

# Right Here In My Arms

*by Hanagasume*

After her messy divorce, Hermione Granger finds that someone is trying to destroy her reputation. She seeks out the help of Severus Snape to help her find out who it is. Will their past relationship affect how they work together?

## Divorce

*Chapter 1 of 17*

After her messy divorce, Hermione Granger finds that someone is trying to destroy her reputation. She seeks out the help of Severus Snape to help her find out who it is. Will their past relationship affect how they work together?

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Thanks to Alliean for the quick beta of this chapter.

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### Chapter 1: Divorce

The walls of the room were pale blue with a white skirting around the bottom, and there was also a high white ceiling. It was supposed to be a soothing colour, which was often why the attorneys preferred to hold all of their client meetings in it. The man already sitting in the room that day was staring at the bottom left-hand corner of it, where a spider web that had been missed during the cleaning was slowly growing larger, as was the spider in it. He wasn't sure how many times he had asked the janitors to make sure they didn't miss that corner because from his seat at the table he could always see it.

He sighed. Perhaps it was time he had the old staff replaced. Just as he was getting up to make a pot of coffee at the cabinet in the opposite corner to the web, the door opened and a tall, slender woman with long legs and silky curls that were pulled back in a knot at the nape of her neck walked in. She was wearing classic black dress robes with a high-collared white blouse and grey pencil skirt beneath. She was the classiest and most attractive client he had ever had in his reasonably long career.

'Good morning, councilor,' she greeted, placing her briefcase in the chair that would be hers for the proceedings of the day.

He nodded briefly. 'Good morning, Ms. Granger. I trust that you are prepared for today's finalizations?' he replied, scooping some ground coffee into the bottom of the plunger before adding hot water.

'I have been ready for this divorce to be finalized for over a year now, Mr. Hetherington,' Hermione Granger replied crisply, brushing non-existent lint from her robes. 'I've been paying you to have this done quickly, and yet there have been far too many problems as far as I am concerned.'

Hetherington cleared his throat softly and pressed down slowly on the plunging device before carrying it over on a tray with cups, saucers, and a plate of biscuits. 'Yes, well, it has been made rather difficult by your former husband's dear lawyer, Miss Grey,' he said sheepishly.

'I don't care about that woman. I just want this over today and you will be ensuring that nothing happens to come up,' she stated curtly, accepting the coffee he poured for her and adding sugar and milk before taking a sip and sighing in relief. She had yet to consume a decent cuppa all day.

'Better?' Hetherington asked at the look of relief on her face.

'Much better, thank you,' she replied, taking another mouthful, managing to do it in such a way that still allowed her to drink gracefully. 'I apologise as you know I am rather unpleasant in the mornings until I've had a coffee.'

'That was why I made it, Madam,' he answered with a nod.

He looked at his watch and saw that it was already a quarter past nine. Ms. Granger's ex was late, not to mention his council. Tapping his foot a little impatiently as he took a sip from his own cup, he reached for a biscuit. At the rate his morning was going, he could end up being there all day. Five minutes later, however, the door opened once more and in walked Miss Grey and her client, Michael Williamson. The man was only slightly taller than Ms. Granger herself was and was of athletic build, wearing his Auror work robes with his dark blond hair swept back from his forehead.

He was a reasonably handsome man who was gainfully employed by the Ministry of Magic and who seemed to be rather the friendly sort, which was what had always confused Hetherington about the divorce. What on earth drove Hermione Granger to divorce her husband of five years, and even put herself through the one year of meetings, discussions, and papers as she had? Why would any witch divorce her husband in the first place? If he had been in Mr. Williamson's place, he would likely have fought and postponed the divorce the whole way too.

'Thank you for finally showing up,' Hermione said in greeting.

She was feeling extremely frustrated with Michael by this point. She had married him when she was twenty-two and fresh out of Healer training, and he had been twenty-nine. At twenty-seven years of age, she was ready to be out of her sham of a marriage and move on with her life. And yet all *he* wanted to do was make amends and try and keep their marriage going. Hermione was unsure as to whether it was because he truly felt for her or because he just didn't want to be single again.

