

Outcasts

by sigh

A post-HBP, post war attempt at the Marriage Law challenge, where I break the rules.

The War Ends

Chapter 1 of 8

A post-HBP, post war attempt at the Marriage Law challenge, where I break the rules.

Disclaimer: The characters, settings etc aren't mine. The Marriage Law challenge isn't mine either, I just borrowed everything. No money is being made off it.

Big thanks to my two betas Millie and Cilla for fixing all my horrid mistakes. :)

The war had ended, but the casualties were still arriving.

First there was free speech. After so many years of darkness and generally horrific events, there were certain things that people just did not want to hear. So it became illegal to mention anything even slightly upsetting about the war in public. Breaking this law, that is exercising your supposed right to free speech, would cost you one month of community service, a tougher sentence than it sounded. Imagine the sort of things that have to be taken care of after a war. A war that involved magic on both sides, and specifically dark on one. Most people would prefer to act like sheep than to openly oppose this law. Then again, most people had voted for this law.

The next casualty was truth. Who cared about actual facts after a war? No one wanted to hear that it wasn't due to The-Boy-Who-Continued-To-Live-Most-Obnoxiously that the Dark Lord was defeated. What kind of a hero does a sallow-skinned, hook-nosed, greasy git of a spy make? Certainly not one that the population could rally behind and worship. So the events and facts of those war years were changed, altered. The people who knew the truth were either not believed, or too involved in their grief to notice the changes at first, and too constrained by the loss of freedom of speech that came later to comment on it.

Trust fell from the list of survivors next. During the war people trusted their loved ones. They trusted the side of good and all decisions made by those in charge of that side. Once the war ended and they saw just how many citizens amongst them had been followers of the scary bad guy, they began to doubt. And when the aforementioned greasy git of a spy was acquitted of all charges pertaining to the death of the greatest wizard of all time, Albus Dumbledore, all trust was lost. Amidst this community, the ruling handed down by the Wizengamot was no longer relevant. They could acquit all they liked; society still held you guilty and extracted its own payment for your sins.

Friendships weren't strong enough to avoid the casualty list. When two of the 'saviours of the wizarding world' uncovered the truth about how the third person of their trio was obtaining information, they didn't bother trying to save their friendship. Apparently, collaborating with Albus the Admired's killer was enough to lose someone everyone they loved. So despite all the hard work she had put in, despite everything the trio of troublemakers had gone through in their friendship, it was over. And the funny thing about this community that no longer trusted; they still trusted their heroes. And when their heroes decided to ignore someone, everyone felt it was their duty to ignore them too.

Hence the two people who had risked more than anyone else in the war found themselves ostracized by the community at large. Which might have been a good thing, considering the next casualty of peace was freedom of a different kind. On the 25 March, 2003, the Ministry of Magic passed their stupidest law yet. The Marriage Law, or Bill 5932 as it was officially called, was passed. Apparently lots of people had died during the war, and the population had fallen. For a world with as little people in it as the wizarding one, this was a serious concern. So in all their magnificent wisdom, the Ministry had now decreed that all wizards and witches must find themselves a mate within two months or face having their wands snapped.

Our two protagonists might have found this amusing, had it not affected them so badly. That the ministry would try to increase the population by threatening to remove half of it was indeed humorous to those couples who were already happily married. Not so to the greasy git and the bushy haired chit. They were single and appreciating it.

Until now.

Alcohol

Chapter 2 of 8

A post-HBP, post war attempt at the Marriage Law challenge, where I break the rules.

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Thank you to SW69 and notsosaintly for continually putting up with my numerous errors :)

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There are good things about being ignored, thought Hermione. Being able to have an entire booth to yourself at a popular bar on a Friday night for one. People just moved out of the way as she walked past, like she was a werewolf.

Ahh, Remus. Another painful thought, another glass of Firewhisky. It was almost amusing how those who had been outcasts all their lives suddenly turned on others when they became part of the pack. Although, when she thought about it carefully, it was almost to be expected of Remus. He had been part of the biggest group of bullies that had ever graced the halls of Hogwarts. Why would that have changed over the years? Another gulp of alcohol, and she was ready to forget them all. Just for tonight; tomorrow she could go back to tormenting herself again.

"Death by alcohol, or death by drowning?"

Oh just brilliant. He was here. How perfect her night was turning out to be. Someone who was still talking to her, that she'd rather would just die. Death by irony might have been more appropriate really.

"You know, I'm not really in the mood for the company of a git tonight. But enjoy whatever it is you're planning to do elsewhere."

"Granger, as sweet as always, I see. Unfortunately, this is the only available seat in this bar, and I plan on getting neatly plastered before heading home."

He had to be kidding. Why didn't he just go stand near the fireplace? Maybe then, one of the flames would leap out and he wouldn't be an issue anymore. And whoever said the phrase "neatly plastered"? Wow, that sounds cool. Argh, she wished she could wipe that self-satisfied look off his face. Annoying her really wasn't difficult enough to be satisfied over.

