

Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen

by rhiannon113

Can Severus and Hermione stay out of their own way long enough to fall in love?

Before I First Met You, I Was Lonesome

Chapter 1 of 9

Can Severus and Hermione stay out of their own way long enough to fall in love?

Disclaimer: I own nothing but the plot.

~~Severus~~

She still manages to stupefy me, with no need of spell work. Just catching her eyes as she raises them from marking her moronic students' homework is enough to stop my blackened, much abused heart.

Hermione is like sunlight and fresh air to my dank, musty cellar of a life. I want to do all manner of 'un-Snape-like' things when she smiles at me, giggling and skipping included.

But I restrain myself, at least when we're not alone. I've spent my adult life scaring the pants off of horny, imbecilic cretins. It's far too late to change tactics now. When we retire to our chambers, however, I can give in to all my whims.

Right. I've never actually skipped. But I have walked quickly with a bit of a bounce to my step. The woman thrills me beyond all reason, but Rome, as they say, was not built in a day.

I can remember feeling terrified and bitter when I realised that I'd allowed myself to be wooed by this child. This amazing, beautiful, fierce, delicate force of nature, young enough to have been sired by me--not that I'd ever so much as laid eyes on her mother, but that's beside the point--could never return my feelings.

My treatment of her went from testy to positively mortifying. Even I wanted to cringe at some of the things I heard myself say. But I felt it was best to keep my distance, for my own sanity. The less she liked me, the easier it would be to remain focused on what our relationship would have to be.

But, gods, that woman brought out the very worst in me, from the moment that she walked back through the doors of Hogwarts as a professor. I'd always known that she was intelligent, but added to that was the confidence she'd gained in the intervening years. Her studies abroad, not to mention the fight against the Dark Lord and all its fall out, had given her the grace and bearing that I found hypnotic.

Staff meetings became torturous. I began to stare at her while the others were speaking. Try as I might have to keep my actions covert, somehow she always seemed to meet my gaze. Sometimes, she would look away quickly, though at times she would smile shyly at me. My blood boiled, and not in the angry, resentful, comforting, normal way.

Then the meetings in the library. Only the first was a true accident, though I'd kept up the charade of 'chance meetings' for several months. I found myself searching for topics during the day that might provoke interesting debates with Hermione. Then, most annoyingly, I found I was making an effort to suggest books or articles she might enjoy.

I don't know if I should have been more pleased or terrified when I discovered just how similar our tastes and views really were. Begrudgingly, I was forced to admit that she was my complement and my equal. She no longer seemed to fear the dreaded 'Snape Glare.' I don't mind saying I was utterly gobsmacked when, for the first time since my early teens, someone simply stared back into my tense, creased face and asked, ever so coolly, if I'd finished with my tantrum.

I found myself in immediate gratitude to any and all attending deities that I was wearing rather voluminous robes that hid the evidence of my 'ardent' approval for her contempt and disrespect.

That same night, in my shower, I pleased myself to thoughts of a specific witch for the first time in twenty years. The faceless female of my fantasies was gone. It was Hermione's face I saw, her body I envisioned beneath me. Her hands, eyes and mouth. In one final show of supplication, I cried out her name as I spent myself.

I laughed afterwards. I now belonged to someone infinitely good and kind, who had no idea that she was the centre of my once pathetic existence, controlling me completely. It was a giant step up from Voldemort or even Albus. Rather like getting your soul back from Satan to turn it over to God. I felt clean and pure every time I thought of her.

That was the cause of my hysterics. I felt clean and pure whilst wanking to thoughts of an oblivious colleague.

Gods above, my life is wholly and utterly lost.

Over the next weeks and months, it became increasingly necessary for me to retire to my chambers and 'find release.' I made excuses right after meals; I ran from staff meetings as though demons gave chase; I'd even needed to duck into an unused classroom once, after she'd smiled at me as we passed in the corridor. Quickly, I surpassed the wanking activities of my early teen years, and this time, my mum wasn't around to threaten me with the imminent failure of my eyesight.

~~Hermione~~

The library has always been my favourite place within the confines of Hogwarts. If I had an available moment, I lost no time in finding my favourite table and reading or marking essays.

After a few weeks, I noticed that there always seemed to be someone watching me. Given the number of ghosts in residence, it didn't seem odd to me.

One night, Severus stalked past my table. He didn't make eye contact, but I felt certain I'd discovered who had been observing me. I decided to leave a trade journal I'd received recently on the table.

I had to make several attempts, but finally, after weeks of stalking and glancing surreptitiously at my reading materials, he stopped.

The sound of his voice surprised me so much that I had to grip the table for support.

"You'll want to read someone other than Thatcher's views regarding Elemental Transfer Efficacy. The man's a waste of space. Try reading Hiensman or Garner. They are at least moderately knowledgeable." With that, he was off again. But it was only a beginning.

From that night on, he stopped and spoke to me about something. Eventually, he sat while he insulted my reading materials. And finally, he brought his own reading to sit with me while we worked in silence, occasionally disrupting the stillness to goad me about one thing or another.

If these sorts of interruptions had been coming from anyone other than Severus, I'd have beheaded them. But I'd been waiting to speak with this man on an intellectual level since before I could understand why I so badly wanted his attention.

At first, it was his voice that captured my attentions. As he'd rattled off his standard (though I hadn't know it at the time) 'First Year Speech,' I fell under the spell. I had more difficulty with my Potions lessons than any other course--not because they were more difficult, but because the sound of Severus' velvety voice was a distraction to me.

My first sexual experience followed a particularly vivid dream of him speaking. Though I didn't have a clue what caused the aching at my centre or how to fix it, instinct took over. I fumbled my way to my very first release replaying his lectures in my head.

By the time I was in my fifth year, I'd noticed his hands and the beautiful, confident way they manipulated ingredients and implements as he worked. I became adept at memorising the way Severus worked so I could bring the mental images back for better use when I was alone.

As a colleague, I was obsessed with him. I'd come to realise that my affections and attentions would be entirely wasted on him. It hurt a bit to know that these feelings would forever go unrequited, but I was willing to accept the pain I might one day feel should he ever discover me.

He was cruel and cold. He was sexy and arrogant. He was the drug, and I was the hopeless addict.

Then one night, everything changed. I needed a different book. A simple Locator charm told me that it was, luckily enough, in the stack opposite our table.

As I stood to walk the short distance, Severus raised his eyebrows at me. I smiled weakly, trying to control my heart rate. Because I didn't trust my voice or my spell casting under his watchful gaze, I pulled the wheeled ladder over to retrieve the book in the Muggle way.

I climbed more than halfway up the ladder, feeling his piercing, onyx gaze the whole way. I reached my destination and took the heavy, dust-covered volume in my hands. For some reason, I decided to turn my shoulders to smile down at him.

As I turned, leaning away from the ladder slightly, I misjudged the effects of the enormous book against my chest. I closed my eyes as I felt the ladder slip away from my body, and I tried to remember to relax for the impact with the hard floor below.

My book seemed to vanish, and the floor never came for me. I landed, remarkably comfortable, against something firm. The sound of his rapid breathing caused my eyes to spring open.

His eyes were searching me, as if for sign of injury. I was cradled against his chest. I opened my mouth to say that I was fine, but the words died as he pressed his lips firmly to mine.

Never in my wildest fantasies had a kiss like this existed. Every nerve ending from the top of my head to the sole of my pinkie toes was singing the 'Hallelujah Chorus.'

I still swear I felt my ovaries perk up and do their victory dance as his hand stroked my cheek, and my arms tightened their hold on him. The world melted away, and I was only aware of his lips and tongue.

The term 'master' applied to him not only in the realm of Potion making. After what felt like days of intense kissing, he pulled away and looked into my more than slightly dazed eyes.

His brow furrowed, and he took a slow breath. "Mr. Weasley?"

I was stunned for a moment and then shook my head. "He's only ever been a friend, Severus." I blushed, but I felt that honesty was best here. "I've only ever wanted you."

~~Severus~~

Over the weeks and months that followed that kiss, we became closer than I'd imagined possible. Never in my life had I known closeness like I'd experienced with

Hermione.

We were well-matched intellectually and had enough differing views to keep discussion interesting. Though, at times, I found her thought processes maddeningly over-intellectualized.

I would rather die than admit it was a quite a turn-on to have a woman who would argue with me. She would not be intimidated. I glared, ranted, and hissed at her through gritted teeth, and still, she would remain calm.

I wanted her physically for as long as I could remember. The kiss in the library only served to frustrate me further. I had experience, but nothing that I would care to share with Hermione.

I'd never had to seduce a woman. I'd either paid or been compelled to act by a merciless tyrant. Hermione deserved far more than that. The thought of disappointing her made me reluctant to push things further.

So we went on for months, snogging like randy fifth-years until I'd have to make my excuses. The shower in my private bath saw more action during those months than in the whole of my residence.

Tension began to mount, and it occurred to me that she would likely assume that my hesitancy was due to some flaw on her part. The very last thing she should feel was rejected.

I hoped she'd simply ask me to make love to her. If she did that, then I'd feel more confident. I pulled away and apologized for what felt like a million times.

Then one night, just after the end of summer term, things had gotten wildly out of hand. I found myself in only my trousers, Hermione atop my lap. She was clothed only in a skimpy lace bra and a scandalously shortened skirt when I broke our kiss to take a breath.

Make a move now! Either get on with it, or get out. One way or the other, stop torturing me! Odd that my genitals had decided to open a mental dialogue with *menow*.

"I should go.... It's terribly late." I tried to smile gently as I disentangled myself from her.

Her delicate yet surprisingly strong arms shot out to circle my neck and pull me back down. "Don't go."

When I could bear it, I brought my eyes to meet hers. Hermione's chocolate brown orbs were full of longing, hope, and something else that I couldn't yet identify.

Does she want me? Like this? I sat, nervously trying not to touch her without looking like I was trying not to touch her.

"Severus." Her hand trailed from my cheek, down my neck, and over my chest. It's rather difficult to appear dignified when one is both randy beyond all reason and frightened.

Yes, that's right. The Snarky Dungeon-bat was afraid. I'm human.

"Don't go." Having said that, she leaned up and placed the softest and most gentle of kisses on my lips, moaning lightly as she did so.

I was done for. The next few moments reminded me most of the times I'd been embroiled in a battle, only exponentially more pleasant. It was blurry and confused. Hands and mouths were everywhere, causing little bursts of lightning to erupt beneath my skin.

Finally, the moment arrived. I held my weight using my left hand, my right hand holding my erection at her entrance. The moist heat coming from within her was having the most exciting and unfortunate effect on me. I could ignore my woeful inadequacy, and hope she wouldn't mind or I could be a man, and admit my shortcomings (no pun intended).

I chose the high road, and struggled to stop my voice from shaking as I sacrificed my dignity on the altar of true love.

"Hermione," I panted, "I swear by all that is sacred in this world that I'll make it up to you later, but, sadly, this first time will be decidedly--ungh--brief."

She laughed and shook her head, reclaiming my mouth with hers. It was extremely short-lived, but never one to go back on my word, the subsequent couplings had more than made up for it. Hermione assured me and anyone within a five mile radius (Silencing Charms be damned) of that very thing.

~~Hermione~~

After we consummated our relationship, everything else seemed to fall into place. I'd been a bit nervous that it would become centred on sex, but it didn't. We were able to find a balance of the physical, cerebral, and emotional. I was in heaven.

Make no mistake, Severus was still difficult--highly irritable, short tempered and set in his own ways. But those were the things I loved most in him.

We fought, sometimes violently. But every time we had an argument that ended in my flinging something rather heavy at his head, shouting, "Fuck you!" it seemed that a few hours later I would be writhing beneath him, moaning, "Fuck me!" with equal sincerity.

In a really odd way, that became the definition of true love for me. I didn't take any shit, and neither did he. We were best friends. We each were aware of the other's flaws and loved in spite of them, if not all the more because of them.

The darkest spot was Ron. I wasn't lying when I told Severus that we'd only ever been friends. At least for my part, we had only ever been friends. Ron had designs of a future for us, involving marriage and a 'happily ever after.' He always had been stupidly optimistic on that front.

I told him about Severus, and he literally lost control of himself. He screamed and threw things. In the end, I put in him a Full Body-Bind and quietly told him that if he really was my friend, he would accept my decision and support me in it.

I haven't heard from him since. I missed Ron's friendship, but I didn't want him around if he was going to constantly berate my choices and never be civil to the most important person in my world.

Severus understood as I grieved the loss of my childhood friend. He really can be quite sweet and thoughtful in the proper circumstances. He even did his best to hide his glee at the prospect of never having to deal with Ron again.

Harry took the news much better. He ran his hand through his hair and pursed his lips for a moment. Finally, he sighed and told me that if Severus made me happy, then that was good enough for him.

I nearly knocked him over with the fierce hug. Harry was my family, and for him to accept Severus was an enormous relief. Though Harry had warned me that it might take him a while to be on his best behaviour and that they would likely never be fast friends.

I was thrilled by anything less than blatant hostility!

~~Severus~~

Marriage came about with some difficulty. I wanted to ask her the first time we ever made love, but that seemed rather cliché. So I waited for the perfect opportunity. Hermione was rare and unique. No ordinary dinner would do for her.

But first, my honour and the depth of my feelings for her demanded that I follow tradition. This posed a problem, however, since Hermione's parents had never fully recovered from the Memory Charms she'd used to keep them safe. I knew that she had no regrets about sacrificing her relationships with them for their own safety, but it did leave her without a father.

The next most likely candidate was Arthur Weasley, and though I genuinely liked the man, I felt it was inappropriate to ask the father of the man who'd been rejected by my intended for a blessing on our marriage.

This left me with only one other option. Feeling as though I'd rather be eating shards of broken glass, I waited for Harry Potter to answer his front door one Saturday morning in September.

"Profess--I mean, Headmaster? Can I help you? Please, come in, sir." Harry looked rather bewildered.

No, you twit, I'm just knocking on every door in London to wish each of my countrymen a good morning! I thought rather nastily, swallowing my venom and nodding politely.

I followed Potter through the house and into the kitchen.

"Would you care for some tea, sir?"

I nodded, realising the only way for the both of us to survive this encounter was for me to humour the imbecilic boy, hopefully putting him at ease in the process.

I tried to think of polite things to say to Potter while he gathered the things for tea. I came up with an extremely short list of suitable topics. This was shaping up to be one hell of a day.

"I understand you've come through Auror training at the top of your class. Congratulations." I tried to keep my voice polite.

While he finished the tea, Harry prattled about his training and his first few assignments. I was pleased to see "The Chosen One" was no longer full of himself. He seemed gracious and had a strength that I found I could almost respect.

After a pause, he looked tentatively at me and asked, "Sir, I mean no disrespect, but what brings you here? We've never really socialized, so I assume this is a bit more than a casual call."

"You are quite right, Potter. I am here to speak to you on a rather sensitive matter. I must ask that you keep all that I say in confidence." I waited for a response. Though he didn't look thrilled at the prospect, the younger man nodded his assent.

I continued. "I'm sure it's come to your attention that Hermione and I have spent a great deal of time together over the last years. I value her as a person, as a friend, and as a colleague. More than that, I find myself with... with deep personal feelings for her." I took a shuddering breath and focused my gaze on the floor.

When I'd reined in my nerves, I went on. "I know that as a result of her parents' difficulties with their memories, she is left without blood relatives. I am also aware that she considers you to be her family. Oh, and of course, Mrs. Potter."

I paused, and the green-eyed git nodded in encouragement (I found insulting him internally soothed me). "That being said, I've come here to declare my intentions toward Hermione to you, as her family. I have gainful employment at Hogwarts, and I also maintain a large number of private brewing contracts.

"I can obviously provide her with more than adequate living accommodations, both at Hogwarts and a small home I inherited that could be used during the holidays. If she should wish to have children, I am amenable to that. I will in no way hinder or discourage her career."

Harry gaped stupidly at me in utter shock and then quickly found his voice. "Do you love her?" he asked quietly.

"Yes, with all my heart." I wasn't truly comfortable sharing my feelings, but I felt I owed it to Hermione to do this, so I met Harry's gaze evenly.