She was confident that it was the second.

Their marriage had been after a whirlwind romance over a summer, a quick marriage with a small ceremony, and a honeymoon that had been intended to last a week, but only lasted two days because he had been called away on a mission. She was fairly sure that the first year had been okay, but after that, they had stayed together purely because they were comfortable with each other. She provided him with the social security he desired, and he gave her someone to take to the occasional function.

'We apologise for our lateness,' Michael said with a slight frown at the coldness of her tone. 'By the time we arrived at the building, it was surrounded by reporters, so as you can imagine, with or without magic it was a struggle to get inside.'

Hermione almost rolled her eyes. Michael, despite his protestations, loved media attention. He liked the spotlight, the fame, and being known. She knew the moment he had mentioned that there were reporters, that he had likely given them a little something to tide them through until the end of the proceedings to keep them interested in the outcome. That was one of her pet peeves when it came to him. She was still unsure what had driven her to marry him in the first place. He didn't even read books, nor did he have the same interests as she did!

'Forget about that, and let's just get on with this,' she said finally, impatience edging her tone. 'Some of us are actually going to work today and may possibly even have to save people's lives.'

Sensing an argument, Hetherington decided to intercept and do his job. After all, Ms. Granger was his client, and he was getting paid to do that kind of thing. 'Ah, yes, we will just need to have the finalized papers signed to sell your house and for the fifty-fifty split of everything you own,' he said, pulling out a thick stack of papers from his briefcase. 'And then all that will be left are the legally binding pages for the separation, and you will no longer be married.'

Michael chose at the moment to open his mouth once more. 'I'm not sure I like how this is going down,' he objected, his councilor nodding to him when he turned to look at her. 'I think this should be thought about a little... Okay, maybe not.'

He had suddenly changed his mind the moment Hermione drew her wand and pointed it at him right between his eyes. He knew exactly what she was capable of when she was pissed off, and he had no wish to be on the receiving end of it again. She sat back down once he stopped talking and pushed the stack of papers towards him, staring him down until he finally picked up a quill and began signing. His lawyer was rather quiet that day and was now simply pointing to where he needed to sign.

When he was finished, she signed the bottom of the final document as well before sliding it back across the table. 'I apologise for all of the delays,' she said quietly, tucking a lock of her short, mousy hair behind her ears. 'Good luck in the future, Ms. Granger.'

Hetherington gathered the papers together and looked them all over quickly before having Hermione sign the pages she needed to and signing the last page himself as a witness of the divorce. Pleased with the swiftness of the meeting, Hermione nodded at her ex-husband and his councilor, who took that as a dismissal, and left the room with their briefcases, promptly. With a small, relieved smile and a heavy sigh, she sat back in her seat, allowing herself to slump a little.

'Thank Merlin that's over,' she said softly, rubbing her temples with her thumbs. 'A year later and I'm back to being Hermione Granger.'

'I really do apologise for the delays, Ms. Granger. I would have kept it within six months, but it's difficult when facing an excellent councilor like Miss Grey,' Hetherington stammered.

Hermione waved him off and stood from her chair, picking up her briefcase. 'Thank you for all of your help, Mr. Hetherington. I expect you shall be receiving your final payment via direct wire to your vault at Gringotts,' she told him with a nod before exiting through the door she had entered.

She walked down the hall to the front door, where there would undoubtedly be a horde of reporters all lined up ready to ask her a million questions about her side of the story. It wouldn't do them any good, however. She was an expert at declining to comment and had been through enough press rubbish in her younger years after the defeat of Voldemort to last her an entire lifetime. Steeling herself, she finally pushed the front door open and walked out into the throng of flashing cameras and loud people shouting questions at her.

'Ms. Granger, is it true that you forced your husband to sign your divorce papers at wand point?' asked a short blonde witch after she had pushed past the cameras, holding a notebook in her hand.

Hermione kept her lips sealed shut and just shook her head, pushing against the crowd that was insistently trying to hold her back. She pointed her wand at her throat and amplified her voice just loud enough to talk over all of them. 'My husband and I are divorced, and that is all that I have left to say,' she said briskly before casting the charm to return her voice to normal and moving on again.

