

Bound

by JTBAB

Hermione has less than a week to solve the one thing stopping her from receiving her inheritance – her marital status. Severus who has become a good friend, does his best to stand by the side, only offering support, but in the end he's there to rescue her in more ways than one.

Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 8

Hermione has less than a week to solve the one thing stopping her from receiving her inheritance – her marital status. Severus who has become a good friend, does his best to stand by the side, only offering support, but in the end he's there to rescue her in more ways than one.

Gift for bookofmoonrevel in the 2007/8 exchange on livejournal.

Disclaimer: The HP universe is not mine. The plot, however, is.

Chapter One

Hermione sighed; her eyes were tired and her back ached. She'd been staring over the papers for well over eight hours, with no break, insisting to herself, and to others, that there must be some sort of loop hole that the lawyer had missed. There just had to be.

She let her head fall back and groaned.

"Sweetheart, I think you should take a break." Hermione looked over at the door, tiredly; her mother had a tray covered with food, in her arms.

Pushing the papers off her lap, she moved to the edge of the sofa. "I know, I know."

"Harry and Ron came by to see you; they were concerned when you didn't reply to any of their owls."

Hermione glared at her mother. "And what, exactly, did you tell them?" Huffing, she got to her feet and turned to gather her bits together. Sheets and sheets of paperwork and parchment were slowly shuffled into a partially organised pile while Hermione waited for an answer. "Well?"

"I told them you were trying to—"

"Please tell me you didn't," she groaned. "Mother!"

"I had to tell them something, and they would have found out sooner or later, and I would have thought that you'd jump at the chance to have Ron—"

"No! We've been through this, mother. We're just friends. Friends! It wouldn't work between us... he's like a brother to me." Hermione quickly shoved everything into a

folder. "I'm going out."

"You have to eat, darling. Your father is worried and you know how he can get."

Hermione was practically a splitting image of her mother except for her father's genes which had finally come into effect and calmed her frizzy hair into soft, loose curls. Her brown eyes, which usually held a sparkle within them, had dulled in the last few days, and the haunted look she had worn since the war with Voldemort had finished was more evident than usual.

Ignoring her mother's concern and words of warning, Hermione threw the folder onto the coffee table and picked up her wand. "I'll be home soon." Giving her mother a quick peck on the cheek, Hermione turned and Disapparated.

Severus Snape was alive and well. He'd survived the war with Voldemort and escaped conviction for being a Death Eater, a spy and the murderer of Albus Dumbledore. Although this was largely due to the uncharacteristic help that Harry Potter had given him during his trials and after; the press had not been kind to him, to begin with. And it took several bribes of interviews before they agreed to leave him alone unless they had something nice to say.

The peace and quiet that his life now consisted of had caused paranoia to spring up. And even after a year to get used to it, he still warded every room as he entered or left just to make sure that everything was well. He had retained the use of two house-elves, but had set the rest free... Kreacher had proven that they weren't all to be trusted, and so he kept only the ones which he had the deepest bond with.

He looked out the window, which was still covered in grime; at first he had not wanted to clean the windows in case rogue Death Eaters had noticed him there... and now he was used to the filth that coloured his view of the outside world.

It wasn't that he was short of money that made him stay in the old run-down house. It was the thought of leaving the one place that had always managed to protect him. The house was a safety blanket that he had no intention of giving up without a fight. All these thoughts were constantly swirling in his mind, though they were persistently pushed back by his Occlumency.

Wrapping his cloak around him, he made his way out the front door. He had a job to do.

Hermione walked down the muddy track, pulling her skirts as they snagged on brambles on either side of her. Harry and Ron would have had a fit if they knew where she was, and alone at that. However, she just didn't care; there was only one person that could help her in her predicament. Only one person she trusted enough to ask for help, knowing everything she said would be held in the strictest of confidence.

Severus Snape.

Glancing up, and to the end of the path, she saw some movement in the distance. Fearing it might be Snape, off on some errand, she sped up and called out to him. Breaking into a run, she quickly reached his side, her cheeks flushed and her breath coming out in pants.

"Severus."

His face remained stoic, blank and stern but she noticed his eyes softening slightly as he gazed at her. "Yes, Miss Granger?" The corners of his mouth quirked up into a smirk.

"Severus, I have a favour to ask of you." Hermione raised a hand to her chest as she began to catch her breath. "Urgently."

"I see." He seemed to search her face for a moment, settling on her lips for barely a second before flitting back up to her eyes. "I'm about to go out; can it wait till I return?"

Instead of replying, she nibbled on her lower lip, pondering his question. His gaze was captivated as she sucked at the plump red lip, gulping and clearing his throat several times before he could gain control of his thoughts once more.

"Miss Granger, perhaps you would like to join me on my errands?" He watched as her gaze shifted up to his; her eyes brightened a little. It was a rare sight and he took pride in the fact he could create a sparkle, no matter how small.

"I'd like that, Severus." Hermione took the arm he offered, and as they started walking, she moved closer to him.

Their playful banter was not new, but it still kept Hermione on her toes every time he smiled. She always expected his stern professor persona to pop back in and for him to take away points every three seconds; although secretly, she liked the fact that every meeting with the severe man was exciting and new.

"So, what has been troubling you so that you feel the need to visit this old man." Snape turned a corner, pulling her closer to him, their leg and hip now brushing against each other.

"You are not an old man, Severus, and you know it. You are barely middle aged."

Snape squeezed her hand. "Perhaps for a Pureblood, but you forget, minx, that I am Half-Blood."

