded without resistance. 'Thank you,' she said, standing and walking around the desk to him, giving him a long kiss. 'Love you.'

He smiled, pushing his glasses back into place on the bridge of his nose. 'Love you too,' he murmured.

.....
When the Floo lit up in the fireplace of the staffroom, everyone was relieved that they had finally decided to make an appearance and both were smiling, which indicated that it was not bad news. Hermione sat down at her usual seat before Severus sat down at the head of the table so that he could see everyone there.

'I suppose you're all wondering why I had to ask you here this morning?' he asked, and there was a soft murmur of assent around the table. He swallowed a little thickly and cleared his throat. 'I had you all come here because I wanted to alert you all to some... changes in the staff.'

'Whatever do you mean, Severus?' demanded Hooch, impatient as ever.

'There have been some changes concerning Hermione here,' he answered, looking to his wife in question and receiving a nod from her.

'You aren't leaving, are you, dear?' piped Pomona Sprout after a moment of silence with a worried expression on her face.

'No, no, it's nothing like that,' Hermione hurried to reassure everyone.

'What kind of changes are they then?' Filius asked, finally making an input into the conversation. Severus had been wondering why the man was so silent.

'Well, to begin with, I'm not Hermione Granger anymore,' she explained, smiling at her husband and reaching over to take his hand that rested on the table. 'I got married on Sunday, actually.'

There were several loud gasps in the room, and Hermione saw more than one person cover their mouth in shock. Thankfully, though, nobody had fainted, so it seemed that the prospect of her being married to Severus wouldn't be too hard for them to accept. Oddly enough, Filius and Poppy Pomfrey were the only two in the room who did not react in a shocked manner and simply sat there with self-satisfied smiles on their faces. Severus eyed them both curiously, sensing a bit of Albus behind this scheme.

'I suppose by now you realize that when I said I was married, I meant that Severus and I married each other,' Hermione continued, ignoring the shocked look that was still on Sybill Trelawney's face. Her eyes were larger than usual, which was generally an unimaginable concept.

'Why did you only choose to inform us of this now?' Rolanda asked briskly, returning to her state of level-headedness.

'It wasn't as though we planned to get married so soon,' Severus answered. 'It just happened to be what Hermione and I wanted. It's not as though we ran off without telling anyone. The Potters and Minerva were at the ceremony.'

'I must say, this is rather a lot more of a surprise than I had actually expected,' Aurora Sinistra said airily. 'Although, the stars are aligned in a particularly romantic pattern for this time of year, what with Valentine's approaching.'

Severus inwardly snorted at that. Romantic stars indeed. He didn't need bloody stars to figure out that their impulsive marriage had been a wholly romantic notion on both of their parts. He listened distantly as questions were fired at them, with Hermione obliging every one with answers. People certainly were nosey beings, weren't they? He sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose, preparing to interrupt the question and answer session in favor of directing his staff to the Great Hall.

'Alright, alright, everyone get out and go to the Great Hall,' he said curtly. 'You've asked quite enough questions already, and you're getting on my last nerve. Hermione and I are married, we love each other, now move on.'

Everyone stood up, grumbling at Severus, and began to move towards the door to exit. Just before he left, Filius turned back to ask one more question. 'By the way, you said that your marriage was the first surprise,' he started. 'What was the second surprise you had for us? I was never able to figure that out.'

'I'm pregnant with twins,' Hermione said, blushing.

Filius smiled, reaching up to pat her hand. 'Congratulations, my dear. You will make a wonderful mother,' he said kindly. 'And to you as well, Severus.'

'Thank you, Filius,' Severus replied politely, and the three of them exited the staffroom and caught up with the others as they entered the hall through the staff door.

Breakfast was quite the usual affair, save for the fact that there was a lot more talk amongst the staff than was usual. Severus didn't need to ask to know what they were talking about. No doubt Poppy had found out about the pregnancy from her Healer friend and was spreading it around. And with telling Filius, he was sure that the small man would have a few words to say to Pomona about it, which in turn, would spread it about the entire table and then the school by the end of the day.

'You're going to announce it to the students then?' Hermione asked from beside him. 'I want to be Professor Snape.'

He smiled warmly at hearing her say that. She always knew what to say to soothe his nerves, just when he was getting cold feet about things. 'I will announce it at the end of breakfast, my love,' he whispered so that only she could hear. 'You will be Professor Snape to those students before the end of this day, I promise.'

The chatter during breakfast was usual until the point where most of them became too hungry to talk and eat at the same time, at which point, they would go silent. During this time, Severus contemplated addressing them, but then he realised that it probably wasn't in his best interests to shock his students into choking on their food. He had no need for any more Ministry business at Hogwarts than there already was. And so, when the time for breakfast came to a close, he stood from his seat, and the entire hall lapsed into total silence. Everyone knew better than to talk when the Headmaster stood up to say something.

'Students, this morning, your professors were alerted to some developments that have occurred at the school that are most important indeed,' he addressed briskly. 'It involves Professor Granger and her changed status within the school,' he continued. 'I will spare you many unnecessary details, however, and simply tell you that from now on, Professor Granger will be addressed as Professor Snape. I am sure you are all competent enough to come to a conclusion for yourselves.'

The silence continued for a moment as Severus resumed his seat at the table, looking a little smug at so successfully confusing them into silence. Hermione rolled her eyes. His penchant for the dramatic would be satisfied for the time being, however, which simply meant that she would not have to be bothered with it for another good while. She saw the comprehension dawning in their eyes, and soon the hall was filled with talking, whispering, and many sets of eyes flying up to the Headmaster and the Deputy Headmistress.

'Well, now that everyone knows, Molly is bound to find out and come to find me and attack me for not telling her,' Hermione said with a sigh.

'Love, you knew that keeping her out of the loop from the beginning was going to result in that,' Severus drawled as he once more stood from his chair, this time to leave the hall. He held a hand out for her also.

Hermione accepted his hand and stood, allowing him to lead her from the hall amongst the whispers and gossiping. People were going to be late for classes if they continued to speculate that way, so Severus went back into the hall and stood with his arms crossed over his chest with a scowl on his face.

'If any of you are late for your classes, you will not be allowed to go to Hogsmeade this coming weekend,' he threatened snappishly. 'Stop gossiping and clear out for your classes.'

Hermione giggled as he returned to her, having heard everything that he had said. He was still her snarky and demanding Potions professor. But she was more than happy to know the other side to him. He was perfect for her in every way, after all. They walked together down to the dungeons, where some of the first year students in her first class of the day were already waiting for her. She smiled at them all, waving them to go into the room, while dragging Severus into her office, laughing softly. He was still trying to intimidate them even then. She didn't mind. She thought it was quite endearing actually. But she was expecting a whole lot of questions in class that day.

'Behave, love. You needn't scowl at them to remind them that you're not soft just because you married me,' Hermione teased.

Severus huffed and crossed his arms, but Hermione wasn't having any of pouty Severus Snape that day.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and lifted her face up. 'Now, how about a kiss, and I'll see you later?' she asked.

He relented and kissed her, watching her go into the classroom for her first class as Professor Hermione Snape.

Breaking News

Chapter 18 of 32

Hermione and Severus break the news of their marriage to her friends.

Big hugs of thanks must go to Madbrilliant and Alliean for the beta of this chapter!

Chapter 18 - Breaking News

A gasp rung through the room, and then for a brief moment, the entire room was eerily silent, until the sound of heavy breathing once more filled the air.

Hermione had sat up in bed suddenly, first gasping, then unable to breathe, and finally, breathing once more except more roughly than she had been earlier when her sleep was peaceful. Every now and then she would be taunted by bad dreams of all the times when she was scared or hurt or alone. She hadn't really had any dreams like that since being with Severus, but they were coming back to her more and more in the past week or so. She glanced over at the clock on the nightstand beside Severus and her bed, which read as a quarter past three. It was early.

She slid out of the bed quickly and padded to the bathroom, using the loo and then standing at the sink, spending a lot longer than usual washing her hands. She washed her sweaty face, and toweled it off before walking back to the bedroom. Severus had shifted over to lie facing the bathroom door, and it was only then that she realised he had his eyes open, although still sleepy. Slipping back between then sheets, she snuggled back against him.

'You had another bad dream, didn't you?' he asked softly.

She nodded against his chest and sighed. 'No putting anything past you, is there?' she replied with a hint of teasing in her voice.

'Love, could it be that you are sleeping poorly because you are nervous about the revelation of our marriage and pregnancy to your friends later today?' he asked carefully, knowing how temperamental she could be with the hormones and all. 'Because I don't think you really need to worry all too much about that.'

'I'm a little worried about how the Weasleys are going to take it,' Hermione answered honestly. 'It's mostly Molly and Ron that I am worried about though.'

'Molly I think I can understand,' Severus replied, kissing the top of her head. 'She was like a mother to you, and loves you like her own daughter. However, I do not understand how this should affect their youngest son.'

'Ron has always been a little sore about my breaking things off with him after the war,' she replied softly.

'His jealousy is irrational. He has moved on and married already, so I do not see how he should have any claim over my wife,' Severus said, a hint of disdain in his voice. He really didn't like Ronald Weasley at all.

'I know, but you know he still has a lot of growing up to do,' Hermione reasoned, looping her arms around Severus' neck and pulling him down for a kiss.

When she pulled away, he was smiling at her slightly before he wrapped his arms around her waist and closed his eyes again. 'Go back to sleep now, love,' he murmured softly. 'We have a big day ahead of us with the Weasleys and the Order, and you'll need all of the energy you can store.'

Hermione nodded, yawned, and stretched a little before settling back into Severus and closing her eyes. She fell asleep almost instantly, suddenly tired from the stress of the dream and the following short conversation with her husband. Later, when she woke up, she was alone in the bed, and the curtains were opened, which meant that Severus was already up and dressed. He tried to stay in with her most mornings, except for those on which he had half duty himself. Even as Headmaster, he liked to delegate himself some menial tasks to take some of the stress off the other professors. Besides, Hermione knew how much he still liked to torment students.

She stretched fully before climbing out of bed and heading to the bathroom for a quick shower. When she came out, she dressed in charcoal grey trousers, a white blouse and a navy coloured sweater before slipping her black teaching robes over the top. She exited her and Severus' shared chambers into his office and then walked down the revolving staircase into the hall. It was just about time for breakfast, which meant that the majority of the student populace were already roaming the halls and heading towards the Great Hall to eat.

Hermione figured she'd just meet her husband there instead of going in search for him and joined the sea of people moving in that direction. The students were all still looking at her as though she had gone completely mad, or as if she was the coolest and bravest woman alive. It had only been two days since the announcement of their marriage, however, so she understood. Being a Saturday, the students were all in free dress and were chatting loudly and walking leisurely.

'Hello, Professor!' exclaimed a cheerful voice from near her, and she then saw the little Gryffindor girl Megan Cabot approach her.

'Hello, Megan,' she replied with a genuinely happy smile.

'Are you well this morning, Professor?' she asked brightly. 'And how is the other Professor Snape too?' she added, not seeming at all phased by the fact that her Head of House had married a Slytherin Headmaster.

'The Headmaster is very well, as am I,' Hermione answered kindly. 'Thank you very much for asking. And how have you been so far this term?'

'I have been super!' the girl said excitedly. 'I passed everything so far! I hear that there is going to be a big party around Valentine's Day too! Is that true?'

Hermione laughed softly and nodded as they walked into the Great Hall. 'Indeed, the other professors are planning for there to be a big feast and to have a slightly extended curfew so that there is a little dance held afterwards,' she said with a slight smile. 'It won't be anywhere near as big as the Yule Ball, and we won't be inviting anyone from the Ministry this time.'

'That sound like fun,' Megan said. 'Well, see you later, Professor Snape!'

And with that parting goodbye, she rushed off to join her fellow first years at the Gryffindor table. The young girl that she had gotten to know a little better over the Christmas holiday surprised Hermione once more. She had no idea how anyone who had lost all of their family could be so cheerful and carefree. Shaking her head, she went to the staff table and took her seat beside her husband.

'Have a nice sleep in?' he asked with a smirk.

'Yes, it was very nice,' she replied with a grin as she helped herself to a rather generous serving of fruit and toast.

'We'll leave straight after breakfast,' he murmured quietly. 'Filius and Poppy have agreed to keep an eye on things here for a few hours.'

Hermione nodded and dug straight into her food with enthusiasm that did not go unnoticed by the staff members. Once they were both finished, they stood from the table and nodded to Filius, who smiled and gestured for them to move along, and they left the hall arm in arm. Severus held her hand as they walked back up to his office, and he tossed some Floo Powder in. They Flooed to Grimmauld Place and were thankfully only greeted by Ginny Potter.

'Everyone is down in the kitchen waiting,' Ginny said in hushed tones. 'They were all really annoying and questioning everything Mum was the worst.'

'I suppose we were expecting something like this,' Hermione replied with a sigh. 'I haven't been able to sleep well for days.'

'I think everyone will be okay with it, except... well, he would be the same about anyone else, but I think Severus is going to be his least favourite choice...'

'Ronald Weasley was already partially aware that I have feelings for Hermione, so therefore he should not have a problem,' Severus said firmly.

'Ron doesn't work that way,' Ginny explained. 'It takes a lot of time for things to sink in with him.'

Severus only nodded, and the three of them left the sitting room and moved into the hall before opening the kitchen door. They could hear conversations floating up the staircase as they walked down towards where the group was gathered. As soon as they reached the bottom and Ginny cleared her throat loudly, all conversation screeched to a halt, and the room was deathly silent. Hermione could feel her stomach doing back flips, and her palms became a little clammy in her nervousness.

'Hello, all, I am really glad you could come here today,' she started off, stammering a little as she did.

'Would you get to the point of this meeting, girl?' demanded Mad-Eye Moody rudely, making Severus take a step forward menacingly, but he was instantly stopped by Hermione with a hand on his forearm.

'I'm sorry if this is inconveniencing you in any way,' she said a little more steadily, glad to be able to touch Severus, even if it was to stop him from attacking someone. 'I just figured that asking everyone here would avoid upsetting people because I had forgotten to tell them,' she continued. 'I wanted everyone to know that I got married last Sunday... and I'm guessing that I won't need to tell you who I married.'

The room was silent once more, and the air was thick with contention. The first person to do anything was Tonks, who stood up and went straight to Hermione, giving her a hug and standing beside her in a fierce show of support.

'Congratulations, both of you,' she whispered.

Molly, who had looked extremely shocked to begin with, was now openly glaring at Severus, who was standing with a ramrod straight back and not favoring her with any sort of look. Hermione had not expected everyone to be so silent. Moody stood up from his seat and began walking towards the door.

'Good on you,' he said in a friendly, yet gruff way, before leaving.

Arthur was smiling at the pair of them while simultaneously looking apologetic for the way his wife was looking at them. Ron, who was standing up the back of the room with his wife Julia, was frowning in distaste, his arms folded across his chest. Hermione had expected no less from him. He still felt slighted by her, and marrying Severus was the worst person she could have replaced him with. While Hermione did not feel she had replaced him at all, she knew Ron's mind.

Molly then stood and walked briskly towards the stairs out of the kitchen, stopping only briefly before Severus. 'She is young enough to be your daughter,' she said coldly. 'She could have been...'

'What Molly? Married to your son? How unlikely,' Severus sneered. 'Might I remind you that you are doing a grave injustice to your daughter-in-law, Julia, by even thinking such?'

The Weasley matron huffed and then stormed off on her short legs, her shoes clicking angrily against the floor as she left. Arthur followed soon after, apologizing quickly

as he did, and Ron soon dragged a rather sad Julia out after them. Oddly enough, the twins were of no such mind as Molly or Ron, and congratulated them heartily. Everyone else seemed to be rather thrilled about the prospect. And when the pregnancy was brought to life, all of the females crowded around asking questions.

The day had had a sad result, but all in all, if they truly loved Hermione, Molly and Ron would certainly change their minds.

Ember's and Envelopes

Chapter 19 of 32

Life at Hogwarts continues, but the extent of Molly Weasley's anger has yet to be revealed.

Thank you to Madbrilliant and Alliean for the beta of this chapter.

.....

Chapter 19 - Embers and Envelopes

Save for the sound of bubbling cauldrons and the chopping sounds that one would associate with cutting up ingredients, the classroom was dead silent.

Hermione was using the clear end of the desk in the first row of student tables as a workbench for her own Potion brewing while simultaneously watching over her first-years work. This was her Gryffindor and Slytherin class, who, despite their house rivalry, shared the same classroom seamlessly. She supposed it was mostly because, after the war, nobody really cared too much about house affiliations, or they simply did not have enough energy or drive to keep the conflict alive.

Pleased at the quiet, she made the decision to let them out early for the day. Being the last class of the day, naturally the students would be eager to get out and back to their common rooms for a rest and to clean up before dinner. Besides, they had been so good the entire lesson.

'You may all finish up the step that you are on in your potions before you cast that stasis over it like I taught you to last week,' she commanded firmly from her position at the front of the class. 'Once you have cleaned up your benches, you are free to go for the day; now hop to it.'

A wave of cheer seemed to sweep through the classroom at the announcement, and suddenly the students were very energetic and hurrying around to pack up and leave. It was not that they didn't like Professor Snape nee Granger, but they loved being let out early. Five minutes later, the cauldrons were all charmed and set aside neatly on the shelves in the classroom that were specifically for that purpose. Most of the students, she noticed, had already fled.

'Hello Professor!' exclaimed Megan Cabot as she skipped up to the front desk. 'What is that you are making?'

Hermione looked up and smiled at her, continuing to stir the potion with one hand while tossing in ingredients with the other. 'I'm making a Vitamin potion for myself and for the hospital wing,' she explained.

'Is that because you are going to have a baby, Professor?' she asked.

Hermione almost laughed at the familiar innocent curiosity that she recognized as a characteristic of hers when she had been a first year. 'Yes, but not just one baby,' she answered with a soft chuckle. 'I will be having a girl and a boy.'

'I wish my parents had given me a brother or sister before they were taken away,' she said wistfully, seemingly undisturbed about talking of her parents.

When Hermione heard her say that, she immediately felt sad and wanted to grab the dear girl and hug her breathless. They remained silent, however, as Hermione completed the rest of the potion, not even speaking as Megan assisted Hermione in bottling the potion in skinny flasks. She even helped Hermione with packing them into boxes and cleaning the knives and brewing implements.