When they refused to move out of her way, Hermione drew her wand once more and pointed it directly at the people in front of her. 'If you will not move out of my way voluntarily, I will clear a path with my wand,' she said in a low, threatening voice, which instantly had people parting to create a path for her.

She pushed her wand back into the inner pocket of her robes before continuing on her way and heading to the nearest Apparation point. She reappeared inside the lobby at St. Mungo's and headed off in the direction of the lift to go up to her office on the fourth floor. She had been working in the long-term ward for two years and had been put in charge of an entire ward. As soon as the lift doors opened, she was inside, and not too long after, was walking out of it on her floor.

'Good morning, Healer Granger,' greeted her apprentice, a rather enthusiastic young woman by the name of Sophia Hargrove. 'Did you, ah... have trouble getting here this morning?'

Hermione sighed as she unlocked her office door and walked in, placing her briefcase on her desk. 'I had a little trouble, but nothing severe,' she answered, shrugging out of her dress robes and hanging them on the ornate coat stand in the corner. She grabbed her navy Healer robes from the stand then also, and slipped it on, buttoning the top-most buttons as usual.

'I suppose we can expect to read all about it in the *Evening Prophet*, then,' Sophia murmured as she handed her boss patient files and a clipboard.

Hermione nodded, walking back out of the office and down the hall, pausing at the end to look back at her short apprentice, with her ice blonde hair and the pink highlights through it. 'Your hair is that new?' she asked.

'Ummm, yes it is,' she answered a little nervously. 'I read the hospital policy and it didn't say anything about hair apart from making sure it is pulled back appropriately during work hours. Was I wrong?'

Hermione shook her head. 'There is no rule against colouring your hair,' she replied with a small smile. 'I was just going to say that it looks good on you.'

A relieved smile broke out on the younger witch's face. Hermione rolled her eyes and gestured for her to go ahead, following behind her into the first patient's room for their morning check-up.

Meanwhile, in a rickety house in the Scottish Highlands, a woman was staring out the window, watching as the rain poured down outside. 'Evan?' she asked softly, tracing a long blood-red nail over the glass.

'Yes, my lady?' the man named Evan answered.

'Did you get the story about Granger's divorce on the front page of the paper for the next week as I asked?' she asked him seriously.

'Yes, ma'am, it has all been arranged.'

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A/N OK, so I will not be posting the sequel for **The Headmaster** just yet, and decided to start another story in the meantime. This hopefully won't be too long, just something to fill in the time.

## Deliberation

*Chapter 2 of 17*

After her messy divorce, Hermione Granger finds that someone is trying to destroy her reputation. She seeks out the help of Severus Snape to help her find out who it is. Will their past relationship affect how they work together?

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Again, I must thank Alliean for the beta of this chapter - she is a gem.

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### Chapter 2: Deliberation

The picture on the front of the newspaper was overly large, to say the very least. It took up almost the entire page, save for the headline and the name of the newspaper. Hermione stared at the picture of herself raising her wand at the reporters and cameramen that had been standing outside the building on the day that the last of the divorce papers had been signed with Michael. It had been two weeks since that fateful day, and the papers were still alive with the gossip and conspiracies behind the divorce.

She sighed and tossed the paper across the table to Harry Potter, who was sitting there drinking his tea and taking a bite of his morning toast. Hermione had stayed overnight at his and Luna's house. The night before she had been practically pacing a hole into the floor, and after she had started muttering to herself, Luna had insisted that she stay and had led her up to one of the spare bedrooms and dosed her with Dreamless Sleep. Needless to say, she had been a tad ruffled in the morning because of it.

'Look at that, Harry,' she said with a hint of anger in her tone. 'It's in the paper yet again! I don't know how many times that picture has been recycled! I've lost bloody count! This is all getting rather absurd.'

Harry nodded. 'I don't know what to say, Hermione,' he replied slowly. 'I think that you should get someone to investigate this for you and find out who is behind all of the slandering in the papers.'

She nodded absently, examining her nails for a moment. 'I suppose that might be an idea,' she agreed. 'I've been getting all sorts of nasty mail at work and at home I can't even recall how many times I have had to light a fire and burn it all.'