"Does she love you?"

I wasn't expecting such direct questions from him. "For some strange reason, yes, she does. Though I'm not a jovial or pleasant sort of person--"

At that, Harry snorted, and I glared at him coolly before continuing. "I assure you I will make her happiness my first priority."

Harry's face broke into a disbelieving half-smile. "So you want my permission to marry her?"

"No. I am asking for your blessing to seek her hand. She is the only one who can grant 'permission.'" I was feeling more annoyed than nervous, hoping he would mistake the one for the other.

Potter laughed outright and stood, extending his hand. When I shook his hand, the boy clapped me on the shoulder. "It's good that you feel that way; otherwise, I think your bollocks would be in mortal peril. Not from me--from Hermione. You might have noted that she can be a bit on the independent side."

We laughed together for the first time. When we parted ways, he assured me that he would not mention our conversation to anyone. In spite of myself, I felt a spring in my step and almost wanted to smile at random passers-by. Almost, but not quite.

A/N: Stay tuned!! Next chapter talks about the proposal, and stag and hen parties. =]

Thanks to the incomparable kizzy7. This one was a terrible chore for her!! Love you, dearest!

Thanks for reading, please review. *hugs*

Then You Came In Sight, And My Heart Grew Light

A/N: I hope you enjoy this bit! See if you can spot two quotes from films starring the very yummy Alan Rickman.

Many thanks to the amazing kizzy7 for managing to be the world's most amazing beta, even while on holiday!!

Disclaimer: Jo owns the players, but I own this particular game!

~~Hermione~~

Severus had been gone most of the day, and I was getting a bit impatient. He'd casually mentioned that we would 'do something' that evening, but never gave any more details.

It was nearly half past five, and there was no sign of his return. The immature part of me wanted to pout and send him a Howler. The sullen, P.M.S. ridden bit wanted to get into a nice tub and leave him a note telling him I was in no state to go out. In the end, I merely sat marking essays, glaring at the clock.

Just past seven, the door banged open, and Severus quite literally fell into the room. He picked himself up quickly and rather ungracefully. I noticed that his hair was completely dishevelled and his clothes looked as though they'd been put through a giant egg beater, probably while he was wearing them.

"I'm sorry. I am inexcusably late. I was... unexpectedly and rather unavoidably detained." He looked as though he were trying to catch his breath and tidy his appearance while being nonchalant and subtle.

He was failing miserably.

I was trying not to laugh or be angry. He was acting oddly, though. If he ever did have to be late, he would always give me the reason. I tried to appear as though I was not seriously annoyed.

He finally stopped fussing over his own appearance and stepped up to me. "Am I forgiven?"

I smiled. "Yes, I suppose. But you do owe me..."

"I always honour my debts, Miss Granger." His smile was pure evil. His arms tightened around me, and his mouth captured my own.

I was focused on the kiss for a moment. All at once, I realised that there was more than a kiss going on. "Severus, I think you're beginning to be happy to see me." I laughed and ran my hand down the front of his robes.

He pushed me away and took a step back. "Don't touch me!" He looked highly affronted.

That was new. Usually, he welcomed any advances I might wish to make. I felt ashamed, rather like a child that had been chastised. I turned away from him and walked to the table.

I summoned a tea service, complete with finger sandwiches and cinnamon biscuits. I began to pour out. It was too late for a proper supper, and I wanted something to eat. I had tucked in before I realised that Severus was still frozen to the floor, staring wide-eyed at me.

I would have felt rude, but I was far too annoyed with him for that now. "If you've finished with your bit as a living statue, there's tea."

Moving his mouth like a cod fish out of water, Severus was staring at me as though I was in danger of being eaten by a rampaging manticore.

"Severus?"

No reaction.

"Severus!?!!" He finally noticed that I was speaking and quickly composed himself. He started across the room, presumably to take the seat opposite me.

Suddenly, he tripped over and went arse over tea kettle, managing to vault the sofa. Impressive.

"My God! What on earth has gotten into you, Severus? Are you high?"

For the second time in as many minutes, he untangled his limbs. He righted the sofa and flopped onto the cushions. He put his head down and pinched the bridge of his nose with his thumb and forefinger.

"That's it. I can't manage to do anything according to plan today. Right." He carefully crossed the room whilst retrieving something from the folds of his robes. He stood over me, frowning severely. I had a rather odd flashback of my days in his Potions class.

"Here. Have this. I love you. I hope you love me. I'm utter rubbish at grand gestures, it would seem." He set a small velvet box on the table next to my tea cup.

I looked between him and the box several times. I couldn't speak at all. My throat felt as though someone had kindled a small fire in it, and I'd bet my last Galleon that my eyes were bugging out of my head.

Severus huffed impatiently and shouted, "Well pick it up, woman! We haven't got all night. In case you've ever wondered, this is a rather uncomfortable position to be in, so get on with it. It's not a hard question, either 'yes,' 'no,' or 'bugger off.' At present, I'll take any of them, as they'll get me out of this gut-wrenching, hellish purgatory I'm in, waiting for you to return from your mental sojourn!" His eyes were flashing, and his chest heaved from the exertion of shouting so much.

Where was the feminist that should have had his bollocks on a silver platter? Nowhere to be found, thank you very much. I was suddenly overtaken by the giddy teenager I'd never been.

He is proposing!

I reached a shaking hand toward the little black box. It was surprisingly light in weight for something that held my entire future. The lid snapped open, and there was a lovely, though modest, diamond in an antique setting.

Tears filled my eyes and my brain supplied--for the first time ever, I might add--only a single thought.

"Yes." I looked up at him, just as the silly tears of joy spilled down my ridiculously flushed cheeks.

His anger seemed to vanish as he immediately fell to his knee. He smiled and cleared his throat a few times. When he spoke, it sounded as though he were getting a head

cold.

"You will marry me?" His words were filled with disbelief.

I nodded, unable to make any sounds recognisable as English.

Severus pressed his lips to mine briefly. He pulled back a fraction of an inch so that as he spoke his lips just brushed mine. "I can't tell you how happy that makes me. I know I owe you an apology for making an absolute nightmare of your proposal...."

I placed my fingers over his lips to silence him. "As long as it ended with you and me, engaged to be married. I love you."

He kissed my fingers, holding them against his smile.

~~Severus~~

For two weeks, I tolerated squeals, bouncing, 'ooos' and 'ahhs.' More people wanted to shake my hand and congratulate me for securing Hermione's hand than had for surviving Voldemort. A life time of espionage won't gain you respect, but managing to have a stable relationship is worthy of worship.

Though I was happy with Hermione. I wondered, rather cynically, how many of the well-wishers secretly wished to inquire on the state of Hermione's mental health. I sometimes wondered about her myself.

The lowest point came when my office was invaded one afternoon by several of my male colleagues and fellow members of the Order. Potter announced that we would be having a Stag night.

I had told Hermione that I wouldn't be going. She'd insisted. The evening turned out to be an unmitigated disaster. The Weasley twins had served as bartenders, and their drinks seemed to be comprised of equal parts petrol and sewage.

Then, in his worst move to date, Potter had left Neville in charge of entertainment. The gormless lout had hired a company of rather voluptuous, lovely (from the photograph) Brazilian 'dancers.' Who turned out to be nothing more than prostitutes. Adding insult to injury, they also turned out to be drag queens.

Drag queens who became rather aggressive when their 'services' were declined. Never insult the ego of a seven-foot tall creature that is wearing obscene amounts of make-up and has some deep seeded issues with his/her sexuality.

The next morning found the lot of the 'stags' nursing not only impressive hangovers but also injuries acquired in the fight that ensued when we had attempted to eject the 'ladies.'

Bill Weasley had agreed to host the event. I certainly did not envy that man when his half-Veela wife returned to find her home in shambles and most of their possessions soaked in vomit. I hadn't wanted the bloody party to begin with.

Hermione's Hen party was a bit more of a problem. Ginevra Potter and Fleur Weasley were rather more adept at party planning. I knew that Hermione was not one for extreme drunkenness, but I couldn't help being a bit nervous.

~~Hermione~~

The 'Hen Party' was really good fun. The girls had planned a route through London, both Wizard and Muggle, touring some of the best clubs the city had to offer.

My memories are fuzzy enough to eliminate the details of the evening. I did, however, have my memory jogged by the article in the *Prophet* stating that the War Monument in Diagon Alley had been defaced. Apparently, Severus' name had been magically altered so that it now read 'Severus Tobias "Sex-God" Snape.'

By the strangest of circumstances, the best curse breakers were unable to change it back.

Luna had provided a large collection of pornographic films, as well as a television and DVD player charmed to work without electricity. The slightly odd former Ravenclaw had stood through the films, narrating them as though they were instructional videos.

At first, it all seemed comical, but after Fleur had confessed that many of Luna's pointers and suggestions were new to her, the lot of us sobered up to listen.

Once I got over the overly made-up girls shouting rude words and making ridiculous faces, it was all very educational. Picturing some of what Luna was advocating with Severus was *stimulating*.

It was a brilliant party. I'd had more fun in that day and a half than I'd ever dreamed was possible. I was excited to tell Severus all about it. I rushed through the door, breathless and more than a little ready for his attentions.

He shut me down. He gave me a cold stare and told me to shower and wash the 'stench of other men' off of me.

Yea, that stung. Though I hadn't heard any details, I was aware that the party thrown in his honour had been less than stellar. Perhaps that was what had him in such a state?

That might be his reason, but not an excuse....

"Fine. I'll just take care of my own needs, shall I?" I prayed my voice wouldn't shake and give me away. I stalked into the en suite bath, fuming.

Just because his Stag Night went tits up, that should mean that I can't have any fun? Is this how it's to be, then? I can only have fun when he does?

I managed to work myself into a real state. I finished my shower and dried off, pulling my towel around me. I set about combing my hair rather more viciously than I normally would have done.

In the midst of snarling, and muttering under my breath, I noticed another face staring back at me from the mirror. Severus had a evil smirk on his face.

"Something vexes thee?" He appeared to be enjoying himself.

Did that sodding ass that think he could play hot and cold with me? He was sadly mistaken.

"Not at all. I'm rather tired. Think I'll turn in." I turned, replacing the brush on the counter. My brilliant plan was to brush past him in the doorway. All went well until I crossed the threshold.

As I entered the bedroom, I felt my towel pull away from my body. I turned, my anger once again burning at supernova level. I now regretted leaving my wand in my cloak.

"Stop it, Severus, I'm not in the mood."

"But you were..." He trailed off. He approached me, black eyes flashing.

I huffed loudly and pulled on my cami and sleep shorts, ignoring him as best I could. I wanted to be angry with him. The arrogant prick thought he could coerce me into

anything.

"Dearest, you're not angry with me? Let me make it up to you." He was using his most persuasive, sexiest voice. He followed me to the bed and ran his fingers lightly along my collar bone.

I roughly pushed his hand away and turned to face him. I knew he could read the fury in my eyes. "You don't get it, do you? When you throw your little tantrums, when you use your appeal to influence me, you're invalidating my feelings. You're letting me know that what matters to me doesn't mean shit to you. That's not what marriage means, not to me anyway. Goodnight." With that, I lay down, turning my back on him. I snuggled under the covers and pulled my pillow closer.

~~Severus~~

She was right. I was behaving like a spoiled child. I was angry that she'd enjoyed her time with her friends. Hell, I was angry that she had real friends. I didn't like anyone to take her time from me, and her bonds with others only served as a reminder that, if not for her, I'd be alone.

I did enjoy my privacy, but living with her had shown me the benefits of interactions with others. Only Hermione could bring out this sort of soul searching in me.

Even more disturbing was the notion that I was manipulating her. I hadn't even been doing it consciously. Making situations work to my advantage was one of the core tenants of my Slytherin psyche. I'd never stopped to consider that she would be hurt by it.

I'd never had to consider the feelings of another person. I thought I was doing a great job, but it would have to go deeper. I realised I needed to let go of my self-centred behaviour.

I loved her. Hermione brought light and happiness to my shitty excuse for a life. She made me want to be better. She was the strongest force in the universe. I wanted to let go and allow her to move me.

For the next several days, I focused only on what she wanted. I listened, better than I ever had before. I had to be careful; she wouldn't want a doormat. I had to find a way to be a true, equal partner. That one was going to be a struggle. I'd spent a lifetime either being entirely dominated, or dominating others. I'd never had what she was offering, what she deserved.

Though she never came out and said she'd noticed any difference, we also got on better than we had in months. Even with the ridiculous stress of wedding plans.

The one major difference, however, came in our sex life. I wanted her to come to me. I can't rightly explain why it seemed so necessary, but in my mind, her initiating the intimacy had become linked with our resolving our previous disagreement. And I won't lie and say it wasn't an enormous ego-boost to have her begging for me.

Fridays had become 'wedding days.' I examined colour swatches, gave my opinion on flower arrangements, and endlessly debated the merits of infused versus torted--which turned out to be a pretentious word for 'fruit-filled'--cake.

This particular Friday, I was prepared for another round of pre-nuptial tedium. Hermione came in, Levitating boxes filled with some sort of brightly coloured frippery and God knows what else.

"Severus, we really must decide on the favours for the wedding, as well as the seating plan for dinner and finalising the menu." She sounded flustered and excited.

"Alright, darling." I wanted to convey my total and absolute dedication to our wedding.

She looked at me as though she were expecting some sort of ugly outburst, but didn't comment. "Now, I've got three colours of Jordan Almonds, and we also need to chose between the flat-edged and fluted tulle."

My fiancé stood before me hold out two bits of fluff each wrapped around a few vivid blue sugared almonds. I threw myself into the discussion as wholeheartedly as possible.

From there, we continued through a rather heated debate on pork chops and sirloin. We made good progress, and other than a bit of bother over exactly how many seats Hagrid would take up at a table, we were nearly finished.

I stood, to be the gentleman and help her clear away and somehow managed to tangle my feet in the table legs and my robes. I managed to stay upright, but I stubbed my toe rather badly.

"Fuckwankbuggershittingassheadhole!" I leaned down and brought my foot up to my hands. I squeezed my foot and hopped on the spot for a moment. When I opened my eyes, I saw Hermione, hands over her mouth, red-faced and teary-eyed.

My first instinct was to fly into a rage that she would have the gall to laugh at my indignity. But then suddenly, it occurred to me that this was one moment I would have to, as they say, 'suck it up.'

I opened my mouth to speak when she cut me off.

"God, I want you, Severus."

~~Hermione~~

Something about the extremely rude string of words that came pouring out of his mouth reminded me completely of why I had fallen in love with him. And why I've wanted him, needed him for so long.

He was a bit shocked when I Vanished everything he was wearing and jumped into his arms.

My clothes Vanished as well, which I could only assume to be his doing. We somehow made it to the bedroom without loss of life or limb. He fell onto the bed, pulling me with him, bumping our chests together.

"Now, Severus, I want you now." Having said that, I attacked his mouth and ran my hand down his chest until I found his erection and slid my hand along it several times.

Economy of words can be quite valuable, especially under such conditions.

"Yes!" His hands wandered over me. He might have said more, but the fingers of his right hand were distracting me.

Perhaps wedding planning was alright after all.

A/N: I don't mean to offend anyone with Severus' reaction to the Drag Queens that come to his stag party. He doesn't dislike them in general, only in this case, Neville assured everyone that lovely women were coming. Another part of the problem was that they were trying to operate as prostitutes rather than only exotic dancers.

Next up: The Wedding

And Now This Whole World Seems New To Me

Chapter 3 of 9

Everybody ready for a wedding?

A/N: I'm so sorry it's been so long since my last update! The next chapter is with my amazing beta, kizzy7, so it shouldn't be nearly as long a delay for the next update. Real life is a killer sometimes! Thanks for sticking with me.

I'm not Jo; I don't make money. But reviews make me smile!!

~~Hermione~~

I'm a freak. I fully admit it. I'm aroused by Severus when he's being an ass. There's something about the way he swears that makes me go a little weak in the knees. And yes, wet in the knickers.

The man is sex on a plate.