"Well, it would make Apparating a great deal more interesting anyway. And of course that seat's empty. It's all your fault it's empty, and you know it. First you cause the problem, and then you turn up to make it worse. Go rot, Snape."

There, that should work. Now she could return to the ever so important matter of drinking.

"You have turned bitter since the war. Unless you can spit out something intelligent, Miss Granger, please refrain from talking to me. Witty ripostes are not the reason I came over, and I would much prefer to drink in silence."

He didn't even look angry. He was just lounging back, looking relaxed and leisurely. Didn't he realize he was being insulted? Apparently not, judging from the casual air emanating from him. Besides, did anyone actually fall for that classroom voice once they had graduated? Trying to intimidate someone who had worked so closely with him was really not the most intelligent thing to do.

She was on the verge of leaving, when two faces suddenly became clear in the crowd. And they had seen her too, sitting here at a table with him. How bad it must all look right now. The anger on their faces was almost like a physical blow to her. After all they'd done to her, it was a wonder she still cared. But twelve years was a lot to throw away; even more to move on from.

Suddenly, it was all too much for her. Between the git across from her and those two on the other side of the room, it was definitely time to leave. Wasn't it enough that she had losses to grieve over, friends to mourn? Did she really have to mourn those that still lived? And on top of it all, to be lumbered with the bat from the dungeons! Maybe life under Voldemort wouldn't have been so bad after all.

The look on Snape's face was too smug to be anything less than irritating. He'd obviously seen them as well.

"If you leave now, they'll think they've caught you doing something wrong again. And with me, no less. Whereas, if you stay, it will look like you're deliberately flaunting yourself in their faces. Hard choice all round, isn't it, Miss Granger?"

Smarmy git. Why did he even bother to talk to people? Did it make him happy to point out the obvious? Of course it was a hard choice!

"Tell me, Snape, do you get a hard-on from other people's unhappiness, or does it go with the territory of having no heart?"

If the smug look had been irritating, this look was nothing short of bliss for Hermione to look at. Finally, she had managed to shock, disgust, and best Snape with words.

Without waiting for her victory to turn into a loss, Hermione picked up her bag and, after downing the last of her drink, stormed out of the bar to Apparate home.

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As he sat alone in his house, Snape wondered just how everything had gone so wrong. It was supposed to have gone a lot differently than how it had eventually turned out. He'd found the one person in the wizarding world logical enough to see the truth behind that horrific act, convinced her, and used her. Through his spying efforts, she managed to pass all the right information on to the Hero. It was his maneuvering that made the way clear for the final showdown. Without him, Potter would have encountered twenty Death Eaters before getting anywhere near the Dark Lord, and would definitely not have had enough energy left to win.

It had been the perfect plan to end a life in the darkness. It was meant to have brought him back to the light; meant to ensure that he could start to live his life. The acquittal

went smoothly. With the use of a Pensieve, the Wizengamot was able to see the thoughts that Potter, so useless at anything involving his brain, had missed. Of course, they had used Legilimency to communicate before Snape had cast the Avada Kedavra. How else could they have had a conversation in a room full of Death Eaters without blowing his cover?

Truth be told, it was his fault that it had all blown up after that. Whilst the acquittal had not exactly cleared his name completely, people were at least willing to acknowledge his existence on the street. It was a start. He didn't want to be the best loved person in the world. A shudder ran through his body at the very thought. Most people in the world were still dunderheads, and would continue to be until they were removed from the Earth, but less of the blatant, open hostility might have been nice. A quiet existence where he ignored others. They weren't meant to ignore him.

Seeing Hermione so openly had been a mistake. He'd had no reason left for communicating with her; the war was over and the hearing finished. But a thank you drink in the Leaky Cauldron certainly seemed appropriate. Not to Weasley. Jealous and idiotic were two very dangerous combinations in someone so exalted by society. Despite her hitherto high standing in the community, Hermione had no chance against the redhead. Never had a child been born with more aptly colored hair than that one. By the time he'd finished slandering both of them, there was no one left that would listen to the other side. Potter had believed it all, of course. Why wouldn't he? Any reason to hate Snape again was welcome. At least, any reasonable excuse to carry on the hatred that had never left was welcome.

It did surprise Snape that they'd been so willing to lose Hermione. Surely, she'd meant more to the both of them than just homework help. After all, without her, they never would have passed his subject at least, and probably every other one at Hogwarts.

Giving up on all of these thoughts, Snape proceeded to drink himself into a deep slumber. He fell asleep on the chair and didn't wake to the tapping of the owl on the window the next morning.

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Hermione had continued her drinking when she had arrived home. Hence, it was her mother who received the owl post the next morning. The headline meant very little to her, and she continued with her breakfast in a blissfully unaware state.

It wouldn't last long. Bill 5932 had been passed and would become effective within a month.