'Would you like some help getting these up to Madam Pomfrey, Professor?' she offered generously.

There were three boxes, and Hermione didn't see any harm in letting her carry one of them, so she agreed. 'You take one, and I will take care of the other two,' she directed, going into teacher mode.

Once they had dropped off two of the boxes at the hospital wing, Megan left, skipping up the stairs and off to her common room to clean up before dinner. Hermione walked the remainder of the way to see Severus in his office, thinking things over in her head. When she arrived, he was seated at his desk with his glasses on, a furrow forming deep between his brows in concentration.

She grinned, placed her box on a clear spot of his desk, and walked around to him, plopping herself down on his lap gracefully. He had been concentrating so hard that he had not noticed her, and so her landing on his legs had startled him. Wrapping her arms around his neck, she kissed the end of his nose adoringly.

'You look so sexy with those glasses on,' she murmured provocatively, running her fingers through his silky hair lightly.

He smiled at that. 'Love, you could be wearing nothing at all and look sexy as all hell,' he replied, suddenly looking smug. 'And all of that is mine.'

She threw her head back and laughed long before sitting back up with tears of mirth in her eyes. He loved her laugh. It was like a faerie bell. He wrapped his arms around her hips and pulled her to rest close against his chest. She smelled of spring and vanilla like an exotic and enticing dessert.

'How was teaching today, love?' he asked, nuzzling her neck.

'It was actually quite nice,' she said, moaning softly when he suckled a sensitive spot behind her ear. 'The students were very good while you were away. Speaking of which how was Arthur at the Ministry today?'

'He's just fine,' Severus said seriously, pulling back to look her in the eyes. She seemed to be stressing over it a little now that it had been brought up. 'Molly is making it very hard for him at home because he is working with me.'

'I should write him a note to apologise,' she said softly.

'Hermione, look at me,' Severus said, turning her to face him. 'You are not to blame for any of this. Molly has narrow opinions, and they are hers and hers alone. She will

come around and then everything will be resolved. Someday soon, she will realize how awful she had been to Julia and all will be well. You'll see.'

Just as Severus said this, however, there was a tapping at the window, and Hermione saw a vaguely familiar barn owl flapping around outside. Realizing that it was carrying a letter, she quickly got up from Severus' lap and went to let it in. It flew inside and dropped the letter on the desk, before swooping back out of the office, with Hermione closing the window to keep out the cold. When she turned back to Severus, she realized that the envelope was actually red and smoking.

He quickly levitated the howler into the air, simultaneously casting a shield bubble around it and casting a silencing charm. Not long after, the envelope exploded and set on fire inside the bubble, turning to ash before their eyes. He levitated the bubble to the fireplace, and released the charms, allowing the embers to settle on the fire that was already going.

'Looks as though Molly is a sight angrier than I had suspected she would be,' Severus mused, looking a little put out.

Hermione wrapped her arms around herself, not moving from where she was standing, feeling more than a little bit saddened. Severus, seeing this, went straight to her and wrapped his arms around her, walking them over to the fireplace and sitting in one of the armchairs before it, settling her across his lap. She snuggled into him, pressing her cheek to his coat, even though the buttons poked her.

'Molly is so upset, and Ron well, I don't even know what to think about him at the moment,' she said, trying to sniffle back tears, but was unsuccessful. 'Everyone else has accepted this for what it is except for them. I mean, he seemed perfectly fine about it at Christmas time.'

'It is just as Ginevra said it hadn't really sunk in at that point,' Severus murmured, hugging her in a tremendous show of support. 'But now that it has, his penchant for acting without thinking in a way that is harmful to others has over-ridden his common sense. Honestly his jealousy is unwarranted.'

Hermione sighed heavily, tears still leaking from her eyes. They sat together like that for what seemed like hours, but was really only minutes. 'I am so lucky to have you, Sev,' she said softly.

'And I am equally so to have you,' he said, squeezing her and pressing a kiss to the top of her head, and then after a moment, he smiled. 'What would you say if I suggested we go and vent some of our emotions elsewhere?'

Hermione frowned in thought for a moment before she caught on and smiled widely through her tears, sitting up on his lap to look at his face. His wicked expression was all that she needed for confirmation of what he meant by his words. She slid off his lap, standing and taking his hand to tug him up from the chair and drag him in the direction of their chambers.

'I think your idea has some merit,' she said airily as she touched the wooden panel keyed to both her and Severus, making the portrait swing open.

They stumbled through it together and down the hall to where the sitting room was warm and glowing from the fire before bypassing it completely in favor of finding the bedroom. Severus pleased and took her twice, exercising all of the negative emotions out of her for a while, and relaxing her to a lethargic state. Even if it were only a temporary fix, Hermione definitely thought that it was worth it. But she was a damn sight more tired than she usually was afterwards due to the pregnancy.

She flopped onto her back, still a little breathless from the exertion, and Severus collapsed in a boneless heap, half covering her with a long arm and leg flung across her, pinning her to the mattress. He turned his head to look at her, a shock of black hair falling into his eyes as he did. She looked at him and smiled sleepily, reaching a hand over to lazily stroke his cheek.

'Ginny was so right about pregnancy sex,' she said suddenly with a short laugh. 'It is fantastic.'

Severus could only nod in agreement. Despite the fact that the knowledge of pregnancy sex had come from Ginny Potter, he had to agree it certainly was something special. It was somehow even more intense than normal sex. A lazy smile spread across his lips, ending in his eyes, which twinkled. He finally understood what it meant to love someone unconditionally, and Hermione had been the one to teach him, however unintentionally she had done so.

'I love you,' he said, leaning in and kissing her sweetly.

'I love you too,' she replied in kind.

They lay there in silence for a while before Hermione's mind drifted back to some time earlier that day. She was thinking about little Megan Cabot again. She found herself thinking of the girl more and more often lately and wondered why that was. She knew it had to be more than just sympathy she felt for the girl. It wasn't pity, but she was unable to put her finger on what it was. In any case, she thought it would be best if she figured out what it was before she talked to Severus about it.

'I have to get up for a shower,' Severus groaned softly.

'I'm too tired for any of that,' Hermione moaned in protest as he sat up and slid off the bed, summoning random bits of clothing to him.

'You don't have to go, love,' he replied, walking over and giving her a kiss. 'Stay and sleep here. God knows you deserve a good sleep. I will make your excuses for you.'

'You're good to me, Severus,' she said with a warm smile, pulling his head down for a longer kiss.

'Not good enough,' he said, taking off to the bathroom before she could protest.

Hermione shook her head as she heard the shower turn on. He would always be more than good enough for her.

Surprising Company

Chapter 20 of 32

Julia stops by at Hogwarts for a surprise visit with Hermione.

Many thanks must go to Madbrilliant and Alliean for the beta of this chapter. They rock!

.....

Chapter 20 - Surprising Company

The Dungeons were oddly silent throughout the day, which was surprising, as the Valentine's feast was fast approaching.

Most of the snow was melted away from the winter, and things were slowly beginning to grow again in preparation for the spring that was fast approaching. It was still cool outside, however, so Hermione had figured that most people would be more inclined to remain indoors. But this, apparently, was not the case. It was a Hogsmeade day, however, and she guessed that the students would have all chosen to go there to buy dress robes or various other gifts and items for the romantic holiday.

She was marking essays for two different classes in her dungeon office that she had kept on, as well as the chambers there. While all of her personal items had been moved to Severus' and her shared chambers upstairs, the lounges, bed, and basic things remained in her former quarters. Severus had gone into Hogsmeade that day with Filius to supervise, and had plans to meet up for a drink with Remus Lupin, Harry, and Kingsley Shacklebolt. Hermione was really pleased that Severus and Harry were getting along well now. She had no idea what she would have done if Harry and Ginny had not been as supportive of her choices as they had.

She sighed and got back to her essays and, for a while, continued uninterrupted by thought or people. That was, until there was a knock on the door that shocked her out of her concentrated state. She looked up, wondering who it could be, and then shook her head. It was probably just a student or another staff member.

'Come right in,' she called out.

The door opened slightly, and someone slipped in just as Hermione looked back down to her essays, and the door closed again softly. She looked up again, and to her shock and delight, Julia Weasley was standing there before her, looking a little shy with her hands clasped behind her back. Hermione smiled at her and stood from the desk, walking around to greet her properly.

'Hello, Julia! What brings you here?' she asked, hugging the slightly shorter witch, who returned her hug tightly. Hermione was reassured by the hug. It didn't seem that Julia was upset with her because of Molly and Ron.

'I needed someone to talk to,' she said quietly with a smile.

'Let's go to my old chambers and we can have some tea,' Hermione suggested, leading her out of the office and down the hall to the entrance covered by a large painting of an old witch. 'Belladonna.'

The portrait swung open and let them inside, and Hermione gestured for Julia to sit in one of the armchairs by the fire before heading into the kitchen to brew some of her special tea. Julia was one of the prettiest witches she had ever met apart from Ginny. She was small and curvy in all the right places, had long straight blonde hair, and the clearest blue eyes she had ever seen. Hermione would have had to say that she was far more beautiful than Fleur even. She and Ron had met at a Quidditch match by accident four years beforehand and had instantly clicked.

She had gone to a wizarding school in America, even though she was born and raised in Wales. Julia had never said an unkind word about anyone, as far as Hermione knew, and had been married to Ron for just over two years. They had not had any children yet, which was no fault of her own, but Molly always seemed to have held that over her. It was unfortunate that she had been dragged into something that had nothing to do with her at all. Hermione felt sad for her.

She returned to the sitting room, levitating the tea set along with her and placing it on the coffee table. 'I hope you like this tea,' Hermione said softly. 'I made it myself, so it's a little experimental.'

'I'm sure it's lovely,' Julia said, taking up a cup and allowing Hermione to pour her tea for her.

Hermione sat down across from her with her own cup and waved her hand in the direction of the fireplace, lighting the fire. 'So, what is it you wanted to talk about?' she asked, figuring the direct approach was best.

'I wanted to tell you that I am not mad at you or the professor at all, Hermione,' she said seriously. 'I'm not upset at you, and I don't blame either of you for what happened a week ago.'

Hermione breathed out in relief. 'I'm going to be honest with you and tell you that I was a little worried about that,' she admitted with a wry smile.

'There is no need to be worried about that,' Julia said softly. 'I have been staying at home with my parents this week for my own reasons, so don't jump to conclusions.'

'I'm sorry about the way that Ron and Molly have been to you,' Hermione said sympathetically, sipping her tea.

'Ron is... Well, I love him no matter how stupid he is. I'm not upset with you about the way he is acting, but I think he just needs some time away from me so that he can sort out himself and his priorities. If he wants me to come back, he'll have to ask me to come back himself.'

Hermione nodded. 'He is just being irrational. We all know that he doesn't still have feelings for me. He is just trying to open up old wounds and sulk,' she said softly. 'He still has a lot of growing up to do.'

'I know he does,' Julia said softly in agreement. 'Which is why I think that moving home for a while was the best idea for us,' she continued. 'But the way that Molly is behaving is just ridiculous. She had no right at all to be upset at you for not marrying Ronald. It was obvious from the moment I met you that you couldn't ever marry someone like him. He's the kind of guy who needs to be taken care of all the time.'

'I couldn't have ever been the kind of woman he needs,' Hermione murmured. 'But you are perfect for him. You are sweet, and you take care of him all the time and do everything for him. Molly is so wrong to judge you in any way.'

'When I first met Molly, she was very cheerful and kind, and then as soon as I married Ron, she started going on and on about "our children" and how lovely everything was going to be and how her "plans" were all going perfectly,' Julia explained. 'She just doesn't realize that I wanted to have a life with Ron for a little while before I had children. I kept on taking the Potion until Ron noticed and told her, and she went completely mental about that. And now I've resorted to using Muggle contraceptives.'

'Oh, Julia I had no idea how bad it was getting there,' Hermione exclaimed, reaching a hand over the table between them and touching her arm.

Julia shook her head and smiled. 'Molly sent me three letters in the last two days, demanding that I come back to Ron immediately. And when I didn't respond, she finally sent a Howler and scared the willies out of my parents,' she said with a short laugh. 'I had to explain to them that Molly wasn't normally like that and that things were chaos over here.'

'I'll bet Molly finding out that I was pregnant didn't improve anything,' Hermione muttered under her breath almost.

'Oh, she was furious that night when the twins came over to the Burrow and were going on and on about your pregnancy,' Julia admitted. 'And then she turned on me and started demanding answers about why I was still not with child.'

'If it is so bad there, why do you stay?' Hermione asked.

'Because, despite all of his flaws, I love Ron, and I do want to have his children,' Julia answered honestly. 'But two years ago, when we first got married, I wasn't ready for that. Maybe when all of this blows over, I will consider starting one.'

'You are honestly the best thing that ever happened to Ron, Julia,' Hermione said, in awe of the woman before her. Julia was handling this in a mature and dignified fashion that Hermione was not sure she would be capable of if she were in the same position. 'I am so glad that I met you.'

Julia smiled brightly at her. 'I am really grateful for your friendship, Hermione,' she said quietly. 'Because I went to school in America and then returned here, I had few

friends on my arrival, and I am glad that Ron has such wonderful people in his life.'

Hermione and Julia talked for a while longer until Julia announced that she had to leave and get back to her parents' house, as she had left that morning without letting them know where she'd be. It had been one of the most interesting days that Hermione had had in quite a long time. She returned to her office after cleaning up everything in her old chambers and resumed marking papers until the noise of students filled the dungeons and she knew that everyone had returned from Hogsmeade.

She immediately went up to the Entrance Hall to greet Severus as he came in. She knew he would be the one pulling up the back of the ranks. He always did. She arrived just as the last few troublesome students were filtering through the great oak front doors, and then Severus came in, wearing his long black winter coat and gloves, his long hair a little windswept. Hermione thought he looked very handsome that way, all dishevelled and cheeks coloured from the cool air.

'Hello, Severus,' she greeted with a smile.

He smiled back at her, offering his pregnant wife an arm and escorting her up the stairs and then in the direction of his office. They had entered their shared chambers before Severus gave into his baser urges and kissed her soundly. They both removed their outer garments, hanging them up on the hooks beside the entrance, and went to sit together on the rug in front of the fire after kicking their shoes and socks off. Hermione snuggled back to sit between Severus' legs and rest against his chest.

'Julia came for a visit today,' she murmured softly, pulling his arms around her and holding him tightly.

'Is that so? What did she have to say?' Severus asked curiously.

'A lot of things,' Hermione replied. 'She told me so many things that I had no idea were going on before now. I have been so busy and wrapped up here with working the past few years that I hardly had time to see just how bad things had gotten with Molly, Ron, and Julia. I felt so out of the loop.'

'I trust that now you realize that you are not to blame for the current debacle over at the Weasleys' then?' he asked her.

'I know, and Julia explained everything to me. Molly has gone completely off her rocker over the last few years, and I hadn't even noticed the change in her,' she said with a heavy sigh. 'I wish I had just paid more attention.'

Severus squeezed her tight and kissed the top of her head. 'Love, it is hardly your fault that you did not become entangled in the Weasley drama,' he said firmly. 'It was probably for the best that you did not become involved earlier than now. There is less now that Molly can blame you for.'

'I know what you are trying to say, but that doesn't make it any easier for me to take this lying down,' Hermione said with a huff.

Severus chuckled low in his throat, planting a kiss on the nape of her neck and letting his hands drift over her stomach. The bump was still small but was ever so slightly more pronounced now. He loved her changing shape. Even though it was only a temporary change, he loved every moment of it. Certainly, he loved the tall, slender Hermione that had been his Deputy Headmistress, but there was something so uniquely beautiful about a woman rounding with his children.

'You're beautiful,' he told her seriously.

Hermione smiled widely at that. Only Severus could say the loveliest thing to her at a time when she doubted herself the most.

Creating Chaos

Chapter 21 of 32

An article in the *Daily Prophet* is published that causes quite a stir in the Snape's lives.

Madbrilliant and Alliean are the amazing beta's to thank for making my ramblings decipherable. And a big hug to everyone who has been reviewing! They are really amazing and encouraging!

.....

Chapter 21 - Creating Chaos

In her entire, although short, lifetime, Hermione had only ever been seriously insulted in a way that she could not ignore a handful of times.

This was another one of those times where she just couldn't ignore the slap in the face that she was receiving from someone who she thought she could trust. She had no idea who had done the deed, but someone had leaked more than a few details of Hermione and Severus' marriage to the *Daily Prophet*, and suddenly that morning they had been all over the front page of the morning edition with the eye catching article entitled "Scandal at Hogwarts!" Severus had been surprisingly calm about the whole ordeal, while Hermione, because of her raging hormones, had been unable to contain the unreasonably emotional side to her.

His reasoning for being so cool-tempered had simply been, 'Well, seeing as you are hyperventilating over this mess, it only seems right that one of us remains level-headed.'

Hermione had been huffing and scowling ever since the owls dropped the paper on the table in front of her along with the morning post. She had read over the entire three page long article over and over again, with all of the photos of the pair of them that had been captured, comments resting below in an insulting manner. She had read about her fling with Victor Krum, Ronald Weasley, and her supposed attempted seduction of Harry Potter no less than three times, all of them with photos.

...and now it appears that the former star pupil of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry is at it once more. Not only that, but now as a role model within the school as a Deputy Headmistress. If readers had thought it was bad back then, it has only intensified since. An inside informant told Daily Prophet writer Sam Doyle that Hermione Granger trapped Professor Severus Snape, former Death Eater and spy for the Order of the Phoenix and current Headmaster at Hogwarts, into a marriage with claims that she was carrying his children.

Now, tell me readers, how many times have we heard that one used?

Hermione clenched her teeth, growling under her breath at the thought of it. This rubbish had Rita Skeeter's influence written all over it. Despite the fact that the *Prophet* had fired her years before after discovering that she was an illegal Animagus, she still had influence over its members. It made her wish she had never uncovered the lousy bitch to begin with.

'Hermione, my love, the light of my life and my very reason for existence,' Severus said to her in a pleading tone. 'Please, please stop reading that damn article and come sit with me for a cuppa.'

Hermione sighed heavily and tossed the articles aside, leaving her rubbish on the dinner table, and went to join Severus on the lounge in front of the fire. She accepted the cup of tea he pressed into her hands and held her hands between his momentarily before releasing them in favor of picking up his own cup and giving her some space.