"Why, so you are, Prince." She giggled, and the sound gave him the urge to chuckle; but he restrained himself, she had yet to answer his questions.

"Miss Granger..." his tone was warning, and she gave him a look before she sighed.

"It's my inheritance."

Chapter Two

Chapter 2 of 8

Hermione starts to regain a sense of self.

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Chapter Two

To begin with Hermione was trailing after Snape as he made his way around the different shops, but after entering an Apothecary, she changed. She began engaging both Snape in conversation and the other patrons.

Snape watched her with abstract amusement as she settled into herself and her confidence started to shine through. Although he could still see that something was on her mind, distracting her thoughts, those she conversed with seemed oblivious, unconcerned with Hermione's wild gesticulations and enthusiastic chatter.

Drawing himself away, he continued making his way around the store, picking up, checking and replacing herbs and potion ingredients. The produce was always high quality; however, he liked to check up on them to be sure. It would not do to have an inexperienced witch or wizard injured through faulty goods.

"I'm sorry, Severus, I didn't mean to ignore you." Smiling, Hermione slipped an arm through his crooked elbow, giving it a squeeze. "I am here with you, after all."

"That's quite alright; it only meant that I could continue my business without you to watch over." His smirk was the only thing that kept her from smacking his arm. She knew he was teasing and that retaliating would only increase his amusement.

"Yes, well. It was fascinating discussing ideas and being taken seriously."

Snape nodded. "I'm sure that you've had a hard time discussing things with the dunderheads you insist on associating with."

"Severus! Please don't insult them; you know that friendship is not just about intelligence." Hermione blushed and shook her head as Snape's chuckles filled the small shop.

"Indeed."

Hermione looked up as the waiter moved away from their table. Snape had chosen a nice spot for their table; it was in the corner, where she could see the room, and he had his back to the wall. A thought about how his habits from spying having never left him briefly crossed her mind before she was distracted by a hand waving in front of her face.

"Hermione, what has been distracting you today? You're not nearly as air-headed normally."

Sighing, she pushed her bread plate to one side and settled her arms on the table. "Severus, you're going to think I'm fickle."

"Why would I think that, my dear?"

"You know that beach house, the one in France?"

"Yes."

"It's part of my inheritance... but there's a catch as to how I can officially acquire it for myself." Hermione covered her face with her hands and mumbled through them.

Reaching across the table, he took her right hand and pulled it away from her cheek. Keeping his grip loose, he gently massaged the back of her hand with his thumb. "Hermione, I can't help if you do not tell me what it is that is troubling you."

"I know, Severus, I know! It just seems so stupid to me now. I had a whole explanation practised on how I was going to explain it to you... and now... and now I just don't know."

"If it's about the house, I know it must be important." Drawing her hand closer to him, he continued to massage it, his fingertips now stroking gently at her palm. "Now, tell me."

"The house cannot be passed on to an unmarried female. A bit sexist really, if I'd been born a male I could have quite easily taken it and not had to worry about finding someone to spend the rest of my life with. It's stupid, I hate it... but we only found the clause after it was too late. If we'd known sooner, we could have gotten it re-written, but it's impossible to re-write when there is no ownership. It's just sitting there! If the solicitors were not family friends, I don't believe I would be able to continue using it, even now!"

Drawing her hand up, he placed his lips against her knuckles as she continued to ramble. Her face became quite red with her argument. "My dear, you are rambling." Blushing pink till even her ears were flushed with colour, she reached for her glass of water.

"I'm sorry, it's just so... so frustrating."

"I know, and I'm glad to be here to hear all your troubles. But now we have that out of the way, I believe we should discuss your options."

Hermione's gaze finally landed on her hand, which was still being held by her companion. Blushing, she slowly withdrew it and reached for her glass of water. "I need to find someone to marry, and I just know that nobody will want to do it so quickly. Their parents just won't approve of it!" Resting her head in her hands, Hermione fought to keep tears from falling. "I just don't see a way out of it, Severus, I just don't." She lifted her head, and as their eyes locked, the tears began slipping down her cheeks. "Help me, Severus."

He wanted nothing more than to reach over the table and drag her round to him, pulling her into his arms and telling her it would be okay. But propriety wouldn't allow it, and he didn't know what he could say to stop the tears from continuing on their path. "We'll think of something. I promise. Let us enjoy our food, and we can continue this later."

Hermione pulled her feet up beneath her and adjusted her skirt until it covered her toes. Despite Snape having built up a large fire, she still felt chilled. He sat next to her, leaning against the black leather, sheets of parchment with notes written on them clutched in his left hand. "So, you have a week to marry or at least be engaged?"

"Yes." Twirling a curl around her fingers, she watched the flames dancing in the grate.

"Would it not be possible to become engaged and gain yourself more time?"

"Engagements must be followed by a marriage within three months; any change of arrangements such as a change of partner, voids this period, and a marriage would have to take place within the day of discovery." She glanced up at him, but lowered her gaze again before he could comment. "Even in the magical world, you would not be able to keep a marriage secret long enough to do that, and one day is not long enough to plan one either... it's not a viable option."

"I see. Well, from everything else you've told me, I suppose the only way out is to choose from one of your friends. Perhaps you'll find ever lasting happiness with one of them." A scowl flittered across his lips when he thought of her and Weasley, but he forced his face to remain a calm exterior to stop her from getting upset.

"But it'll still be so rushed, and I always dreamed of finding the right person. Falling madly in love with them, getting married when we both felt it was right, and living happily for the rest of our lives together. I still want that."