## The Morning After - Severus

### *Chapter 3 of 8*

Waking up hungover, in a chair is not the best way to start the day... nor is it his biggest problem

Disclaimer: None of the recognisable stuff is mine. I think someone else had the 'Uncle Sev' from Draco, but I'm not sure so I can't credit it... Let me know if it sounds familiar.

Author's Note: Thanks to my betas for their work on this chapter, and to SW69 and notsosaintly for their tireless patience with my errors :)

The Morning After - Severus

"Well, don't you just look magnificent first thing in the morning?"

Severus opened one eye cautiously, then gave up and roared with his eyes closed, "Get out of my house, Malfoy, before I decide to curse you. You never were quick at learning a lesson, but a few well aimed hexes and even you would take the hint."

"Ahh, and your breath is beautiful as well. Late night drinking, hmm? Well, get up, and listen to me. There's bad news, and you need to get your act together."

What news could be worse than the presence of Malfoy in his house this early in the morning? And the fact that he knew there was no hangover potion left in the cupboard. These days he was using it more quickly than he could brew it.

Opening both eyes, he recognized the look on Draco's face. He wasn't going anywhere, but his patience looked pretty close to leaving.

"You're not getting anything intelligible out of me before my first cup of coffee."

"Which I anticipated, and if you'd care to look up from the ground and focus on the table, you'll notice not only a mug of coffee, but also a hangover potion. I took it for granted that you would need it this morning, since you need it every morning."

Being sassed by one so young was not a pleasant experience, with or without the hangover. But the little brat had a point; Severus couldn't remember the last time he hadn't gone to sleep drunk. Although passing out on a chair was a new low, even for him.

Stretching to get all the kinks out, he reached for the potion and the coffee and downed both in two gulps. Draco grimaced in disgust but remained silent, unwilling to push the older man any further in one morning.

"Well? You did say there was something important. Would you like to elaborate? Or am I in for a fun guessing game, the likes of which I love oh so very much?"

With one eyebrow elegantly raised, Draco looked towards the owl that was still hovering outside the window.

"Perhaps you should let the owl in, and then you won't need me to tell you the news."

Muttering the whole way to the window, Severus opened it and took his newspaper, leaving payment in the pouch. When he opened it out to the headline, he almost dropped the paper onto the floor.

"How could those idiots be so stupid as to think this is actually a GOOD solution? My God, they just have no idea! And now we're all stuck with the consequences. I don't suppose you came over here to tell me that you still have a say at the Ministry and can get me out of this?"

Severus' thundering rant made Draco lose some of his composure. No matter how long he spent with the man, he still couldn't get used to the increased volume when he was in a rage.

"No, I don't have that much of a say. I was able to find out something for you, though. You've already been petitioned by none other than Dolores Jane Umbridge."

"What on earth does she think she's playing at? How could such a TOAD of a person expect anyone to marry them? Does she honestly expect me to accept?"

This time, Draco was prepared and had steeled himself against the onslaught. It was still slightly unnerving, nevertheless.

"Well, you actually have no choice. Unless someone else petitions for you or accepts your petition, you have to marry her."

Severus snorted at the idea of receiving more than one petition and conjured another cup of coffee for himself. This was too much like the end of the world to face with only one cup in his system.

"No petition of mine would be welcomed in any wizarding household, nor am I likely to receive any others. That must be the reason behind her petition. Hers is equally unlikely to be accepted, if for very different reasons."

Draco watched the older man speculatively, wondering just how his next statement would be received. With a deft change of subject, he uttered his next sentence. "As I hear it, you're not totally alone these days, Uncle Sev. There is a certain drinking partner whom you seem to see quite often."

"Stop using that infernal nickname. I'm not your uncle, thank heavens, and I'm certainly not a 'Sev' by any description of the nickname. And your wife talks far too damn much for her own good. I wish you wouldn't repeat gossip from that gang of imbeciles she associates within my earshot. I do not have a drinking partner. There was only one seat left in the bar, on one night, and so I took it. It wouldn't have mattered who was sitting in the opposite one."

Severus started fiddling with his mug, an action that did not escape Draco's attention.

"Well, I doubt she would have received very many petitions, if any. Any petition made by you would have to be accepted from her," Draco hypothesized.

Looking off out the window, Draco's expression was hard to determine. Severus' own face was carefully blank, an ingrained habit from the war years. Otherwise known as his teaching years.

"This is all pointless to ponder. I am not sending her a petition, and I am not accepting the toad's either. There must be an alternative somewhere that we haven't thought of. Now leave me to my morning routine; I'll Apparate over tomorrow to speak to you."

Standing up to leave, Draco bade him farewell. Just before popping out of the house, he made one more statement, "That's really too bad, Snape, because I've already sent a petition to her on your behalf."

With that, he was gone. Severus was rooted to his chair and couldn't, for the life of him, move.

## The Morning After - Hermione

### *Chapter 4 of 8*

Hermione receives her petitions.