'This is something that we can easily overcome,' Severus said simply, taking a long sip from his cup of strong black tea. 'You have classes to teach in about ten minute's time, and while you are busy teaching today, I will go to the Ministry and ask Arthur for a favor. Merlin knows he owes me a small favor for all the running around he makes me do for the ruddy Ministry.'

'Do you think he would be able to help?' Hermione asked curiously, the tea seeming to have soothed her a little.

'I have a feeling that the informant would have to be one of his own,' he replied, certain of what he was thinking about. 'This is only a little bump in the road. It will be easier to smooth over than you know.'

'Thank you so much, Sev,' she said, putting down her teacup and insinuating herself onto his lap, wrapping her arms around his neck.

'You know I'd do anything to make you happy,' he murmured back to her, touching his lips to hers in a chaste kiss.

A few minutes later, Hermione left through the Floo to her office in the dungeons, leaving Severus alone to his thoughts. His wife probably hadn't realised that outside of her own fury at the articles, he too was rather angry. At one time, he had had severe anger management issues, and most likely would have been rather inclined to raving and ranting himself about it, if it were not for Hermione. He had become calmer since being with her, and he knew that he had to be the responsible one.

With that, he got up and went to the fireplace, tossing in some Floo powder, stepping into the green flames, and calling out for Arthur's office at the Ministry. He walked out of the fireplace there and saw that Arthur was sitting at his desk behind a mountain of paperwork, notes hovering around in the air above him also. Severus always had hated the Ministry memos. They liked to poke and prod people sharply while riding in the elevators.

'Arthur, I need you to do something for me,' he said immediately, striding over to his desk and sitting in the chair across from him.

'I had a feeling I would be seeing you today,' Arthur said, looking up from his work and smiling at him wearily. He was obviously in need of a vacation.

'As you probably know, there was a rather unsavory article splashed across the front page of the *Daily Prophet* this morning, and it has upset my wife very deeply,' he said gruffly. 'Not to mention myself.'

'What would you like me to do about it?' the Minister offered.

'I think we should start with having the ignorant berk who wrote the article in the first place fired,' Severus said coolly. 'And then I think it would be prudent if you assigned a department to censor all of the articles going through before they are put in the *Prophet*.'

'That seems like a reasonable request,' Arthur said with a grateful sigh. 'I had thought you would come in here demanding something ridiculously hard for me to do.'

Severus smirked and nodded. 'Hermione is distraught,' he told the older man. 'She was in hysterics all morning, and I had to tell her that I would come to you now to get her calm enough to teach her classes,' he added. 'I know that a member of your family went to the *Prophet* with this. Now, I need you to tell me who it was.'

Arthur blanched a little at Severus' request. He knew that this was one of the questions that Severus would be asking. It was just the sort of thing he would do if it were his wife that was being wronged. He understood completely how the younger man was feeling, and he wanted to be able to help him so much. But he was still a little anxious about selling out a person in his family to the people that they had wronged. He loved his family immensely, and what he was about to do made him feel sad.

'It was Molly,' Arthur replied sullenly. 'Now, I know you are mad, but please understand Molly has not been well for the last few years. Things have been getting worse, and I have even taken her to St. Mungo's discretely for check-ups every now and then. Her mind was a little deteriorated from the war.'

'That is no excuse for spiteful behavior,' Severus said in a low voice.

'I know it is not an excuse,' Arthur said seriously. 'But please, whatever you are planning on doing to her, just don't hurt her.'

'I would never harm a hair on your wife's head,' he said quickly, looking at him seriously. 'I merely want to talk to her. I want her to understand what it is she is doing to my family and her own.'

Arthur nodded understandingly, standing and going around to where Severus was, holding out a hand to him. 'I am honored to be a friend of yours, Severus Snape,' he said seriously. 'For all of my years above you, you seem to have accumulated a wisdom that is far greater than your age.'

'It was perhaps Albus' best influence,' Severus said with a sigh, standing and shaking hands with the older man. 'I will see you at a later date, Arthur.'

Severus then Flooed back to Hogwarts and walked around his office as he thought. It was just lucky that the carpet was practically pace-proof, or there would likely be holes through it by then. He was caught up on thinking what he would say to Molly Weasley if given the chance. There was no way that her mind was deteriorated seriously enough to affect her good judgement. If anything, it was only sharpening as time went by, and this was what gave Severus the most grief. Make no mistake, he had once liked her a great deal and was grateful for all the times she had healed him after returning from a revel and being unable to get to Poppy.

He owed her on some level, and he was going to repay her by talking some sense into her and making her see that she was being nonsensical. An hour later saw him sitting in the chair behind his desk once more. He spun around in the chair to face the wall where Albus' portrait hung, and with a wave of his hand, the curtains parted. Once again, Albus appeared to be asleep.

'Old man, stop faking it,' Severus snapped a little too harshly. 'I know you're awake, you know you're so let's just save us all time and get on with this conversation I know that you've been dying to have with me since overhearing my conversation with Hermione earlier.'

Albus chuckled and opened his eyes. 'You've come to ask my advice about Molly Weasley,' he stated simply with a twinkling in his eyes and a smile.

'Naturally,' Severus replied tartly.

'First things first, my boy; how is Arthur feeling about this little mess?' Albus asked curiously.

Severus frowned. 'Well, I'd hardly call it little, now that this so-called mess is public, but I suppose he is dealing with it in the best way that he can,' Severus replied solemnly. 'I feel for him a great deal. I would certainly hate to be in his position now. I certainly have no idea what it is like for my wife to act the way that Molly has of late. Hermione is too sweet and non-corrupt for that.'

'Hermione is indeed a sweet young woman,' Albus agreed. 'But do not underestimate her, Severus she has powers that other wizards and witches alike could only dream of possessing.'

Severus nodded. 'In any case, Arthur is in a bad way,' he continued. 'I fear that he will need a very long vacation after this ordeal is sorted and done with.'

'I hear that Julia Weasley stopped by to visit your wife over the weekend?' Albus said, with a slight question in his tone.

'She did indeed pay a visit. I was in Hogsmeade at the time, however, Hermione did give me a full recount of their discussion,' Severus answered seriously. 'It has led me to believe that what has happened now involving Hermione and myself was just the end explosion of something that has been a long time in the making.'

'And you think that Molly Weasley is behind all of the commotion then?'

'I have no doubt that she is one of the major antagonists in the entire fight. And her dunderhead of a youngest son, Ronald, was not helping things either,' Severus replied, pinching the bridge of his nose. 'I wish that boy would grow up and realize what a good thing he has and let go of his childish grudge.'

'Then this is what you need to tell the two of them, Severus,' Albus said kindly, his blue eyes, even in the painting, strangely sad.

'Thank you, Albus,' Severus said.

Albus nodded and closed his eyes as Severus drew the curtain back across by his own hand this time.

The Confrontation

Chapter 22 of 32

After a check-up at St. Mungo's, Hermione and Severus go to the Burrow with Julia to give Molly the talk.

Many thanks go to Madbrilliant and Alliean for the beta of this chapter. And a big thanks to all of my readers!

Chapter 22 - The Confrontation

The room smelt heavily of the cleaning fluids that were often used in Muggle hospitals, and beside the examination bed on the silver trolley sat a jar of clear jelly.

Hermione was busily removing some of said jelly from her stomach in the bathroom just next door while Severus stood outside with the Healer discussing the ultrasound she had just had. The ultrasound, oddly enough, had become quite the popular thing to do when a witch got pregnant in the wizarding world. Hermione, having been raised as a Muggle until her acceptance into Hogwarts, decided that she too wanted to go through the experience. She had never seen her husband as amazed as he had been when he first saw their children on the television screen.

The little things that had shown up on the screen had looked something more like a sea monkeys than actual babies, but that had not made them love their children any less. In fact, Hermione had found them quite endearing. Once she had finished cleaning herself up, she re-covered and left the bathroom in search of her husband. She saw that he was with the Healer clutching a big yellow envelope, smiling broadly at her when he saw her approach. He was lovely when he smiled that way. Her heart fluttered in her chest as he extended a hand out to her.

'Ah, Madam Snape, I was just letting your husband here know that you have the healthiest twins I have ever seen at this stage of a pregnancy,' Healer Larson said cheerfully.

'That's wonderful to know,' Hermione replied, stepping to Severus' side and allowing herself to be wrapped in his arms. She had been a little worried that there would have been some sort of complications caused by her recent stress.

'Well, I would love to stay and chat some more, but the other patients are calling me,' Healer Larson said with a friendly smile. 'Don't hesitate to call me if somehow complications do arise.'

'We shall,' Severus replied immediately, steering Hermione towards the direction of the Apparition area.

'Are we headed to the Burrow then?' Hermione asked, her anxiety over what was to come flavoring her tone.

'Yes, my love, I am afraid we are,' he answered with a firm nod. 'I think it would be best if you sat with Julia for the duration, however. She will likely need your support more than anyone.'

Hermione just nodded in agreement and wrapped her arms around Severus for them to Apparate in tandem. They reappeared at the edge of the Weasleys' orchard, closest to where the little Muggle town was just down the hill. They had agreed to meet Julia in that exact spot so that the three of them could go as a unit to the Burrow. They did not have to wait long, for soon after their arrival, Julia Apparated about two meters away from them and smiled weakly in greeting.

'I am unbelievably nervous,' Hermione confided to the slightly younger witch. 'It's the damn pregnancy hormones they get me wound up easily all the time.'

'There's no need for nerves,' Julia assured her, taking one of her hands in both of hers. 'Come on and let's get this over with.'

Severus, ever the supportive one, took Hermione's free hand in one of his own, twining his fingers with hers on one side, while Julia held the other. Just in that moment, Hermione knew she was one of the luckiest people alive. She had such wonderful, supportive, loving people in her life, surrounding her with their warmth. She had no idea what she had ever done to deserve such a thing.

As one, the three of them walked up the dirt road towards the not-so-rickety Burrow. Severus was pleased that, despite his elevated rank amongst wizarding society, Arthur Weasley was still the same man he had always been. He had not become a materialistic man, and he, Molly, and some of the offspring still lived in the same old house they always had, despite a few necessary repairs. Feeling like unwanted guests, they went to the front door instead of the back as they usually did and knocked carefully, only to be greeted by a smiling Bill.

'I was wondering when the day of reckoning would come,' he said good-naturedly with a charming grin, opening the door a little wider to allow them entry.

'Hello, Bill,' Julia greeted, giving her brother-in-law a tight hug.

People were still a little shocked where Bill was concerned. Almost two years before, out of the blue, Fleur had divorced him. Most people had thought that they were the ideal married couple, but it seemed that her objections to Molly's interfering ways and her presence in their life had been too much for her to handle. Bill, of course, had defended Fleur vehemently and had only just recently been welcomed back at the Burrow by Molly himself. It seemed that even defending the woman he had been in love with was akin to betrayal. As far as Severus was concerned, however, Bill Weasley had acted the part of a man, just as Ronald should have.

'You haven't been at work for the last few days,' Bill commented to Julia as he took up everyone's coats.

Julia smiled. 'I've been a little busy, but I'll be back bright and early on Monday,' she offered simply in reply. She too, worked as a curse breaker for Gringotts.

Bill nodded. 'Well, come on through to the kitchen,' he said, gesturing for all of them to follow. 'Mum rarely even leaves the house these days, and Ron likes to sulk around near her, so it's convenient, you see.'

Hermione had to contain her smile at the sarcasm and joking attitude that Bill was displaying in the face of such a serious event. She got the feeling that the whole thing was simply drawing out his own bitterness towards those members of his family, and that he had no objections to them being brought up short. His marriage had been ruined in the same manner, after all. The four of them entered the kitchen to find Molly with her back to them, standing at the stove cooking. Ron, surprisingly, was nowhere to be seen for the time being.

'You have visitors, Mum,' Bill said simply, stopping at the doorway as the three visitors walked further into the kitchen. He had no plans to stick around and play sides it would have been unfair.

Molly turned around, and as soon as she saw whom it was, she glared and turned right back around to her stove and continued to do as she had been before their arrival was announced. 'I have no wish to see anyone at present,' she said petulantly, placing her free hand on her hip while stirring the pot with the other.

'Molly, be reasonable,' Severus said a tad gruffly. 'We have gone to a lot of trouble to come and see you today, with the intentions of making peace. It would be terribly rude of the Minister of Magic's wife to be so inhospitable, no matter who the guests were.'

'If I were the type of woman who was concerned about society, I am quite certain that I would have never married Arthur,' Molly said tersely.

'This has nothing to do with bloody society, Molly,' Hermione snapped. 'Turn around and face us and tell us to leave, if you dare.'

Severus places a soothing hand between her shoulder blades and rubbed up and down in a calming circle. Hermione looked at him gratefully and calmed herself down a little. It would be no use fighting irrationality with the same. Bill gestured for them to sit down at the table before taking his leave to the sitting room to wait it out. Just as he left, however, Ron walked in through the back door and into the kitchen. When he saw Severus, his eyes went livid for a moment, before he spotted Hermione and Julia sitting side-by-side like best friends. He wanted to snarl at that, but instead, favored them with a look of hurt pride.

'What the hell are you lot doing here?' he asked rudely. 'I should think that you would realize that you aren't welcome here.'

As he said this, his gaze was on Severus. All in the room that were actually paying attention noticed this too. Hermione frowned at his childish behavior, which made Julia tighten the grip on her hand to calm her. As much as Julia loved Ron, she was getting sick of him also, and understood how Hermione was feeling. She, however, had no intentions on letting him see that he was having an effect on her. She had to be the strong one.

'Ron, this has to stop now,' Julia said firmly. 'I know you're a little upset right now, but don't you think you are being too sensitive to something that has little to nothing to do with you at all? Did you not marry me? Do you not actually love me?'

Ron's expression changed to a shocked one. 'Since when are you on their side?' he asked in bewilderment. 'Don't you love me anymore?'

Julia frowned. 'Now you're just being ridiculous, Ronald,' she said coolly. 'Throwing my own questions back in my face is really childish.'

And that was when it happened. Molly spun around so quickly then that she knocked the big pot of soup clean off the stove top, allowing it to slosh over her shoes and the floor, making a metallic clang as it hit the ground and bounced. She had such a look of madness on her face and in her eyes that Hermione was trembling slightly in fear. When had this happened? When had the kind, loving, gentle Molly Weasley been exchanged for this harriidan? Had it been after the war and all the horrors she had witnessed? In the end, it had happened, and something had to be done.

'How dare you even come into this house, let alone address your husband that way?' Molly shouted at Julia, spittle flying out of her mouth as she spoke.

Julia stood calmly, looking down at Molly from her taller height. 'Ronald is much less as husband to me as he is a son to you,' she said simply. 'Obviously from your reaction, I can see that I am as unwelcome and unwanted in this house as I have ever been in the past year. I'm sorry that I could not live up to your expectations and become a Weasley breeding machine for you both. I would have been all too happy to provide you with some children one day had this not happened, but I can see that I obviously was not the woman you wanted for Ronald.'

Julia was so calm and serene the whole time, even as she walked from the room the way she had come, intending to leave on that note. It was blatantly apparent to everyone in the room that the Weasleys had just lost one more of their number. Hermione wanted to cry for Julia, but decided to keep strong. She and Severus had yet to say their piece to the two in the room with them.

'You have just allowed the best thing that has ever happened to that worthless son of yours walk right out of this house,' Severus said coldly, his temper beginning to slowly escape his control. 'I came here with the intentions of making peace, but I can now see that it would have been in vain. You have truly become a person that I would rather have nothing to do with, Molly Weasley, and were it not for Arthur, I would have severed ties with you when you destroyed your own son Bill's marriage to the woman who married him even when he was scarred. You have thrown away good thing after good thing constantly.'

He took a deep breath and paused there. 'Now, I want you and your waste of a son to think about what I have said, and about what Julia has said also,' he continued. 'If something comes to you, I wish you the best in righting your wrongs. If not, however, I hope that you might both spend the rest of your lives miserable in your inability to see your own good fortune and instead covet others.'

He stood from his seat at the long table and, walking around to Hermione, he held out a hand for her and pulled her to her feet. They walked from the kitchen wordlessly, passing Bill sitting with Julia on the front porch on the way out. The pair stood and followed, Apparating away from the house without remorse. The four arrived at Grimmauld Place shortly afterwards and were admitted to the house by a nervous-looking Ginny, who was holding Lily to her side.

As Hermione entered, she felt her heart sink into her chest and her eyes fill with tears. Even after coming out as a winner, she felt as though she had lost much.

Midnight Revelations

Chapter 23 of 32

Megan Cabot is able to provide Severus with some interesting information...

Kudos to Madbrilliant and Alliean for the beta of this chapter!

Chapter 23 - Midnight Revelations

Many times over the duration of the next week, Severus felt as though he had come up against a hundred-foot brick wall.

The *Daily Prophet* continued to spew forth drivel all throughout the week as though there were not some other important event in the wizarding world to write about other than the Headmaster of Hogwarts and his wife. Severus was starting to understand just how annoyed Hermione was with the whole thing and had been tied down with all of the work he had to do around Hogwarts, the Ministry, and all of the hate mail he had been receiving from "concerned citizens". He just knew that someone devious, someone shameless, and someone with an agenda had to have been behind it all.

Severus had seen the man who had supposedly written the report once since the initial one appeared in the paper, but he was not convinced it was he. If he didn't know any better, he would have thought Rita Skeeter had written it. It was certainly the same style of writing as she was famous for and, as of yet, he had been unable to get out of Molly Weasley exactly who it was she had gone to. His patience was wearing thin, and he had little time on his hands as it was.

Hermione was unable to do her jobs on top of his own, and with the pregnancy approaching the next stage, she was even wearier than usual, not to mention had a larger appetite. She had been in better control of her emotions in any case, which meant that he was able to allow her to investigate into the articles more than he had been. Originally, she was either bursting into tears or going into a rage over it, so he had kept her away from the case. But now he was too weary to object.

'Severus? Love, are you coming to bed soon?' Hermione asked from the doorway to their bedroom, which she was leaning against as she looked at him sitting in an armchair in front of the fire in thought.

He nodded and stood from the chair, walking over to her. 'Come, lets sleep, pet,' he murmured softly, gently leading her back into the room with a warm hand on her back, pulling the door closed behind him.