"And you can still have that, Hermione." He reached out and cupped her cheek, his thumb stroking it as he waited for her to look up at him. "It's still possible, just not quite yet. Be patient, love."

AN: Thank you in advance for taking the time to review!

Chapter Three

Chapter 3 of 8

Severus struggles to deal with Hermione's innocent actions. And Hermione gets into a little bit of trouble with the boys.

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Chapter Three

Hermione woke with a start. It took her a while to get her bearings as to where she was. Smiling as thoughts from the night before rushed back, she curled up tighter under the cloak she was under and listened to Snape breathing before dozing back off again.

Snape on the other hand was wide awake. He had a crick in his neck, and his arms were wrapped around Hermione in one form or another, and his legs had stiffened and numbed straight, having propped his feet up on the coffee table at some point the night before.

He groaned and forced himself to move and in the process nudged Hermione back into wakefulness. "I know you're awake, Hermione."

"Not." She snuggled into his lap, gripping his trouser leg with one clenched fist whilst her other supported her cheek.

"Hermione, you can't stay under there forever, besides, if I don't move soon, I think my legs are going to fall off." He rolled his eyes as she giggled. His body, on the other hand, was not quite in such a relaxed state as he would have liked. He was highly sensitized and he was struggling to contain his reaction as she wiggled and moved about. Deciding that if he waited much longer, it would be too long, he tickled her as an excuse to move her, and gingerly slid out from under her. Wincing as his back clicked and his legs creaked. "I sound like an old man. Now, what would you like for breakfast?"

"Breakfast?" Hermione asked as she poked her head out from under his cloak, her cheeks flushed.

"Yes, breakfast." Holding out his hand, he waited for her to take it before pulling her up. "Traditional fry-up or something boring?"

"Well, when you put it like that, Severus, how could I pass up the chance for something boring?!" Smiling, she followed him into the kitchen. "Urgh, I hate wearing yesterday's clothing!"

"You can use my bathroom, if you wish. And you could take one of my shirts and transfigure it into something suitable for you to return home in." Snape moved around his kitchen, gathering up things he would need for making their breakfast, and went about setting them up, leaving Hermione to watch on.

"I couldn't, I know how precious you are about your shirts." Hermione grinned as he threw her a look.

"Go. You'll only pester me with annoying questions about what I'm doing!" Snape's lips twitched, but he stopped the smile before it could widen. "Up the stairs, first door on the right, there's a couple of shirts in the cupboard just next to it."

"Oh, how will I choose between the colours?" Hermione giggled and shot out of the room, quickly making her way to the bottom of the stairs where she slowed to a walk before continuing. She'd never been upstairs before, having only stopped over for brief chats before moving down to his potions lab in the cellar.

She ran her fingers over the ornate wood carvings that covered the walls up the stairs and along the landing. Reaching the door she had been directed to, she pushed it open to check it was the right one before moving to the cabinet next to it.

She had been correct in her assumption that choice of colour would be slim, well, actually nil. They were all white, but their styles were different. Grabbing the closest one to her, she continued on into the bathroom and turned the shower on.

Feeling fully refreshed, she stepped out of the shower and dried off, cringing at the thought of casting a freshening charm on her underwear, and deciding instead to go without. Turning to the shirt, she laid it out and thought about what style would be best considering the material; for all the things Hermione excelled at, the ability to transfigure one material into another, she failed to succeed in.

Finally deciding that a long dress would be better than anything else, she searched through her dirty clothing for her wand.

"Shit." She began to panic when after her second check of each item of clothing, she failed to find it. Sitting there and staring at a shirt was not an option, so she quickly slipped the shirt out and crept to the door. Checking to make sure Snape was still in the kitchen, she waited until she heard the sound of movement from below before sneaking down the stairs, her eyes sweeping each stair in search of her wand. "Where are you?"

She had only made it halfway across the living room on her way to the sofa when Snape came through from the kitchen.

"I thought I heard you-" He visibly gulped, and Hermione flushed pink as his eyes washed over her. Taking in the white shirt, which only just reached mid-thigh, her wet hair hanging in loose curls over her shoulders, the wet material under them causing the material to stick to her skin.

"I couldn't find my wand, and I -"

"Yes, um, well, breakfast is ready when you are. I just wanted to ask whether you wanted fried or scrambled eggs."

"Fried, please." Hermione smiled and twirled a wet curl around a finger. "I'm just going to have a look for my wand around the sofa before coming through."

Snape tilted his head in response and strode back into the kitchen, past the frying pan, and towards a cabinet next to the back door. Flinging one side open, he reached in and grabbed a deflating draught and downed it without hesitation. With a flick of his wrist, the now-empty vial flew towards the cellar door, and Snape turned back towards the frying pan and started to make Hermione her eggs.

Hermione slid onto a chair at the kitchen table and pulled a plate towards her. "Mmm, this smells delicious, Severus!"

"Thank you." He flipped the eggs over to make both sides slightly crispy before lifting the pan and making his way over to Hermione, sliding them onto her plate, draining as much oil off each as he did so.

"I thought that you could transfigure your shirt for me; I didn't want to spoil your shirt by my 'foolish wand waving'."

All Snape could do was nod as he forced his gaze away from her bared collar bone.

Hermione ate her breakfast with gusto, and Snape found it very hard not to just sit there and watch her. His watching her became such a distraction that Hermione stopped eating and looked up.

"What?!"