Disclaimer: Nothing recognisable is mine.

Author's Note: Thank you for the patience of everyone still reading this. I haven't had internet for over a month and haven't been able to update. I will try harder now I've got it.

Reactions II: Hermione's

Hermione woke up thinking Crookshanks had died in her mouth during her sleep. The fuzzy, vomit-inducing taste certainly supported this theory. Unfortunately, the big lumpy presence next to her proved that the taste was entirely her fault. Luckily as a witch, hangovers and their symptoms were easily cured.

Crawling out of bed, she reached for her supply of potions and downed the appropriate one as if drinking a shot of liquor. Some things came so easily when they were practiced often.

The smell of breakfast wafted up the stairs and a fully recovered Hermione wandered down to fill up for the day. It was hard to put up with involuntary exclusion from society on an empty stomach.

Manoeuvring herself from the kitchen to the table was difficult whilst carrying a mug of coffee and a plate full of food. Crookshanks wasn't helping matters by winding himself in and out of her legs. Luckily, her mother took pity on her and fed the cat to keep him happy.

However, the look thrown over shoulder at her daughter contained no trace of the motivating pity. Helena Granger was well aware of what made her daughter inattentive first thing in the morning. She only wished that Hermione would find better friends than Ron and Harry. Friends who didn't keep her out all night, drinking until she could barely make it home.

Hermione was happily ignoring her mother's accusing glares and making good progress through a plate piled high with food. Reaching for the paper, she suddenly lost her appetite. The Ministry had actually managed to outdo all previous stupidity and had passed the Bill that would remove the last of their civil rights.

Being the social outcast that she was, Hermione was well aware that if she did receive any petitions, they weren't going to be desirable in the least. Mentally snorting at the thought that ANY wizard would be desirable enough to make her want to give up the precious little she had left in her life, she turned to the rest of the post. There were three other letters on the table, and with a sick feeling in her stomach, she began to open them. And promptly lost her breakfast.

Helena Granger was not alarmed by her daughter's vomiting. Drinking all night does do this to people. Nevertheless, she quietly gathered up a glass of water and some cleaning products along with a bucket. Self-induced or not, it's hard to see your only child sick.

As she began cleaning up, some words from the letter Hermione had been reading caught her eye. Someone had proposed to her? Had Ron finally woken up and done what they had all been waiting and planning for since the two were in school together? But Ron's name wasn't on the parchment. Some boy named Marcus Flint, that Helena had never heard of, had proposed.

"Well, I know you're old enough to live your own life, but I would have thought we'd meet any boy you were serious about before the proposal came in, Hermione."

Hermione groaned as she realized how many more lies this new development was going to take to cover up. It was hard work hiding half her life from her mother.

"I'm sorry, mum; things have just been so hectic at work that I haven't had a chance to bring him around. I promise I'll do it soon. Thanks for cleaning up."

With that last thank you, she left the room before any more awkward questions had to be answered. The other two envelopes were tucked into her pocket and, with this in mind, she grabbed the bucket on her way out just in case. In the relative safety of her bedroom, she sat down to open the last two.

Viktor Krum had petitioned her. That was relatively unexpected. She hadn't heard from him since before the Final Battle. Writing took so much effort when you were trying to concentrate on winning a war, and neither had thought of writing when it was over. A marriage with someone she didn't really know anymore was not appealing at all. Living in Bulgaria was definitely out of the question. She might be a pariah in England, but it was her home, and it was where she was going to stay. A lifetime of being a 'Quidditch wife' did not sound like a position she'd be able to fill too well either. So, the third person it was.

Opening the third letter, Hermione let out a scream of anger mixed with frustration. Snape. It always came back to Snape. It wasn't enough for him to torment her for seven years at Hogwarts, ruin her two closest friendships and make her as hated as he was in society; now he wanted to claim the rest of her life as well? No way was she even going to keep this petition. Raising her wand, Hermione produced one of her infamous waterproof fires. It had worked against him for her in her first year; it should work now.

Except, the parchment wouldn't burn. The ministry had certainly foreseen the unhappiness that would follow some marriage proposals, especially when forced upon people like this, and had made the proposal parchment impossible to destroy. Hermione tried anyway.

After trying fifteen different methods, she gave up. It was obviously a waste of time, and she certainly needed every minute she could get now. It was time to seriously think about who would be acceptable and petition as many people as she could. There was no way she was going to choose out of the three she'd received.

Thumbing through the wizarding equivalent to a phone book, Hermione giggled to herself. She could make good on her second grade crush and petition Lockhart if she wanted to. Facing a lifetime of him might not make having her wand snapped seem like such a dire consequence.

Getting serious and down to work, Hermione sorted through the names. All Weasleys were out from the start, as was anyone over the age of forty. Most of her schoolmates were never going to accept a petition from her, nor would she want them to. That cut down the list considerably.