'You've been working too hard,' Hermione complained as she lay down on the bed above the stifling covers.

'We'll be able to take a break soon,' he murmured, thankful that the end of the school year was fast approaching.

Hermione nodded, snuggling up against him despite the warmth. It was well and truly into spring, and the weather had become pleasant and a little warmer than usual, which was a nice change from constant rain during the spring. Severus lay on his side, turned so that he could look at his wife as he stroked her pleasantly rounded belly. Her bump had become significantly more rounded than it had been a month before, and she was starting to look like a pregnant woman now, confirming that she was well and truly Severus Snape's wife and the soon-to-be mother of his children.

Soon enough, Severus drifted to sleep and Hermione was able then to gaze at him openly, tracing the sharp angle of his jaw. He was the most beautiful man she had ever seen in sleep. He was so serene and peaceful; she had no idea how she could have ever found him repulsive. Besides, no man had ever loved her the way he did, and she loved that too. Closing her eyes and snuggling up closer, she let herself fall asleep in the arms of her husband.

The next morning, the pair of them woke and showered before dressing for the day in their teaching robes. Hermione's robes were just voluminous enough that the roundness of her belly was not yet visible, but her lesson plans had all been altered to lessen the danger that she would be in if something went awry in class. The students did not need to know that she was with child just yet, and she was happy to let them all find out gradually anyway.

They left Severus's office together, heading to the Great Hall together for breakfast. On the way they passed many of the students who were simply ambling their way along slowly, still sleepy. One student, however, was not so tired and had actually bounded up to them with seemingly endless enthusiasm. Megan Cabot was smiling broadly as she approached them to walk next to Hermione.

'Good morning, Professors!' she exclaimed, slipping her hand into Hermione's with the ease of familiarity. Hermione just wanted to hug the girl just because she was so incredibly adorable when she did that.

'Good morning, Miss Cabot,' Severus said politely.

Hermione however, was not so formal and restrained. 'Good morning to you too, Megan,' she said brightly. 'I take it you are well?'

'I am very well, thanks, Professor Snape,' she answered with a grin at both her Professor and the Headmaster.

'I trust you slept well, Miss Cabot?' Severus asked, which made Hermione beam at him for being so darling for her.

'I would have slept well, but the girls in my room were up talking all night,' she answered with a small shrug. 'It doesn't really bother me, but I managed to hear what they were talking about, and I thought I would come and talk to you about it this morning if you have time. It's really important.'

'Is that right?' Severus said carefully. 'Well, in that case, you should come up to my office straight after breakfast. I will excuse you from your first class. The password for the stairs is Caligula.'

The girl nodded and then slipped her hand from Hermione's, running ahead a little to join a group of girls as they entered the hall. Severus led Hermione around to the staff entrance and stopped her just before she opened the door to go into the Great Hall. He led her to the window and sighed heavily.

'I had a brief, little look into Miss Cabot's mind to make sure she was serious about the importance of this matter, and it appears that she has information about the article in the *Daily Prophet*,' he said quietly.

'Oh, Severus, this is good, isn't it?' Hermione asked hopefully. 'Although, that was still a little rude, digging around in Megan's head that way.'

Severus smiled a little, walking back to the door with her. 'What I will never understand is your fascination with that young girl. She is just another student,' he said, shaking his head.

Hermione sighed. 'You don't understand because you just don't want to see it for yourself,' she said with a huff as they walked into the hall and along the head table to their seats. 'She is just like me.'

Severus knew she was right they were both Muggle-born, bright, cheerful, and enthusiastic. Both of them were orphaned because of the war. They were different in appearance but still very alike. He knew what Hermione wanted as far as Megan Cabot was concerned. He supposed he could get used to the girl being around. She was rather pleasant, to be perfectly honest. They would just have to wait until all of the troubles with the articles were cleared up before he did something.

Breakfast was over faster than Severus could have imagined, and soon he was in the dark hall near the staff door, kissing his wife soundly before she headed to the dungeons and he headed back up to his office to see Miss Cabot. He went up the spiral staircase and entered his office to find her standing over near the stand where Fawkes was perched, stroking his feathers.

'Miss Cabot,' he said by way of announcement.

She looked up and saw him, smiling as she did and walking over to his desk. He sat in his chair behind the desk and then gestured for her to sit opposite him. She did as she was bid immediately, and that was when Severus noticed the grim determination on her face that he knew so well. Hermione had looked the same way when she had

been that age. He had not liked her much at that age, to be honest, but he admired her determination. It made him feel a brief flash of guilt over Hermione's age in comparison to his, but he shook the thought away. Hermione and he were different people from the ones that they had been all those years before.

'So you've come to tell me about the article in the *Daily Prophet* that day?' Severus asked, getting straight to the point.

She nodded. 'Yes, sir,' she answered immediately. 'The girls were up all night talking about it. They didn't have anything to do with it, but they had overheard a few Slytherin boys in the halls talking about it at lunch yesterday.'

'Do we know the names of these boys?' Severus asked, leaning forwards and resting his elbows on his desk in his interest.

'Yes, sir. Simon Green, Jared Garfunkel, and Julius Mulciber,' she said, numbering them off on her fingers. 'The girls said that they heard the boys mention a woman some reporter for the Prophet. They couldn't quite make it out, but Amelia Jones said that it sounded like one of them said the name Skeeter.'

Severus' eyes went wide, and he knew he had finally gotten her. 'And did they happen to mention anything else?' he pressed further, eager to get as much information as he could so that he could begin setting up his trap.

Megan nodded. 'I heard the girls mention a Weasley, and they also said something about a beetle flying around the school and meeting the boys in the dungeons,' she said with finality.

Severus nodded. He had her by the antennae. 'You have been very helpful to me and my wife, Miss Cabot,' he said a little stiffly, uncomfortable with showing gratitude to a student. 'I will not forget what you have done for us.'

'I was happy to be of help, sir,' she replied, getting up from her seat. 'Can I ask you to write me a pass for class?'

'Certainly,' he said, swiftly doing so. He would do anything for that girl. She had just saved him and Hermione a huge amount of trouble and had practically solved the entire case for him.

He handed her the note and with a nod, she left the office, and Severus settled back into his chair to relax a little bit. All of the tension in his body seemed to melt away, and it was all because of what one little Gryffindor had told him. He recognized that the young girl respected Hermione immensely and that she seemed to be mild-mannered and raised well by her deceased parents. There was really only one thing he could do to make his Hermione happy in this case.

'Albus, what do you think?' Severus asked suddenly, spinning his chair to face the former Headmaster.

'I think that Megan Cabot will make a fine addition to your new little family, Severus,' Albus said with a cheerful smile on his face.

'I suppose now you're going to say that I would make an excellent father figure for her too,' Severus grumbled a little sarcastically. 'I could hardly replace the empty space that her true father left behind.'

'Ah, but who said anything about replacing her true father? I merely meant that it will be nice for her to have someone there a male to protect her, watch her grow, and scold her when she is dressed inappropriately for her first date with a young man,' the older man said with a chuckle. 'And you will be the kind of man who would do that mark my words, Severus.'

Severus almost smiled in spite of himself. Even the thought of a daughter of his going on a date with any young boy made him get protective, and his daughter had not yet even been born. He turned a scowl on the Headmaster who, guessing what was going through his mind, laughed a little harder in his frame.

'You take care of that family of yours,' he said, stroking his beard. 'Hermione is a wonderful woman and witch it almost makes me wish that I had someone like that when I was young. I would have snapped up such a woman in a second in my younger days.'

Severus felt a little wave of sadness rip through him at that. How could he have forgotten? The Headmaster had not known the love of a woman as he had, and he was the far more deserving of them. 'I promise I will do my best,' he said softly.

At that, Albus nodded and walked out of his frame, no doubt to go and have a chat with one of the other Headmasters.

A Trap Well Set

Chapter 24 of 32

Hogwarts has a bug problem, and Severus is determined to have it taken care of.

Kudos go to Alliean for being the awesome beta for this chapter, and WriterMerrin for her patience.

Chapter 24 - A Trap Well Set

It had been a perfect and clear day, with not a single howler sent or a cloud in the bright blueness of the sky. Everything was at it should have been.

Hermione had been in a rather good mood that day and, thankfully, had gone past the overly emotional stage of her pregnancy. Nobody was more relieved than Severus about that. He had his sweet, rational wife back. She had already taught her first years that morning and had been blessed with Megan's assistance in the storage room; she was ahead in the class readings and was more nimble than Hermione. She was currently in her afternoon class with her N.E.W.T Potions group and had them all brewing their Veritaserum quietly. She was pleased to be in the presence of a little bit of maturity.

Because everyone was working so silently, this gave her a chance to reflect on Severus and his very cryptic words to her that morning. He had been murmuring something about making sure he got all his work done in the morning so he could deal with another tiny problem in the afternoon. Somewhere in there, she had remembered he had mentioned something about recruiting some of the Slytherin boys to help him with it, and so she had simply nodded and smiled at him.

Now that she had been thinking about it for longer, she decided that she would have to make sure she had a good chat with him about it when her class was over. Looking at the clock on the wall, she noted that there was about ten minutes until classes were over for the day, and she stood and walked around the room to survey the students' progress. Seeing nothing amiss, she returned to her desk, which was littered with essays, and stood there to address them.

'Alright, you may all cast your stasis charms and pack up for the day,' she commanded firmly with a small smile. 'You are all doing well, so I won't be giving you any homework for the weekend.'

There was an audible sigh of relief through the room, and Hermione smiled, reminded of the days with Harry and Ron and how the two of them would always be grateful when Severus did not force homework on them, and how she would always be a little disappointed that there was one less chance for her to prove herself to him. She had really sought after his attention in those days, needing to prove herself as a witch and wanting Severus to like her as all the other teachers did. He had been a very hard man to please, and it was only now that she knew how much he truly admired her talent.

Once everything was cleaned and put away, she Flooed into Severus's office and found her husband sitting at his desk, scribbling away furiously with his glasses perched precariously on the end of his nose. She walked over to him silently and, with the tips of her fingers, nudged the glasses further up. He looked at her and smiled gratefully before finishing off his paperwork and letting his quill drop carelessly from his fingers.

'Hello, my love,' Hermione said with a smile, leaning down to peck him on the lips gently before squeaking as he pulled her onto his lap. 'You shouldn't do that I'm getting too heavy.'

Severus chuckled. 'You, my sweet one, shall never be too heavy to sit upon my lap,' he said, nuzzling the tender skin of her neck. 'And you smell quite lovely today is that the citrus perfume I made for you?'

She nodded. 'Yes, and a hint of the vanilla,' she replied. 'I couldn't resist they both smelled so good to me today.'

He laughed softly into her neck as he pressed a kiss to her nape before pulling back and simply settling for holding her close to him. 'I have some very important business to get to in a few minutes, love,' he said with a long sigh. 'I am sure you remember what we were discussing earlier this morning, and it appears as though the schedule must be moved forward a little sooner than I had planned.'

Hermione took the chance then to ask him what was on her mind. 'Actually, Sev, I was too busy eating breakfast, and I had no idea what you were talking about this morning, I'm afraid,' she said with a guilty grin. 'Could you please tell me exactly what it is that you need to do this afternoon?'

'What's this I hear? My wife was too preoccupied with gorging to listen?' he teased, rubbing her rounding belly until she slapped at his hand. 'Oh fine, I will only tell you that today might be the day that we finally bring the case of the Daily Prophet article to a close.'

'You mean you've solved it then, yes?' she asked, eyes lighting up.

'Indeed, with the assistance of a bright little Gryffindor, surprisingly,' he answered with a proud smile. 'I will be down in the dungeons, but I ask that you stay up here while I attend to the problem and await my return, yes?'

'Fine, then,' she answered with a sigh, knowing it was pointless to argue.

Severus then quickly moved her off his lap and stood before sitting her back on the chair comfortably. 'Go and take a nap, love. You're looking a little tired,' he gently insisted, and she nodded.

After leaving his wife and his office, Severus made his way down to the dungeons, passing various students and other professors on the way. When he had nearly arrived there, Rolanda Hooch, who was surprisingly strong for an older and shorter woman, pulled him to the side abruptly.

'What can I do for you, Rolanda?' he asked impatiently.

She rolled her eyes at his tone. 'Now, Severus, I don't ask for much from you, but I do ask that you keep the students away from the Quidditch pitch unless they are players,' she said huffily. 'I now have the lawn hexed several different shades, with the words "Slytherin Rules" carved into it.'

'And you are coming to me because of what?' he snapped irritably. 'I am not the Head of House go and see someone else about your problem. I have matters of importance to attend to.'

'You are the Headmaster do something about it,' Rolanda replied in mild frustration. 'I should think you would be able to say something to discourage it.'

'Fine, I will go down to the Slytherin common room tonight after dinner and have some words with all of them,' he agreed hastily. 'Now are you satisfied? Good, now I must really get going.'

He left her abruptly in the Great Hall and went to the staircase down to the dungeons, descending them briskly but silently, and continuing down the hall until he reached the large portrait covering the entrance to the Slytherin common room. He passed that and turned left down a little-used corridor, approaching the soft voices he knew would be there. He was still wondering exactly why they would choose that place of all the inconspicuous spaces in the castle. Shaking his head, he moved in, casting an invisibility charm over himself and joining the Slytherin boys there.

'...Ummm, well, Snape doesn't seem to be much like he used to either,' one of the boys murmured to no one in particular.

Severus frowned when he heard mention of his name and narrowed his eyes as he continued to listen to the inane gossip that the boys were spreading. It wasn't until after a few minutes that he finally caught sight of a shiny beetle that was sitting on the palm of one of the boys. His smile in that moment was almost feral, and he knew that it was time. He crept up on them and then reached down, plucking the beetle from the boy's palm and releasing his invisibility spell. There was a brief pause before all of the boys finally looked at him.

'Well, well, well, what do we have here?' he asked them in a dark, even voice. When no one answered, he glared. 'Get on your feet, you fools!'

They all scrambled up and stood with their heads hung and hands clasped behind their backs in surrender. Severus pulled the jar out of his pocket and glanced over the beetle before putting it inside and screwing on the lid with holes poked through it. He smiled inwardly at his good fortune in capturing the silly chit of a woman so easily. Who would have thought Rita Skeeter was stupid enough to fall into such a simple trap? She really had lost her touch.

'Follow me,' he barked out at the boys, turning sharply on his heel and striding down the hall.

By the time they arrived at his office, Severus was feeling less smug, but more angry. It had taken him a long while to get his Slytherins out of the papers for general misbehavior and trouble, and now he was going through the whole damn thing again with these silly Slytherin boys who had a bee in their bonnet because of their Muggle prejudices and dislike of his wife. Well, he wasn't having any of that in his school. He knew he could easily expel them and be done with them, but he thought it might be more profitable to suspend them and give them detentions for the rest of the school year, humiliating them instead.

He ordered them all to sit in the chairs before his desk and sat the bottle on a high shelf before going to the fireplace to Floo Harry. He tossed in the powder and stuck his head in to speak. It was not, however, Harry that answered the call, but Ginny instead.

'I need to speak to your husband about a pest problem we're having at Hogwarts,' he told her immediately.

'Ah, well I will go and get him. He was just changing Lily,' the very rounded Ginny Potter said before disappearing from sight and calling out her husband's name. She returned moments later smiling. 'He'll be here in just a second. How is Hermione doing over there?'

'She is well, and the babies are very healthy,' he said stiffly, aware that the students were listening in on the conversation. 'Where on earth is Potter?'

Ginny giggled. 'Oh, here he is,' she murmured. 'Catch up with you later, Sev,' she said before moving out of the way as Potter's face appeared.

'What can I do for you, Professor?' he asked with a small smile.

'Will you come through to my office now? I have a small problem that I think you could take care of for me,' he asked, biting his tongue to stop himself from being snide. He hated asking Potter for favors.

'I'm on my way through,' Harry answered, and Severus stood once more and dusted himself off before moving back to his desk just as Potter followed through. 'So, who am I arresting?'

Severus almost snorted with laughter at the sight of the boys' faces when they heard Harry say "arresting". They were all pale and nervous, and that comment left them quaking under the Headmaster's glare. He reached up to the shelf and took down the jar, unscrewing the top and flipping the beetle out of it and flicking his wand in its direction, forcing a transformation. Ten seconds later, Rita Skeeter, with her bleached blonde hair slightly askew, stood in the office looking haughty and betrayed.

'Please, feel free to arrest Miss Skeeter for a breach of her parole and various criminal acts,' he said simply.

Harry grinned and walked up to Rita, magically binding her hands behind her back. 'If it weren't you I was arresting, I would be really put out,' he told her. 'It's my day off, after all.'

'Never liked you anyway, Potter,' she spat.

Severus almost smiled on hearing this and watched with great pleasure as Harry led her to the fireplace. Then he turned to the boys with a cold look. 'You will all be suspended,' he said simply. 'Be ready to work hard on your return.'

Daily Interruptions

Chapter 25 of 32

After running an errand for Arthur at the Ministry, Bill decides to pay Julia a visit at work.

Hugs to Madbrilliant and Alliean for the beta of this chapter!

.....

Chapter 25 - Daily Interruptions

The halls at the Ministry were strangely silent that day, and this was something that made Arthur Weasley feel out of his element. He was used to the hustle.

He looked down at the sheet of parchment in front of him on his desk and sighed heavily, rubbing a hand over his eyes. This notice had been sitting in his drawer for nearly a week now, and he had, up until that morning, been unwilling to even look at it. It was, of course, the papers to file for a divorce this one, conveniently being between Ronald and his lovely wife, Julia. All that was left to be done was for him to sign the pages and then send them off to the Office of Marriage, Divorce, Birth, and Death. On reflection, he thought that the office could use a better name than that long-winded title, but cast that inane thought aside quickly.

He sighed once more and picked up his quill, shaking away the nasty feeling eating him up on the inside, and dipped it into the red inkwell. He had to do it some time, and by the looks of things, his Ronald had been just as eager, if not more so, to sign the document. It really puzzled him how anyone could let a jewel like Julia get away, but then again, that was his son. Applying quill to parchment, he signed it with an official flourish and then folded it back up and dropped some purple wax on it before pressing his seal into it and closing the documents.