I was also rather touched at the Herculean effort he'd put into assisting with the wedding. I doubt he'd attended any weddings, yet he'd jumped in with both feet, offering views on the colour and style of the bridesmaids' robes and what type of nibbles we ought to have for cocktail hour.

He impressed me and turned me on. We hadn't had sex for several weeks, and in that instant, I wanted him. Something about the combination of his willingness to help and hopping like an angry ostrich made me crazy.

That was a good night. The next morning, we talked. He apologised for being jealous of my party. And I got to hear the full story of what happened during his. The best bit of the story was that he didn't really blame Neville for the mistake. Honestly, who would expect 'ladies of the evening' to be, in fact, men?

He also admitted, rather sweetly, that his main issue was me going out without him. He still lacked the self-confidence to believe that I desired him above all others, not out of pity or lack of options.

"Flattering as it is, Severus, I'm not going to say I'll never go out with my friends. I love you; I enjoy spending time with you, but I'm also going to need time with my friends. Believe it or not, you may even benefit from it..."

"You mean..." So he'd noticed the new moves I'd picked up from Luna and Fleur.

"That's right. Those are the sorts of things that come up at 'Hen' parties. You see?"

He looked uncomfortable, rather like he was fighting some sort of internal battle.

"I am willing to concede that it *is*, indeed, valuable for you to spend time with your fellow witches."

Oh yeah, baby, victory is mine!

~~Severus~~

I gave in. I gave in because whoever had given her the pointers on fellatio was indeed a gifted individual. Make no mistake, Hermione was skilled to begin with, but now, well, the experience defied description.

She was an amazing witch. I found myself drawn to her lectures. I'd slipped in unnoticed by her or the students to sit in the back of her classroom. Listening as she expounded on her favourite theorems of Arithmancy was a beautiful thing.

My favourite was the way she would handle misbehaviour. A few weeks into the fall term last year I happened to sit in on a lesson of seventh years. Her lectures were fascinating, and she knew more about Arithmancy than anyone else on the planet. You would think the dunderheads in her *elective* class would be appreciative, but no, they chose to test her time and again.

"And so, if you'll all take out fresh parchment, we'll work through this next equation together... Yes, Miss Murray?"

I watched as Hermione walked to the middle of the room and spoke with one of her students. She leaned over the girl's desk to speak and to look over her work. I couldn't make out what was said, but they were speaking quietly as most of the other students were following Hermione's instructions.

I looked around the classroom and noticed that the young men directly opposite Hermione were staring at her bottom rather than taking out their supplies. Automatically, my hand reached for my wand.

I watched in horror as the one seemed to be goading the other into something. My first thought was to hit him with *Fallis Galacialis* curse, but I remembered that my love had a rather independent streak, so I watched the little scene unfold.

As Hermione continued to focus on the young witch who had asked for her help, the boys behind her were struggling to keep their laughter silent as they ogled her. Finally, the gormless tosser next to her worked up his nerve.

Several things happened at once. Just as Hermione finished with her conversation, she straightened and backed away from the desk. Sadly, the little pervert behind her chose that moment to 'go for the gold.' Only as he was reaching out, she changed position. Instead of getting a feel of her bum, his hand went between her legs, causing her to gasp and then round on him.

Due to the position of his hand, and being startled by where he found it, he was thrown to the floor.

Hermione stared down at him, anger radiating from her like heat. He rose suddenly into the air and hung upside down in front of her.

"Since, Mr. Smith, you are so concerned with gaining first hand knowledge of the female anatomy," she flicked her wand at him once and he winced sharply, "you will undoubtedly enjoy true *personal* experience." He gasped in shock, his voice now an octave higher.

Hermione turned on her heel and walked back to the front of her class. As Mr. Smith landed on the floor in a heap, she turned back to him. "By the way, that will mean detention with Mr. Filch for the next two months. Don't worry, you'll be back to normal by morning."

She continued with her class as though nothing had happened. God, our love truly was written in the stars.

~~Hermione~~

In the weeks before my wedding, I began to wonder why on earth I'd agreed to have a formal wedding rather than an elopement. I thought we were done with details, after all the tripe I'd been dealing with since my engagement.

But everyday I got at least half a dozen owls dedicated to wedding business. I was tired of having to *Scourgify* all my students essays because they kept getting covered in owl shit.

Ginny and Luna were helpful. And I was grateful that Fleur wanted to take care of all the planning for me, but she was making everything so bloody complicated. I didn't even know what sugar boxes were for, let alone why in the blue fuck it would matter if they were white or gold.

I was so busy in the days proceeding the wedding, I barely saw Severus. I missed him. It seemed like a bad oxymoron that the wedding, the event that was meant to bind us forever, would push us apart.

By the morning of the wedding I was in a foul mood. Fleur, Ginny and Luna were all hovering over me, mumbling to one another about eyeliner, spiral curls and the pros and cons of stephanotis.

"You know, all this garbage seems ridiculous. I don't know why it's necessary. Severus doesn't care what I wear or how I look."

Fleur looked scandalized. "Zut alore! Zhere izz no way you caan jus walk eentu your own weddeen wizzout lookeen mawher bootee-fool zan ever befour! Zis izz madness, Ermynee."

Being in such a dark humour, I had no patience to try deciphering her obnoxious accent. "I've no fucking clue what you're yammering on about. Either finish now, or I'll jinx your hair into a permanent frizz!"

Fleur looked affronted, but didn't cease her activities. Muttering what sounded like, "yoo weel sank me lateer", she continued her assault.

What felt like several years later, I was waiting for my entrance. Harry walked into the small tent that was my current prison.

"What are you doing here?" I didn't mean to sound rude, but I had been pushed past the point of caring.

Harry smiled at me, and instantly, I was relaxed. "You know, you look beautiful." I smiled, feeling a bit self conscious.

"Thanks, Harry. Shouldn't you be getting to your seat?"

Harry laughed softly. "Hermione, I gave Severus my blessing on this marriage. I think it only fitting that I be the one to hand you over to him." He took my hand gently.

I felt the tears sting in my eyes. "You're going to give me away?"

Harry shook his head gently. "Never. We're family. I'm just going to extend that family to Severus today. But you, you will always be my family. I love you."

I couldn't speak. I leaned over and kissed his cheek. I clutched his arm tightly and allowed him to lead me out of the tent.

The girls fell into step behind us. In spite of my attitude towards her, Fleur had done an amazing job with the decorations.

White chairs in rows formed a semi-circle, facing a gazebo that was covered in lilies and fairy lights. I saw faces of people I knew, smiling and nodding at me. Harry patted my hand and kept leading me forward.

I looked up to see Severus looking solemn and handsome in his dress-robos. Suddenly, all the crap of the past few days melted away. This really was the point of today. Me and Severus. Forever.

We reached the end of the isle. Harry reached to shake Severus' hand. Then they exchanged a few quiet words. Before I could make out what was said, Harry turned to me.

He leaned over until our cheeks were touching and whispered in my ear, "Be happy, love. He will take good care of you." He kissed my cheek and then passed my hand to Severus.

Severus was looking at me intently. He smiled slightly and squeezed my hand.

To be honest, I didn't pay much attention to the ceremony until it came time for us to say our vows. I hoped I would be able to get the words out while maintaining some dignity.

Severus had to go first. His onyx eyes burned into mine, and everything else in the world faded away.

"Hermione. I saw my life very clearly. I was alone, and that was what I wanted. But then everything changed. I found you. Nothing in my old world made sense anymore. For the first time in my life, I was glad to be proven wrong.

"Everything is different now. I am whole. You make me whole. You make me the man I was always meant to be. I pledge here today to spend the rest of my life loving you and making you happy."

I almost couldn't breathe. For a moment my vision was entirely clouded by tears. I dabbed at my eyes and took a deep breath. I felt as though my insides had melted to a puddle on the floor, but one look at Severus' calm, loving face soothed me.

"Severus. Most everyone in my life looked at me as 'bookish.' I wasn't seen as a whole person, only as a brain. You changed all that. No one can challenge my ideas like you; no one can point out my mistakes like you; no one makes me feel beautiful and loved like you. I gave you my heart a long time ago. Today, I give you everything else. All that I am and all that I have I lay at your feet. I love you."

I was so intent on taking in every detail of his face, I'd failed to notice that tears were pouring from his eyes. The whole assembly went dead silent, awed at his reaction.

I slowly raised my hand to brush away his tears. His hand came up to hold mine to his cheek. I closed my eyes as that one moment stretched into eternity.

There is an old Wizarding legend that says the flash of light from the Binding spell done on the rings will only be as bright as the couples' love is strong. Harry and Ginny's had been a near-blinding gold.

I slid the simple black titanium band onto Severus' finger and placed a kiss over it. He did the same when he'd placed the fine platinum band on my hand. Our left hands clasped, we watched the officiant circle his wand over our joined hands.

I felt the electric tickle start at my hand and shoot up my arm straight, into my heart. I had only a fraction of a second to notice that Severus had an amazed expression on his face that must have mirrored my own when a brilliant flash of purest silver light erupted from our rings.

Through my squinted eyes, I could just make out the shapes of a brilliant silver otter gracefully entwined with an equally luminescent phoenix gliding through the air around us.

The vision was gone as soon as it had come. I was again distracted by the words I'd been longing to hear since the age of three, "I declare that you are bonded for eternity, in mind, in spirit, in body and in love. Severus, you may kiss your bride. Ladies and gentlemen, pray raise your wands for the new Professor and Madame Snape!"

~~Severus~~

The best moment of my life was hearing those words and pulling Hermione into a kiss that left the both of us breathless.

As we turned to walk up the aisle, I found I didn't care who noticed that a foolish grin was plastered on my face. We passed through the showers of multi-coloured sparks sent into the air all around us.

I took one moment to look deep into her eyes and take in her elated expression before we were barraged with guests all clamouring for our attention. We then had to pose for innumerable photos.

It seemed everywhere I turned we were pushed and prodded. My normal radius of personal space was utterly decimated. The best times were the cutting of the cake and dancing with Hermione.

After that, I was drawn into a conversation with Bill Weasley and several others. It was some time later when I realised I hadn't seen my wife. She was absent from the group on the dance floor, so too from the gaggle of witches giggling and gossiping in a corner.

I began to search in ever-widening circles. I was just inside the Forbidden Forest when I heard her sobbing.

My instincts as a spy warred with my protective nature. It was second nature for me to learn all I could about a given situation before charging ahead. Though, if someone were fool enough to threaten my wife, he would soon reap the consequences.

After a quick Disillusionment charm, I crept forward. I couldn't make out much of the back of the person with her, but I could clearly see Hermione's tear-stained face. Her expression was a mix of heart-breaking sadness and frightening anger.

I tapped my left ear with my wand to cast the *Audious* charm silently. Now I could hear her words perfectly.

"...can't think that I'd take this seriously. I never, at anytime, gave you the idea that we would be a couple..."

"But Snape? *Snape*?!? Hermione, bloody fucking hell! You cannot possibly have feelings for that monster. He's a git!"

Hermione's hand shot out to slap Ron's face. I shook my head in disgust. The little wanker thought he had the right to turn up at our wedding and upset Hermione?

I wanted so badly to hex him into oblivion, but I knew she could handle herself. If Weasley was going to play dirty, I would have no qualms whatsoever about hexing him in the back. So I watched, hidden in the trees.

"I love him, Ron. I wouldn't expect your puny brain to understand. I told you once before that if you weren't able to support my decisions then we were no longer friends. So unless you'd like to change your tune and give me your best wishes, BUGGER OFF!"

The filthy little blighter stepped forward and grasped her roughly by the upper arms. He shook her slightly with each word he shouted. "You. Will. Not. Do. This. To. Me!"

I was just raising my wand to strike when I saw a flash of light emanate from Hermione. Ron jumped back from her and raised his singed palms, studying the blistered skin.

"What the hell did you do that for, you ridiculous, frizzy-haired bint?"

Hermione ignored his insult and stood glaring at him. "It wasn't anything I did, you dolt. I'm *married*. No one can touch me without my permission, especially if Severus would be unhappy about it. If you've finished, I've got a rather large group of guests I should really be getting back to..."

Ron began to sob, all traces of anger fading from him. She turned away from him and I couldn't blame her. He'd sunk to the ground, looking pitiful and broken.

She began to carefully make her way out of the small clearing. Just before she broke through the trees, he spoke. "So this is the end for me, isn't it?"

Hermione's posture stiffened, but she did not turn. "Ron, why don't you look on this as a new beginning?"

Thanks to kizzy7. I'm so lucky to work with her. Also thanks to everyone who is reading this, even after my long break. I'll be better!

Please review. =]

Honeymoon is up next...

You're Really Swell, I Have To Admit

Chapter 4 of 9

The honeymoon awaits!

Disclaimer: Not Jo, just captivated by her brilliance!

A/N: Right. This chapter will earn the rating and earn it well. MASSIVE LEMONS! Graphic, massive lemons with a side of light BDSM (very light). If you're reading this wearing jammies with feet in them whilst listening to The Wiggles, or if you're underage, you should definitely skip this chapter. However, if pervy is your cup of tea, enjoy!!

Thanks as always to the brilliant kizzy7 for making this presentable for me. Love to you, darling!!

Chapter 4

You're Really Swell, I Have to Admit

~~Hermione~~

I'd been upset by Ron's appearance at the wedding and subsequent drama. However, in the big picture of the day, it barely registered. I never expected Ron to be supportive. I was only glad that the rest of the Weasleys saw how foolish he was and supported my marriage.

In no time at all, Severus was Apparating us away to our honeymoon destination. He was annoyingly secretive, going so far as to recruit Ginny to pack my luggage for me so I would have no clues as to our destination.

I still have to smile at the memory of him walking toward me, carrying a small strip of black cloth as we prepared to leave.

"Hermione, I'm just going to place this over your eyes so I can surprise you with our arrival." He smiled devilishly, kissed me softly, and tied the silky cloth around my head, causing the world to go dark.

I felt the nauseating pull as he Apparated us away from the forest just outside the gates of Hogwarts. My first sensation after the squeezing darkness was of salt and sand beneath my feet. A beach.

His arms tightened around me as he picked me up to carry me indoors. A few clicks and grinding sounds later, and he placed my feet delicately on the floor. I heard the sounds of his boots moving around the room as well as the sliding, rippling swish of fabric as he removed his robes. When he walked again, his footsteps now carried the soft slap of bare feet on a hard surface. I stood like a statue, waiting for his instruction.

We had made love many times previous, and I'd seen his naked body thousands of times, but something was different about this. Perhaps because of the stress of the day; perhaps because this would be our first time as a married couple, but whatever the reason, I was as nervous as a virgin on a pirate ship.

There was also the fact that other than hearing the faint sounds of his movements, I had no awareness of my surroundings. We'd never been the type for simple, vanilla sex, but this was farther along the 'kink path' than we'd gone.

I stood there breathing heavily for what could have been hours. My nerves were strung like piano strings, and my pulse was rising. Every so often, I would get a feeling that he was approaching me, and each time my nipples would become erect and gooseflesh would cover my skin. I was trembling with anticipation.

When finally he spoke, my mouth went dry and my knickers were flooded. "You are doing remarkably well, love. Then again, you were always at your best during a test circumstance." He laughed softly.

"You are enjoying the tension, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Would you like to remove your blindfold now?"

"No."

He laughed softly once more. "Then please, undress."

My shaking fingers pulled out my wand to tap the hundreds of buttons that held the back of my gown closed. The dress parted, and I removed it carefully. Without touching my fingers, Severus took it from me.

Due to the shape of the back of my dress, I hadn't worn a bra. I bent to remove the slippers from my feet, one at a time. Something changed in the air as I stood before him clad in only a miniscule pair of very wet, white lace knickers.

I suddenly felt a brazen sense of confidence come over me. "You like what you see, don't you, Severus?"

"Yes," he sputtered in a choked voice that sounded as though he'd been screaming for hours.

"Are you stroking yourself?"

"Yes."

"And have you..." My words were cut off as his mouth descended on mine. Up until that moment, I'd thought our very first kiss would be the best kiss ever. This one took the prize by a wide margin.