The people left on the list were strangers. They could have any sort of perversions, and she wouldn't know until it was too late. Unfortunately, she was running out of options. Short of snapping her wand, there really wasn't much choice left.

Somewhere in the back of her consciousness, she heard the front door open and close. She could hear low voices from the lounge room, but ignored them, writing it off as one of her mum's friends. Until her door opened.

Turning around she saw the last person on earth she wanted to see; the one person who consistently turned up despite this fact. Snape.

## Discussions

### *Chapter 5 of 8*

Snape visits Hermione after she receives her petition. Can any good come of it?

Disclaimer: Nothing recognisable is mine. Obviously.

Author's Note: This chapter is going up unbetaed, so my apologies ahead of time for any mistakes. Thanks again to the lovely Southern and notsosaintly for all their help and encouragement with this fic.

### Chapter 5 – Discussion

Seeing the object of her thoughts standing in her doorway gave Hermione a very clear idea. The Ministry parchment wouldn't burn, but the person who sent the parchment would surely burn just as easily as anyone else. And, if the fire was aimed harmlessly at his clothes, no real damage would be done, right? It was certainly a theory worth testing.

"Well, your mother is a lovely lady. Pity more of her manners didn't rub off on ... Why are you trying to set me on fire?"

"Because I can. Now stand still - it's easier that way."

"Hermione, standing still would make no difference. Do you think I would walk into the lion's den with meat hanging around my neck? My clothes are flame retardant. You cannot light me on fire. I am aware of your favourite curse enough to guess at the need for protection from it. I did, however, hold high hopes that you would not prove childish enough to warrant it."

"I can be as childish as I choose. Three marriage proposals do not necessarily make someone mature."

Snape's heart sank at the number. So, others had seen fit to send a petition. Facing a lifetime with the Toad, his mind began to race. New ideas formed, and persuasive arguments settled in, ready to be used.

"Three? My, my, you are a popular child. Should I assume from this that Weasley finally stopped being a prat long enough to see the truth?"

Hermione felt a stab of pain as she finally fully understood everything. Had the law come into effect earlier, she would have been spared this agonizing decision. It would simply have meant an earlier date was set for the inevitable nuptials between her and Ron. She wouldn't have needed to choose - she wouldn't have needed to face three different types of torment - all brought about by one silly, ill-conceived law.

New thoughts crystallizing in her mind, Hermione thought she saw everything. The reason she wasn't with Ron right now was standing in front of her. Worse, he'd sent a petition to take what should have been Ron's place.

"Why did you send this? You can't want a union between us any more than I do, yet you send this. Is it a mockery? And now you are here to further the mockery? Is that

it??" Her voice became shrill and high pitched towards the end of the outburst.

"It was not a mockery, Miss Granger. It was an offer for a marriage of convenience. One that would be convenient for both of us, I might add."

Snape hoped he had more control over his voice and emotions than she did. This was, of course, a stupid thing to hope for – of course he did. He had practice in far worse situations after all.

"I fail to see the convenience on my part. I want a marriage born of love and compassion, not hatred and loathing. More than anything else, I want a marriage that does not include you. You must want more from life than a marriage of convenience?"

"There is a lot more I want from life; a lot more that I will get from life. In an ideal situation, I would not even be contemplating marriage to you, and I would definitely not contemplate anything less than love as a reason for marrying. Then again, when one has no heart, it's hard to hold out for anything more than a marriage of convenience for too long."

Hermione's face flushed scarlet as she remembered the insult thrown at him the night before. Why did such good comebacks always haunt you later?

All this talk was getting on her nerves, and it was useless. The law didn't come into effect for a month, and she would use every second of that month to find a way out of it.

"Was there a purpose to this visit? I have research to be getting on with."

"Always the studious little bookworm. Yes, there was a purpose. In time, Hermione, you will see that the best petition offered to you was mine. I won't make it too hard for you to accept when that time comes. Only, make it soon. I have other petitions myself that I must see to."

Hermione threw the closest object to hand at the wall as he departed.

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"If you don't have a good reason for wearing my carpet out, perhaps you should stop. Ginevra spent too long decorating the manor for you to ruin it now."

Severus stopped his pacing as Malfoy entered the room. Unfortunately, the one person who could help him escape a lifetime of living in a swamp with a toad was also an arrogant, bullying git.

"Shut up, Malfoy, and help me out. The little chit has already received three petitions. As much as I wish to avoid a union with her, there is no one else. I will not be married to Umbridge!"

Draco permitted himself a small smile, but only because the older man's back was turned. There were too many aspects to this situation that were funny, especially to someone already happily married.

"Her other petitions could not have been desirable to her. Who were they from?"

Draco's question was accompanied by a glass of Firewhisky, the surefire way to calm Severus down. The only way to calm Severus down most of the time.

"Marcus Flint and Viktor Krum."