He was just about to summon an owl to deliver it to the office for him when there was a knock at the door. He stood and walked over to the door, opening it only to find Bill on the other side waiting with a handsome smile on his face. Arthur was often baffled by the way that, even though he had a tough time of it, Bill always managed to summon the energy and feeling to smile.

'Hello, Dad I was just popping in for a spell before I headed back to Gringotts,' he said as his father opened the door wider to let him in.

'Hello there, I was just about to finish off my paperwork for the day and go down to the Auror's department to meet Kingsley for a pint,' Arthur said, walking back to his desk with his son and beginning the process of tidying it up.

'Ah, well, far be it for me to keep you from your lunchtime pint,' Bill said teasingly, helping his father tidy a little. It was as he did this that he noticed the folded parchments on the table. 'What's this for? Do you need it to be posted?'

'Ah, I just needed to get that down to the MDBC,' Arthur answered. 'Actually, if it's not too much trouble, could you take it down there on your way out? I'd much prefer you take it than an owl.'

'Another birth?' Bill asked with interest.

'Another divorce, I'm afraid,' he answered, shaking his head as he pulled on his Minister's robes. 'Ron and Julia's divorce, as a matter of fact. I've been putting it off for a week, but I finally caved in this morning.'

Bill's eyes widened as he picked up the small pile of parchments and nodded. 'I'll make sure they get there,' he said seriously. 'Although, you probably shouldn't have tried to put it off like that.'

Arthur nodded. 'I know that,' he said in frustration. 'I suppose there was just some part of me that wanted to give it a little more time to see if Ron and Julia could come to a compromise.'

Bill shook his head. 'Julia has more sense than to make the same mistake twice, Dad,' he said with a sigh of his own. 'I know how you cared for her and want her to be a part of our family, but it was not to be. Wouldn't you be happy for her if she were to be unburdened as a result of leaving our family?'

'You know I would,' Arthur told his son seriously as they walked out of his office, warding the door behind them on the way.

'I'll say goodbye here, and maybe I'll drop by home on the weekend to see how Mum is doing,' Bill promised, walking in the opposite direction to his father.

He walked at a leisurely pace down the hall before boarding the first elevator to open and took it down four floors before getting out, pleased that he had managed to escape being assaulted by the memos flying around inside the lift. He stopped quickly by the MDBD main office and stood in the short line-up for the secretary's desk. As he waited, his stomach was doing somersaults inside him, making him feel a little jittery and nervous about work. He didn't know why he should feel nervous. It was only work after all, and he would only be seeing Julia, his younger brother's recent ex-wife, whom he happened to be great friends with.

Of course, it didn't really help all that much that he was attracted to Julia, and had been for the past year. He had beaten himself up many a time for being so repulsive as to covet his brother's wife. Fleur, up until his sudden realisation that he had feelings for Julia, had been the only woman who had managed to attract his attention. At Hogwarts, he had not dated because he had not desired to, and afterwards, when he had first entered the working world, he had simply not had time to, and then he had met Fleur the summer after her graduation.

They had what most would have called a whirlwind romance, but to them it had been truer than any long and dragged-out affair. It had ended well between the two of them they were still in contact and owed every so often. Fleur had moved on and had gotten engaged again. Bill was labeled a black sheep of sorts in the family and had fallen for a woman who was already taken by his brother. It was not exactly the most promising of starts to a new life.

However, he soothed himself with the thought that even though he was sad that Ron and Julia had not found happiness, he no longer coveted a woman who was someone else's. It was bad that he had in the first place. But he knew that she would never be able to see him that way. After all, she had always told him that she was grateful that he was the big brother she had always wished she'd had.

Sighing, he moved forwards as the line did and soon ended up at the front. 'Please ensure that you file this properly the Minister's priority filing,' Bill said, handing the parchments to the clerk.

'Right you are, gov'ner,' the witch said through her thick Cockney accent.

Bill nodded and turned on his heel, leaving and striding to the lift once more. He took it down another two floors until he finally reached the main entrance hall with the fountain and restored statues. He Flooed directly to Diagon Alley, and briskly walked in the direction of Gringotts, arriving soon after and heading straight to the communal paper office. There he found Julia, flipping through books and examining something. He went to her with a small smile on his face. She was very pretty when she was busy concentrating on her work.

'Hello, hello,' he greeted cheerfully, pulling her up onto her feet and into a tight hug, lifting her and spinning her around.

Julia emitted a tiny squeak when he had first lifted her feet off the ground, but relaxed after a moment and simply smiled at Bill and his outrageous ways. When she was settled back to her feet, she took a moment to take him in. He was still as handsome as ever, although it looked as though he had shaved that morning because his chin was smooth, and he was smiling at her as if something brilliant had just happened.

'Hello to you too,' she greeted. 'And just why are you so happy today? Did the Goblins finally sell Gringotts to the Ministry or something?'

Bill shook his head. 'That is something that would never happen, my dear,' he answered, still smiling. 'Actually, I just came back from the Ministry and had stopped in to see my father. He had me take some papers down to the MDBD office for him. Can you guess whose papers?'

Julia frowned in concentration for a moment before it finally clicked. 'Oh, he's finally signed the divorce papers!' she exclaimed in surprise.

'He certainly did,' Bill replied, pulling her in for another short hug. 'You are now Julia Crittenden-Ainsworth again.'

Julia let out a soft laugh, hardly able to believe it. She had hardly even been a Weasley to begin with. She really had always been an Ainsworth at heart. The news made happiness bubble up inside of her, and she smiled widely, setting down her work brush and casting a charm to put all of her artifacts back to the storage shelves. She was going to take the rest of the day off and go shopping, she decided. Then she would go back to her London flat and take a nice long bath and drink a glass of wine.

'I'm going to take the rest of the day off,' she announced for him to hear.

Bill nodded and helped her tidy up. 'I'm sorry that it didn't work out between you and my brother,' he said sincerely. 'It took a lot of guts for you to leave our family, and I just wish he could have been a man about everything, and then you wouldn't have had to. It was the same with Fleur and I supported her and whatever she wanted to do.'

Julia smiled sadly at that. It had been a tragic thing when Fleur had left Bill. She had been told by Ginny that he had only ever loved one woman and she was the one woman who divorced him. It had always been a sad tale to think about, but even then, she didn't pity Bill. He was a really special guy, and she was sure that someday he would sweep a really lucky and lovely lady off her feet.

'You're good to me, Bill,' Julia said, patting his cheek before collecting her things up in her arms and walking towards the exit.

Just as she was about to close the door behind her, she felt his hand on her shoulder. She turned to look at him and saw the mixed look in his blue-grey eyes. 'Come over for dinner tonight? I'm having Ginny and Harry over, and Hermione and Severus might be coming too,' he said seriously.

Julia smiled. No Bill would not let her fall out of the Weasley fold. 'Alright, is there anything I should bring along with me?' she answered.

'Just bring yourself, that's all' he said with a charming grin, releasing her.

Julia nodded and continued on her way, smiling as she went. She wasn't married to Ron anymore. Her world hadn't fallen apart. She was not going to lose her job, livelihood, or friends over the entire thing. Ginny and the majority of the Weasleys would still talk to her and be friendly with her, so she had very little to worry about. Their house had been sold, and everything split evenly between the two of them. She still had her flat in London from before she had married Ron. Everything would be fine.

She told herself that as she walked down Diagon Alley, towards the Leaky Cauldron, out into Muggle London, and while she was busy shopping and buying a pretty navy blue dress that she doubted she would have occasion to wear. She wasn't shopping because she was depressed. She just needed the time to think. And think she did as she Apparated home and drew herself a bath. She even did some serious thinking while she was lounging in the scented, bubbly water. It wasn't until she was dried and getting dressed in jeans and a jewel blue blouse that she realized why she was thinking. As much as he had hurt her, she didn't hate Ron. She wanted him to move on quickly and be happy with someone more suited to him. But what she wanted the most was for him to move on first so that she felt justified that she could move on herself.

She nodded and then Apparated to Bill's house for dinner.

Blissful Ignorance

The Snape's attend the Potter's dinner party, and Lily, once again, torments Severus.

Hugs go to Madbrilliant and Alliean for the beta of this chapter. Additionally, a big hug must also go to WriterMerrin for her patience with all of my commas.

.....

Chapter 26 - Blissful Ignorance

The crash that sounded through the house immediately alerted all of the adults to the fact that there was a child running around without supervision.

Hermione and Ginny burst into the sitting room as quickly as they could in their pregnant states, both a little out of breath from power-walking the entire way there. Ginny walked through and found little Lily sitting on the floor beside a shattered vase that had once been on the coffee table. She was looking decidedly teary-eyed as she sat there, sporting a little purpling bruise on her forehead. Rushing to the little one's side, Ginny scooped her up and tried to soothe her while Hermione cast a charm to piece the vase back together before returning it to the table.

'Oh, darling, let me take a look at your head,' Ginny cooed, rocking the girl a little as she spoke.

Hermione walked over to join them and pulled a small jar out of one of her robe pockets, offering it to her friend. 'It's just some bruise salve,' she explained as Ginny took it from her, eyeing it warily. 'Just about everything I come into contact with bruises me.'

Ginny smiled then and laughed. 'I know how you feel. I get a little bit that way myself,' she said, proffering a recently-bruised arm at her.

'You should use some on yourself too,' Hermione said seriously.

Ginny nodded and sat down with a sulking Lily on one of the couches, opening the jar and scooping a little of the salve out, then began rubbing it gently on the girl's bruising forehead. Once that was done, she kissed her daughter's cheek and set her back down on the floor before Hermione commandeered a spot on the couch and rubbed some of the salve onto Ginny's arms to heal and remove the bruising. Once they were finished, Hermione resealed the jar and smiled.

'There, all done,' she announced, putting the jar back in her robes.

Ginny grinned, and the two of them sat back on the lounge to relax while Lily sat on the floor sucking her thumb and playing with a little plush ball. It was quiet and gave the two women some time to think things over. Ginny wondered what was on her friend's mind because, by the looks of it, it was something good as she had a little grin on her face.

'What's that smile all about, 'Mione?' she asked, nudging her with her shoulder.

'I'm sure you already have some idea why at the very least,' Hermione replied, her smile broadening as she spoke. 'I am deliriously happy. I'm married to the man I love, and I'm carrying his children. What more could I ask for?'

'I am so happy for you, Hermione,' Ginny said with a tender smile, hugging the older woman to her tightly and closing her eyes as a tear escaped. 'You will never be able to know how thrilled I was for you when Severus came into your life.'

Hermione smiled, her thoughts immediately going back to how difficult it had been for the two of them to finally come together. Severus had been such a stubborn arse when it came to getting around to admitting he had feelings for her. Come to think of it, at Christmas, he had been an insensitive arse. She looked over to Ginny and gave her a bright, honest smile. She was so happy with her life.

'How are things at Hogwarts now that Skeeter has been taken care of?' Ginny asked with interest. 'I hear that you and Severus got a whole lot of apologies in the post for a week from all the people who had sent you howlers because of that woman.'

Hermione laughed aloud at that and had to wipe the tears from her eyes. 'It's really wonderful to know that half the wizarding world doesn't think badly of us anymore, but I was beginning to think that Severus would have preferred they hate him,' she answered with a sheepish grin. 'I only read a couple of the apology letters myself, and most of the ones directed to me were apologizing for calling me a tramp.'

Ginny laughed at that one. If anyone was the furthest thing from being a tramp, that someone would have to be Hermione. She had always been goody-two-shoes as a Hogwarts student, and as a Professor and Deputy Headmistress, she had always ruled her classroom strictly but fairly. She was similar to Minerva in that way. Just as she was about to open her mouth to say something, Severus Snape himself Flooed into the sitting room, walking out and dusting himself off a little.

'Severus!' Hermione exclaimed, launching herself off the couch and into his arms in less than three steps. She must have flung herself half-way across the sitting room.

Luckily for everyone there, Severus was quick and strong, catching her easily in his embrace and hugging her to him while spinning her around in the air. Once he had set Hermione back on her feet, she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him. He went a little stiff for a moment and then relaxed enough to return it briefly before pulling away from her. He was still a little uncomfortable with showing affection in front of others, but Hermione was proud of how far he had come already.

'You're early,' Hermione told him as she led him over to the couch.

'Filius was buzzing around like a ninny and wouldn't leave me alone until I agreed to leave early,' Severus offered in answer.

Just then, Lily seemed to clue in to what was going on in the room and spotted a new arrival on the couch. On seeing it was Severus, she toddled over and put a little hand on his knee, looking up at him imploringly. Hermione was about to squeal at how cute it was, but instead she settled for simply smiling. Who knew what Severus would do if she did that to him?

'Just who else is coming to this dinner of yours?' Severus asked Ginny as he reluctantly lifted a cheery Lily up onto his lap.

'Oh, well, let's see Remus and Tonks are coming, and so are Fred, George, and Minerva,' Ginny listed off on her fingers. 'Oh! And I invited Julia and Bill. It seems mum has decided to give Bill a bit of a hard time again, so he hasn't been home in a while or seen anyone other than Jules.'

Severus frowned at that comment, feeling his current disrespect for Molly grow. He had really hoped that after a few weeks it would have calmed back down. But she was consistent, if nothing else. He bounced the toddler on his knee a bit, making her squeal with delight and causing both the women to focus their attention on him and the little girl on his knee. Ginny was smiling in amusement, while Hermione just looked completely baffled.

'A few months ago and you didn't even want Lily on your knee, and now you're playing with her?' she asked in amazement. 'Severus, I'm surprised at you.'

He cleared his throat uncomfortably, although he did not cease his bouncing. 'Call it a fatherly instinct that is probably caused by the fact that we are expecting our own children,' he said seriously. 'I can't treat our children callously, and this one here seems to like me enough. What's the extra practice?'

Ginny stifled a giggle. 'I didn't think someone could be quite so affectionate and clinical all at the same time until you, Severus,' she said from behind her hand.

Severus rolled his eyes at her just as Harry entered the room and took in the sight of his former Potions Professor bouncing his adorable, red-headed toddler on his knee. It was a little disconcerting to say the very least. He strode over to his wife and gave her a proprietary kiss on the cheek before sitting on the arm of the lounge to join the conversation.

'So, what have I missed?' he asked cheerfully, obviously oblivious to Severus' stare of absolute horror at Harry seeing him playing with Lily.

Ginny smiled at her husband and brushed some of his dark hair out of his face. 'Nothing of importance, love,' she informed him kindly.

After about half an hour of simply sitting there and chatting idly, Hermione and Ginny went to the kitchen to begin preparations for dinner, leaving Lily with Severus and Harry in the sitting room. Severus had protested Hermione and Ginny having to make dinner on their own and tried to insist that he was perfectly exceptional at cooking and that he was sure Harry would be a reasonable enough assistant. The two women had laughed and told him off, saying that they were all too happy to make the dinner for the party. He reluctantly backed down, and so there he was with the boy who continued to live, holding his sleeping child, sitting in his house.

Two hours later when the doorbell rang, Harry jumped to his feet and went to immediately greet the first guests. He was rather excited about the whole thing, as he hadn't seen Remus and Tonks in a fair while and was pleased at the chance to catch up with them. Opening the door, he greeted Bill and Julia, who had tagged alongside him. Harry had noticed them spending a lot of time together of late, but considering they had both been victims of Molly's tirade, he figured that the pair of them were comfortable with each other because they worked together, and that they both now had something in common.

'Hello there, you lot,' Harry greeted in his goofy, un-chivalrous way. 'Come on inside and join Professor Snape and I for a drink in the sitting room.'

'Us lot have a name,' Bill muttered under his breath as he entered, pushing a bottle of wine into Harry's hands as he passed, chuckling the whole time.

Julia smiled and gave Harry a hug as she passed into the house. 'Are Hermione and Ginny in the kitchen then?' she asked politely.

'Head on in if you like,' Harry replied, closing the door behind him and taking the wine and his person into the sitting room once more to join the other men. 'I wonder when Tonks and Remus are going to show up...'

Harry sat down across from Bill just as Severus stood up with Lily cradled firmly in the crook of one arm. 'Where is her room?' he asked Harry. 'I'll take her up to bed.'

'Upstairs, first room to the left of the staircase,' Harry said briefly.

Severus nodded and walked out of the sitting room, heading up the stairs quietly, carefully holding the girl to his chest so that she would not be disturbed. He wasn't quite sure when it was that she had fallen asleep on him, but he imagined it had been some time after Ginny had fed her something for dinner. One minute she had been playing with the fingers of one of his hands, and the next minute, her head had softly fallen back onto his chest, and she was hugging his hand close to her.

He entered the bedroom that Harry had directed him to and walked over to the cot, carefully extracting her hand from the position it was in, curled into his white linen shirt. He gently placed her in cot and quickly covered her with a light blanket, even as her arms were reaching out to him in her sleep. He felt a tug in his chest at the sight and reached out to affectionately brush a lock of red hair out of her face. He turned around to leave the room then, only to run into Hermione in the open doorway.

'That was one of the loveliest things I have ever seen you do,' she told him when he reached her side, and she wrapped her arms around his waist.

Severus cleared his throat softly and tucked a curl out of Hermione's face also, stroking his long index finger down her nose before tapping the end of it. 'Come now, you know very well that I must like the girl,' he said a little gruffly, unused to expressing himself about those things.

Hermione laughed softly at his discomfort, leading him back downstairs to join their friends.

Mutual Regard

Chapter 27 of 32

The final exams for the year are approaching, and Severus has been busy planning a surprise for Hermione.

I would like to thank my brilliant beta Alliean, for all of her help with this chapter.

.....

Chapter 27 - Mutual Regard

The final exams for the school year were slowly drawing closer, and the students who cared about their final results were going into a sort of frenzy. Hermione had been so busy all week and weekend, marking and preparing her Potions students for their exams, and being particularly hard on her O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. students. After all, their results were the ones that affected their futures the most. She had been in the dungeons, and some nights during the week, Severus had needed to go and fetch her simply because she had fallen asleep at her desk and he had been a little worried about her. He was so nervous about the stress all of it was causing her that he had made sure that she would go see Poppy.

Severus himself had been busy all week preparing for the examination board of professors to come to Hogwarts, which was no simple task. He had to provide rooms, meals and seating for them, which was a tremendous effort when all of his staff were busy doing their own exam preparations. During this time, Severus had also been rather preoccupied with sorting out the delivery of some very important pieces of paperwork from the Ministry. Hermione had asked him a few times exactly what it was that he was doing, but he had waved her off and said it was Ministry work.