'You really should consider my suggestion then,' Harry said, just as Luna walked into the kitchen with a small smile on her face.

'How are you this morning, 'Mione?' she asked, sitting down on the chair between her husband and Hermione.

'I could be better,' she muttered, drinking down a mouthful of her tea that had gone mostly cold because the post had arrived and she had gotten distracted reading the latest gossip. 'I could be divorced and happy, but instead I am divorced and being hounded by Merlin only knows who.'

Luna patted her hand sympathetically. 'It will work out in the end. Bad people rarely ever get away with bad deeds,' she said in a soothing voice.

Hermione nodded, and after finishing her tea and taking the empty cup to the sink, she Summoned her cloak to her and pulled it on, preparing to leave. 'I have to get home and get ready for work I have to start at noon today.'

Harry nodded, and both he and Luna stood and saw her to the door. 'I will look into the source of the articles and everything for you while I'm in at the office today,' Harry told her, referring to his office in the Auror's department in the Ministry.

Hermione nodded and Apparated once she was out the back door of their house. She reappeared in the sitting room of the house she had been sharing with her husband up until she had kicked him out over a year earlier. It was perfectly free of any remnants of his presence in the house, which was exactly the way she liked it. Her house was always the picture of perfection and was much lovelier without the rustic male touches of various items being strewn willy-nilly about the house.

Walking up the stairs, she entered the master bedroom and crossed into her bathroom, shedding her clothes and cloak from the day before and waving her hand in the direction of the shower to turn on the taps. She stepped under the spray when it was a reasonable temperature and let the water wash over her hair and body. After scrubbing her hair and soaping up her body, she rinsed off and got out after a few minutes, casting a drying charm on everything but her hair and tucking a towel around herself. She had no wish for her hair to dry out too much, and the drying charm did just that to it.

She sat down on the chair before her vanity and applied moisturizer to her long legs and calves, even rubbing some onto her arms to keep them smooth and supple. She combed her hair carefully before plaiting it into a long braid that hung down her back neatly. Then she finally dressed in her undergarments and went in search of what she would be wearing beneath her robes. She found a pair of black slacks and a white blouse, donning them both and putting on her Healer robes over the top.

Satisfied with her appearance, she slipped on her shoes and went to her study to grab her briefcase before Apparating to the main lobby as usual. She got into the elevator with a big group of people and managed to make her way to the back. Everyone else was headed to the third floor, and the last thing she wanted was to get pushed out by the crowd and end up waiting on that floor forever for the next elevator. The group took ages to scramble out, which tested her patience a little. However, she managed to smile the entire time and even wished them a pleasant day.

She got off on her floor and was immediately met by Sophia, who walked along next to her explaining an incident in her wing that had occurred an hour earlier that she had not been notified about. As if her day hadn't started off badly enough, and now she had someone that she needed to strangle because one of the Healers wasn't doing their job correctly. She frowned as she opened the door to her office and dropped her briefcase in, accepting the patient charts immediately and following Sophia down the corridor. She was supposed to be notified when there was an incident in her ward.

'Who told you that you were not to notify me?' she demanded of her apprentice as she walked down the hall, her shoes clicking sharply against the floor.

'It was Healer Burgess,' Sophia explained. 'I was banned from the room after the patient was taken inside, and I have only seen a peek of him since.'

Fuming, she stormed her way over to the room door, opened without bothering to knock, and stared around at everyone with her hands on her hips. 'I apologise for being late. I will endeavor to come in earlier next time,' she stated in a hard voice, not bothering to hide her annoyance at her staff members.

'Ah, Healer Granger,' Burgess said, flicking his wand to draw the curtains around the bed to hide the patient from her view. 'Please, come with me just outside. There are a few things that we would like to talk to you about concerning the patient inside. I just didn't think it would be prudent for you to be alerted until the authorities were on their way over here.'