He smirked. "Nothing. You seem to have a very healthy appetite, and it just shocked me slightly."

"Severus, eat your breakfast before it gets cold." Hermione shook her head and continued to eat. Sometimes it wasn't worth exploring what Snape was thinking; it often left her more confused than before she asked.

They didn't get too much further in their meal before there was a loud knocking on the back door. Hermione looked worriedly up at it. "Are you expecting someone, Severus?"

"No, are you... right, my house." He drew his wand and moved slowly towards the door. He cast a few charms to protect the insides of the house and opened the door, only to be bowled back as Harry and Ron stormed in.

"Where's Hermione?" Ron's eyes swept the room wildly before coming to a rest on Hermione, who was frozen in place, a slice of toast half way to her mouth. "What the bloody hell is going on?" He turned his gaze to Snape and glared.

Recovering from her shock, Hermione launched to her feet. Unfortunately, this made her state of undress even more obvious. "Ron! You can't just barge into people's houses and start shouting! And Harry, you too! What were you thinking?"

Harry placed a hand on Ron's shoulder to stop him speaking. "We were thinking that you may be in trouble. Your mother informed us that you had gone for a walk to clear your head, but that you hadn't returned. We tracked you to here, and here we are. And I'm with Ron. What is going on, Hermione?"

"I'm eating breakfast, which I might add is getting cold because of you two!" Hermione clenched her fists together at her sides. She may love the boys, but they were forever butting into her life when she really didn't want or need them to.

"But, Herm-" Ron started.

"No. No 'buts'. I want you to leave." As Hermione sat back down and picked up her fork, she glanced back up at them before returning her gaze to her plate. "Leave. I'll come to the Burrow a little later; you don't need to worry about me."

Ron started to argue back, but Harry realised that Hermione would not be bullied on the matter and laid a hand on his shoulder. "Come on, mate. She'll be round later." Pulling Ron with him, he left, glaring at Snape as they passed him.

"I don't know why they have to be so over-protective of me. It's ridiculous really." And with that she silently went back to her breakfast. Ignoring Snape as he too returned to his food.

AN: Thank you for the reviews!

Chapter Four

Chapter 4 of 8

Molly interferes with Hermione's plans...

Chapter Four

Hermione placed the book Snape had lent her on her desk, slipping the sealed envelope in between the first page and cover. He had told her not to open and read the letter unless she was desperate. Her curiosity over what it contained had already caused one corner to curl from her picking at it, but she had promised. And she kept her promises.

Searching through her wardrobe, Hermione grabbed a pair of jeans and some underwear, quickly pulling them on. Glancing at her selection of tops, she decided to keep Snape's shirt on; it smelt of him and so was a comfort for what she was about to face.

Twisting her hair into a knot, she used her wand to keep it in place, before taking a last look at her room. The light pink walls, cuddly toys and frills were such a regression into her childhood, she would be both sad and happy when it was over and she was in her marriage bed. Shaking herself out of her melancholic state, she slipped a pair of trainers on and walked downstairs. Her parents were still at the surgery, and she felt bad about leaving again without seeing them, but there were several different things that she had to see to before she could relax at home again.

Wrapping her cloak around her, she Apparated to the Burrow. The boys would be expecting her.

The news of her intention to marry so soon had Molly Weasley in a fluster. Hermione had to keep ducking from the amount of things flying around as all the chores were done through magic. Normally against such things, when something this big took over Molly's priorities, she pushed everything to the back burner and used the thankful excuse of releasing her excess energy on her magic usage.

Hermione had tried to convince her that Ron was not going to be the ideal man for the job. Best friend or not, they had tried dating, being together and thinking of the future, but they were just too different. It wouldn't work, and after figuring it out, they had agreed it was all for the best, and at least they still had their friendship. Molly, on the other hand, was a lot harder to convince. Apparently, she had already made plans for Ron and Hermione's wedding before they had ever officially announced they were together.

"Mum, I love Hermione as a friend. You're going to make her upset. It's her decision." Ron had surprised her with his support throughout the afternoon, with him repeating phrases like this on and off.

It took hours before they managed to come to a compromise, with Hermione and Ron agreeing to go on a date to 'make sure' that there was nothing there. Molly sat there smugly as they prepared to go out, and Hermione had to fight the urge to roll her eyes at her behaviour.

"Enjoy yourselves, dears. Arthur and I won't wait up." Giving them a wink, Molly went back in the Burrow, closing the door quietly behind her.

"I'm sorry, Mione." Ron wrapped an arm around her shoulders. "You know how she gets."

"It's okay, let's just get this over and done with, and hopefully she'll be happy. At least we can enjoy it without her watching over us." And with a grin, they both Disapparated.

As they waited for their meals to arrive, Hermione tried to ignore the awkwardness, but eventually, she felt the need to address it. "You know it's not going to happen, right? That I love your family and you... but just not in that way."

"I know, Hermione. Don't let what my mum said bother you, I know you don't feel that way. And rest assured, neither do I." Ron sighed. "I'm just here to please my mother and to keep her off both of our backs."

She smiled. "I'm glad we're still on the same page, then."

"Of course." Ron smiled back at her and gave Hermione's hand a squeeze before folding his arms in front of him. "We are going to have to come up with something to tell her, though."

"I know." Hermione shook her head and reached for her water just as a shadow fell across their table. As she looked up, she saw Lavender Brown move in to slap Ron.

"So this is why you couldn't come out with me tonight? You were going out with your whore!"