This was, in fact, a little bit of a lie, but he had said it with only the best of intentions, intent on surprising Hermione. This was going to be like a sort of gift to her, without it actually being so. That morning, he had gathered all of the paperwork together, signed it all himself, and arranged a meeting with a certain eleven-year-old Gryffindor girl. So far, the plan had gone ahead as he had expected, and all he needed was Megan Cabot to arrive so he could go to Hermione. As he had expected for the past ten minutes, there was a knock on the door.

'Do come inside, Miss Cabot,' he said politely.

The door opened a fraction, and the skinny little Megan Cabot entered the room quietly, closing the door behind her.

'You asked for me, Professor?' she asked softly as she approached his desk.

'Yes, indeed, I have something rather important I would like to discuss with you this morning, and I need your cooperation,' he replied, gesturing for her to sit. 'Now, I assume you must be curious, so feel free to ask me your questions now, and I will answer to the best of my ability.'

Megan nodded carefully, twisting her fingers together in her lap.

'Well, I would like to know why you asked me here for a start, sir,' she murmured quietly.

Severus took a deep breath before beginning his explanation.

'It came to my attention, especially during the Christmas break, that you no longer have any family, correct?' he asked, trying to be sensitive, but on seeing her nod, he relaxed a little more. 'Well, the main reason behind my asking you here is because my wife and I would very much like to remedy that.'

'You want to find me a family?' she asked, tilting her head a little in confusion.

'In a manner of speaking, yes, that is essentially what we would like to do,' he answered a little vaguely. 'It is not my wish for you to have to go back to the Muggle world and have to live in an orphanage.'

'So, you are getting someone to take me in?' she asked, her eyes lighting up, which Severus took as a positive sign.

'Actually, we are rather trying to have you adopted into a wizarding family,' he said slowly, gauging her face for a reaction, and when he saw none, he pressed on. 'I was rather thinking that you might not be opposed to joining my family with Hermione.'

The room was deathly silent for a moment, and Severus found himself feeling too nervous to look up and see the girl's face. He heard her chair move, and her padded footsteps on the carpet as she walked, and assumed she had decided to leave. But as soon as he looked up instead, he found that she was walking around his desk, and he soon had Megan Cabot's arms wrapped tightly around his neck in one of the most suffocating hugs he had ever been given by one so young.

'Thank you so much, Professor!' she exclaimed as she clung to him. 'I am so glad I came to this school, and I am really very grateful to both you and the professor for everything you have done for me already! I would love to be a part of your family!'

Soon, she was crying into his shoulder, and all he could do was embrace and comfort her. Obviously, she had been under a lot of stress, what with losing her parents, being alone, and going to a Magical school all in a matter of a couple of years. He liked this girl a great deal, and he felt that, even though he did not love her as a daughter, he was sure he would come to think of her as his own in time. He simply patted her back and handed her a handkerchief when she was finished sobbing.

'I-I'm s-so sorry, Professor,' she said in between breaths as she wiped her face and stood back up properly. 'I-I'm really, really happy, and I guess I just lost myself for a minute there.'

'That is quite alright, Miss Megan,' he said correcting himself. 'Now, I know you will want some time to consider this for a little longer, but as soon as you have decided, I have the papers for you to sign.'

'I can sign them now,' she said shyly. 'I won't change my mind.'

Severus nodded. 'Very well, you sign in these three places,' he said, indicating them with a dot on each with his quill. 'And then, you touch your wand to the last one, and your part will be finalized.'

Megan accepted his quill and did as directed before touching her wand to the last signature and smiling at him when she was finished.

'Okay, all done,' she announced, placing the quill back on his desk.

'Thank you very much for that,' Severus said kindly, in his most sincere tone. 'Now, all that is left to be done is get Hermione's signatures and the Ministry department's stamp of approval. And then you shall remain with us for as long as you should like, and we will provide for you henceforth from that time.'

'Thank you again, Professor,' she said, hugging him around his neck again.

'You may call me Severus when we are not in front of any of the other students,' he told her seriously. 'When I become your adoptive father, I think it would be rather silly for you to have to call me "Professor" all of the time, don't you think?'

'I like your name, Severus,' she said cheerfully, sounding natural as she said it. It was as though she was supposed to be a part of his and Hermione's life together.

'I suppose I should be glad then,' he answered teasingly, allowing her to see a little of the man he was behind all of the snark and sourness. She was going to be his daughter, so she had a right to see who he truly was. 'Now, I am sure I have interrupted some very serious studying for you, so you should run along and get that done. Perhaps you would come back and have dinner with Hermione and me this evening?'

'I will be here at six,' the girl answered with a grin.

Hugging Severus once more, she then skipped her way out of the room giddily and closed the office door behind her. Severus sighed and smiled, looking at the papers before him with both their scrawled signatures. He had done the right thing that day; he could just feel it. He was about to stand and head to his and Hermione's chambers when a familiar voice came from behind his chair, sounding very much like someone clearing their throat for attention. Severus reluctantly spun his chair around to face Albus Dumbledore's portrait.

'Is there something you wanted, Albus?' he asked in a mildly bored tone.

'Nothing more than to congratulate you, my boy,' the older wizard said with a chuckle. 'It does me good to see that your little family is slowly getting on in size. I always did think you would make a good father.'

'You think the same about everyone, Albus,' Severus said sarcastically.

Albus shook his head and sighed. 'I do hope that you are not intending to keep your family here all summer, Severus,' he said seriously, stroking his beard in thought. 'Perhaps you could relocate to your estate in Spain. I am sure Hermione would love that, and young Miss Megan looks as though she would be thrilled at the prospect of spending her summer in a Spanish villa.'

'You do have a valid point,' Severus mused. 'I cannot very well begin my family in this godforsaken castle. I'm not sure we would stay all summer in Spain were we to go, however. Hermione will want to return here for her confinement in the last month, I think. I am under the impression she wants Poppy to deliver the twins.'

Albus clapped his hands together cheerfully.

'Splendid, splendid! I am glad you decided to listen to me this time, Severus,' the former Headmaster teased.

Severus scowled at him for that. 'Don't you have someone to go and visit in the castle, or something? I still have other work to be getting on with,' he asked skeptically. 'You can either go off for visits, or I'll shut the curtains on you.'

'I'll take that as my cue to leave then, shall I?' Albus asked jovially.

'Quite,' Severus replied gruffly.

After Albus left his portrait in search of a friend to visit, Severus decided to take a short break and sat back to relax in his chair. He was just about to get up and go over to open the windows to the office when Hermione Flooded in, looking a little haggard and definitely distraught. She rushed into his open arms, and he hugged her tightly before swinging her into his arms with practiced ease and carrying her over to the chairs and sitting with her on his lap.

'What is the matter, love?' he asked, stroking her hair as she sobbed. This was the second lot of tears to stain his robes that day.

'I'm just so tired, and I can't keep awake long enough to finish my marking for the sixth year students, and all I want to do is curl up in bed with you, without you having to come and find me in the dungeons sleeping on my marking,' she said as she hiccupped and cried.

Severus soothed her and stroked her hair and back until her sobs calmed and she was simply just breathing and snuggling into him. He had been wondering when she was going to crack from the stress with her being both a professor and his deputy. He was sure she was feeling it a lot worse, especially with the twins. Soon enough, her breathing became even, and he knew she had fallen asleep. He stood from the chair and took her into their chambers, laying her down on the couch and propping a pillow under her head. She deserved to sleep for a while and recuperate. He would just have to give her the news about Megan later.

He Summoned the papers from his office and placed them on the coffee table near the lounge so that his wife would see them when she woke up, then left for his office once more to finish his paperwork for the day. He pushed his glasses back up the bridge of his nose and got busy, working conscientiously until he heard Hermione's voice yell for him, growing louder as she approached. She burst into his office with amazing speed and threw herself onto him.

'Oh my god, Severus Snape!' she cried, throwing her arms around his neck. 'How could you not tell me we are adopting Megan?'

Severus smirked at her. 'I thought I just did,' he murmured before claiming her lips in the sweetest of kisses.

The Quiet Office

Chapter 28 of 32

Bill drops by Julia's office at work to offer her a distraction...

Kudos go to Madbrilliant and Alliean for the beta of this chapter.

Chapter 28 - The Quiet Office

Weekends were always quiet at work, as fewer people would be coming in and out of the building for business.

Julia had once enjoyed days like these, where she could sit in the eerie silence and keep to herself quietly while working away on some new charms for breaking curses on cases and various other items found in tombs and caves. But those days were gone and past, and now she found that working on her own in the deadly quiet office was a little daunting, and she missed the noise. Sighing, she stood up from her workbench and went to the window, throwing it open wide and being instantly assailed with the smells and sounds of Diagon Alley below.

Glad to be breathing fresh air, as the room had been a little stuffy, she moved back to her bench and picked up the small puzzle box in front of her. The box was not an artifact at all. It was a gift she had been given by her grandfather before he had passed away, and she had not been able to find a way to open it in over eight years. Some days she would bring it in to work with her, hoping for some inspiration as what to do from the knowledge and experience she garnered there.

She pushed the box aside and put her head into her hands tiredly. She knew why she was unable to concentrate. The only problem was, she wished she wasn't thinking it. Bill Weasley, her best friend and the older brother of her ex-husband, was constantly on her mind these days. She was half glad that he was not at Gringotts that day, because when he was around, the idea of getting productive work done lately was a novelty. It had only been two months since she had divorced Ron, and while they had been having problems for a long while, she simply had not expected to move on quite so quickly and find herself noticing and falling for a man whom she had not thought of in a romantic way until just recently.

'Busy at work, I see,' murmured a familiar voice right into her ear.

Julia nearly fell off her stool from the fright she got. Thankfully, a pair of strong arms wrapped around her and righted her on the stool effortlessly before she was able to spin around and face the intruder. What she caught sight of was a casually dressed Bill, wearing a black t-shirt with a pair of casual jeans, his long hair untied and loose around his shoulders. He was stunning. It wasn't any wonder that half of the women in the building would swoon as he walked passed them, let alone smile at them with his dashing grin in the halls.

'I was having a little trouble concentrating,' she replied sheepishly with a shrug, being careful not to make too much eye contact. His eyes were lovely.

'You need to get away from this office, love,' he said in a friendly way, walking closer to her and putting an arm around her shoulders in a one-armed hug.

'I wanted to get some work done on the box today,' she protested weakly as he started to steer her towards the door to leave.

He shook his head at her and plucked the box and her bag from the table, taking everything with him as he coaxed her out. 'Let's go have some lunch,' he suggested with a beaming smile that left her a little breathless.

'Okay,' Julia found she was saying in reply.

Allowing herself to be led down the three flights of stairs, they left the building together with his arm wrapped carelessly around her shoulders and Julia clutching her bag to her chest like a safety blanket. She was getting a lot of strange looks from a fair number of the women, along with looks of both contempt and jealousy. She hadn't received looks like that before in her life, and being on the receiving end of them was a bit too daunting for her.

'Bill, they're glaring at me like I'm the devil,' she hissed under her breath in his general direction.

He laughed, tilting his head back in that way of his as he did, and pulled her closer to him before kissing the top of her head. 'Julia, I was hugging you like this when you were married to my brother, and I'm not going to stop hugging my best friend just because you divorced the little prat,' he said with a smile.

Julia smiled at that. She was relieved to know that, despite her divorcing Ron, Bill still considered her to be his best friend. She swallowed her fears of being ridiculed and relaxed, looping her bag onto her arm and shoulder and walking along beside him normally. They finally reached a small café in the middle of Diagon Alley, and Bill drew a chair out for her to sit before he assumed the seat opposite her. A waiter appeared, and they placed their orders before settling back comfortably to enjoy the summer sunshine and each other's company.

'How have you been?' he asked seriously, leaning forwards to rest his elbows on the table as he looked at her.

Julia nodded and offered him a small smile. 'I feel fine, honestly,' she answered, almost telling him the truth. 'It gets a little lonely and quiet at my flat, but other than that, I've been doing well.'

'Seen much of Hermione and Severus?' he queried.

'I saw Hermione just last week the Hogwarts school year has just finished yesterday, I believe,' she replied, fiddling with the salt and pepper shakers on the table.

'Yes, Ginny was kind enough to inform me when she asked me to have dinner with her and Harry the other evening,' Bill said, smiling at the waitress who brought out their orders and thanking her politely. She was blushing by the time she walked back inside to resume her duties. When he looked back across the table at Julia, he saw that she had an eyebrow raised at him. 'What?'

'Why do you wait around like this, Bill? There are thousands of perfectly lovely, not to mention eligible, witches who would give their entire wardrobe of shoes away for the chance to have a conversation,' she said, partially out of exasperation and partly from jealousy. 'What are you waiting for?'

Bill simply smiled at her while his brain was frantically screaming, 'You I'm waiting for you!' He reached a hand out and stilled her fiddling hands on the table and gesturing at her food. 'I don't want anyone to sacrifice shoes for me. Those women they're all the same. Before, when I was scarred by that werewolf before the Healer's at St. Mungo's fixed it, none of them would have looked at me twice.'

'You have a lot of depth to you, Bill Weasley,' she said, taking a bite of her sandwich. 'I can see why Fleur was like a godsend to you. She wanted you, scars and all.'

Bill nodded, surprised that he did not feel a tug in his chest at the mention of Fleur's name. At one point, it has hurt him so badly to think about Fleur, but now, she was like a pale memory in comparison to the woman across from him. After that, they ate together in silence, occasionally smiling at each other and often accidentally brushing knees beneath the table. Once they were done, Bill paid for it all, and together they went for a leisurely stroll down the Alley.

'I should get back home,' Julia said after a long while. She had been with him for the better part of four hours.

'I'll see you to your door then,' he offered chivalrously, with a smile that made her unable to resist him.

She nodded, and they walked to the nearest Apparation Point in the Alley, and Bill wrapped an arm tightly around her before Apparating them both into the sitting room of her flat. She dropped her bag onto her kitchen table, fishing out her wand and giving it a quick flick to open the blinds and the windows to allow fresh air and sunlight into her cozy apartment.

'Have a seat anywhere,' she told him as she went to the kitchen to put on the kettle to boil for making tea.

Instead of sitting, he wandered around her small sitting room, looking at the abundance of photos she had on the mantle of her fireplace, and the shelves that were not holding her precious book collection, and the various little china ornaments that he knew had once belonged to her great-grandmother. To be honest, since her divorce, Bill had never fully walked into her apartment at all and was rather surprised when he saw her decorating style. It was very tidy, but she liked to have a lot of photos of memorable things around the place, like ones of her family and friends, and things that she cherished. It was very different than her house with Ron.

While he was waiting and listening to her bustle around in the kitchen, he spotted something a photo that had immediately caught his eye as he looked more closely at the mantle. In one of the positions of honor, right beside the photo of her with her parents, was a lovely little picture of Julia and him. He was standing behind her in the photo and had his arms wrapped around her and over her shoulders. They were both smiling and wearing their beige work uniforms from the time they had spent working together in Egypt for Gringotts. It had been when he'd first met her.

It had been Bill that had introduced Ron to Julia in America when the two had gone over to watch Ron play a Quidditch match. They had clicked instantly, or so they had all thought, and Ron had once again been determined to make a Hermione out of her. Unfortunately for him, Julia was her own person, and their divorce had been a result of Ron's blindness. Bill would not be making the same mistake. He found that he was in love with his best friend, and he wasn't going to let her go.

'Would you like tea or coffee?' asked Julia from the kitchen doorway then. 'I'll only make a pot of either one, but not both.'

Bill smiled. 'Plunger of coffee would be lovely, thanks, Julia,' he replied, putting the photo of them together back on the mantle and going to join her in the kitchen.

He found her there, carefully spooning the exact amount of coffee into the bottom of a Muggle press percolator before adding water into it and sitting the lid on the top, setting her watch to time how long it should sit for. She saw him in the doorway and gifted him with one of her beautiful smiles the kind that he had been missing ever since the problems began in the family with his mother and brother. He walked over to her and tucked some stray hair behind her ear, and just as her watch went off, he pressed the plunger down on the coffee slowly.

'Julia?' he asked a little hesitantly.

She looked up at his face curiously, wondering at his tone. 'Yes?' she answered.

'Would you... I don't want to seem insensitive by asking this, but I was wondering if you would like to accompany me for dinner sometime,' he asked, looking at the kitchen bench top nervously.

Julia felt her breath catch in her throat. Was he...? 'Are you asking me out on a date?' she asked quietly so not to sound like she was assuming too much.

He sucked in a deep breath audibly and nodded. 'I know this might be moving a little too fast, and I understand if you say no after all I did rather spring this on you.'

Julia caught his hand in her own and leaned forwards, pressing her lips to his cheek gently. 'I would love to go on a date with you, Bill,' she said sincerely, brushing his hair back from his face as it had fallen in front when he had been trying to hide behind it. She grinned at him and hugged him around the waist, prompting him to respond in kind, and he reached around her petite form in a fierce hug.

'Coffee now?' she asked with a laugh as she pulled back.

Bill nodded, feeling lightness in his step that had not been there before.

Summer Vacation

Chapter 29 of 32

The summer vacation has begun, and the Snapes are in Spain.

I would like to thank Alliean for her beta of this chapter. She is truly a gem :)

.....

Chapter 29 - Summer Holiday

Spain, while hot during the summer, was a very lovely holiday destination and popular amongst Muggles and magical folk alike.

Severus was now pleased with himself for having had bought a property in Spain ten years beforehand when he had been bored one summer. Now, it could finally be put to use, and the house-elves that cared for the house would have a purpose. Hermione, when the idea was first suggested to her, had been enthralled, hugging and kissing him all over before dragging him to their bed for a long lovemaking session. He, of course, had not objected to any of this in the least.

So, two weeks after the students had left, when the only remaining folk who were in the castle were other professors, and of course, Megan. Severus announced that they would be packing up and going on vacation. Megan, who was still over the moon about becoming a part of their slowly growing family, had been totally beside herself about it. So, after about two hours of getting their belongings together for the trip, they all went by Floo to Snape Villa.