"There doesn't really seem to be much of a problem then, Uncle Sev. And I'm still unaware of your reason for trying to ruin my wife's decorating. Flint is one of the few suspected Death Eaters that is still at large. Granger would never marry someone who would put her life in danger. Or someone who would not allow her research to continue. Krum, whatever advantages he has over you, lives in Bulgaria. No female that is so attached to her parents as to still be living at home long after it is necessary would be willing to live that far away, even with apparition, flooing and owl mail. So stop worrying, and for Circes' sake STOP PACING"

Severus looked startled at the vehemence that accompanied the last two words. Malfoy rarely lost his composure, a habit ingrained in him by his father and housemaster.

"Sweetie, I'm just ducking out to the shops..."

Mrs. Malfoy's words were cut off when she realised there was another presence in the room. It was hard to get used to this man, despite his large role in her husband's life. Even when he was trying to stop himself from laughing, such as he was now, he still frightened and intimidated her.

"Don't laugh at the emotion in my life, Snape, just because you have none in yours. Ginevra, have fun, and before you ask, no there is nothing I need. Try not to spend too much time around those... people. You know how annoying you find them all after a while."

After Ginny left, the conversation quickly headed towards less important subjects. Triviality was the easiest thing for drunken minds to cope with.

And so another night passed with Severus getting as drunk as he could.

## Letters

*Chapter 6 of 8*

Letters to and from our favourite pair.

Disclaimer: Nothing recognisable is mine.

Author's Note: Thanks to my new beta Rhiannon :)

Chapter 6: Letters

Dear Hermyness,

By now you would have received my petition. Please accept. I know together we will produce many wonderful kids. You would make me such a beautiful wife and mother. I miss the home cooked meals my mum used to make. You could help me by cooking and cleaning, and I could help you by giving you lots of kids. Please accept.

Yours,

Marcus Flint.

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Dear Miss Granger,

I'm writing to inform you that you, like me incidentally, will be considered a single witch under Bill 5932. In these circumstances, you will have two months from the date the law becomes effective to find yourself a partner and marry him.

I must confess I feel extremely lucky to be alive at a time when such exciting things are happening everywhere. To think, we will be part of the first generation of couples brought together by the never-ending wisdom of the Ministry. Our children will be the first to be able to proudly proclaim that they were a direct product of the quick thinking ingenuity of Minister Scrimgeour .

There is, however, one troubling aspect about the new law. No one is compelled to marry the first person that submits a petition for them, and they are, in fact, able to submit subsequent ones to other people. I have it on good authority that you seem to have received three petitions for your hand in marriage. If you would be so kind as to take an older, more experienced woman's advice - you might find that your life would be much better if you didn't accept Severus Snape's petition. There is no telling what would happen to you, should you marry the former Death Eater.

Wishing you a long and successful marriage,

Dolores Umbridge.

Special Assistant to the Minister of Magic.

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Snape,

What in Merlin's name is the attached letter about? Please try to keep your jealous suitors away from me in the future; I want nothing to do with them.

Hermione Granger.

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Dearest Severus,

I sent you a petition over a week ago and have yet to get your answer. I need your input on the colour theme and a date for the upcoming nuptials. I know that there is just over two months until the ceremony needs to be completed, but I am rather anxious to start married life with you.

I am aware of one Draco Malfoy submitting a petition to one Hermione Granger on your behalf. Do not trifle yourself over such matters, however, as I have dealt with the issue. There is nothing left to stop this marriage.

Please respond quickly with suggestions for theme and date.

Awaiting your reply,

Dolores Umbridge.

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Secretary Umbridge,

Please remove me from your correspondence list. I no longer wish to receive any kind of letter from you. I will not be accepting your petition, so no input from is needed in regards to your wedding day.

Potions Master Snape.

\*\*\*\*

Malfoy,

You incompetent git, the Toad knows you submitted that petition for me. This situation is getting out of my control.

Why would she be fighting this hard to make sure I accept the petition? She's up to something, but I don't know what. I've included her letter to me and one she sent to Granger. Tell me what you make of them.

Speaking of Granger, I honestly don't think she's going to accept my petition. We need a new plan. Snapping my wand sounds like an excellent idea at this stage.

Snape.

\*\*\*\*

Uncle Sev,

How is life at your house? Life at Malfoy Manor is brilliant. Ginevra is pregnant, and we are having a dinner to celebrate. Your attendance is expected. Your good manners will need to shine through as certain members of her family are also invited, and I'd like to avoid carnage in my recently decorated dining room.

What I also expect off you is the ceasing of these constant attempts to send me insane. Stop Worrying. I'm serious. We have two whole months to find a back up plan, should Hermione say no. Since she won't, this whole incessant worrying is becoming tiresome and getting on my nerves.

I'll see you next Friday, promptly at 6 for pre-dinner drinks. Preferably non-alcoholic in your case. Learn to behave yourself before then.

Your favourite nephew,

Draco.

P.S. Please note the polite way of addressing a letter to someone.