"Hey! She's not a whore; it's Hermione." Ron stood up so quickly his chair fell backwards. He grabbed Lavender's wrist before she could slap him again. "You're making a scene, sweetheart."

"Don't 'sweetheart' me!" Lavender screeched. "I'm not the one cheating!"

"Lavender." Hermione stood up slowly. "I'm not here as anything other than a friend. We're just here because we're trying to get Mrs Weasley off our backs, so please don't worry... you can join us if you wish."

It was as if the wind had dropped and was taken out of her sails. Lavender sagged against Ron and laid her head against his shoulder. "Okay, that would be nice."

Ron waved over a waiter, who quickly brought over a chair and set it down beside Ron's place. "There you go, sweetheart. You sit down there and we'll talk." Turning to the waiter, he scowled. "Can you bring the lady some water and a menu, please?" The waiter nodded and hurried off.

Overall, the meal had turned out to be a pleasant affair. After explaining everything to Lavender, she promised to help her, as well as apologising for interrupting them and calling Hermione a whore.

Not really knowing what else to do, she graciously accepted all the help that was offered to her. Snape was good, but, well, he was a man, and there were only so many things she was willing to talk to him about. Especially when it led to accidental events like the previous night; it was something she knew she would be teased about for a long time to come. And she was sure her future husband would not approve of such a close relationship and possibly even ask for a Pensieve to prove that nothing had actually happened that night.

Settling into bed that night, she fell asleep without a frown on her face, although whether that was from Lavender's advice or from Snape's, she wasn't sure and didn't really care to contemplate which.

Chapter Five

Chapter 5 of 8

Some of the Weasleys help Hermione come to a realisation...

Disclaimer: *I don't own Potterverse... the plot, however, is mine!*

Chapter Five

Hermione woke to the sound of an owl tapping on the window. Drowsily, she dragged herself out of bed and to the window, throwing it open and letting the disgruntled bird in. Attached to the large barn owl's leg was a thick roll of parchment. Rolling her eyes, she could just guess where that had come from; there was only one person she knew that would have written that much and sent it to her that early in the morning - Molly Weasley.

Slowly ripping open the seal with one hand, she pulled a few owl treats from a box on her desk. "Here you go, girl." She placed them on the windowsill so the bird would feel free to leave when she was finished. Hermione unrolled the parchment and began reading.

Dear Hermione,

I heard of your disastrous dinner through a friend. She saw how you were interrupted and Ron assaulted. I'm sure he will be pressing charges, and I know you won't hesitate to sign as a witness to the attack.

But let us forget this small minute detail...

And so it went on, singing both Ron's and her praises, until it suddenly changed tack.

Of course, if you feel one of my other sons is better suited to you, I will fully understand; I know Ron can be a little... moody at times, and this can take a lot of getting used to.

And of course I wouldn't want anything to ruin your friendship, especially as it may make Harry feel a little left out, even if he and Ginny are making their own plans. I can see that another of my sons would help avoid this.

"What?" Hermione couldn't help it, her jaw dropped a little. "You have got to be kidding me." She continued reading, her eyes widening with each new word.

I have set up a meeting for you with my eldest two. I hope you'll keep it between us my reasons why... I felt the twins would be too childish for you, as I know how serious you can be, and Percy is just the opposite. I know you like your fun, dear. Bill and Charlie will be meeting you in Diagon Alley at 2pm, I've only given them a few of the details... but be sure to dress up. Bill is still talking about marrying this Fleur girl, and I don't approve at all. In that way, I wish for you to choose him, if only to keep him away from that stuck up... sorry, I shouldn't say such things, much less write them.

I'm sure you'll be eager to get ready for you're afternoon meeting, so I'll leave it there. I hope to hear of your choice soon.

Your future mother-in-law

Molly Weasley

"Oh! Oh no... oh no, no, no, no!" Hermione crumpled the letter in her hand as she looked desperately around her room as if it could give her some sort of excuse of how to get out of her meeting. "I can't believe she brought them all this way... I just... urgh!"

Sighing in defeat, Hermione grabbed some toiletries and walked into the bathroom to get ready for the day and her meeting.

All the anger had left her body, and all that was left was nervousness. She wasn't sure exactly what Bill and Charlie had been told about her situation, if anything. And it was that which was scaring her. If all Molly had told them was that she was in some kind of trouble, she was going to have to tell them everything about her embarrassing situation.

Sighing, she sat down outside of a small café and settled in to wait for the boys, men really, to meet her. Hermione had arrived early in an attempt to calm her nerves, and it seemed to be working. That was, until she saw the two of them striding down the street towards her. She gave a weak wave to make sure they saw her and waited for them to reach her.

"Hey, Mione." Bill smiled cheerily and gave her a kiss on the cheek. Charlie followed suit before they both sat down. "So what's up?"

"Yeah, Mum said it was urgent that we get here to meet you." Charlie looked at her with a concerned expression on his face. "What's going on?"

Hermione scowled and rubbed at her face. "So she didn't tell you anything at all?"

"Nope. Just that we had to meet you." Bill pulled his chair closer to Hermione. "It's nothing bad though, is it?"

"Great." Rolling her eyes, Hermione set about telling them everything, what she wanted, what she needed, and what had happened so far. The most reaction she got out of them was when she was retelling them her stay with Snape, but they didn't comment, only glanced at each other knowingly.

"So what do you want us to do?" Bill leant back in his chair, his earring swinging. "I mean, I've got Fleur."

"I know. I'm not expecting anything; I didn't even ask for you. It was your mother."