This was how Severus, two days later, had ended up lounging on a deck chair beside a huge Grecian-style pool as his wife napped right beside him on the huge chair, tucked against his chest while Megan splashed around in the water. Severus smiled as he watched her, not able to believe how much she had truly grown on him. He cared for the girl quite a lot more than he thought he would be able to care for a child that was not his own, and this pleased him. He would have really disliked being unable to care for her as she rightly deserved.

Hermione, of course, simply adored Megan and would spend quite a lot of time outdoors with her, picking flowers and just generally getting to know her better. While sometimes it made Severus feel like a third wheel, he knew it was for a good cause. He wanted Hermione to be close to Megan. Smirking, he trailed a long, pale finger down her arm, causing goose bumps to prickle her smooth, lightly tanned skin. The sun was causing her freckles to stand out more prominently on her nose and cheekbones. Admittedly, Severus found them quite lovely while Hermione disliked them.

'They are awful and spotty,' she had told him one day when they had first started to make themselves known.

He had laughed and kissed her into breathlessness. 'You always look like a beautiful goddess to me, love,' had been his only reply.

Sighing, he let his arm fall down to rest on the chair, feeling lax from the warmth. It was no wonder his wife slept like she was right now. He felt a little drowsy too. Just as he was contemplating moving the two of them inside, a wave of water washed over him, icy cold and wholly surprising. He sat up abruptly, as did Hermione who was woken from her nap, and they both looked over at Megan, who was trying but failing to disguise her mirth at having caught them by surprise.

'I wonder who that might have been,' said Hermione with a grin as she took off the wrap around her hips and made her way to the water with the young girl, smiling and laughing. 'Oh, you are in for it now!'

Smiling at the two women in his life, he pulled off the dripping wet shirt he had been wearing and walked over to the pool to join them. It had been rather hot after all, and he reasoned that he was only going into the water to cool off not because he actually wanted to join in their merrymaking. Two hours later, after all three had become thoroughly waterlogged and exhausted from the sun and the exertion, they went back into the large, sprawling house, and Megan went off to her own bathroom while Hermione and Severus showered together in theirs.

'You had fun out there,' Hermione commented with a grin as the water sluiced over them.

Severus attempted to look a little gruff, but it failed completely and ended up as a sort of half smile. 'I did have fun both watching and joining,' he replied. 'The two of you make it easy for me to relax and enjoy myself. My last visit here was over five years ago, and I stayed indoors mostly.'

'I don't know how you could!' she exclaimed. 'It's so lovely here.'

Severus chuckled at his wife's obvious enthusiasm for the place. 'Well then, I believe that perhaps we should make a habit out of visiting every summer,' he suggested, which earned him a long kiss.

A short while later, the two emerged from their shower and dressed, Hermione in a light, cotton summer dress, and Severus in his usual black trousers and white linen shirt. She had tried to coax him into wearing something cooler, but in the end he hadn't budged one iota. She did, however, manage to convince him to leave the shirt untucked and mostly unbuttoned, with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. A man could only resist so much before caving to the whims of his lovely wife after all.

They walked down the stairs hand in hand, meeting up with Megan on the way down to the dinning room for lunch. 'Is there anything in particular that you would like to do this afternoon?' Severus asked the girl.

'We should have a picnic lunch!' she exclaimed with a wide grin. 'There is lots of shade over by those trees next to the lake, and we can all be outside and eat!'

'That's a wonderful idea,' Hermione praised, taking Megan's hand with her free one and gazing affectionately at her.

Severus nodded his approval of the idea and left the two ladies to go and collect a blanket while he went to the kitchen and asked the elves if they could prepare a picnic basket for their lunch. Pleased at having a request, the elves went to it straight away, and within ten minutes, they had a basket packed full with all sorts of picnic foods and drinks. Thanking them, Severus took the basket and met up with his two ladies by the pool before they all linked up and strode down to the lake and trees.

'Thank you, Severus,' Hermione said as Megan ran off ahead with the blanket. She was so young still, in some ways, while in others, she was older than her years. 'You have been so good to me, and to Megan.'

Severus schooled his face to remain impassive and simply nodded at first. 'I think most people would know by now that I would do anything for you,' he replied. 'However, I will admit that seeing Megan happy also has come to mean something to me.'

'You can admit that you like her, Sev; you know that don't you?' Hermione said, curling her arm around his tighter and moving closer as they walked. 'I think you will be such a good father to all of our children, if this is evidence. You have been so wonderful to a child that was not your own, and you will be just as good, if not better, to your own children.'

Severus nodded, and he knew just what he wanted to say to that. 'When our children come along, I do not want Megan to feel as though she was not equally a part of the family. I want all of them to be treated equally no favoritism.'

Hermione grinned, kissing him on the cheek. 'You truly are a special man,' she announced before releasing his arm and walking along ahead of him to join Megan sooner.

They had the picnic blanket spread over the ground evenly, assisted by Hermione's magic, of course, and were both sitting by the time Severus reached them. He set the picnic basket in the middle and told them both to dig in. Hermione gladly opened it up and pulled nearly everything out of it, spreading the contents over the blanket before tucking straight into a sandwich. She was pregnant after all, and eating for three was no easy task. She found that she was hungry more often than not and woke in the middle of the night constantly, to find that she was starving and craving strange meals, or craving strange meals like cold spaghetti, pickles and ice cream, or a sandwich of banana, jam and peanut butter.

It was on nights like those that she appreciated Severus the most. He was, after all, the one who would ensure that she got what she desired to eat, and he never complained about being woken up for such trivial things. In fact, she realized soon after the craving period had begun that he rather liked pampering her. It sort of gave him another purpose, and if anyone liked to be needed for something, it was Severus Snape. Smiling to herself, she looked up at her husband and saw that he and Megan were having an eating competition to see who could wolf down a sandwich the fastest. She knew that Severus could easily have won, but he seemed to be chewing a lot more than usual, slowing down purposely to let Megan win.

'You slowed down on purpose,' Megan accused after he finished off his last bite.

'Oh, did I?' he asked silkily, moving so that they were level eye-to-eye. 'However did you come to that conclusion, my dear?'

Hermione laughed at the obvious banter and stuffed another pickle into her mouth. The twins were rather demanding when it came to food. The roundness to her belly, while smaller than some women, made her look just like she always did, but with a watermelon strapped on to her front. And she would only be getting bigger in the last couple of months. She felt like a whale most of the time, but Severus was very persistent in convincing her otherwise something which often left them nude, panting and sweating, lying amongst the Egyptian cotton linens of their bed.

Hermione was certain she would never tire of Severus as far as that side of their marriage went. He was insatiable, and she was always ready for him. Sitting back, she watched the two most important people in her life at that very moment play. It was the loveliest sight she could have ever imagined. Not in a million years would she have imagined this to be the way her life would turn out before she had fallen in love with him.

'Hermione, Hermione! Do you want to see what Sev'rus showed me?' Megan asked excitedly, her enthusiasm seemingly endless.

She smiled at the girl tenderly, shifting over so she could watch more easily. Severus shifted behind her then and pressed himself into her back, allowing her to lean back against him. She smiled up at him, leaning up just a little to kiss his chin before settling against him and getting ready to watch. Megan, without a wand, then levitated a leaf which turned into a paper chain of cutout girls. Her eyes wide, Hermione clapped and sat up, only to pull Megan to her in a hug. She was such a bright, lovely girl; Hermione just couldn't resist loving her like she was her own.

After they had all finished eating, Hermione fell asleep on Severus' lap, the rest of her sprawled over the blanket. He murmured a charm to put everything back into the basket neatly while Megan went to pick some flowers nearer to the lake. When she returned, she neatly arranged them and left the bunch on the picnic basket - 'For the elves to have,' she had said cheerfully. Soon after, Megan yawned and fell asleep with her head against his chest, still sitting up. He smiled and drew her against him, wondering how he could have been so lucky as to be blessed in so many ways.

When the sky began to glow an orange-pink, indicating that it was well into the evening, Severus woke his two ladies up and they returned to the house. After showering again, and dinner, Hermione and Severus tucked a sleepy Megan into bed and then went upstairs to their own room, collapsing onto the bed in a boneless heap.

'Thank you so much for today,' Hermione murmured sleepily against his chest.

'Any time, my love,' he whispered back into her ear, feeling equally drained. 'Sleep well, my pet.'

She yawned and snuggled against him, pleased that the house had been charmed so that the humidity and heat would not be a problem. 'Love you, Sev.'

Severus smiled, his eyes closed and arms tight around her. 'Love you too.'

A Friendly Dinner

Chapter 30 of 32

A small dinner gathering at Grimmauld Place attracts the attention of an uninvited guest.

Thanks go to the marvelous Alliean for the beta of this chapter.

Chapter 30 - A Friendly Dinner

Summer had begun on rather a pleasant note for the majority of those in the wizarding world, now that they had the freedom to move around without the threat of a Dark uprising looming in the near future. Bill had successfully taken Julia on three dates and two other informal outings, both of them acting respectfully towards each other. They were both unsure as to when the appropriate time would be for them to let all of the restraints fall away. Bill had held back from kissing her senseless on many occasions, mostly due to the newness of their relationship and out of respect for her. Julia, however, did not try and make any forward moves because she was usually too shy, and she was afraid of making Bill into the black sheep and outsider of the family more so than he was already.

They were treading on fragile ground, keeping their relationship a secret from everyone, save for Harry, Ginny, Hermione, and Severus. At work, their conduct was as it had ever been, except perhaps a tad more formal than it had been before to discourage anyone from suspecting, and all of their dates and outings had been conducted in mostly Muggle locations. Julia was actually surprised that they had yet to be caught out by someone. Bill was mostly relieved. He did not want bad press running about all over the place about them--especially--Julia because of him. Somewhere outside of the fog that was her thoughts, she heard her name being called.

'Julia? Hey, are you in there?' asked a cheerful female voice.

She blinked and turned to look over her shoulder at Amanda, the witch who worked in File Storage at Gringotts.

'Ummm, sorry about that,' she said, sitting up a bit straighter and smoothing out her skirt. 'How can I help you?'

'Just wanted to make sure you got the memo about having all your paperwork for this month done by Monday,' she replied in her thick Cockney accent. 'Have a nice weekend, won't you, love?'

Julia smiled at her. Amanda was really a lovely lady. 'Thanks for the reminder. You have a good weekend too,' she replied with a friendly wave as the woman left her office.

She sighed heavily and sat back in her chair, slouching a little and closing her eyes. She reached her hand over to her desk and grabbed for the puzzle box, wrapping her fingers around it, and was just about to open her eyes again when she felt fingers brushing hair out of her eyes, tucking the strays behind her ear tenderly. She sat up and turned to see Bill standing behind her high-backed office chair, smiling down at her. She smiled back at him, standing up so she could throw herself at him in their usual hug. He caught her with ease and embraced her warmly, stroking her back a little.

'Good afternoon to you too,' he said with a chuckle.

Julia let out a deep breath and snuggled closer. 'Bill, I am so exhausted!' she exclaimed softly.

'You should have gone home earlier there's no need for you to even come in on a Friday, love,' he told her, admonishing her lightly as he gently tilted her face up so he could see her better.

'I can't stay at home alone,' she admitted a little sheepishly. 'I'm so used to someone always being there when I get home it feels too empty.'

Bill smiled despite the fact that she meant Ron. He was a lazy git, who would stay at home all day when he didn't have Quidditch practice and still expect for her to make his dinner and pander to his every whim. If anything, it should have been the other way around. In his eyes, she deserved to be treated like royalty not as a housewife. He stroked a finger down her nose and smiled.

'We'll have to remedy that some day,' he said softly, not leaving any room for confusion about what he meant by his statement. 'But for now, please get home and take a nap before dinner tonight. I'll be around to collect you at seven, so you'll get at least three hours if you go now.'

Julia nodded reluctantly, her heart still beating fast in her chest from his murmured comment about her living arrangements. Oddly enough, she hoped he was meaning the near future when he spoke of it. She knew from their times sharing quarters in Egypt that they could live together compatibly. With a spark of hope settling in her chest, she hugged him before leaving and Apparated from the main hall to her little London apartment. She left her briefcase on her office desk and then shrugged off her robes, hanging them on the coat hooks beside the front door. With that done, she went to take a nice cool shower and slipped into a thin dressing gown when she was done. Checking the time and seeing that it was still only half past three, she flopped onto her bed, intending to get in a couple hours of sleep.

She was out like a light immediately and only woke three hours later, leaving her half an hour to get dressed to go to Harry and Ginny's for dinner that night. Hermione and Severus were going to be there after their month in Spain with their adorable adopted daughter Megan, as well as Remus and Tonks, whom she and Bill had decided they could trust. She got dressed in a pretty white skirt that fell to her knees, with a cornflower blue blossom pattern embroidered on it. She pulled on a matching blue blouse and brushed her long blonde hair back before charming it into a loose braid that fell to her waist. She had just finished her make-up when the doorbell rang, and she went to answer, only to find Bill standing there looking dashing in faded blue jeans with a partially unbuttoned black shirt tucked into it, with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. His hair was tied back as usual, and his cheeky grin spread over his lips. He swept her into a hug, kissing her forehead when he pulled back.

'You look lovely. Shall we go?' he asked, offering her his arm courteously.

She linked her arm with his and smiled at him. 'Yes, let's head over there now. The sooner we get questions out of the way with Remus and Dora, the better,' she answered, leaning close to him so that he could Apparate them both.

They Apparated to the park across from Grimmauld Place and walked around the hedges, crossing the road after a few cars had driven past, and then pressed the doorbell. Julia bit her bottom lip nervously as she had so often seen Hermione do before forcing herself to act natural. She didn't need to go around broadcasting that she was having bad feelings about being there that evening. Ginny and Harry had been so kind to her after her divorce from Ron, for which she had been grateful. A pregnant Ginny answered the door looking flushed and happy.

'Come in, you two!' she exclaimed on seeing them. 'Hermione and Severus just Flooed in with Megan, and Remus should be here with Dora any minute now!'

She ushered them inside in traditional Weasley style and led them all into the sitting room to meet with their friends. Julia was immediately surrounded by Hermione's arms, hardly able to breathe until the very pregnant woman released her from the clinch. Megan, who in her completely lovely way, called her 'Aunt Julia' -- and also called Bill 'Uncle' -- hugged her. The girl had amazing manners for one so young.

'It's so good to see you,' Hermione told her once everyone had calmed down and the men had gone off to sit in their own little corner with some drinks while the ladies retired to the comfortable lounges.

'It's great to see you too,' she replied warmly, taking Hermione's offered hand in her own. 'You have a lovely tan and set of freckles there, 'Mione. The pregnancy is going good, yes?'

She nodded. 'I had a check up just two days ago at St. Mungo's, and Poppy also stopped by for a visit at Snape Manor this morning,' she replied with a huge grin. 'Both of them are a little smaller than usual, but are perfectly healthy. She thinks they should start getting a little bigger in a short while.'

'That's really great, Hermione,' Julia said with a smile. 'I am so glad that you are all doing so well.'

'Speaking of which, how are things going between you and Bill?' Hermione asked, looking over to the redhead in question.

Julia blushed a little at the mention of their relationship, and was just about to answer when the doorbell rang again. This time, Harry jumped to his feet and ushered Ginny to sit back down and went to answer the door and let in their guests himself. This lull in the conversation gave Julia the chance to swallow some of her nerves and regroup in order to answer the question. Remus and Harry reappeared in the doorway, and a grinning Tonks, with her hair its normal mousy-brown shade, entered shortly after them.

'You so have some explaining to do, Miss Julia!' Tonks said, plopping herself on the footstool in front of all the ladies seated on the lounge.

Julia had once more opened her mouth to speak when the worst thing that could have possibly happened occurred -- something which explained the niggling sense of unease she had been feeling all day. She turned to see why everyone had suddenly stopped talking, and it was because a very red, angry-looking Ron was dusting himself off over by the fireplace which still had a green glow around it from him Flooing in. He stood stiffly, his arms crossed over his chest, wand in one hand. His eyes wandered over the room, lingering for a moment to glare at her before turning towards Harry and Ginny. From her position, Julia saw Severus quickly tuck Megan behind him.

'I heard there was a dinner party on here tonight,' Ron said a little gruffly, his jaw working furiously. 'I thought that my invitation must have somehow accidentally gotten mixed up in the post and not delivered. But, now I can see that you weren't expecting me...'

Julia looked around and sought out Bill's eyes with her own. He nodded, slipped quietly from behind the other men, and joined her over by the lounge in a silent show of support. Ron saw this from the corner of his eye and looked over properly to see that his own brother had gone to stand with his ex-wife. He did not miss the moment when Julia and Bill linked their hands together as he moved in to sit where Ginny had originally been beside her. The vein in his temple throbbed visibly.

'I had no idea that this was a couples only party,' he said through clenched teeth, his fists balling up. 'I would have brought a date if I had known.'

'Don't be like that, Ron,' Bill said seriously. 'Don't be a sore loser. This whole thing could be a lot easier for you if you would learn to let go and grow up.'

Ron turned his whole body on his brother, whipping his wand out towards Bill as he moved. 'Don't you talk to me, you lying, backstabbing bastard!' he spat, bits of spittle flying out of his mouth.

Just then, Lily began crying from her room upstairs, alerting everyone to the fact that the noise from Ron yelling had woken her up. Tonks waved Ginny off and slipped out of the room to deal with it while everyone else remained still. Ron with a wand when he was angry was a dangerous thing, especially with two pregnant women in the room. Julia could feel her stomach trying to crawl out of her throat as she sat waiting.

'Ron, please put the wand away and let's talk,' Hermione tried to reason.

'Don't you talk either!' he yelled at her, eyes never leaving Bill and Julia. 'I will deal with you later, once I've finished teaching these two cheating liars a lesson!'

Before anyone could stop him, Ron yelled a clear and decisive 'Crucio!' and Julia's world went black.

The Family Feud

Chapter 31 of 32

Julia awakens after the drama of the ruined dinner party.

Hugs and kisses of thanks go to Alliean for the beta of this chapter. And hugs to WriterMerrin too, for being her awesome self :)

.....

Chapter 31 - The Family Feud

The walls in Grimmauld Place were actually quite a pleasant shade of mint green in comparison to the awful off-white colour that had been left behind prior to Harry and Ginny's renovations. When Julia finally came to, she sat up abruptly, but instead of finding herself in St. Mungo's as she had expected when she had first heard the Dark curse come from Ron's mouth, she was in Grimmauld Place. She looked around the room and recognized it as the main guest room. She slid out of the bed, realizing that she was wearing a nightgown that was not her own, and walked over to the window, parting the curtains, squinting from the light shining in. It was daylight outside, and she must have been out for quite some time. Her whole body felt a little underused.