My mouth opened to his, and I felt a tingle as his tongue brushed against mine. One of his hands toyed with my nipple, and the other pulled the silk binding from my eyes.

His face was harsh and intense as he pulled back to gaze into my eyes. "I hope you weren't frightened, my love. I only wanted to surprise you, but then you looked so aroused standing there, I couldn't help myself."

I took a deep breath to try and keep my voice steady. "I enjoyed it, Severus. I hope it was a good lesson for you on how much your very presence affects me." I ran my fingertips over the skin of his chest and over his abs.

He gasped slightly as my fingers caressed his erection. He moaned as I began to stroke him softly. His eyes were drifting closed as though he were lost in the pleasure of my touch.

I felt his fingers crawling slowly over and then under my knickers. As he ran his fingertips up and down my slick folds, I thought I would lose my mind.

"Oh, yes, Severus, yes. Please!" I began to stroke him faster and moved my other hand down to gently roll his balls in my palm.

He plunged two fingers into my heat and groaned loudly. He began to pump them in and out. I needed more.

"Bedroom!" I growled. He swept me into his arms and rushed us over to the bed. When we fell into a tangle of jumbled limbs, he somehow removed my knickers and flung them over his shoulder. I was vaguely aware that they'd landed on a miniature of Cliodhna that decorated the mantle.

I scrambled over his body, kissing as I went. Finally, I reached my goal. I took him in my mouth slowly at first, teasing him.

"Gods, yes, Hermione!" His hands fisted in my hair, encouraging me to increase the speed and depth. The taste and feel of smooth skin over rock hard muscle was almost more than I could take. The moisture was now flooding out of me, coating my thighs and dripping onto the bedclothes.

I felt his hands pull at my hip and paused to peer groggily at him. "I want some of this," he whispered. I dimly realised he was trying to pull my hips around so he could use his mouth on me.

I moved my body over his and shuddered in anticipation.

Severus' oral skills defy description. There simply are no words for how amazing he makes me feel. I can't even say specifically what he does, but I like it. After only a few minutes of flicking, stroking, and probing, I was coming into his mouth.

I redoubled my efforts, wanting to make him feel the same intense, nearly painful pleasure he had given me. I moved my hips away from his head so I could focus on him.

Breathing carefully through my nose, I took him deeper into my mouth. As his tip hit the back of my throat, he groaned loudly. His arousal had increased after my orgasm; it wouldn't take him long like this.

I continued moving and listened as he vocalized his pleasure.

"Mmmm... Yes. Yes. YES! Just like that." He groaned and thrashed as my tongue moved over his head before I moved to swallow around his length once more.

"You know what I need, love. Oh, gods. You are so goo... ooo... duh."

These pleasure induced bouts of verbal diarrhea never failed to drive me mad with ecstasy. I was so focused on his words and the feeling of his cock in my mouth that I was completely caught off guard when he broke free and pushed me away.

"What..."

His eyes flashed for a moment before his face softened, and he pulled me into his arms. "No, love. This is wonderful and completely pleasurable. You know I am always overwhelmed when you pleasure me, but..."

Severus paused and looked thoughtful. "This just isn't what I had in mind for tonight."

~~Severus~~

She looked scared and hurt when I told her it wasn't what I'd wanted for our wedding night. The last thing I intended was for her to feel guilty or sad, but honestly, the evening had taken a major left turn from the vision I'd had since I'd grovelled to bloody Potter.

Right, once the hysterical laughter ends, I'll admit that I'd been hopelessly romantic about the entire wedding night. Candles, flowers, romantic music...every cliché known to Wizard-kind.

I'd pissed and moaned my entire life about men who allowed some bird to come along and trade their balls for a leash. I was ready to make the exchange myself. One last thing so that it's clear that I've gone 'round the twist. In exchange for her heart, there was no price too high.

The rest of the night was slow and intimate. It was a sweet and tender expression of how very much I loved her.

By my way of thinking, we had the rest of our lives to be dirty and have a bit of kink. So we spent the next two days exploring our thresholds of perversion. I've turned romantic; I haven't died.

The night before we were meant to leave, she woke in the middle of the night, screaming and crying. I tried to wake her gently and took a fist to the nose for my trouble.

My wife awoke to the sight of me, looking like the victim of an animal attack. Then she started screaming again.

It took time, ice, soothing words, and a shot of Ogden's for the pandemonium to die out. At long last, we were seated in bed, and she told me the story of her nightmare.

"I've been having these dreams for months. There are several variations, but all on the same theme. Sometimes you die, killed by that wretched snake of Voldemort's, but usually you just leave me. No warning, no letter. Just g-gone."

She slipped into sobbing again at once. I was left feeling as though there was a sinkhole in the middle of my chest. My fears were the same...that either by choice or providence, she would wind up hurting and alone because of me.

I would pledge my soul to any and every deity if I thought it would make me enough for her, worthy of her.

A wise man once said that love wouldn't even get you halfway in a relationship. I can only assume he meant the love of someone who really knew how. My pathetic attempts to be what she deserved would likely not last us the month.

~~Hermione~~

I suppose everyone thinks that their honeymoon is lovely, but mine really was. Though I'd known him, worked with him, and lived with him, I saw a side of Severus I hadn't dreamed existed.

He was always a bit withdrawn, only now he would explain the reasons behind his woolgathering. It was such a thrill to me to be able to share thoughts with him. The depth of the man I had married seemed to grow exponentially.

Severus spent an entire afternoon telling me some of his happiest childhood memories. I respected the values he'd acquired from growing up in a less than privileged home with only the merest hint of parental guidance.

I was slightly bothered by the fact that we'd never actually discussed having a family of our own. I could never work up the courage to start the discussion. I hoped that, like Harry, Severus would want to have a family of his own to make up for the lack of one during his youth.

I wasn't ready to get pregnant right away, not at all. I wanted to focus on my marriage and continue to establish my career before I had to worry about another huge responsibility placed on my shoulders.

Ginny and Harry were ready to have children until, in their words, "their family felt complete," whatever in the hell that meant. I had no intention of a becoming a baby factory. In my opinion one, possibly two children was the perfect number.

I knew I had to talk to Severus. I'm by no means the world's most maternal person, but I did feel strongly about having at least one child.

My tension mounted as the days passed. I was pulling away from him once again. I found myself wondering what had happened to the brave witch that had faced off with Death Eaters over and over?

I'll tell you, she was cowering in fear that this issue was the one thing that would be a 'deal breaker' for my husband. I couldn't avoid the feeling that I was weak, but independent as I've always been, I could no longer picture my life without him.

What if we couldn't get passed this?

Perhaps I could do without a child? But the thought kept coming to me that with no family (apart from Harry and Ginny) and a husband twenty years my senior, I would very likely find myself alone in later life. Wizards' life spans were significantly greater than those of Muggles, but that didn't change the fact that once Severus was gone, I would be alone.

The loss of my parents had drastically changed my views on family. I wanted to find out what our child would look like. I wanted to find out what it was like to watch him hold our child.

I'd already begun to dream of watching my middle grow to accommodate the life within. The question was, did I want it badly enough to chance my future with Severus?

~~Severus~~

She brought up the subject of children. Goddammit! I thought that it wouldn't be something I'd have to worry with. I'd spent my life watching after the half-witted offspring of the Wizard world.

Right, to be fair, there had been the occasional bright spot. My bride herself was quite an engaging young lady. But most had been complete and utter wastes of space and matter.

I got the distinct impression that my wife had only been thinking of the sweet-smelling hair and the softly little coos. She wasn't counting on vomit and tantrums and high-pitched wailing at all hours of the day and night.

No, others were meant for wiping snot and excrement.

But if Hermione really wants one, perhaps it's not such a terrible idea. Perhaps with two superior intellects raising it, a child might turn out to be less than revolting.

Where the hell did that come from? Why was I suddenly willing to look at an issue from any point of view other than my own?

Because you, you sodding git, are in love with her. And she's the most important thing in the world. If she asked you to, you'd cut off your own willy!!

Son of a bitch. This puts a wrinkle in my life-plan!

5. Seems To Fit You

Chapter 5 of 9

It's time for our newlyweds to discuss the issue of children...

Chapter 5: Seem to Fit You

Disclaimer: I did not create this world, I only play here.

~~Severus~~

Something was wrong between us. I knew it, and it bothered me. She put on a smile and went through the motions, but there was a definite distance between us. I couldn't work out a way to fix it.

When I asked what was wrong, she would smile vacantly and deny that there was anything bothering her. It was a nearly unbearable temptation not to use my Legilimency.

But she'd know in a moment, and I've never felt the need for firsthand experience with the entrail expelling curse!

One Thursday evening, I sat marking essays in the lounge. The door banged open, and my wife rushed into the room. She was flushed and looked upset.

"Severus, we need to talk."

She sat staring at me, not moving or speaking any further.

"Go on, Hermione. I'm listening."

"I want a baby."

She looked near to tears and sat trembling on the edge of the sofa.

"You realise, my love, that even with magic, human gestation will take around nine months?" Disappointing as it was, I couldn't deal with the issue head on.

She sighed deeply and rubbed at her eyes. "Do you want children, Severus?"

This was the moment of truth. I would have to crush her, tell her that I didn't want drooling, bratty ankle-biters.

As I looked into her face, I felt something new coming over me. The thought of her belly swollen with a life that we had created had an indescribable allure to it.

Any child of ours would almost assuredly be bright and interesting. True, I did carry some of my father's lack-lustre genetic material. But Hermione came from excellent stock, and no one could dispute the quality of the Prince line.

Did I want a child? Again, I found myself doing a slight dodge of the issue.

"You'd like to conceive this evening?"

Her voice was thick with emotion as she answered me. "Time frame is not the most pressing issue. Will you be willing to have a child at some point in our relationship?" She sounded defeated.

I stood slowly and crossed the room to kneel in front of her. I placed my palm on her soft, moist cheek to raise her eyes to mine. "If you wish to have a child, then I wish it as well. I would like some time to adjust to our marriage before we embark on parenthood, but in time, I would like to have a child. Yes."

~~Hermione~~

I think my heart stopped in that instant.

I stared into his black eyes and saw nothing but openness and love. He would do this for me.

"Are you sure?" I stammered.

He laughed softly. "Of course not. But there are greater gambles to be taken in this life than having a child with the woman one loves beyond all reason."

I found my mouth to be entirely dry and my stomach full of butterflies. I didn't want to cry, but my eyes teared up of their own accord.

"My dearest, you must understand something. If it were entirely up to me, we'd spend eternity as the two of us. But the idea of a child that we create with our love does hold some intrigue for me.

"Not to mention, there is little doubt that you'll have to make some sacrifices for being my wife...either in opportunities that will be denied to you because you're married to me or in friendships that will be severed because of me. This is something I'm willing to concede for you."

For the next few weeks, it was hard to focus on getting ready for the coming term. My mind was constantly adrift on blissful thoughts of building a home and family with the man I love.

I'd become what I'd hated all my life: a sentimental female.

I still took my contraceptive potion every morning. We did agree to a child, but right now, the most important thing was to settle into our marriage. I wasn't sure how to balance a career and being a wife.

The Great Hall turned out to be a Hall of Great Torture for me. I had to sit with my husband and share a conversation with twenty other people. We couldn't touch or exchange glances without the others taking the mickey from both of us for weeks.

Minerva still got misty-eyed every time she saw the two of us together. I honestly thought my old mentor was in danger of crying herself to death. Others in the staff were just as bad. Hagrid had pulled the both of us into bone-crushing hugs and wailed every time we'd come to breakfast together.

Severus certainly wasn't one for being overly demonstrative in public, and I quite agreed. As one of the youngest members of the staff, I wanted nothing to cause the students to see me as anything other than an authority figure.

I wondered how Albus and Minerva had kept their relationship hidden for all those years. I admired them for their conviction and willpower. I had asked her for advice, which caused another crying jag on her part.

She had then winked at me and said, "The reserved you are in public, the more pent-up ~~urges~~ you'll have for your private time!" Then she actually let out a rather Lavender Brown-like giggle. Perhaps there was more to her than stone and tartan.

I was ready for my start of term meeting with Albus. I gathered my notes and plans and made my way to his office on the Friday before the students arrived.

The castle was in top condition, cleaned and ready for the onslaught of youth. I had tried to look at Hogwarts through the eyes of a first year since I'd become a part of the staff. I never wanted to lose my sense of wonder and forget the magnificence of my surroundings, even if it was my home now.

I approached the gargoyle and whispered, "Raspberry tart." The old, stone figure smirked at me and said, "Of course *Madam Snape*."

I bristled instantly. "Actually, it's Professor Granger-Snape." I gave him a rather cold stare, and he leapt aside.

Albus was waiting for me with open arms, as always. He was thrilled to hear of the plans I'd made for my upper level classes, Arithmancy having been a favourite subject of his while he was at school. We chatted over lessons, speculations on this year's new additions to the Houses, and old friends. He'd recently visited Grimmauld place. I laughed until I cried at his tales of the hijinks that his and Severus' namesake got up to. Harry and Ginny were certainly going to have their hands full and quite soon.

The talk of old friends led to the news that Neville was back from his holiday. He'd been to Asia in search of some rare type of Lotus. He'd apparently had success in finding it, and he was bringing several starts back with him.

When I left Dumbledore, I noticed that Severus would still be in his meeting with the Head Students' selection committee. I decided now would be the perfect time to run out and see my old friend. Neville and Severus had made their peace, but neither was particularly comfortable in the presence of the other. Neville and I would have a much nicer visit on our own.

The greenhouses were a riot of colour and life. Neville certainly had the right touch at Herbology. Though he didn't like to admit it, his skills had now surpassed those of Professor Sprout. Whenever she came round to visit, she made such a fuss over his successes that Neville blushed for days afterward.

As I walked through the door, I heard Neville whistling from somewhere inside.

"Hello? Neville?"

"Hermione? I'm so glad that you've come! Just stay right where you are! I've just got to get this orchid pollen taken care of..."

I turned to examine some of the new additions while I waited for Neville. There were some amazing species of plants in here. I was just admiring some of the Twinkling Stargazer Lilies when I noticed the most intoxicating scent I'd ever encountered.

I spun on the spot and followed the smell. I headed down one of the rows and stopped abruptly before a large orchid that was so red it was nearly black. The fragrance became stronger but somehow not overwhelming.

I leaned over to breathe it in more deeply. As the sweet perfume filled my senses, I had a sense of falling, and the whole world began to spin. And everything went black.

~~Severus~~

I was just leaving the meeting when a thrill of fear shot down my spine. I can't explain how or why, but I was sure that Hermione was in danger. I pulled out my wand and whispered an incantation I'd only ever heard my mother use.

When my father would go on his frequent pub crawls, he would often be gone for days. My mother would be in a state, worried that he was dead somewhere. She'd whisper into her wand, and it would glow, pointing in whatever direction would take us to him most quickly. A white light meant the person being sought was injured or ill; red meant he was with another woman; green meant dead, and gold meant he was fine.

I'd followed that spell with my mother a thousand times through pouring rain, thick snow, or in the dead of night. We'd trudge down dank alleyways, under bridges, or over filthy, muddy river banks.

I said a silent prayer that the spell would work for me. I tried to calm myself as I whispered, "*Trouver Amore!*"

I'd barely finished when my wand pointed sharply toward the front doors and glowed white. I ran out onto the grounds, and the wand changed directions. I was off to the greenhouses.

I rounded the first one and ran forward. The wand suddenly pointed sharply to my left. I entered the greenhouse to hear Longbottom sobbing and heaving. I ran through aisle after aisle of ridiculous plants.

Finally, I saw Longbottom struggling to lift the seemingly lifeless form of my wife. I tore her from his arms, and panic almost overtook me. All I could think of was getting her to the hospital. Suddenly, I felt the tug and suffocating blackness of Apparition.

A split second later we were in front of Poppy. I decided I would ponder over the impossibility of Apparating within the grounds of the school when my wife was safe.

Madam Pomfrey seemed to take an inordinate amount of time with her diagnostics. She ignored my shouted demands for information as she worked over Hermione. Finally, she began to whisper incantations while doing complicated wand movements. She paused to summon some phials of potion from her office.