\*\*\*\*

Malfoy,

I'm not your uncle. Please stop at once. I'll be there, but don't expect me to deal with the Weasley clan sober.

Snape.

\*\*\*\*

Dear Miss Hermione Granger,

It gives us great pleasure to announce the pregnancy of Ginevra Malfoy. To celebrate this momentous occasion, what we hope is the first of many; you are cordially invited to dinner at the Malfoy Manor next Friday.

We will be meeting for drinks at 6:00 pm and sitting down for dinner at 7:30pm.

Dress is formal.

Please RSVP by Wednesday.

We look forward to your company,

Draco and Ginevra Malfoy.

\*\*\*\*

Dear Viktor,

How's everything in Bulgaria? Life in England is okay, just a little stressful at the moment. My work is going great though, so one less thing to complain about.

I was getting ready to accept your marriage petition when it occurred to me that I'm not sure where we would live once we were married. I'm assuming it would be England, right?

Just a silly question I thought I would bring up.

Thanks,

Hermione.

\*\*\*\*

Hermione,

Of course we would not live in England. I sent a petition for you because I would like to avoid a marriage arranged by my parents, not because I want to avoid them completely.

Please do not let this stop you from accepting. With my athletic skills, and your brainpower, our kids would be very special.

Think of the fame they would receive, living in Bulgaria where their dad is a national hero.

Please answer soon,

Viktor.

## Dinner Party: I

*Chapter 7 of 8*

The first part of the dinner party at Malfoy Manor.

Author's Note: Hi guys, sorry it's taken me forever to get this chapter up. I was originally planning to make it longer, but feel it would be easier to end the chapter here, and start a new one. If real life could just stop kicking for awhile, you'd all get updates sooner. Better yet, if anyone wants to do my assignments for me, I'll concentrate on the fic :). Big thanks to everyone still reading and to Sunshine and NSS due to the lack of a beta on this chapter.

Usual Disclaimers apply.

\*\*\*

"Welcome, Hermione, I'm glad you could make it." Draco's greeting was accompanied by a kiss on her hand.

"That makes one of us. And a grand total of one in the entire room I'd wager." Hermione's sarcasm was hiding the nervousness she was feeling at stepping into the room alone. Admittedly it wasn't a very successful cover up, but it just needed to be there, it didn't need to be great.

Seeing through her clumsy façade, Draco handed her a drink heavily infused with alcohol. Unfortunately, before the conversation could continue, more people arrived. Hermione left Draco to greet the newcomers and tried to find an appropriate corner to hide in. Five minutes into the evening and she had already forgotten why she had come.

"Hermione! It's been such a long time. How are you?" Ginny interrupted her mental regrets.

"I'm great, Ginny. Congratulations on the pregnancy. How does it feel?"

As Ginny rambled on about all the intricacies of the first three months of pregnancy, Hermione let her mind wander. She had deliberately arrived an hour late to minimize her socializing time, but half an hour was still too long.



Casting her eye around the room, the other guests finally began to register with Hermione. Charlie Weasley was there with someone by his side, both the twins were present with Luna Lovegood and Susan Bones as their dates, and Blaise Zabini was there with Pansy Parkinson. It didn't take someone with Hermione's intelligence to figure out she was the only dateless person there. Or that the mood in the room was decidedly anti her.

"...so anyway, I finally figured out that a little ginger in the morning will stop the vomiting. Have you seen Draco anywhere?" Hermione tuned in just in time for Ginny's rambling to end.

"No, he was greeting someone that arrived just after me, but he seems to have disappeared." Lucky she'd heard enough to answer the question.

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"You didn't warn me she would be here. Dammit, Draco, you do not have the right to blindside me like this. I should have been told so I could prepare."

Severus accompanied his words with furious pacing. He'd pulled Draco into the library as soon as he'd seen Hermione. His anger was directed as much at himself as at Draco, but he was never going to admit that. After years as a spy, he should have been able to see through a set up. Draco had certainly learnt too much about deceiving people throughout the war.

"If you would stop pacing and calm down, you would realize it's not quite the drama you insist on making it out to be. You have got to be one of the biggest drama queens ever to grace the ranks of Voldemort. And you know what the rest of them were like! Now, down your whiskey, refill your glass and come on out to be social in the last ten minutes before dinner." With that Draco stormed out of the room, leaving Severus harbouring resentful thoughts.

## Dinner Party: II

*Chapter 8 of 8*

The rest of it

A/N: See, you guys got this one much quicker. It feels good to be writing again. Slightly longer than the last one and they should have been just one chapter. Hope you enjoy.

Usual disclaimer applies.

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Dinner Party: II

Hermione looked at her plate and let out a little sigh. Fish. Of course it was fish. The one thing she couldn't stand, and they had to serve it for dinner. She sighed again and reached for the wine.

"You might not be so unhappy if you were to have a husband and children to cheer you up, Hermione."