There was a knock on the door, and she turned around just in time to see Hermione slip into the room and close the door behind her. She smiled at her and joined her over by the window, drawing open the curtains and opening the window manually like any non-Magical person would. Julia often forgot that Hermione was in fact a Muggle-born witch. Mostly because she was more powerful than the majority of the purebloods in their world.

'How are you feeling?' Hermione asked gently, taking one of her hands in both of hers.

'I am feeling okay,' Julia replied after swallowing. Her throat was a little dry. 'I am a little confused. I can't really remember all that much about what happened with Ron what day is it?'

'It's Saturday morning, love,' Hermione said, leading her back to the bed and nudging her to sit back down so she could do a check up. 'You passed out last night, so Severus and I brought you upstairs and gave you a little Dreamless Sleep so that you could let your body rest for a little. You must have been tired yesterday.'

Julia nodded, letting Hermione wave her wand over her and cast all of the diagnostic charms she needed to before she nodded and smiled in satisfaction. The older witch left then, and Julia dressed in the clean pair of jeans that had been laid on the bed for her, donning the t-shirt as well. She noticed then that they were in fact her own clothes, and resolved to make sure to find out who she could thank for going to her apartment for them. She left the room and walked back down the stairs and down into the basement kitchen, finding Hermione and Ginny sitting at the table with Remus, Tonks, Lily and Megan.

'Good morning, Aunt Julia!' Megan exclaimed, patting the empty spot at the table beside her with a happy grin on her face. 'Are you feeling better?'

Julia smiled. 'I am much better, thank you, Meg,' Julia replied, taking the seat beside the young witch.

'Let me pour some tea for you!' Megan insisted, wandlessly levitating a cup over from the cupboards and manually pouring steaming hot tea into it before passing the mug over to sit in front of Julia.

'Thank you,' Julia said gratefully, accepting the offered mug.

She took a sip of it and sighed in relief. There was nothing that tea couldn't fix. Like any good British citizen, she loved her tea. Sitting back in her chair, she did not notice that everyone at the table was actually watching her with nervous expressions until she looked around properly. She swallowed a large mouthful of tea quickly before opening her mouth to ask what was with the staring.

'Before you ask, we need to explain a few things to you about what happened yesterday evening,' Tonks said, holding up a hand to silence her. Julia closed her mouth and prepared to listen. 'For starters, Ron did cast Crucio on someone last night, but it was not you. You passed out from being overwhelmed and exhausted. In actual fact, he managed to get Bill, and everyone was so shocked at first that nobody moved, but then Severus jumped in and tackled Ron and took his wand before binding him.'

'Is Bill okay?' she asked, her voice becoming a little panicked.

Remus reached a hand over the table to her and covered her trembling ones. 'Bill is going to live, my dear,' he reassured her calmly. 'He just had to stay overnight at St. Mungo's as a precaution. Harry and Severus stayed there with him. None of us had any idea that Ron had the potential to cast quite so powerful a curse. Bill had tremors for most of the night, but now he's just really tired.'

'And Ron?' she asked, a noticeable hitch in her voice.

'He has been put under arrest and is now residing in the Ministry keep while he is awaiting his trial. I have a feeling he will be going to Azkaban for a while,' Tonks answered, unable to keep a trace of sadness out of her tone. The former Auror looked a little ashamed of herself for it.

Julia reached one of her hands out to Tonks and patted her arm. 'It's okay to be sad about it, Dora,' she said, feeling a little calmer now. 'It is sad to think that Ron could lose it like he has. I feel sad for him too.'

'Would you like to see Bill?' Remus asked her. 'He is being released around noon, so you could go there to bring him back.'

Julia nodded. 'I would like that,' she answered.

Remus nodded. 'Come with me, then. I will take you there to his room. Hermione says that you need to take it easy and not exert yourself too much at the moment,' he explained at her questioning look.

Sighing in resignation, she nodded and stood, following Remus up the stairs to the sitting room. They left the house and went to the hedges of the park, Apparating in tandem and reappearing in the main lobby of the Hospital. Remus led her to the lift and pressed the button for the third floor minor injuries ward. They stepped out of the elevator and walked down the hall until they reached the last door at the end of the corridor. It was a private room, and on walking into it, Julia saw Harry asleep in the chair beside the window, and saw Severus standing and staring out the window with his hands tucked into his pockets.

'I've brought a visitor,' Remus announced, making Severus turn around to face them.

He jerked his head in the direction of the bed where Julia turned to see a sleeping Bill resting upon it, wearing the flannel pajamas she had given to him in Egypt while they had been sharing living space. She walked over to his bedside and sat down on the edge of the bed. Severus, meanwhile, walked over to Harry and gave his shoulder a shake, waking him from his slumber with a snort. He sat up abruptly, pulling off his glasses to rub his eyes.

'Come on, Scarhead; we're leaving,' he said gruffly, crossing his arms and leading the way out of the room while Remus waited for Harry.

Harry followed, looking a little dazed. 'Did he just call me Scarhead?' he asked a chuckling Remus as they left the room, closing the door behind them.

Julia smiled as all the other men left her alone with Bill in the room. Likely they wanted to give the couple some space to talk about everything that had happened. She really appreciated Severus taking the initiative of getting the other two out of the room. She felt as though she really would need that time to speak with him. Gently, she brushed some of his long auburn red hair out of his face, which made his features twitch. Letting her warm palm press fully against his cheek made him stir, and then when she rested her other hand on his chest, his eyes flickered open slowly, indicating that he was waking.

He rubbed his eyes to rid them of sleep, pushed himself up to prop his back against the pillows, and smiled warmly at her, taking one of her hands in his own and bringing it to his lips to kiss her knuckles. Julia blushed and scooted closer, leaning her head against his chest and wrapping her arms around him tightly. His strong arms came around her, not quite as firmly as they usually would have because his body was still a little weak from the strength of Ron's curse. Surely, it was an accident that he had managed to curse his own brother so cruelly?

'I am so glad that you are alright,' she whispered quietly against his neck, unable to keep the tears from falling from her eyes and wetting his pajamas.

Bill chuckled huskily and cuddled her closer to him. 'I am relieved that you are well also,' he murmured, kissing the top of her head. 'I was worried about you even when I knew that Ron hadn't cursed you.'

Bill simply held her while she cried until her soft sobs became sniffles, and eventually became nothing at all. When she was ready, she finally sat back up and faced him, and he passed her some tissues to blow her nose, which she did gratefully, turning her back to do so and jumping down from the bed to go and toss them manually into the bin before returning and resuming her seat. He smiled at her, and she grinned back sheepishly, a little embarrassed at having just cried all over the front of his shirt. He captured her chin with one hand, and before she could protest or even think, he pressed his lips to her own in the kiss he had wanted to give her for so long.

A few moments later when he broke it off and pulled back, he moved away a little so that he could admire her cheeks, flushed from crying, watery, sparkling eyes, and the slight plumpness of her bottom lip. He grinned at her before leaning in and kissing her again soundly; however, this time she reacted accordingly and wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him right back. They shared a deep, tongue-tangling kiss that seemed to last for hours instead of just minutes before they pulled back at the sound of a knock on the door.

'Come on in!' Bill said chuckling, drawing her right up beside him on the hospital bed, intending to hold on to her no matter what.

Arthur Weasley walked into the room and closed the door behind him, moving to stand a lot closer to the bed than Bill would have imagined. 'Hello, Bill, Julia. I am glad to see that the both of you are not adversely injured,' he said warmly with a look of relief in his eyes.

'Hi, Dad,' Bill welcomed, pleased that his father had taken the time to visit. After all, Arthur had not done anything to him it had been Ron and his mother.

'I'm very sorry about everything that has happened in the past few months with Ronald and Molly,' Arthur told Julia, who nodded and smiled at the man. It was true he had been a bit of a pushover, but she could tell he was sincere. 'I am also very sorry that the events of yesterday have made the two of you have to come out into the public eye. I imagine that you were not intending to make this known quite so soon.'

'It was not our intention to make anyone uncomfortable,' Bill said softly. 'I especially didn't want Julia to be cast in a negative light to the public. We never had a relationship, or even considered one, until after the divorce. I was the one who asked first.'

Arthur shook his head and smiled. 'I do not doubt that the both of you have been honorable in every respect, which is why I have put a team in charge of media control and coverage of your story. I don't want any false press about either of you,' he said seriously. 'I am also not going to let Ronald get off easily with this one. He did the worst possible thing he could have ever done to a member of his family more than once, and for that he shall suffer the consequences. I am having your mother receive psychiatric help here at St. Mungo's, starting Monday.'

Bill nodded. It looked like Arthur Weasley was stepping back up to take charge.

Perfect Tranquility

Chapter 32 of 32

The Potters visit with the Snapes at their country estate during the end of the summer...

Many thanks must go to Madbrilliant and Alliean for all of their help as my beta's. And thanks must also go to WriterMerrin for her patience with all of my commas.

I would also like to thank all of the people who read and reviewed this story. I really appreciated the feedback!

.....

Chapter 32 - Perfect Tranquility

The English countryside was green and growing, rolling out flat and hilled around the manor, with forests on the edge of the property and plenty of grass fields in which to

explore. After their return from Spain for the first month of the summer, the growing Snape family relocated to one of Severus' many properties in the United Kingdom. This one just happened to be located twenty or so miles outside of Devon. It was not exactly the smallest residence that had been bequeathed to him on the death of the majority of his family members, but it was certainly one of the loveliest ones. The townhouse that he had bought in London five years beforehand was going to be an ideal location for when the summer was drawing to a close so that they could be close by to Diagon Alley.

That afternoon at the Manor, Megan had gone for a walk around the grounds with Harry and Ginny, who were guests of theirs at present. Lily was taking a nap in the guest nursery, and Hermione was in the private upstairs study napping on the couch. Severus had contemplated what he was going to do all afternoon with one of his ladies gone on a walk and the other sleeping. Frowning, he realized that the picture was not an ideal one, and he Apparated upstairs to the study and walked in through the door, striding over to his lightly slumbering wife.

Kneeling down in front of the lounge she was resting on, he rested a hand on her hip, rubbing a small circle there before moving down the fabric of her summer dress to her knee, and then working the hand back up under the dress. Smiling deviously when he reached the cotton of her knickers, he pressed his lips to hers. Her eyes flickered open at both the kiss and the feeling of his hand fondling below, grinning wickedly before tugging his head back to hers for another kiss.

After warding and locking the door, the pair of them wasted no time in getting undressed and getting down to business first on the lounge, and then the floor, finally followed by the desk. If Hermione had had any doubts about her husband's virility, which she most certainly didn't, they would have been put to rest then. His exhaustion only overtook him after the third round in two hours. They had both been glad that the charm on Lily's room to alert them as to whether or not she was awake had not gone off.

'You, husband of mine, are the most insatiable man in both the wizarding and Muggle worlds,' Hermione said breathlessly, laying flat on her back on Severus' desk, still nude, with Severus resting on top of her, still slotted between her legs.

Severus let out a tired chuckle, pulling himself away from his lovely pregnant wife and falling into the chair at the desk. 'I have to get my fill while I can,' he retorted with a smug grin. 'After all, soon this will all be an activity of the past.'

Hermione sat up and smiled. 'Not if I have anything to say about it,' she said, slipping off the desk and wandlessly Summoning her dress and undergarments back to her.

Slipping them back on, she blew him a kiss and left the room, locking the door again as she left. It would not do for anyone to walk in on Severus sitting naked at his desk after all. Grinning at the thought, she walked down a flight of stairs, her movements only a little hindered by her growing roundness. She arrived at Lily's room, and on entering, found the girl still sleeping. She walked over to the crib and touched her little nose. The move apparently woke her, and she blinked up at Hermione before breaking into a cute grin.

'Hello there, Lil,' she said, lifting the girl out of the bed and up into her arms. 'Are you feeling hungry now? I sure am.'

'Hungry!' Lily agreed vocally, hugging Hermione around the neck.

Laughing softly, she carried the girl down the stairs with her, thinking that it would be lovely if all babies were like Lily had been. They arrived in the kitchens, and the two house-elves in there suddenly halted in their work as they usually did when the "Mistress" of the house entered the room. Both she and Severus had been requesting that they just get on with their work and not go out of their way to do special things, but in the end, it was a house-elf's nature to strive to please.

'Can I please have some applesauce for Lily?' she asked the nearest one, who beamed, pleased at having a task to do.

Hermione did not know many of the elves by name there, as the sheer number of them had amazed her when Severus had first brought them to the manor. She had already had over half of them sent to work at Hogwarts instead, and still there were around twelve lingering in the house as though it was their sanctuary. She sat and plopped Lily into the highchair beside her, a small bowl of the requested toddler food appearing there the moment she was seated. Gurgling with pleasure, the little red-haired cherub began to feed herself while Hermione asked them to make her a sandwich.

'Better make that five sandwiches,' Severus said as he joined them in the kitchen, once more fully dressed in his trousers, white linen button-down, and a black waistcoat. His dress was still as formal as ever when there was company.

No sooner had he joined them at the table than the sandwiches arrived on a small platter, and both husband and wife immediately dug in. About an hour later, when the couple had retired to the downstairs sitting room, Megan entered the room and immediately flung herself at Severus, being mindful not to crash into Hermione in the meantime, and launched into a grand story about their explorations that day. Harry and Ginny laughed, sitting on the lounge across while Lily sat on a rug on the floor playing with her stuffed animal collection.

If anyone had looked in on this scene about two years beforehand, they would have thought that it would have been impossible. Such domesticity and acceptance from Severus Snape was an unimaginable prospect at that time and all the years before. In an alternate universe, Hermione might not have ever gone to college, and might have actually married Ron Weasley and given birth to all of his children. But it was not to be. She was the wife that never was to him, and that, coupled with the horrors of the war, had messed with his mind.

Hermione smiled, watching as her charming adoptive daughter was perched on the arm of the lounge, her legs hanging sideways over Severus' as she talked to him animatedly, waving around the rare beetles that she had collected on their walk. She noticed how Megan loved to learn and how Severus responded to that eagerness with a pride that even he would have had a hard time trying to conceal if he wanted to. But lately, when it was just her, Megan, and their close group of friends, he didn't feel the need to be so formal and cool or reserved.

His affection came more easily, and words of love being murmured into her ear were an all night, all day, and everyday occurrence. A year ago, Hermione and Severus had only just started calling each other by their given names. And now, they were often coming up with new, sappier endearments to call each other while making love, or simply talking, or even as a thank you, just for being there. She was so pleased that she had come to know and fall in love with him.

'Hermione?' asked Ginny from the other lounge. 'Do you want to come up and help me give Lily a bath and change?'

Hermione nodded and stood, leaning into Severus momentarily to give him a kiss on the cheek which seemed to make him pause as he was talking for a moment, capturing her hand with his and kissing it briefly before letting her go and getting back to talking with Megan about bugs. Laughing inwardly, she got up and followed Ginny with Lily out of the sitting room and up the stairs to the guest suite bathroom. She filled the tub up halfway with warm water while Ginny undressed the girl before sitting her in the water, which she immediately began to splash in.

'Come now, you, hold still a bit for mummy and let me wash you, and then you can play,' Ginny reasoned firmly, showing Hermione just how it was done. Her ease with playing the part of a mother came naturally to the redhead.

'Have you heard from Julia and Bill lately?' Hermione asked Ginny.

'Actually, we got a letter this morning, but I forgot all about it when Megan dragged us out on that little adventure of hers for the day,' Ginny replied with a laugh. 'Bill moved Julia into his house in London where he and Fleur used to live together, and now that all of her stuff is out of the apartment, they've put it up for rent. It looks like they are in it for the long haul.'

Hermione smiled at this news. 'I certainly hope so,' she admitted. 'They have both suffered enough in the past few years, and they are so good together I'm surprised we never saw it before! It was just lucky that the two of them saw it themselves and grabbed a hold of the opportunity before it slipped right past them.'

Ginny nodded in agreement. 'I'm happy for them too,' she said as they watched Lily splash around with her bath duck.

A few minutes later, Lily was plucked from the water and dried with a spell before she was re-dressed in a little yellow dress and white tights, and taken back down to the sitting room to join the men before dinner. That night, after their meal had been eaten, the guests were happily ensconced in their own bedchambers, and after Megan had

gone to her bedroom and was tucked into bed reading, Hermione and Severus finally went to their own rooms. They bathed together and dressed for bed before climbing in under the covers, extinguishing the light, and cuddling.

'I got a letter from Arthur today,' Severus murmured into her ear softly, his voice heavily laden with tiredness.

'What did he have to say?' Hermione asked curiously, rolling over so that she was facing him instead of spooning with him. 'It must be something of importance or you wouldn't have mentioned it to me; now spill.'

'Ronald's trial has been put on hold until after he has had a full psychological analysis,' Severus said with a heavy sigh, pulling her close to him. 'He did everything that he could to make it unnecessary, but apparently some of Molly's cousins the Prewett's - had something to say about it to the Ministry on her behalf, and now the trial may not even go ahead as it should.'

'But that's not even fair,' Hermione huffed. Certainly, Ron had been her friend at one point in her life, but things had changed a lot since then.

'Life is rarely ever fair, however, I am sure that the afterlife is far more just, so worry not about him never receiving retribution for his crimes,' Severus said soothingly. 'It will come back to bite him on the arse eventually, pet.'

'So, how on earth did this come about?' she asked curiously.

'Arthur forgot about Molly's relatives and the possibility of her contacting them about what was going on,' he explained with a wry smile. 'Poor Arthur. Needless to say, her mail is being very thoroughly scanned now, so there most likely won't be any other problems caused by her, so to speak.'

'And you've told Harry already?' she asked, to which he replied with a nod. She closed her eyes, breathing in the clean, masculine scent of him deeply. 'I hope that everything works out soon. This feels to me like next year at Hogwarts is going to be a little more hectic than we anticipated.'

Severus leaned in and kissed her soundly. 'Whatever it is, my darling, we shall get through it together now, won't we?' he murmured.

His only reply was another of those sweet kisses of which he could never get enough.

~Terminus~

.....

A/N - The sequel will be out soon! Thanks!