It was odd to watch the matron administer potions I had not prepared to Hermione. She did have other suppliers, and some potions were complicated to brew and rarely used. These she contracted out to other brewers.

At long last, she sighed and turned to me. "Severus. She was poisoned."

"What the bloody fuck did Longbottom do?" I spat through gritted teeth.

"It wasn't his fault, and you know it. He had an Amoremordre Orchid. Are you familiar with that breed?"

I could only nod. My whole body was numb as I sank into the chair at Hermione's bedside.

The Amoremordre Orchid was one of the most deadly poisons ever discovered. Its poison lay in its scent; one only had to breathe it in to be affected. Sadly, the deadly reaction only worked on a person who was truly, deeply in love. Legend held that the stronger the love, the more efficacious the poison.

Her love for me had nearly taken her life. Pomfrey waffled on about how Neville usually kept the flower under a protective barrier, but since he hadn't been expecting anyone, he hadn't replaced it after he'd harvested some pollen from it.

He'd evidently shouted a warning to Hermione not to come any farther into the greenhouse after she'd announced her presence.

Due to his quick reaction at containing the beastly plant and my inexplicable Apparition, my wife, my reason for existence, was alive. She clung to life by the merest of threads.

Poppy placed a comforting hand on my shoulder as she explained that Hermione would be in an unconscious state for several weeks. The healing charms and potions that had been used on her would take time to have full effect.

There was no way to tell when or if Hermione would ever awaken. What was worse, if she did come around, there was no way to tell what state she might be in once she was awake.

I sat by her bedside, holding her limp hand in my own. She drifted seemingly peacefully between life and death.

I made myself a promise, if she couldn't come back to me, then I would join her.

A/N: Please don't hate me! If I didn't leave here, the chapter would have been ridiculously long. The next one is nearly complete and ought to be up soon.

Thanks to kizzy7, beta par excellence! Thanks also to everyone who's been reading and reviewing. Final thanks to the admins here at TPP. I love this site!!!

6. I Could Say...

Chapter 6 of 9

Severus does what he can to cope with his feeling of isolation.

Chapter 6: I Could Say...

A/N: I put in warnings for violence here. There is no direct violence, only someone relating stories of a violent past. It's fairly mild, but if violence against women and children is a particularly soft subject for you it might be wise to skip those bits.

I'm not Jo. Sad about that, really.

~~Severus~~

Who knew the world could stop turning because of one little witch? Every inhabitant of the castle came to encourage me to rest or go have a hot meal. Without exception, I told them to bugger off. I had no intention of leaving until she walked out beside me.

The students returned, and Dumbledore, in a seeming show of magnanimity, found a substitute to handle my classes until such time as I felt inclined to return. Filius conjured walls around Hermione's bed, even adding a private bath.

Minerva put three house-elves on 'sick detail.' They changed sheets, brought food and whispered their wishes that the 'brave girl who was knitting' make a full recovery. Harry came to hold her hand for an hour and waxed poetic on their many adventures, and then he left.

They all did. They came, tried to help, found their help completely ineffectual, and left. The days and nights began to flow into one another. My mind wandered back to my childhood. In the foggy mist that comes between late night and early morning, I began to talk to her.

"My father hated me. He'd loved my mother, but when I came along, he couldn't stand it anymore. He'd tolerated her magic so long as she pretended to be normal while they were in company. At first, he'd been thrilled with a son.

"That all ended when I was three. I still remember it. I had a few toy animals. I was playing with them on the rug in the lounge. I remember thinking how much more fun it would be if the animals could make noises.

"Suddenly, the little tiger began to growl and run along the pattern in the carpet by himself. I was delighted. As I watched, more of the animals began to move and make sounds on their own. I was captivated. I almost didn't hear my father's voice.

"Look there, 'Liena. Do you see what *your* boy's gone and done?' He sounded odd, as though he had to strain to get the words out. I continued to be mesmerized by the animals until I heard my mother cry out. He had knocked her to the floor and was continuing to kick her.

"Her sobs and screams were drowned out by his shouts of fury. He bellowed about how her nasty blood had poisoned me. The bastard didn't let up until she was unconscious. That was the first time. There were many others, and they were far worse.

"It took years before I understood the sounds that came from their bedroom, and they sickened me even more once I knew what they meant."

I droned on into the night about my shitty excuse for a childhood. As I spoke to her, memories I didn't realise I had come back to me. It was both fascinating and terrifying.

I told her that my mother had once confided in me that it wasn't only my fault that my father hated us. I recalled to Hermione in vivid detail the night my mother told me the worst of it. I still don't remember getting the beating, only lying on my bed as my mother healed my numerous wounds as best as she could.

She told me that I had been a twin. She'd been delivered of two boys. I was the elder of the two. We'd apparently looked just alike, though he'd been a bit smaller than me. The both of us had shown little signs of magic early on.

When we were only a few months old, I'd fallen ill. A few days later, Sectus had gotten the illness from me. I recovered, and he hadn't. She told me that my father blamed her for not taking proper care of us. He believed that if she'd taken better care of us, I would never have gotten ill in the first place. He also blamed her because she couldn't use magic to save my brother or bring him back from the dead. Her explanations that magic wasn't a 'cure-all' fell on deaf ears.

Until I showed signs of outright magic, he'd managed to hold his rage in check. But after, he had no mercy. He'd go out drinking, gambling, or frequent brothels. Once or twice, he even brought a woman home with him, laughing in my mother's face before beating her and taking the woman to their bed.

I cried as I unburdened my soul to my wife. It felt good to tell her, even if she didn't hear me. I told her that I'd always secretly feared that if I were to ever have a child, my father's horrible disposition would rear its ugly head in me.

I shed no tears when I told her of the night my father had died. It was the summer before my third year at Hogwarts. He'd been drinking more heavily than usual. One night, he'd beaten me until both my arms were broken and blood ran from both ears.

Then he'd advanced on my mother, brutally raping her right before my eyes. When he was spent, I had prayed he'd leave her alone. But he hadn't. He'd continued to hit her about the face and head. He had dragged her toward the stairs by her hair, and I had known what he meant to do. He was going to try and kill her.

Something inside me had snapped, and I'd began to wish that he'd be the one to tumble over the balcony. Almost before the thought had finished forming in my head, he'd been thrown back from her. With a last, confused look at the both of us, he'd flown over the railing. He had landed on the stone floor of the entry below.

His head had broken, rather like an egg tapped against the side of a bowl. I had no tears for him the night he died, and I still have none for him as I recall my part in his death. My mother had sworn to the representatives of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement that he'd fallen in a drunken stupor. They'd believed her story without question. We never spoke of what really happened.

"Years later, after my mother had died, I began to wonder if she hadn't been wishing he'd go over the railing too. Perhaps it was the both of us, using non-verbal magic. Perhaps there really is a God. Whichever, I've never regretted my actions. I know one thing."

My voice choked off for a moment. I quickly regained control and fell to my knees at her bedside. My heart pounded in my chest as I took her hand. This was more of a revelation and had deeper meaning to me than even my wedding vows had.

"Hermione, I swear to you and all that is good in this world, I will never raise a hand to you or to any child we have at any point in the future. If there is even the slightest chance that I might, I swear that I will throw myself into the sea!" I placed a kiss on her knuckles.

~~Hermione~~

Somewhere in the murky blackness that surrounded me, I heard his voice. It echoed in my mind and bound me to reality like a mooring line. Through the deep quiet, the soothing velvet of his words seemed to surround and caress me.

Little by little, it seemed to pull me closer. I listened as he talked of his childhood. I was filled with anger aimed at his father as well as grief for the child Severus had been. Truly, with all he'd gone through, it was a miracle he had any measure of sensitivity or compassion.

I thought about a lot of things. I remembered my parents and thought of the grief I'd felt when they'd been taken from me. I'd placed memory charms on them of such strength that neither Dumbledore nor I were able to restore their memories of their past life. At the very least, Dumbledore had been able to add some details to their manufactured memories so that I could be included in their lives in some fashion.

I'd forged a new relationship with them now. They didn't know me as their daughter, only as a friend of theirs. I'd told them my dead parents had been dear friends of theirs. They were congenial, and on the few occasions I'd been to see them, they'd been truly happy to see me.

The sacrifice of a family was a small one if you considered that they were safe. I had always considered my friends to be family. Harry and Ginny had been wonderful. The Weasleys, Neville, and Luna all included me and by extension Severus in all their plans at the holidays. They were supportive and concerned. My colleagues treated me with love as well.

But Severus made all the difference in the world. He had made me complete and fulfilled. I hadn't even known there were pieces missing until he was a part of my life. Without him, I truly would feel alone. It wasn't that he always gave me my way, either. He loved me enough to argue with me, to point out my shortcomings. He knew the worst things about me, and it was still alright.

His voice washed over me. I don't know if it went on for days or hours or years, and I didn't care. He was there, pulling me back to him like the moon pulls on the tides. The darkness wasn't unpleasant; in fact, it was almost comforting to lay in gentle nothingness with only his voice.

And then, quite suddenly, the sound of his voice was gone. Immediately, my peaceful, meditative state was gone. I was confused and distressed. I wanted to reach him; I needed to get back to him. I wanted to cry out, beg him to come back to me, but I couldn't.

I had only a singular thought. I must reach him. But how?

~~Severus~~

I had talked to her until my voice was hoarse. I slumped forward to rest my forehead against her mattress, a few inches from the hand I'd been holding all night. Exhaustion was threatening to overtake me.

As I drifted into sleep, I saw her there. My Hermione floating as though in a black, star-filled sky. She looked so peaceful. I couldn't reach her. Just as I was trying to jump, a hand reached out, landed on my shoulder, and shook me softly.

"Severus?"

I groaned impatiently before snapping, "Bugger off, old man! I've no wish to hear your nonsensical ramblings."

The old bat chuckled softly. "There is no need to be rude, my boy. I'm simply here to discuss the recent breach in our castle's heretofore impenetrable defenses."

I sighed and sat up. There was no arguing with Dumbledore. "What in the world are you on about?"

When I raised my head, Dumbledore was looking at me with a concerned, yet slightly amused expression on his face. "You managed to Apparate in spite of the most ancient and strongest anti-Apparition enchantment in the world. In spite of your exceptional abilities, I believe I've discovered the reason behind this."

I was actually most curious about to find out, but I was in no mood to play his games. "Then tell me about it or get out!"

My old mentor...honestly, my father for all intents and purposes...looked as though he wanted to again admonish my rudeness. I raised my eyes to his, and for once the blue eyes were not twinkling.

"Severus, thanks to the two of you, we've discovered something I would have thought impossible. Godric Gryffindor himself placed the Anti-Apparition wards on these grounds. To all recorded history, there hasn't been a breach in over a thousand years.

"I went to the Founders' portraits and spoke with them. They were stunned that this has happened. To make short of it, there was one exception to those wards. Only in life or death circumstances can the wards be broken...."

"What a load of tripe! Are you mad, Albus? Do have any idea how many life and death emergencies there have been in the last two decades, let alone the last thousand years? Why don't you tell me it was because the sky is blue?" I sneered at him and mentally cursed him for taking my focus off of Hermione for nothing.

Albus knitted his eyebrows and frowned at me in what I can only assume was supposed to be an intimidating way. "I don't much care for your tone, young man." He stopped and glared at me meaningfully and effectively made me feel like a twelve-year-old again. "As I was going to tell you, there's a bit more to it than that. Yes, the circumstances must be those of life and death. The persons involved must be soul mates. Not only soul mates. They must be soul mates who were created specifically to find one another."

I could only stare at him, mouth gaping. "So not only is your theory about 'true love conquering all' correct, but there actually is a higher power? He or She or It does in fact exist and put such specific care and attention into my existence that at the time of my creation there was a master plan for Hermione and me to be together?"

"I wonder how upset Mr. Potter will be when he learns that the entire situation with himself, his parents, and the Dark Lord was a contrivance to put me and Hermione in proximity with the Order. Come to that, how Riddle would feel if he could know that his reason for living, for coming to power, was for us!"

Dumbledore stood and placed a hand on my shoulder. My first instinct was to shrug it off, but I stopped. "Severus, there is nothing in your past that should have given you the gifts of faith, optimism, or hope. But use this as a base for building those qualities within yourself. You have been blessed with something special. Treasure it." He nodded and walked out of the ward.

I was left to think over what he'd said. Hermione was extraordinary, but it was almost too much for me to believe that she was gifted to me from God... gods? Some all-powerful being sent her to me. And, in a cruel twist of fate, was now threatening to remove her from me.

It was then that I noticed the tears that were pouring down my face. I turned back to the bed and again lowered my head to the softness of the mattress. I'd been told that God existed, and I'd been shown that He hated me.

The sobs that shook me seemed to be transferring into the bed. There was definite movement beneath me. Not that it could disturb Hermione in her current state, but the idea of shaking her violently with my emotional outburst was uncomfortable for me.

I did what I could to calm down, though I still felt too discouraged to lift my head. As my breathing began to slow down, my imagination began to run wild. I fantasized that Hermione's hand was gently stroking my hair.

I sighed in contentment as her nails grazed my scalp and her fingers combed through the strands to trail over my shoulders. It was hypnotic. I knew it was dangerous to allow myself to slip into this kind of delusion, but the sensation that the mere thoughts of her touch brought out in me was so powerful I couldn't bear to stop.

"Severus."

I knew I was in trouble. It was one thing to imagine her touch too clearly, but dream that she was speaking to me again was downright destructive.

"Severus."

This time the analytical side of my brain took over. I wondered why my psyche chose to make her voice so weak and strained. One would think that my fantasy of her would be that of her at her best.

Suddenly, the stroking stopped, and the imaginary hand rested softly on the back of my head. "Severus, won't you even look at me?"

My head snapped up to see her eyes open, looking back at me. I had only an instant to register that before the world went black.

A/N: I know, I know, another evil cliffie. I'm sorry for that, but I promise you all that this story is controlling me! I have no choices here! Fortunately, it's nearly writing itself at this point, so updates ought to be timely.

Thanks as always to my own personal Dumbledore, Kizzy7. She truly has a magic touch!

Thanks to the admins here and also to all of you who are so kind to read and to review (even those of you who threaten me). It keeps me motivated to write!

7. I Tried to Explain

Chapter 7 of 9

Now that we're all awake, the fun begins.

Chapter 7 | Tried to Explain

A/N: I am so thrilled with the response this story has gotten. I want to thank all my lovely reviewers! Your comments (and threats) keep me going.

Kizzy7 is amazing. I am so lucky to have her as my beta! Go read her work, she's brilliant.

Jo is taller, thinner and infinitely more wealthy than I am!

~~Severus~~

There is really no way to describe the disconcerting feeling of awakening with a throbbing headache whilst your employer looks down at you, giggling smugly. Lack of that experience will not make a life any less rich, I can assure you.

"Have we had a bit of a fall?" Albus asked merrily.

I righted myself slowly, rubbing the sizable lump on the back of my head. "Accio!" I grumbled. A moment later, a small vial of headache potion whizzed into my hand. I downed it in one and then turned to glare at the jolliest Headmaster in the land.

"My boy, I can't believe there is nothing you'd rather do than sit on the floor?" Dumbledore was going to find out what it was like to have a chair magically inserted into his rectum.

No sooner had I begun to mentally cast the spell when the events that occurred prior to my foul mood and head trauma came rushing back. I forgot about Dumbledore as I hurried to my feet and frantically searched the ward for Hermione.

Her bed was empty, though judging from the disorganized state of the bedclothes, she must have only just left it. Before I could even give voice to my panic, Albus beckoned me to sit on the edge of the bed.

"Sit down before you fall down *again*. Madam Pomfrey has only taken her to tidy up a bit. Sleeping for five weeks will give one a yen for personal hygiene regimens."

I lacked the courage to ask the question that burned above all others. I looked into the blue eyes just as I had since I was a child and silently begged for the answer.

Albus placed a hand on my shoulder, and this time, I didn't shrug it off. "She's much weakened, son. It will take time and many charms and potions for her to be back on her feet again. Poppy is unable to give a complete prognosis at this point."