Hermione grudgingly followed Burgess from the room and down the hall to the staff lounge. There were a couple of apprentices in there, who cleared out the moment they were waved away. Standing stiffly with her hands on her hips, she waited for Burgess to tell her exactly what was going on with the new patient. He sat down on one of the chairs and crossed his legs, taking his time. Hermione felt as though he was just doing it to annoy her. She was the Senior Healer on that floor, and everyone else was supposed to be working under her, not going over her head.

'I demand an explanation, Burgess,' she said curtly, not bothering to sit.

'It appears to me that the ah patient who we received an hour ago was someone who was formerly associated with you, so we thought it would be best to leave you out of it until the Aurors arrive to investigate,' he replied greasily.

Hermione frowned. 'You thought wrong, and I will be ensuring to note this mistake on your record,' she snapped, walking briskly from the room with her robes whipping around her dramatically.

She opened the door to the patient's room once more, and this time waved her own hand to move the curtain that was blocking her view. To her shock, Michael was lying on the bed, his eyes open and unfocused, and his breathing a little irregular and harsh. She noted that he was pale and sweaty, and that his veins were quite stark and almost green beneath his skin. And then she noticed the tattoo one that had never been there while they had still been living together. It looked to be relatively new and was a scarab beetle with a very poisonous quality to it.

'Make sure you analyze that tattoo you don't want to miss any traces of a possible dark spell,' she told Sophia, who nodded numbly at her.

Hermione walked down the hall, feeling a little uneasy. She had been so sure that her ex-husband had been one of the main sources behind all of the slander, and yet, he was there in the hospital, either having been poisoned or touched by a dark curse. He could have still been behind it. Just because he was in hospital now did not mean he wasn't behind it before. She sighed heavily and entered her office, dropping into her chair behind her desk heavily and leaning her head against her arms on the surface of the desk. Now that she could hear nothing beyond the door, she was painfully aware of the growing headache towards the back of her skull.

'Healer Granger?' piped Sophia from the small gap she created at the door.

'Come in,' she told her, waving her in and lifting her head from her arms. 'What do you have to tell me about why he is in here to begin with? Who found him and brought him, by the way?'

'A Miss Grey brought him in. She said she had found him in his kitchen passed out cold at the table,' the younger witch immediately replied. 'She said she had gone over there to finalize payments that he had not made to her, and that she thought he was dead she's in the waiting room just outside the ward.'

'Ah, that does sound like Michael not making payments on time, and then putting them off until I have to pull out my money and pay for it for him,' she said, before feeling a slight pang of guilt. He was in a bad way just down the hall from her, and she had the nerve to think like that?

She shook her head and dismissed Sophia, who was just opening the door to the office to leave, as Harry entered looking a little flustered, along with Kingsley Shacklebolt, who was the Head of the Aurors Department. Hermione indicated that they both be seated and signaled for Sophia to stay instead.

'How can I help you, Harry?' she asked.

'We were asked to come here by Healer Burgess to discuss the state of Michael Williamson,' Kingsley answered formally before Harry could reply. 'He seemed to be particularly insistent on it, and seeing as Williamson is one of my Aurors, it became something of a priority for our department. I hope you understand.'

'Of course,' she said simply. 'Now, I don't mean to be abrupt, but I have work to do, so please ask your questions, and I will answer as best I can.'

'Where were you between the hours of eight and ten this morning?' Kingsley asked seriously.

Hermione almost rolled her eyes. She knew she would become a suspect. 'I was at Harry and Luna Potter's house eating a late breakfast and reading the newspaper,' she answered plainly.

'Very well,' Kingsley said, writing in a notebook. 'Well, I suppose that is really all I had to ask. It seems like you have rather a busy day ahead of you.'

Hermione almost growled at him. He wasted her time just to ask her that? As he stood to leave, Harry gave her a smile and hugged her quickly before following his boss from the room. Sophia slipped out of the office without another word, leaving her to her own thoughts. She reached into the top drawer of her desk and withdrew a vial of headache potion, pulling out the stopper and downing it in one swallow.

'Fuck this,' she muttered under her breath, closing her eyes tight.

# Decisions

## Chapter 3 of 17

After her messy divorce, Hermione Granger finds that someone is trying to destroy her reputation. She seeks out the help of Severus Snape to help her find out who it is. Will their past relationship affect how they work together?