"Ahhh, another Weasley meddling in the works." Charlie grinned and took one of Hermione's hands. "If it helps, I'm not in a serious relationship. Unless you count my dragons... I'd never be able to leave the reserve except to go to another."

"I know, Charlie, I'd never ask you to leave what you love. Moreover, Bill, don't worry about it. If I had the choice, I'd ignore it all and hope it would go away, but that's not going to happen." With a huff, she copied the boys and leant back in her chair. "But I really don't think it would have worked with either of you. I love you too much as brothers."

Both Charlie and Bill grinned at that, and then simultaneously, they reached over and ruffled her hair, causing her to squeak. "Well, sis, guess you'll have to put up with us being all over-protective with whoever you choose."

The three of them decided to order some lunch, and over it, they discussed Hermione's options again. She was starting to enjoy seeing everyone's different perspectives on her situation; it helped her think more clearly on her own opinion.

The two men escorted her home before making a hasty retreat from the country to avoid Molly Weasley's wrath at their inability to convince Hermione to marry one of them. But none of this concerned Hermione, the boys had helped her understand that this was much bigger than Molly's feelings. Even bigger than hers. It was about building a future, and being happy.

AN: Thank you to everyone for the reviews! They're great!

Chapter Six

Chapter 6 of 8

Lavender and Ginny attempt to cheer Hermione up...

Disclaimer: *Potterverse is not mine. The plot, however, is.*

Chapter Six

The next day, Hermione Flooed Ginny and Lavender and set up a meeting. She was bored of the boys - men - in her life choosing what was best for her, and she wanted a woman's perspective. And although she had already had a little of Lavender's, she had felt that she had restricted her opinions because of Ron being there. This way, they could have a private little meeting.

And even though it was only eleven in the morning, the three of them were sitting in Lavender's flat with one bottle of wine already finished and another on the way to following that.

"What you need... is someone that already cares for you, and you them, but neither of you having sibling feelings for each other... or whatever your problem is." Ginny was slurring slightly as she swayed in her seat.

"Yeah." Lavender grinned. "Know anybody, Gin? Surely there's someone in her life."

Hermione, who was still nursing her first glass, scowled. "Stop it! This isn't helping anybody; I don't have feelings for anybody."

"Sure you don't." Ginny smirked. "Hmm, what we need are a couple of bottles of Veritaserum."

Lavender shook her head so enthusiastically that she almost fell off her seat. "No, no. What we need," she paused for dramatic affect, "is to use the truth or dare spell."

"How will that help?" Hermione downed the little wine she had left and placed her glass on the table. "We're not playing a game here! This is my life... and my-"

Ginny giggled, her eyes glinting as she turned to Hermione. "No, it's not a game. But it does reveal secrets even you may not know."

"What-"

"Like crushes." Ginny placed her glass on the table next to Hermione's and settled herself back into her seat as if about to observe an experiment. "You may not know them yet, but deep down, they're starting. The spell reveals that."

"I'm sooo glad I never had to play that when we were still at school." Lavender shook her head.

"I know; I always made sure I was caster so I wouldn't have to play." Ginny laughed, "You should have heard some of the things I found out!"

Both Ginny and Lavender dissolved into fits of giggles whilst Hermione looked on slightly bemused, but extremely wary of what was going to happen. Slightly intoxicated, she did not even attempt to defend herself when Ginny raised her wand; she just crossed her eyes in an attempt to follow the tip of her wand.

Hermione felt a warm wave wash over her as an orange light enveloped her, which caused a slight squeezing sensation before disappearing.

"So how does it work?" Hermione asked nervously, suddenly wishing she hadn't had any of the wine at all as it churned about in her stomach.

"We'll take turns asking you questions... and you just answer them. Obviously, dares won't be involved so that aspect won't come into play... but you won't be able to lie."

"Okay." Hermione's face paled slightly, and her eyes flicked nervously between the two other girls as she watched them confer about which questions to ask.

"Right, first question: Are you in love with anyone?"

As hard as she tried, Hermione couldn't say 'no'. It actually felt like a physical weight was resting on the tip of her tongue, and she couldn't speak. She couldn't even mouth the word.

"We'll take that as a 'yes', but that it's an unconscious feeling."

"Does he show any feelings towards you?" Lavender chipped in.

Again, she tried to say 'no'; she had no idea why. She hadn't even known she was in love with anyone, let alone that they could have been in love or have feelings for her. Sighing, she hung her head.

"Oooh, another yes!" Ginny bounced up and down in her seat. "Okay, okay, I have one... do we know him?"

"Yes." Hermione sighed; this wasn't really working. She wasn't finding out anything. "Look, before you ask another question, I have one of my own."

The two drunk and excited girls glanced at each other before answering in unison, "Go ahead."

"Will you be able to ask who it is?"

"It doesn't work that way; you have to be consciously aware, at least a little, for you to be able to answer with a name."

"So there's no point in continuing then. We know I'm in love. That he has feelings for me. But I've made no progress... I don't know who the 'he' is. I'm going to lose my house." Hermione burst into tears. Ginny and Lavender set about comforting her and sending each other glances which suggested blame on the other for suggesting the game in the first place.

A couple of hours later, the three girls were asleep on the sofa, huddled up together, offering each other support. Both Lavender and Ginny had tried their best to comfort Hermione in her discovery, but it had only served to depress her more.

She just couldn't think of who it could possibly be. Everyone she had ever dated was out of the question; there were reasons those relationships had ended, and everyone else had been such a close friend from such a young age that they were more family than husband material.