I felt as though all my blood had been removed and replaced with milk. I didn't care about anything other than the fact that my wife was still with me. I hadn't lost her. I did something at that point that I hadn't done in years, if ever.

I said an extremely sincere prayer of thanks. I sagged into the bed, and two fat tears of relief slid down my cheeks. For once, the barmy old codger sitting next to me chose to keep his mouth shut. We sat in silence for several minutes. I managed to get control of myself. I felt comfort and affection for Albus, knowing he'd never tell a soul of my momentary loss of emotional control.

A silver mist shot out the main doors of the Hospital Wing. It was four-legged and enormous. I wasn't able to discern what exactly it was. Again, the ever omniscient provided my answer.

"Poppy has sent for Hagrid. She didn't want to Levitate Hermione, just in case. Hagrid happened to be nearby and offered his services." He stared at me for another long moment. "Poppy's Patronus is a St. Bernard. Appropriate, don't you think?"

Hagrid came through the doors and proceeded down the ward in the direction of the office. His only greeting to us was a slight nod. I listened to the sound of his heavy footfalls upon the smooth stone floor.

My heart was pounding along with the rhythm provided by Hagrid's boots. I would see her in moments. What would her reaction be? How visually apparent would her illness be? I don't mean to imply that I was concerned out of vanity; I was afraid of how it would affect me if she looked extremely frail.

The air currents around us changed, and I looked down to find I was now sitting on the edge of a bed that was freshly made with clean linens. I moved to stand and turned to look back down the ward.

Madam Pomfrey was leading Hagrid, who seemed to be walking with the softest steps he possibly could whilst cradling a small bundle. In fairness, I suppose anyone would look small whilst being carried by a giant.

My heart pounded in my throat as they approached. Madam Pomfrey pushed past us, and Hagrid came up to the far side of the bed to deposit the tiny woman who was my whole world onto the bed.

Pomfrey fussed over her for a few minutes, adjusting pillows and smoothing blankets. Finally, she stepped back.

Dumbledore smiled and stepped forward to address the patient. "I'm pleased to see that you're up and about, Professor. I will leave you. I only wanted to give you my well wishes in person. I'll be popping in to visit all through your convalescence." He gingerly patted her ankle and walked out.

My eyes met with Hermione's for the first time in weeks. I couldn't look away. I heard Hagrid mumbling his farewells and the matron making her way back to her office. I heard the soft swish of the door to her office closing.

And we were alone.

Her eyes were slightly dull, but still the deep brown I'd come to love. I noticed that her face was rather thinner than I'd seen it. She was pale and looked as though she was struggling to keep her eyes open.

"Would you like me to leave you to your..."

"No!" Her voice was thin and gravelly, consistent with not having spoken properly for nearly two months. Her hand lifted tremulously toward mine. I caught her small hand in both my own.

"Alright, my love. I won't go." I reached out to stroke her cheek with the backs of my fingers. I found I had to concentrate rather hard to stop my hand from shaking. I tried to smile at her, rather than gawk at her like a moron. "I've missed you, love. Have you missed me?"

Hermione's face went blank, and her eyes widened slightly. "No," she croaked.

My heart turned to ice in my chest, and my mouth went completely dry. "I s-see," I stammered. I started to pull my hand away. That bloody plant hadn't erased her love for me, had it?

Her little fingers were suddenly clamped around my own like thin bands of steel. When I looked into her face, I was startled by the fierce determination and look of defiance she wore. Her head popped off the pillow, and she glared at me.

"No, you remarkably obtuse *dunderhead!* I didn't miss you because your voice was the only thing, the only connection I had. I can't explain it; I can't define it. I was floating alone in... in blackness. No sight, no feeling, no sound. And then I heard your voice.

"Your voice was what I clung to; it was the only thing that kept me going.... I wanted a way to get back to you. I suppose it sounds highly superstitious and quaint, and it's not possible. But sometimes what is thought to be impossible is only very rare. We are that rare, Severus. We are." Her already choked voice was even more muted by tears when she'd finished.

A thought came to me like a bolt of lightning. "You're right, Hermione. We are that rarest of loves. Madam Pomfrey no doubt told you how you came to be in the Hospital Wing? We broke the Apparition wards for the first time. The very first time in a thousand years, the magic of Godric Gryffindor was broken. And it was broken by our love. The same force that caused that bloody weed to seek you out for its attack also saved you.

"Our love is rare and pure and worthy. I don't doubt that you could hear me, my love. Just as I don't doubt that I would be able to hear you anywhere on this Earth, in Heaven or in Hell. I'm only grateful that you still love me."

I had kissed her lips thousands of times before and would kiss them thousands of times afterward, but this first kiss after I'd become convinced I'd have to live the rest of my life on memories was amazing. I wanted the moment to last forever, but as I held her, I could feel her muscles sag with fatigue.

"You need sleep, my darling."

"But, Severus, I don't want..."

"I won't leave you. I'll be here when you wake, my love."

"Severus?"

"Yes?"

"I love you."

"Forever is not long enough; the ocean isn't big enough to contain the love I feel for you and from you."

She slept, clutching my hand to her heart, a smile on her lips.

~~Hermione~~

I felt as though I'd been swimming in icy, filthy water for days. I was exhausted and disgusted. When Madam Pomfrey asked if I'd like to bathe a bit while Dumbledore brought Severus around, I'd agreed as enthusiastically as my weakness would allow.

I looked down at Severus from Hagrid's arms. He was prone on the floor, a look of horror frozen on his face. Madam Pomfrey assured me it was from shock and exhaustion and that he'd be fine in just a moment.

The bath felt wonderful; the water was warm and sweet smelling. I drifted in and out of sleep as I listened to her go on and on. She told me the details of Neville's Orchid and that it would have drawn me in above all others. Then she continued with tips and instructions for my recuperation.

"...for at least six weeks..."

"Drinking plenty of water..."

"...anything too heavy. Mostly stay with broth and yogurt."

"...will render most basic potions ineffective. That will include vitamins, headache remedies, cough potions and con..."

"...you'll have to do something else because..."

"So just be careful..."

"...wouldn't want to have an unplanned..."

When I no longer smelled like a heap of garbage, she helped me into a robe. I sat on the bench in her bathroom and waited for Hagrid to carry me back to bed.

The tenderhearted giant had eyes full of tears as he held me to his chest. He murmured words of affection and encouragement to me as he placed me on the bed. He gave me one very whiskey kiss on the forehead and stepped back.

I wanted everyone else to leave so Severus and I could have some time on our own. It felt more therapeutic than anything else I could imagine as we gazed into one another's eyes.

I was angry with him when he assumed that I would want him to leave. Though I could understand his self-deprecating behaviours, they got rather old after a while. Especially now, when I'd been ill for so long.

My heart had swelled in my chest at his simple, sincere declaration. As I drifted to sleep, I somehow remained aware of his presence.

When I awoke the next morning, it was to shouting voices and angry words. Madam Pomfrey and Severus were standing on opposite sides of my bed, both red-faced and glaring.

"I am perfectly capable of attending my own needs, *Madam*. I do not need you or anyone else to tell me when I require a shower! I will not leave my wife's side until I feel the time is right."

Madam Pomfrey bristled. "Then I'll speak more plainly. *You are foul, Severus. You are stinking up my ward! I can care for Hermione without your supervision, thank you very much. Now go!*"

Severus looked as though his head would explode. I knew I had to intervene before the motherly Matron of the ward hexed him into the next century. Why is it that the magical abilities of those who are nurturing and affectionate are always underestimated?

"Severus!" I couldn't shout, but even in with my frail, little voice, his attention immediately turned to me.

I took a shaky breath and continued. "You must listen to Madam Pomfrey. If she says you need to leave for a few minutes, you should respect her enough to take her advice. And she's quite right. You do smell. Go! I'll be fine in the hour it'll take you."

Severus looked as though he was trying to make up his mind about something. His shoulders slumped slightly, and he nodded. He leaned over me, dropping a kiss on my cheek. I grimaced slightly at the smell. He was rank.

The next major battle was whether or not Severus had to go back and teach his classes. I did love him, and his presence was comforting. But anyone who's ever doubted the old adage about 'too much of a good thing' should take it from me that it's most definitely true.

I loved him, but his constant hovering was extremely irritating. If I shifted my weight or sighed, he was in a panic, demanding to know what was the matter. He leaned over me and refused to let me do anything for myself. If someone else came to visit, Severus wanted to answer all their questions and tell them what made me tired or when I needed to eat or sleep.

And the worst was during my 'exercise periods.' Poppy and I were working on building my strength by walking and sitting for longer and longer periods. Severus would shout at her if I appeared fatigued or stressed in any way. She told me privately that she was afraid he'd begin to impede my recovery if he didn't give me a little space.

I knew he wouldn't like it, but I was going to have side with Madam Pomfrey.

The discussion was highly emotional from the first word. He looked as though I was stabbing him through the heart.

"Severus, understand me here. You need to occupy your mind with something other than me. You can take all your meals with me. You can even sleep in here, mark essays, whatever you'd like. But you need to go back to work!"

"I will decide what is best for me...."

I cut him off. I couldn't handle him with kid gloves forever. "I need you to go back to work. I've had no privacy whatsoever in the last few months. Now that I can stand, I'd like to use the toilet on my own. I'd like to sigh without going through the third degree. I love you, Severus. I appreciate that you're trying to show it.

"But if I'm not given the chance to do some things on my own, I'm never going to recover. Please. For me?"

He nodded weakly.

"Stop with the 'someone's just run over my puppy' look. I love you, and ~~do~~ need you. But I also need time. Hang on, isn't this a replay of a conversation we had before we were married? Severus, individuality should not hinder a relationship. It should make it more healthy."

I watched his shoulders tighten and his back become more erect. He gave me one quick nod to show that he'd heard me and stormed away.

I'm going to be a brilliant parent. I've already had experience in tough love and forcing someone to let go.

I worked as hard as I could under the watchful eye of Poppy, who was quickly becoming a very great friend. I was quite proud of my accomplishments, if being able to take the most basic care of oneself is to be considered an accomplishment.

As always, I'd become completely focused on my goal. Within a few weeks time, I was on my own, or at least more on my own than I had been for months. I nearly wept for joy at being able to sit in my own lounge by my own fire and read.

My Elvish staff member, Pickapoo, was wonderful. She responded well to my way of asking for rather than demanding her assistance. Poppy was around twice a day for therapy and just to check in. Dumbledore also visited; I enjoyed discussing the books he'd lent me immensely.

The surprise was Severus. I assumed he'd poke his head in at every imaginable excuse, but he did not. He woke in the mornings, asked if I required anything, and then left. He didn't stop in for lunch or dinner and must have taken to marking his essays and exams in his office as I rarely saw him before bed.

After a few weeks of this, I began to feel both neglected and angry. He needed to find a middle road between feast and famine of his affections. Just because I didn't want him to stand over me all hours of the day and night certainly didn't mean that I didn't at least want to spend some time with him during the course of the day.

Truth be told, that's not all that was frustrating me. It had been months since I'd had any of his *isomantic attentions*. True, I wasn't up for any sort of bedroom gymnastics, but a little intimacy wouldn't kill me. I began to have extremely vivid dreams that left me covered in a sheen of sweat and rubbing up against his sleeping form. After the third night of this, the real damage was done.

I was shaken awake, sweat-covered and dry-mouthed. I was on his side of the bed, and he was standing over me with a disgusted look on his face. My nightgown had been pulled to one side at the bodice as well as being cinched up around my waist. The look on his face was one that wouldn't have been out of place at the scene of a massacre.

"I'm sorry?" I mumbled weakly. "I must have been having a dream and accidentally..."

He continued to stare down at me, and I was once again transported back to my fourth year of school, when he'd stared at me in contempt and mocked my recently hexed teeth. I swallowed over the rapidly forming lump in my throat.

I needed to fix this, whatever it was. I needed my husband back. I was a grown, married woman. There should be no shame for me in displaying my desire for the man I married. Tears of hurt and rejection spilled over.

"Why don't you want me?"

The cold, aloof expression on his face flickered for the merest hint of an instant before he spoke. "You need your rest, and not to mention that in your condition, undue physical exertions can't be wise. I think we must all use our best judgement and behave with maturity. Rash urges and primitive compulsions have no place in your recovery." His eyes were focused on the wall just over my shoulder as he spoke with a monotone, icy timbre to his voice.

I flinched as though he'd struck me. My heart pounded in my chest, and I wondered what on earth had made him be so cold and unfeeling. I was almost dizzy with the confusion that had overcome me. It just didn't make sense.

I reigned in my emotions and struggled to hold in the tears. I needed to maintain some dignity. It was seriously unpalatable to me to be the sort of woman who would beg for the affections of a man who did not deem her worthy.

Though in my heart, I felt sure that he had real feelings for me. That almost made it more difficult for me to take his actions. If this was some desperate attempt to save

himself from the pain that can come from attachment and emotional vulnerability, then it only proved that he would place his needs above my own.

Something deep inside broke, like the string of a toy wound too tightly. I felt the snap and resulting emptiness.

"Of course you're right, Severus." I turned and walked back toward my room. As I closed the door behind me, the click was surprisingly sharp with a definite finality to it.

~~Severus~~

I'm a coward, a bastard, and a child. I was hurt when she seemed to reject me. Though I knew it was not a true rejection, just as I knew that she both needed and deserved her privacy. It still caused me pain that I could not fulfil her needs on my own.

I pushed her away. At first it wasn't intentional, but I realised how much easier it was not to love, not to let anyone in. So I took the easy way out. I did what was in my own selfish interests and pulled away from her.

Retreating into oneself is an incredibly dangerous and seductive means of comfort. It only requires that one convince oneself that they are unnecessary to others. I had been a master of this very thing when Hermione had come into my life. After her rejection, it was almost too easy to slip back into my old patterns.

It's always seemed odd to me that my Patronus is not an ostrich or a turtle. Avoidance and isolation come so very naturally to me. And now that which was natural to me had hurt the one I loved more than anything else.

I'd seen it in her eyes. Some light had gone out. I had done that. I had caused her to lose a bit of her own natural spark. Rather than the candle lighting the darkness, the darkness was pulling the candle down into its own abyss.

If we were to carry on like this, soon she would be empty and cold. She would be exactly like me.

A/N: Thanks to kizzy7 and to the admins here for their help and guidance.

Please drop me a review! The Chapter 8 is already with my beta.

Did anyone else laugh at 'Stinky Severus?' =]

8. Bella, Bella

Chapter 8 of 9

How broken can something be before it can't be fixed?

Chapter 8 Bella, Bella...

A/N: Lemon alert!

I do not own Harry Potter. He owns me.

~~Hermione~~

My nightmares returned. I woke up screaming, covered in sweat and completely terrified. The difference this time was that I woke up alone. I'm not sure where or when Severus slept, but it certainly wasn't in my bed.

I heard through the castle 'rumour mill' that he had resumed his old habit of stalking the corridors by night, threatening students and staff if he found them. I had also learned that his behaviour towards his students had surpassed even his previous lows. He was ruthless with them; he took points, assigned staggering amounts of detentions, and was generally evil and vindictive.

It was obvious to me that he was suffering as much as I was. If he wasn't going to give me the opportunity to talk to him, how was I to make anything better? I had always been the one to come to him and make nice. This time, I didn't want to be the one to give in.

Silly as it might sound, I was determined to be an equal partner in our relationship rather than some sort of wilting flower. As much as I loved him, I knew that he would never be able to respect me if I didn't stand my ground.

So I was ready to deny my own feelings to prove a point. Perhaps it was a bit of vanity, but I've never been able to forget something my mother told me: "Love won't get you half way in a relationship, Hermione. Your spouse must respect you, and you must respect him. Sometimes respect is easily had, and sometimes it's rather hard won. Either way, every functioning relationship is a two-way street."

They were words of wisdom that I'd nearly forgotten until right before I'd married Severus. He was a strong man, a strong man who deserved an equally strong woman to stand by his side. I didn't like the current situation, but I would endure it in hopes that on the other side of this pain lay something beautiful and amazing.