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A big hug of thanks must go to Madbrilliant for the beta of this chapter!

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### Chapter 3: Decisions

The halls of Hogwarts were quiet that night. On an ordinary night, there would be little miscreants running around all over the place, pulling pranks, planning misdeeds, or attempting to copulate in dark corners. Severus Snape hated nights like these where he was unable to take off house points. Taking out his personal frustrations on his students had always been very therapeutic for him, and by not having the chance to, he was likely going to wake up even fouler the next day.

He huffed silently to himself. Why couldn't they just come out of their common rooms for a few minutes? It would have made him feel so much better especially after the letter he had received earlier that evening. He had just been sitting down in his private study to do some marking for the fifth-year essays that had come in that day when an owl had begun tapping furiously on the window, demanding entrance to his domain. He had reluctantly let it inside, and the fact that he recognized the owl and gave it a treat before sending it off meant nothing at all.

Neither did the fact that he knew the owl belonged to Hermione Granger, even before he had seen her tidy, round cursive on the letter it carried. He knew because he had given her that owl on her 18th birthday, two months before she had graduated. He kept telling himself that he really didn't care that she had written to him. But he knew very well that he was just lying to himself and that he did care. Try as he may, Severus had been unable to ignore Hermione since she had graduated from Hogwarts. Hell he'd even had a tough time ignoring her as his student.

He sighed heavily, leaning against the windowsill of one of the windows on the fifth floor. It was a very cold night beyond the walls of the castle. Decidedly, he pulled the letter out of one of the pockets lining the inside of his robes and looked at the unbroken seal. He had yet to read it. Somehow, he was afraid that reading it would make him feel more pain than he was already feeling. He rubbed his thumb idly over the purple wax, smiling fondly for a moment at the all-too-familiar seal.

It had been her seal before her marriage to the Auror.

Shutting his eyes for a moment to block out the unwanted image of Hermione with that idiot ex-husband of hers, he flicked the seal with his thumbnail and unfolded the letter cautiously. Her familiar cursive made his chest constrict slightly, and he forced the emotions back down, determined not to allow his facial expressions betray him. Severus Snape could not be seen showing emotion in any way.

*Severus,*

*I need your help. I know that I am likely the last person you ever wanted to hear from again, but the honest truth is that I need you to help me. Ignore this letter if you like, but please finish reading it first.*

*I have been having rather a lot of trouble with the newspapers for the last three weeks or so, and it has slowly been coming to the point where I am feeling threatened enough to quit my job and become a recluse in the Muggle world. Okay, so maybe that's a stretch, but I am thinking about taking the long leave that I am owed by St. Mungo's, and I am planning to hunt down my foes, however many there may be. The owls and hate mail I receive each day has been getting bad, and since my former husband's admittance to St. Mungo's a week ago, it has only been getting worse.*

*Please, Severus I need your help. You are the best at tracking out of anyone I have ever known, and I know that if anyone could find these idiots, it would be you. Do consider it, and please owl me back your reply.*

*Sincerely,*

*Hermione J. Granger*

He rubbed a hand over his eyes. This was a lot more complicated than he had anticipated coming up against. She needed his help. Everything in him was leaning towards walking out of the castle and Apparating over to her the second he passed through the front gates. But his carefully restrained sense of self-control reigned in that desire. He would have to give it some thought. Even looking at the words on the page was causing pain. The thought of working so closely with her once more was both a daunting and thrilling prospect to him.

'Severus?' asked a soft voice from behind him.

The dark-haired man looked over his shoulder at his employer and friend, Albus Dumbledore. He schooled his face to a decided neutral and pushed away from the windowsill, walking over to the older man. 'What can I do for you this evening, Albus?' he asked wearily.

'Come to my office, my boy,' he commanded in a soft tone that left little room for argument. 'We'll have a nice, hot cup of tea and some cake.'