Eventually they had fallen asleep, but it was troubled sleep which wouldn't leave them feeling refreshed at all. But at least they had escaped reality, even if it was only for a moment in time.

AN: Thank you for reading!

Chapter Seven

Chapter 7 of 8

Hermione's parents come to the rescue...

Disclaimer: *Potterverse is not mine! The plot, however, is.*

Chapter Seven

Hermione sat in her parents' living room, her face covered with her hands. It was just no good; she didn't like anyone enough to consider marrying them. At least no-one that she knew. They were either too fussy, too clingy, too distant, and the faults just went on. She was going to lose the house in France, and there was nothing she could do to stop it.

Her beloved house, where she had spent every holiday before going to Hogwarts, was going to be lost to some distant cousin who had just gotten married. And it wasn't even a cousin she got along well with.

Shaking her head slightly, Hermione rubbed at her face with her hands; she'd never let anything beat her, and here she was letting a silly little thing like matrimony get in the way.

Suddenly, she gasped, "Severus!" Scrabbling up from her seat, she rushed across the living room floor. Dashing around the sofa and through the door, up and around to the stairs, she clambered up them two at a time. If she'd spared a moment to collect her thoughts, she would have just pulled out her wand, but now wasn't the time to think. She only had one more day to secure a marriage proposal before all was lost.

Rummaging through her drawers with haste and adrenaline-fuelled panic, her room began to look like someone had ransacked the place; paper, parchment and files were littered across the floors, and drawers were half open.

"Where is it? Where is it?" She sank down in a heap and stared in front of her. Her hands reached up and threaded through her already-tangled hair, gripping hold of it and pulling. "Where is it?!" Finally, despair consumed her, and she fell on her side as sobs racked her body. "Severus... I'm sorry."

Standing under the steady stream of the shower, her eyes closed, she fought to steady her breathing. Having a panic attack over not finding a piece of parchment was ridiculous; her mother was right: she was over-tired and over-stressed.

As the steam and hot water gently warmed and massaged her body, the tension began to seep away...if only superficially. She gently massaged first the shampoo and then conditioner in her hair, groaning as she realised that she was going to have to get out soon. She didn't need any more problems in her life, especially ones caused by her own actions.

Turning the taps off and stepping out of the shower, she wrapped a large, fluffy towel...which she had left to warm on the radiator...around her and made her way back to her bedroom.

Approaching her desk, she ignored the mess that she had created in her room and pulled out a fresh piece of parchment and a quill; she set about writing a note to her parents, letting them know that she was going away for a while.

She seemed to lack emotion as the quill flew across the page, explaining why and where she was going. She had to say goodbye, and she needed to do it alone. Folding it over and sealing it with her new wax stamp that Severus had given her for her birthday the previous year, Hermione placed the letter on her desk and began getting dressed. Twisting her hair into a bun, she threaded her wand though it to hold it in place. Grabbing her rucksack, she threw a few essentials into it and pulled the drawstring closed, securing her possessions with a few personal wards.

Taking one last look at the house, she stepped and turned to Apparate, the familiar sensation of suction accompanying her to her destination.

She lifted her head as an owl swooped in through the open door, watching as it gently settled on the back of an oak chair.

"Hello, Archimedes, I hope your flight was uneventful." Hermione listened to her parents' owl hoot in reply. She stepped forward to take the letter and received a playful nip in return. "I'm afraid I don't have any treats, but if you're willing to wait, I'll cook up some bacon for you..." The affronted look Archimedes had been giving her just moments before vanished, to be replaced with satisfaction and smugness, making her grin. "I spoil you, Archy." Shaking her head, she took the letter with a small smile gracing her lips.

Unfolding the parchment, she was surprised to find not just one letter, as she had originally thought, but three. One from each of her parents and then a blank one with no writing on it at all. Deciding to leave the anonymous one 'til last, she opened her father's and quickly read through it. It consisted of warnings to be careful and pleading with her not to do anything stupid. Her mother's was much the same, but also contained a reprimand for the mess she'd left her room in and a post-script to say she'd included an important-looking letter...which had been sitting on her desk unopened...and that she wished her luck in whatever she chose.

Looking at the anonymous letter, filled with confusion over what her mother meant, she gasped as writing began to appear on the folded parchment as if being written by an invisible hand.

Hermione, my love

She didn't recognise the writing at all, and for a brief moment, she was frozen in fear over what it could contain. Several possibilities flew through her mind at the speed of light before she settled on only two possible explanations. Either it was from some stranger who had heard of her plight, or it was from one of the Weasleys she had been out with over the past few weeks.

Taking a deep breath, she turned the parchment over in her hands, and her breath caught in her throat. Sitting there, clear as day, was Severus Snape's seal, pressed into hot green wax.

"Severus..." Her voice was quiet, and her eyes flickered over every inch of the parchment in front of her, her eyes searching for that speck of ink in the corner. Something that had made him smile as he'd watched her looking at it, and there it was. The black speck, which seemed much larger than she remembered, sitting in the corner of the parchment, like a statement.

After her frantic searching of her room had turned up nothing, she had thought this note of hope was lost for good and had been too embarrassed to go to Snape and ask him what it had said. Instead, she had run away to spend the last few days that she could in the house by the sea. But here it was, as clear as the blue sky above her.

Finding it suddenly very hard to swallow, she ran her finger under the wax seal and unfolded the parchment. It took three read throughs before her hurried eyes allowed her to read slowly enough to absorb the words in front of her.