I fell into my routine with the outward appearance of ease. I didn't mention his absence or inattention when we did speak. I maintained polite small talk anytime he decided to speak to me. I marked assignments for Dumbledore, who was teaching my classes, so I could stay involved with my work.

I read, I exercised, and I even amused myself by writing the occasional short story. With every day, I grew stronger. I longed for the day when I could resume at least some of my routine.

Springtime was fast approaching and, with it, the lovely weather that would make it nearly impossible for me to stay inside.

Poppy had agreed that I would first be able to take over only my seventh-year class, and that only after I'd proven that I could go through the motions of a normal day. This meant I'd soon be dining in the Great Hall again. While I didn't look forward to spending time with Severus under the watchful eyes of our colleagues, I still relished the thought of the human interaction that I'd so long been denied.

She promised that if I could maintain my current progress for two more weeks, I could begin to take meals with the rest of the school. After a week of that, I would be encouraged to deliver the marked assignments to Dumbledore's office and then to get books in the library. If all that went well, I could begin teaching again. Of course, they would add my lessons back one level at a time so as not to overwhelm me, but it was a place to start.

The night before I was to begin taking meals outside of my confinement, I sat before the fire reading. I was distracted by the sound of raised voices coming from somewhere nearby. I got up to follow the sound.

In the passageway, just past the loo meant for guest use, was the door to Severus' office. The shouting was coming from in there. Though my higher sensibilities told me that eavesdropping was not right, I decided that in my current circumstance, what my husband didn't know wouldn't hurt him.

"*Audious!*" I hissed. Suddenly, I could hear them as though they were right in front of me.

"I don't give a good goddamn what you barmy, old meddlers think! She is my wife, and I'll behave as I see fit."

"Severus, if you meant to cock up your relationship, you're doing splendidly. The girl needs your support and affection. She needs to feel loved! My God, an infant would understand that!"

Minerva sounded as though she might leap across the desk and throttle him at any moment.

"What in the bloody fuck would you know about it, you frigid, old cow?"

"Severus! If you speak to *my* wife in that tone one more time, I shall hex you into the middle of next month. Quite literally!" Though Dumbledore had not raised his voice, the tone was cold enough that I felt the hairs on the back of my neck stand up.

"Albus, I realise that the two of you are acting from some misguided notion that I welcome your intrusion into my private life. Now, please, sod off!"

"*Silencio!*" Dumbledore had rendered Severus unable to speak; I wondered if he might have also used a non-verbal spell for immobilization on him. Because Severus made no sounds whatsoever after that.

"Severus, I have tried to be a guide to you all these long years whilst also allowing you to live your own life. I have watched, time and again, as your own selfishness and insecurities have driven you to isolate yourself from those who would offer you support and friendship. I cannot stand by this time. Even if it were only you at stake, I would not allow this. But as you are also inflicting great pain on Hermione, I must speak.

"You have finally found someone who can look beyond all the barbs and spines you've carefully constructed around yourself. Because of that, you have felt vulnerable. The only other time you've ever felt that way, the object of your affections was taken from you, though in no small part by your own doing the first time.

"Now, on seeing that Hermione might have been taken from you, quite by accident, you have again pushed her away. I believe it is your vain hope that if you do not outwardly demonstrate your affections to anyone, including her, that if you should lose her, it would lessen the pain of that loss. I can assure you, Severus, it will not.

"If you should ever lose her, you will look back on this time as a sad and sorry waste of what might have been a few more months of happy memories. Or you can add more fuel to the fire of your own assertion that you are, indeed, an arse!"

"Think about what I've said. Don't push her away. If you do, you will regret it forever. She is worth the risk. Good night, Severus."

I scurried away from the door as quietly as I could. Dumbledore's words meant more to me than I could even fathom at the time. I was eternally grateful that he would speak to Severus on my behalf. At the same time, I was shamed because I didn't want someone to reach in and fix things in my life. I wanted to be able to do the work with Severus to fix what was broken. I also wanted Severus to decide on his own that I was worth the effort rather than being pushed into it by someone else.

As it turns out, I had nothing to worry about. Nothing about Severus' behaviour changed after his discussion with Albus and Minerva. If I hadn't overheard, I would never have guessed that it had taken place.

I was conflicted. While I sincerely wanted to be the one to sort things out with my husband, I was disappointed that the interference of people whom he respected would have no effect whatsoever. I was ashamed of myself for even knowing of their conversation and for wishing it would have worked.

So my nightmares got steadily worse. My muscles were continually sore from thrashing about; the dark circles under my eyes were so deep that soon people would begin mistaking me for a vampire. I even had a sore throat, presumably from screaming night after night.

And through it all, Severus gave no indication that he noticed anything. I assumed he either didn't care or no longer spent enough time in our suite to notice. Neither prospect was appealing to me. I was alone most of the time, and he obviously preferred it that way.

I felt a numb emptiness that alternated with a crushing sadness. I wasn't sure which I preferred. When I was in pain, I wished that it would end. But as soon as the numbness took over, I began wishing I could feel something, anything, just so I'd know I still could.

I found myself avoiding everyone else as well. I went to Dumbledore's office when I knew he was in class. I went to the Great Hall for meals, but I sat at one end of the Head Table, eating quickly and then leaving. I didn't look up from my food and only nodded or shook my head if anyone were to ask me a direct question. Even Madam Pince, the now alarmingly ancient librarian, tried to speak to me when I was in the library. So I'd taken to visiting the library when I knew she was already in bed. I sent owls away without opening letters and blocked my Floo connection.

One night, an alarming thought occurred to me. I was walking along the corridor, back to my rooms (I could no longer stand to think of them *asurs*). I turned a corner and found myself passing by the Grey Lady of Ravenclaw.

She greeted me with a slight incline of her head. I almost stopped in my tracks. She was so sad. Even after being dead for over a thousand years, her pain washed over me in waves. I wanted to reach out to her, to offer her some comfort, but I felt powerless in the face of her terrible loneliness. I stopped and turned to watch her as she continued along past the portraits and coats of armour.

Then it hit me like a pail of ice water. I was well on my way to becoming the Grey Lady. I avoided all contact, I exuded sadness and desolation, and worst of all, I was so trapped in my own Hell that I was losing the ability to see anything other than my own misery.

If I died right now, I would be another heartbroken ghost, wandering these halls for all eternity. I hated myself for allowing this to take over my life. All I had left was darkness and sorrow.

I was drifting down the hall, and Harry approached me. He reached out his hand to grasp mine, and his hand drifted straight through my body. He shook his head sadly and walked away. After Harry came more of my friends, each with the same result. Their efforts to help me only proved that I was beyond any help.

Finally, Severus approached. I was terrified by this time, screaming at the top of my lungs for him to help me. I shrieked until my throat tore and bled. I pleaded that I was so alone and so scared. But he didn't seem to hear me. He continued walking until I couldn't see him anymore.

I was all alone and completely beyond help. Though I knew it couldn't help, I continued to cry out for Severus.

~~Severus~~

I had only just returned to my office and poured myself a generous measure of Ogden's when a tortured scream scared me so badly I jumped to my feet and flung my glass across the room. It shattered against the wall.

I was standing in the middle of the room, wand drawn, breathing heavily when the air was rent by a second scream. This time, the voice was intelligible.

"Severus!"

I was off toward the bedroom in our suite without a thought. Anything in my past was magically hurled out of the way.

It didn't matter that I'd barely seen or spoken to her in months. All that mattered was that Hermione was calling for me. I would walk through fire or Hell or both to get to her.

Though suddenly, the full weight of my galactic stupidity hit me. I'd pushed her away out of fear. My own selfish fear of being vulnerable had reduced her to a mere shadow of what she had been. I had avoided her so much that when I did catch a glimpse of her, what I saw was unnerving. She'd lost weight so that her once slender form was now absolutely skeletal. Her once full hair looked limp and lifeless as it hung, now always partially obscuring her face.

Though her posture was usually slumped under the weight of a rather cumbersome pile of books, there was now a rather defeated slump of her shoulders that had nothing to do with an outward, physical burden.

The evidence of her mental struggles had been getting gradually worse and worse over these last few weeks. I had begun to avoid our quarters at night so I could shut out her screams. I didn't want to believe that there was anything I could do. I didn't want to reach out to her because I knew that if I held her again, I would never be able to let her go.

I ran to the door of our bedroom as it flew open. I saw her there on the bed, blankets a tangled mess over her thrashing body. Her face was contorted with pain, and her frame racked with terrible sobs. I was frozen with panic.

My indecision ended when a horribly sad cry escaped her, and two words pierced my frozen heart and sealed my fate.

"Severus, please."

Though she hadn't seen me and wasn't even awake, there was no way I could just walk away after that. I was drawn to her, literally compelled to approach the bed. As I sank onto the mattress next to her, her thigh brushed against my back. It was the first contact we'd had in what felt like forever.

Evidently, she was as starved for affection as I was. She reached toward me and, with surprising strength, pulled me down to her. I was stunned and paralyzed for a moment. My head told me to run, though another head, as well as my heart, told me there was no other place in the world for me tonight than right here with her.

She began to pull her body closer to mine until she'd climbed me like a tree. Her thin but surprisingly strong arms were wrapped around me, as were her legs. I felt her heart beating and her tears soaking into my shirt.

The sweet smell that was her soap and shampoo and *just* her washed over me, and my breath caught in my throat. I'd almost forgotten how completely she could affect me. I had an erection that was threatening to split my trousers, my pulse was pounding in my ears, and my mouth was so dry I could barely swallow.

As I panicked, she brought her face closer to mine as she moaned my name. I groaned involuntarily in response. Her lips ghosted over my neck and shoulder, making me shiver. I couldn't move.

"Severus," she murmured into the skin behind my ear. "Is this a dream? Oh, God, if it is, I don't want to wake up."

I wanted to tell her she was dreaming or crazy or dead and being tormented in Hell. But somehow, I found myself doing nothing of the kind. I reached up to stroke the back of her head with one hand whilst the other hand cupped her cheek and turned her face towards mine.

"Hermione," I breathed as I looked into her eyes. The slightly dulled eyes were hooded. With lust or sleep, I couldn't be sure. It almost overwhelmed me when she shifted so that my arousal was pressing directly into the heat coming from her core.

We were separated only by two flimsy layers of fabric. I wanted to feel that again, no matter what it cost. It felt as though I had to connect with her this way, even if this was the last time she'd ever let me touch her.

Her little hands were tearing at my shirt, pulling it back over my shoulders as buttons flew all over the room. My hands trailed down her body until I found the hem of her nightdress. I gathered it, and in one quick movement, it was over her head.

I shifted her slightly, bringing our bare chests into contact. She shivered as both of us moaned out loud. A thick fog seemed to have leaked into my brain. All I wanted was to be as close to her as possible.

Evidently, she had the same thought. As her lips moved over my neck and chest, I felt them forming whispered words. At first, I thought she was whispering endearments or exclamations of passion, but then I felt my trousers vanish into thin air. I realised what she was actually doing.

Our bodies moved together, each of us revelling in the sweet torture of friction and heat. I was a man possessed. I moved my mouth down to her nipples, licking and sucking the peaks until they stood at attention.

"So long... Oh, God, Severus. It's been so long..."

I licked over her concave belly, delighting in the little, squirming motion that my attentions elicited. I moved further down, driven to taste her and drive her over the edge. Just to prove that I could do.

I licked her slowly, teasing her. I wanted to draw this out, to worship every nook and cranny of her centre. She was wet already and continued to spill her juices as I made love to her with my mouth. She was shaking, and her words were unintelligible. Not that I would have been able to articulate anything other than the most primal of growls at that time.

As she came undone under my tongue, her hands sprang to life in feeble effort to pull me closer to her. I continued to kiss and stroke her until her breathing eased up a bit and then allowed her to guide my face up to hers.

"I need to taste you now." Her voice was husky, and I was certain every molecule of blood in my body was now concentrated in my erection.

I pushed her away. "Later," I growled. "I need to be inside you. Right. Now."

"Oh, yes! God, yes. Please, Severus! I need you..." She was clawing me with her tiny fingers, trying to bring us closer. In her current state, she lacked the sufficient control.

I had no such difficulty. I manoeuvred slightly and poised my turgid shaft at her entrance. I pushed in slowly as we both cried out in pleasure.

Her eyes opened fully and somehow seemed to lock on my own. That was how we came back together. Eye to eye, body to body, heart to heart. It was hot. It was tender. It was intense.

When it was over, I'm not sure whose tears covered my face, and I found I didn't care. I rolled off of her and tried to move away slightly to give her a bit more room.

I had no more than decided to shift my weight when her arms grew strong as iron and held me fast.

"I've waited so long for this. I can't let go, not just yet."

Who was I to argue?

A/N: I hope you enjoyed your lemons! =] Thanks as always to kizzy7 and the admins here at TPP.

Thanks also to all those who read, and especially those who review as well. Reveiws are like hugs from the non-Stinky Sevvy! LOL

Only Helps Me Tell You

Chapter 9 of 9

Their relationship is back on track. Sort of...

A/N: I really hope you like this next bit. I ask you to trust me.

Thanks to kizzy7 for being the world's best beta. Thanks also to the admins. I love TPP!

I do not live in Scotland, nor am I married to a doctor.

~~Hermione~~

The complete happiness and peace that I felt that night didn't last long, at least, not with that sort of intensity. We were much better than before, but still far from perfect. Severus spoke to me; he held a civil tongue with our colleagues and even gave out what was for him a *reasonable* number of detentions. But he still held something back.

I didn't have much time to ruminate on my husband's mental state. I had now taken over all my classes. With the exception of one hour a day when I took a nap. Dumbledore and Madam Pomfrey together had prevailed. It had taken some manipulations of timetables and a great deal of cooperation from the other members of staff, but they managed to make the arrangements before they told me of the idea.

I was stuck. If I declined, I would be the stubborn, ungrateful bitch that caused everyone such difficulty; if I accepted, I would be admitting that I needed a bit of extra time to recuperate. My sense of decorum waged war with my pride. Decorum won out.

During my 'nap time,' Severus would stop by with an article he thought I might appreciate or a book he didn't think I'd read. We would chat for a few minutes, and then he would kiss me softly before going back to his class.

We took dinner in our rooms two nights a week. Severus said it was to keep our connection alive. Privately, he told me it was to keep the Nosy Parkers out of our private affairs. I looked forward to our evenings. They were surprisingly reminiscent of the time before we'd been married. We talked and laughed. We debated and argued. He even beat me at chess. That told me he believed me to be recovered.

For nearly three months, I felt wonderful. I was busy with classes, and my thoughts were pre-occupied with Severus and our new-old connection. The approaching end of term was also bringing many tasks that I'd not had before.

I had written letters of recommendation to the Ministry for my two most promising students, the Head Boy and Girl to be specific. I'd watched Ava Robinson blossom over the past few years. She reminded me very much of myself. She wanted a career in research. She'd gotten top marks from me and from all her other teachers. It meant more than I can say when she asked me to give her a reference. The other was a young man who'd come to my classes in his fifth year. He was bright and charismatic. The other students followed him like ducklings. Truth be told, he frightened me.

It was silly, but Terrance Rowles reminded me of another Head Boy with the initials *T.R.*. It was unfair of me to hold such a prejudice. So I treated him the way I had treated the rest of my top students.

I was headed down from my class room to the Great Hall for one of our 'public dinners.' It had been a lovely day. Ava had come to tell me that she'd gotten the position with the Ministry. My sixth-year class had gotten excellent marks on their exams. Severus had sent an owl saying he had a surprise for me after dinner tonight. There was a spring in my step as I passed through the doors of the Hall. I smiled at the sea of young faces that turned to greet me as I made my way up to the top of the Hall.

I'd nearly reached the head table when my stomach gave an odd lurch. I couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong. I reached up to smooth my hair back from my face, and I was shocked to notice that my forehead was covered in a thin layer of sweat. My hands shook slightly. I must have been hungrier than I thought.

I made it to my seat and began to fill my plate. I was ravenously hungry. Everything looked and smelled wonderful. I had taken several large bites of steak and potato when I noticed an odd smell. I swallowed the enormous amount of food in my mouth and felt my mouth and eyes begin to water. The odour seemed to be getting worse every minute.