Severus rolled his eyes in at the irony of it. Of course Albus would show up at the exact time that he was having an inner emotional crisis. He swore the old coot knew more about what went on in the castle than the founders had when they had first built it. He did, however, follow the man grudgingly down to the fourth floor and up the stairs past the gargoyle guarding the office. Albus flicked his hand and the fireplace lit up, and Severus saw that tea things were already set out on the coffee table in front of the fire and in between the two armchairs there.

'Have a seat by the fire, my boy,' Albus directed.

Doing as he was bid, Severus then proceeded to pour tea for the both of them while Albus was over at his desk, fluffing around, and eyed the cake. In the end, he decided he did not want to risk choking on ancient fruitcake. The Headmaster soon joined him and immediately took a piece of cake, biting into it with the vigor of a Weasley male that had gone a few hours without food. Needless to say, Severus expressed a look of clear distaste before taking a sip of his black tea.

'I know why you asked me here, old man,' Severus growled softly. 'Don't think I do not know your game. I've been working for you for over twenty-five years, and I know

your methods. You are trying to force me to admit aloud something that you very well already know.'

'Whatever are you talking about, Severus?' Albus said with a smile on his face as he took a mouthful of his tea, having consumed his piece of cake.

Severus bit his lip. 'Damn you, Albus! You know I got a letter from Hermione, and I bloody well know that you know what it's all about!' he said angrily, his frustration becoming evident. 'You likely also know that I am extremely conflicted about this, and chose to purposely interrupt me while I was thinking about it to force me into this conversation with you.'

'Oh, you think you have it all figured out, my boy,' Albus said, shaking his head. 'You do, however, need to talk about this and get it out of your system. It's not good to bottle your feelings and emotions the way you have been.'

'Albus, what more do you want me to admit to you? That I was in love with Hermione Granger from the moment she returned to the castle for her seventh year? That we had a relationship for nearly two years after she graduated? Or is it possible that you would like to hear me admit that I am still very much in love with her?'

'That is your business,' Albus said softly. 'But I would like to know if you intend to help her out of the situation that she finds herself in.'

'You know I will,' Severus answered quietly. 'You know how I feel about her still I could never turn her away, no matter how much seeing her would hurt me.'

'She loved you a great deal, Severus,' he older wizard said.

Severus frowned. 'She was the one who left me, Albus,' he said gruffly, closing his eyes and pinching the bridge of his nose to chase away a headache. 'I...'

'You still love her very much, and seeing her suffer because of another man is causing you to want to protect her like you did when you were together,' Albus said simply.

'She's not weak not by any stretch of the imagination,' Severus commented blandly. 'She just needs help fining the people that are wronging her.'

'And you will find them and help her put them away,' Albus said seriously, setting down his empty teacup. 'Now, I think it is a reasonably late hour, and we ought to go to bed. I think that you have made Ms. Granger wait quite long enough for a reply from you, and I do believe your Lysander is eager for some exercise and a hunt tonight.'

Severus nodded and bid the Headmaster goodnight before Flooing directly from the office to the sitting room in his chambers. He went immediately to the study, wondering how Albus had managed to help him make up his mind in such a short time once again. It was always that way with him. Grabbing a sheet of parchment, he picked up his favourite quill, which just so happened to be the one Hermione had given him for Christmas the first year they had been together, and began to write.

After several attempts, he was finally happy with a letter, instantly crossed the study to his dark eagle owl, Lysander, and stroked his feathered head to wake him. 'Come now, I have a letter for you to take to Hermione,' he said as he coaxed the owl.

As soon as Hermione's name was mentioned, the owl hooted softly and stuck out a leg, opening his eyes fully. Severus knew he had been faking it. Tying the letter to his leg, he opened the window and let the owl launch off his arm and into the night. Lysander knew exactly where he was going. Shaking his head and smiling ruefully, Severus left his study and went to his bathroom, stripping off his robes, frockcoat, and shirt. He waved his hand to turn on the shower before dropping his trousers and kicking all of his clothing to the side along with his shoes and socks.

After showering and washing both his hair and body, he dried off and dressed in his long pajama bottoms, falling onto his bed. He closed his eyes and, not for the first time, fell asleep thinking about the woman he was in love with still. When he woke the next morning, he was in a slightly better mood than the night before, but he would still need at least two cups of coffee before he would be able to carry on a civil conversation with any of his colleagues.