My dearest Hermione,

I'm sure you will realise how hard it is for me to write this, but it is my last hope of ever having you as my own.

You may not have noticed recently that our meetings are full of behaviour that is more fitting to that of more than just friendship. I've seen the looks you bestow upon me, but I'm unsure if they are intentional or just an innocent unconscious action. Whatever they may be, they cause my chest to tighten in what I can only think of as love.

I'm unsure as to whether you have any of the same feelings, but please, I beg of you, if after your search for someone to live your life with, you find yourself alone and with no option but to give up what you love... think of me. Give me a chance, for I find myself quite enamoured with you.

You know where to find me whatever the case.

Your loyal friend,

Severus

Tears were coursing down her cheeks when she finally came back to herself. "Oh, Severus..." Taking a few deep breaths, she turned to Archimedes. "I'm afraid your bacon will have to wait, Archy, I have something important that I must see to."

Ignoring the indignant screech that followed her out of the room, Hermione rushed outside and to the edge of the wards. She didn't even stop to put on some shoes or fetch her cloak, forgetting that the north of England would be colder than France. With a flourish, she was gone.

Snape sighed; it had been almost a week since he had handed that parchment to Hermione, and the last day that she had left to secure an engagement was drawing to a close. And he'd still not heard anything back from her in regards to it. Turning to his familiar, he shook his head. "She must have found someone, Bastian."

Despite the way this thought constricted his breathing into shallow gasps, it was the only way to quench the hope that had been building in his chest. It was a technique he'd used often during the war...and even before...to stop embarrassment and heartache.

It wasn't working particularly well in this case, though, and without the added danger and risk, he found it was slowly overwhelming him. "Sitting here is getting me nowhere; I have things to do." Calling his cloak to him with barely a flick of his wrist, he pulled the thick black material around him and strode to the front door. "I'll bring you back some fish, Bastian." A smirk lifted the corner of his mouth when he heard the loud meow that followed this statement, and he closed the door behind him before he let his long strides lead him away to the wizarding market that was held just a few estates away from his.

Hermione only just managed not to Splinch herself, although, if anyone were to look close enough, they would notice a chunk of her fringe was missing.

She broke into a run as she made her way through the wards surrounding his house, arriving at his front door, her breath coming in short gasps, her feet now covered in dirt, and tears still running down her cheeks.

"Severus!" She knocked frantically on the black wood. Both fists pounding at the door when she received no answer. "Severus! Please answer!" She kept on until her knuckles were scraped and bruised and she had tired herself out from her hysterical sobbing and yelling. "Severus," she whispered, collapsing against the door in a heap. Her feet freezing and dirty, her clothes suited to warmer weather whipping around her in the frigid wind, her hands cold and bruised, and her face wet with tears.

And that was how Severus Snape found her. The scowl that had sprung to adorn his face when he had seen the huddled body on his doorstep fell away as he rushed to her side with a cry of recognition.

"Hermione, what are you doing here?" But all he got in response was a mumbled rambling. Lifting her into his arms, he opened his front door quickly, rushing through and kicking it closed behind them. "Silly girl," he muttered as he settled her down on his sofa.

He carefully lowered a blanket over her before starting a fire in the bare hearth. Once the flames were flickering merrily and he was sure they were not about to go out, he began his search for some Pepper-up Potion.

Bastian watched with a mixture of annoyance and amusement as his master went through the house in search of the potion. Finally, with a mewl, he jumped down from his perch on the back of Snape's favourite chair and trotted down the hall and into the bathroom. In the cupboard beneath the sink, he pulled out the sought after phial. Gripping it firmly but delicately in his jowls, he made his way to his frantic master.

It took a while for Snape to pay attention to his familiar, who was trying to attract his attention, but when he did, the look of relief that crossed his face made Bastian sure he was going to receive an extra large serving of fish for his supper.

Tilting her head back, Snape gently opened Hermione's mouth and poured the potion down her throat. Coughing a little as steam seeped from her ears, she slowly opened her eyes and focussed on him.

"Severus, I'm sorry. So sorry... I didn't realise."

Unable to maintain eye-contact, he turned away. To be rejected was one thing...he had expected it, just not face-to-face. "I see." Clearing his throat, he struggled to rebuild the delicate walls that had surrounded him until she had broken them apart. "I understand."

"No, no, I don't think you do." She raised a hand to his cheek, forcing him to turn to her. "I love you, too."

AN: Finally! :D They know each other's feelings! Just one more chapter to go, and we're all done!

Epilogue

Chapter 8 of 8

Hermione and Severus spend some quality time at the house in France...

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Hermione smiled happily, stretching out on the decking and letting her skin soak up the sun's rays.

"Severus, could you put some sunscreen on my back, please?"

"Of course." Moving from his comfortable position in the shade of the house, he settled next to Hermione's warm body. Untying her bikini strings at her neck and back, he squirted some lotion onto his hands and warmed it before starting to apply it to his wife.

"Mmmm... thank you." Sighing, Hermione wriggled slightly, causing her bikini top to shift and uncover her left breast; too relaxed and drowsy to notice, she squealed in surprise when Snape tweaked her nipple.

"No," he whispered into her ear, rolling her over till she was on her back, "thank you." Positioning his knee between her legs, he lowered himself onto her before letting their lips crash together, revelling in the feel of his wife's arms as they wrapped tightly around him.

The End

AN: Thank you to everyone that helped polish this chapter up... and thank you to everyone that has been reading and reviewing!