I looked around until I found the source of the stench. I held my napkin over my nose, trying in vain to block out the terrible smell. Then I saw it. There on Flitwick's plate was the source of the foul and mysterious odour. Flitwick had a bit of roast chicken on his plate. My eyes locked on the offensive poultry, and I knew I was lost.

I stood, knocking over my chair, and ran for the door of the small chamber just beyond the platform. I burst through and searched frantically for a bucket or even a large vase. I could have just let loose and then Vanished the sick later, but the thought of having to look at it... Well, it wasn't good.

A large vase appeared just in front of me at the last possible second. I heaved into it as the sounds of my retching filled the room. My stomach continued to spasm in the attempt at forcing out its contents until the muscles across my lower back and abdomen ached.

When it was finally over, I sunk to my knees, sweating and trembling. Tears poured from my eyes, and I felt as though I'd never be able to stand again. I was just going to slump to the floor when I felt strong arms close around me.

"Come on, love. Let get you to the Hospital Wing, shall we?" Severus' voice washed over me. I wondered how long he'd been there. As if he could read my mind, Severus Vanished the nearly full container of vomit.

He carried me away through back passage ways so we wouldn't have students gawking at us. He held me tightly against him. I felt as though I'd never been ill. I still felt rather sore and tired, but my stomach had settled itself completely.

We entered the ward, and Poppy directed Severus to set me on a bed just opposite her office.

"As much as I enjoy your company, I'm seeing entirely too much of you, Hermione." Her frown would have frightened a student to death.

I sighed. "I really am feeling better. Most likely it was something I ate. Now that it's out of my system, I should be fine. Surely we can go now?"

She didn't answer me, only continued with her examination of me. So I turned to Severus, seeking an ally.

"Don't look at me, you stubborn little sprite. I quite agree with our esteemed matron." He used his most persuasive tone.

I was just about to tear into him when I was cut off by Madam Pomfrey.

"Hermione!" I was startled by the harsh tone to her normally soft voice. "Did you pay any attention to the instructions I gave you for your recovery period?"

I looked at her, completely puzzled.

Severus looked murderous. "Woman, do you mean to tell me that *this* is the result of that fucking weed? I swear, I'll destroy every last one, potion ingredients be damned!"

The two of them faced off as they leaned over me. I was thoroughly confused. As I looked from one angry face to the other, I wanted to tell them that I felt fine, but there was no chance.

"It's nothing to do with that," Poppy snapped. "Let me explain."

Severus sneered at her. "You're only protecting Longbottom and his miserable plants."

I cleared my throat. "Poppy, do you know what's wrong? I feel fine, so it can't be much."

At once, her face dropped into a look of concern. "Hermione, I only need to do one more test and then I'll know for sure."

Severus looked as though he'd very much like to tear the old girl limb from limb, but at a look from me, he allowed her to proceed without comment.

Her wand, now smooth and permanently shiny with use, waved over me, and her lips moved quickly with a rapid series of whispered spells. I felt the whirls and pulses of her magic as they rushed over, around and through me. At long last, she quieted. Her eyes were focused in at a spot a few inches above my lower abdomen.

I glanced to Severus. His face held the confusion that must have been mirrored in my own face. We locked eyes for only a moment when we were interrupted from our mind meld by a sudden glow. A glow that was nearly bright enough to have lit the room all on its own.

I tore my eyes from Severus' to see an orb of white light hovering over my body. While we watched, it pulsed three times and then turned a vivid shade of blue. I stared into the azure light until my eyes began to water from the glare.

I looked first to Severus, who looked stunned, and then to Madam Pomfrey, who looked both pleased and a bit apprehensive.

"Wha... what is, rather, what d-does that mean?" I was too puzzled to be ashamed of the tremor in my voice.

"That, my dear, means that the two of you are going to be parents." Madam Pomfrey smiled at the both of us.

~~Severus~~

Being an educated man of a rather superior intellect, I had full comprehension of the matron's words. Yet for some reason, I could not get any further in my thought processes than to repeat the words over and over again, like an echo in a church.

"...parents..."

"...you two..."

"...parents..."

Parents. Parents. Hermione and I are going to be parents. A child, my child, is in her womb right now. She will bear my child.

I am. Going. To. Be. A. Father.

I did the only thing I could think to do at the moment. I smiled weakly at Hermione. "Well, as you're in no imminent danger and I do have quite a lot of marking to get through this evening, I'll go. See you later this evening, my dear."

I stood up and turned away, even as I saw her mouth opening. Whether she wanted to stop me leaving or curse me, I couldn't bear to stay and find out. My brain was in full overload, and I didn't want to sort my thoughts and feelings in front of anyone else.

She did it intentionally. She wanted a child, and her agreeing to wait was only a ruse. This was intentional.

The rational part of my brain told me this was ridiculous, based on the look of horror that had come over her face the moment Poppy had told us what the light meant. It also stood to reason that Hermione was a planner and knew that I hated surprises with every fibre of my being. She would never have put me in this position, never.

She is female. They do this sort of thing all the time. They assure an innocent yet horny man that contraception has already been sorted. Then they stop taking potions or use those blasted "No-Fail, Guaranteed Proposal Hexes" that were advertised in witches' magazines in the late fifties. You've been duped!

No! She didn't want a child right away either. She was far too engrossed in her career to want a child right now anyway.

Right, it doesn't matter. Either way, we're having a child. It's completely immaterial how or why this has happened. What matters is, I've got to find a way to drag my wretched self out of the cesspool that is my normal mental state before I attempt to support my wife through a pregnancy, let alone act as some sort of role model for a child.

Fear overtook me. What if I had to sit through disgusting obstetrical examinations or procedures? What if she sicked-up every time we sat down to eat? What if she decided we could no longer have sex? Or what if she decided that her breasts belonged to the baby, sex would injure the baby, the swallowing of semen would cause improper development of the baby and maternal orgasms would cause irreversible brain damage in the baby?

I was fucked, no pun intended. I had no desire to return to my monastic way of life.

~~Hermione~~

My head felt as though it was spinning, and I couldn't quite breathe. Poppy gave me a sip of water, and I became aware of some rapid movement to my left. Had I not been stunned into a stupor, I barely noticed it. I was too busy trying not to vomit or hyperventilate or both.

I wanted a child, it's true. But I didn't feel *readyright now*. The worst part was, I didn't feel that I could express my own reservations. I knew for a fact that Severus was not going to be comfortable with this. I would have to do everything in my power to make him feel reassured.

A baby.

Suddenly, I could not move or breathe. Visions of small blankets and stacks of nappies filled my mind. The shrill cries that were filling my imagination were broken occasionally by soft coos and sighs. Little toes, soft, downy hair on a tiny head, big eyes looking back into mine, soft skin and the smell of a freshly bathed baby were intoxicating all my senses.

With eyes filled with happy tears, I shook off my visions and turned to look at my husband. He wasn't leaning over my bed. I looked down and saw that he was no longer on the floor. I scanned the small room and came to the startling conclusion that he was gone.

"He stepped out for a moment, dear. Let's discuss the care you'll need over the next few months, shall we?" Poppy's voice was strained and tense.

I looked at her face and saw that she was trying to conceal her anxieties from me. I was uncomfortable but kept still as I listened to her talk over diet, supplement potions, and the pros and cons of nursing.

I did my best to be attentive and seem interested. But I couldn't help wonder where Severus had gone and when or if he'd come back. I wanted to talk over this with him. I wanted to hear his concerns and hopefully alleviate a few of them.

I was relieved when Poppy finally allowed me to go back to my quarters. I walked through the corridors, thinking of Severus. I was lost in thought when something solid bounced off my chest.

I looked down into a pair of large, brown eyes. "Please excuse me, Professor. My mind must've been off somewhere."

The small boy in front of me broke into a crooked grin. He was short and rather scrawny. At first, his messy black hair reminded me of Harry. As I looked closer, I saw that his dark, messy hair was curly. Not riotous curls, as I had, but slight waves.

I shook myself out of my musings. "Not at all, Mr...?"

The young man opposite me only laughed as he bent to retrieve a heavy book I hadn't noticed before. He straightened up and grinned at up at me once again.

"Watson, Professor. I'm in Gryffindor."

Of course, Minerva had bragged to me that Mr. Emerson Watson of Gryffindor was well on his way to breaking my long-held academic record. Though I'd glimpsed him a time or two, this was my first interaction with him.

Mr. Watson began to tell me about his current research for Transfiguration, work he'd decided to do rather than having been assigned. I listened at first but almost immediately found myself wanting to pull the boy into an embrace or ruffle his hair. I was drawn to this young man, not romantically but affectionately. There would be no way for me to show any physical affection to him without the situation becoming extremely awkward.

He was so familiar but obviously too young to have been in one of my classes. Perhaps he was the son of an acquaintance of mine. I ran through a list of possibilities, barely listening as he spoke.

There was something in the combination of his features and mannerisms that was mesmerizing. I was seized by the sudden, over-whelming compulsion to reach out and stroke his cheek. My hand was actually rising from my side when the phrase "Professor Pervert" ran through my mind. I suddenly snapped back into the conversation and out of my odd preoccupation.

"... with all that, I reckoned it would only make sense if I took as many of the electives as soon as I'm able." He smiled again, and I noticed that his front teeth were prominent, not near what my own had once been, but certainly not unnoticeable.

"If I may, Professor, what electives did you take in the third year? Only I understand you were the brightest student ever to study here, so I'd hoped to take a leaf from your book."

I continued to stare at his thin, narrow face. But my verbal flood gates finally opened. "Yes, of course. I took everything. It turned out to be a mistake. Unless you've no experience in the Muggle world, Muggle Studies is unnecessary. Divination is not required for most career paths, so it isn't of any great benefit either. Arithmancy and Ancient Runes are both required for most advanced studies and many of the more profitable careers. Care of Magical Creatures is interesting, not to mention that Hagrid knows more about magical beasts than anyone else. You should challenge yourself without becoming over-whelmed. I made that mistake myself, and I'll always regret it. It's also important to make friendships and enjoy extra-curricular activities while you're here. Being a well rounded person will aid you in most any career field. I would also advise you to keep yourself healthy, eat your meals and get enough sleep. A little fresh air and exercise never hurt anyone either. Have you thought of being a Prefect? It's an honour as well and looks nice on your CV. If you keep grades up, you ought to be well positioned for a Prefect badge. I enjoyed it myself, and of course it's the first step if you'd like to become Head Boy..."

I realised that I'd been sharing a stream of consciousness with a young man who was now staring at me as though I had grown an extra set of arms out of my head. Even though I was embarrassed, I felt the need to ramble on and on.

Poppy had neglected to mention that pregnancy would make me go mad. I felt as if I had no control over my verbal diarrhoea. While I continued to study his features, I noticed that he was listening politely but looking ever more amused as I prattled on.

He looked amused but slightly embarrassed as he tried to surreptitiously check his watch. "I'm terribly sorry to interrupt, Professor. If I don't get to the library, I won't get to bed before dawn. Have a good evening." He nodded politely and turned to walk away.

I stood staring after him. I was both amazed at my own stupidity and enthralled by how enchanting the boy had been.

Wouldn't it be lovely if my son turned out to be like him?

What in the name of Merlin was wrong with me?

This was shaping up to be an interesting nine months. Perhaps I ought to wear a sandwich board bearing the legend *Mad Pregnant Woman* on each side. At least that way, I'd be able to hold onto some shred of dignity.

Severus wasn't in our quarters when I arrived. I walked toward his office, thinking he might be up for a talk now. I opened the door quietly to see the Pensieve on the desk. Severus was nowhere to be found.

He was likely reliving his horrid childhood, and I had no desire to be any more intimately acquainted with those memories. I sat in the chair opposite his desk to wait. We needed to talk, and if I avoided him now, it would help nothing.

I'd only been waiting for a few minutes when the strange surface of the Pensieve began to swirl rapidly. A moment later, Severus appeared before me, looking grim and

sober.

"Hermione, we need to talk."

~~Severus~~

Reliving my past was nothing that would help the situation, but right now, I needed to keep fresh in my mind the horror that I'd inflicted upon countless students if I was to avoid making such a mess of my relationship with my own son.

I shivered at the word. *Son*. The thought of my own offspring terrified me more than I could possibly say. But what frightened me most was the thought that the relationship between Hermione and me would change.

I had to make sure that I was on good terms with the boy. That way, his mother would never have to side against me.

And if I were to be completely honest, I was quite jealous of the baby that would have her undivided attention for the first two years of his life. I was pouting like a toddler at the thought of my wife shifting her focus away from me.

I hated myself for not being the supportive husband that my wife so richly deserved. I knew that I should have been concerned for her. She was the one who was about to become a co-owner of her own body. She was the one who would be missing work and radically changing her schedule and habits. It was selfish of me to worry over my own challenges and fears when hers were so much more salient and equally beyond her control.

I had gone to the Pensieve to keep myself focused on the cruel bastard that I could be, that I usually was. If I focused on him, then I would be able to suppress that side of myself for our son.

I smirked to myself as I remembered that my motto had become *for her*. Now it would change, *for him*, or more accurately, *for them*.

While I was in the Pensieve, I'd decided that we had to deal with this head-on. When I emerged and saw her sitting there, I knew the moment had come.

Her eyes met mine as I spoke. I was distracted for the briefest moment by the warmth and light her chocolate eyes held. Every aspect of her, physical, mental and emotional, enthralled me.

I'd once thought that the Dark Lord's torture was the most persuasive power in the universe. I'd been wrong. The curve of her neck as her head bent over a book, the light of discovery that illuminated her face when she'd solved some kind of problem or another, her soft hands as they pushed stray curls away from her profile...all of it fascinated me. She was the drug, and I was the addict.

"Severus, you are scaring me. It's rather rude to tell me that 'we need to talk' and then stand there gaping at me. If it's something bad, lingering like this won't help anything. Please, whatever this is, just out with it." She was frowning and looked both annoyed and on the verge of tears.

She thinks I'm going to leave her or insist she get rid of the thing.

It was time for damage control. "Hermione, I want to apologise to you for walking out on you earlier. I had a great deal to think about, and, I'm ashamed to admit, I was feeling rather overwhelmed..."

She cut me off in a rush. "Severus, please don't think that I did this intentionally. I was keen on waiting too. Poppy evidently went over all the side effects my treatments would have at a time when I was only partly conscious. Also, we were apart for so long, and then when we finally... finally did, er, get together, well, I had other things on my mind. I'm sorry... I'm so sorry that this is unexpected. I'm scared of what this will do to us and also of all that this will change. But at the same time, I'm thrilled. I carry a life inside me, a life that we created. I love this child already because it is the pure combination of the two of us."

Her eyes pleaded with mine, and I could only lean toward her to brush my lips softly against her own. I took her hand in mine and tried to remember what I'd been getting at when she began purging her soul.

"Hermione, don't. I love you. I will love our child to the best of my ability. But I need you to understand that this is something that is not going to come naturally for me. I have spent the better part of my life in a constant attempt to repel children. I'm a bit unsure as to how to change that.

"Please listen. I am frightened also. I'm not sure I'm ready to share you, even if it is with my child. I am afraid that we will lose or at the very least weaken the connection we've been trying to re-build over the last several weeks. I am frightened of taking on a task that will require a lifetime of patience, understanding, and self-sacrifice on my part."

At this, I placed my palms on either side of her face before I continued. "I love you, and I can swear that I will do my best. What I cannot promise is that my best will be good enough."

She wrapped her arms around me, pulling our bodies against one another. I loved her more than I could say in that moment. I sighed in contentment. She understood my fears and wasn't running away. My arms slid around her to pull her more firmly against my chest.

Her breath tickled my neck. "Severus, it will be alright. You can do this."

I hope that this will not prove to be one of the only times you've ever been wrong, my love.

A/N: I hope you liked it. I'm sorry that there wasn't any action in this one, hopefully you found some of it funny.

The reactions people have when they find out they're to be parents is usually a great source of comedy.

Thanks for reading and reviewing!!

Up Next: An unexpected visitor and a period of adjustment.