Snape just never knew when to leave well enough alone, did he? And who made up this seating plan, anyway? Seating her between the great bat of the dungeons and Charlie's wife, a woman she'd never met before, was just cruel.

"You mean you would be happier with a wife to boss around, especially now that you are no longer able to torture those unfortunate enough to end up in your classroom. I fail to see how that would please me."

Alcohol probably wasn't the best thing for Hermione to be drinking at the moment. Her temper was bad enough these days without the added boost.

"For your inform..."

"So, Hermione, did you know that Blaise and Pansy recently got engaged?" Draco used to be so much smoother with his interfering.

Hermione was starting to wonder just how many people were trying to play matchmaker for the bat, and why Draco would be sticking his nose in. For now, she'd go with the flow, but tomorrow she would want answers.

"Congratulations, Blaise. And to you, Pansy. It's good to see some happy unions as a result of this idiotic law."

Before either could reply, a commotion down the other end of the table drew everyone's attention. George, Fred and Ginny had been talking quietly amongst themselves, but the twins had gradually gotten louder, and now they were almost yelling.

"I don't care about her feelings, look what she did to our brother! You should be ashamed to have her eat at your table, Ginny. Your flesh and blood should come before any tramps you knew in school!"

It didn't take anyone long to figure out who the 'she' was. Hermione quietly began to put her napkin on the table to leave, but was stopped by a hand on her arm.

"This is Draco's house and any guests he's invited will not be driven out by anyone. And he certainly will not let them be insulted," Severus whispered, whilst directing a meaningful glance at Draco.

"Oh, this is just perfect. Not only do you invite the woman who betrayed our brother to your house, we get to sit here and watch her flirt with the traitor." The disgust in Fred's voice was so vehement it was almost visible.

"THAT IS ENOUGH. Family or otherwise, you will not come into our home and speak to my wife in that manner. She is visibly upset, and you are out of line. If you do not want to sit down and celebrate our future heir, then you can leave. If you choose to stay, you will treat Ginevra with much better manners than you have shown thus far. You will also learn to treat my guests in a better manner. If you can't be civilised, perhaps it's better for you not to stay."

Draco certainly inherited his father's command and control of situations. Hermione had to admire the way he protected Ginny, even knowing it was going to get him into all sorts of trouble later. It was funny how protective Ginny could be of her family, even when they were being rat bags. Except with Ron, of course. Those two never did work out their sibling issues.

"Fred, George, listen to me. Hermione did nothing wrong. Ron overreacted and didn't bother waiting around to hear the full story. Don't make yourself look like prats, the same way he did. Sit down and let's just enjoy our meal."

"No, Ginny, I've had enough of this. You didn't even invite Ron tonight, your own brother. I can see where your loyalties lie, and I'm not staying any longer. Are you coming, Fred?"

And so they were down to ten. Hermione was calculating how quickly it would take her to clear out the rest of the room, when a voice piped up from next to Ginny.

"This really is great fish, Malfoy; you must get your house elf to show mine how to do it properly"

Ahh, Luna, always in her own world. For once, she was a grateful distraction for everyone, and the tension started to evaporate.

"Well, I think everyone's pretty much finished eating, or lost their appetite by now. Shall we retire to the sitting room?" Draco, ever the host, started in that direction without waiting for an answer.

\*\*\*\*

Hermione was weaving her way back from the bathroom when she bumped into Severus. Somehow she didn't think she'd had enough alcohol to make it through this conversation sane.

"You always did have a habit of wandering around places you shouldn't be."

"Oh, sod off, Snape. I'm walking back from the bathroom. I am certainly not wandering around someone else's home alone."

"My mistake. I assumed if you were walking back from the bathroom, you'd be in the general vicinity of either there, or the sitting room. As it is, you're about three hallways in the wrong direction. How silly of me to assume you were somewhere you shouldn't have been on such little evidence."

Her cheeks had gone bright red, and knowing that did nothing to calm her down. She took a step forward and was ready to make a scathing comeback that was sure to put him in his place, when someone else walked into the hallway. She jumped back quickly in time to see a look of horror on Ginny's face. Something told her this was all going to be bad.

"How could you, Hermione? In my home?? After I defended you to three of my brothers? And with that traitor of all people?"

"No, Ginny, it's not like that. I was ..."

"Oh, spare me. You're cheeks are all red, and when you heard me coming, you jumped apart like the guilty party that you are. I don't care what pitiful lie you'll make up this time to cover yourself, just get out of my house. Don't come here again. I don't want to see you. And you," she said, turning on Severus, "if I could ban you from this house, I would. Just know that you're not welcome here on my part, no matter what my husband might say."

Knowing that it was all just useless, Hermione took her coat from the house-elf that had popped into the room at Ginny's words and quietly followed it out.

She'd had enough of Severus Snape ruining her friendships to last a lifetime, and in the morning she would accept Viktor's proposal.

Severus watched her go and knew that now was the time to act, or he'd be stuck with the Toad for life.