He dressed in his customary black and went up to the Great Hall, sitting himself on Albus' side as usual, immediately reaching for the coffee pot. Albus was unsurprised by these actions and thankfully held off on talking until he had consumed half of the cup. It was a few sips into his second cup that Severus decided to pay attention to Albus' soft coughs to gain his attention.

'Are you coming down with something, Albus? Or are you just choking on your food?' he asked in a low, silky voice.

'Not at all,' Albus said with a jovial grin. 'Did Lysander enjoy his flight last night?'

Severus shrugged. 'I wouldn't know he has yet to return from his little jaunt in the countryside last night,' he muttered, stabbing his fork into the scrambled eggs on his plate idly.

'So, when can we expect her to visit?' he asked, not bothering to be the least bit discreet about the entire conversation.

As a consequence, Minerva's eyes turned to him curiously from Albus' other side. 'Who is coming here?' she asked, staring between the two of them looking for an explanation. 'Well, come on and just tell me before all of my hair turns silver.'

'Why, Hermione Granger, of course,' Albus said with a twinkle.

Severus almost groaned out loud from the look on her face and the way her jaw gaped open unattractively. 'Minerva, do close your mouth. It is not dignified for a woman of your distinction,' he said curtly, forking some eggs into his mouth and concentrating on chewing to block her out.

'You had better explain when she comes, Severus Snape,' she said with a huff.

He sighed and nodded reluctantly.

## Desperation

*Chapter 4 of 17*

After her messy divorce, Hermione Granger finds that someone is trying to destroy her reputation. She seeks out the help of Severus Snape to help her find out who it is. Will their past relationship affect how they work together?

Many thanks go to Sequana for the beta of this chapter :)

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#### Chapter 4: Desperation

The rain had just begun to beat down against the ground as Hermione began her hike up the hill to the castle. It was already dark out, even though it was only four in the afternoon, and she could barely see in front of her. She had already cast a Repelling Charm on her person to stop the rain from coming into contact with her and was hugging her arms around her body tightly to ward off the chill. Winter was just around the corner, and the icy rain beginning to fall at that time of year was a sign that the snow was not too far away. Huffing, she pushed on ahead half-heartedly.

Ever since Harry had suggested that she have someone look into who was behind the pushing of those articles, her life had gone pear-shaped. Originally, Harry had offered to look into it himself, but after coming up against too many walls, and having to follow the Auror's code, he had suggested another alternative for her.

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*'Hermione, I'm really sorry about this,' Harry said with a sigh, standing from his office chair and walking around his desk to her.*

*'It's fine, Harry,' she said, waving it off.*

*'No, it's not fine. I owe you an explanation at the very least,' he insisted. 'I have been restricted by so much red tape here, and trying to find the person behind all of this shit has been hard. Kingsley pulled me aside today and told me to be careful and not to push my luck or he'd have to take me off fieldwork and put me at a desk.'*

*Hermione took her best friend's hand between both of hers and gave it a squeeze. 'I don't care about that, Harry you need to look out for your job first,' she assured him calmly. 'I don't want you getting into any trouble here at the Ministry because of me.'*

*'You know private investigators don't have the same restrictions as Aurors do,' he murmured carefully, his green eyes very nearly lighting up as a thought occurred to him. 'Actually, I can think of someone who would be even better for the job than that... but, oh you won't like my idea...'*

*Hermione sighed. 'Go on and tell me anyway anything would be better than seeing myself on the front page of the paper for the rest of the month,' she told him.*

*'There is only one person I can think of who could track anyone and I literally mean anyone down,' Harry said seriously. 'Severus Snape.'*

*Hermione looked up into his eyes and gave him a look, her cinnamon eyes flashing dangerously and her lips pinching together tightly. She abruptly dropped his hand and walked a couple of steps away from him, her back becoming straight. Harry, realizing what he had just said, looked down at his feet, scratching the back of his head. She sighed heavily and sank down into the chair in front of him.*

*'You know very well that I can't ask him to do this for me,' she said softly. 'And bringing him up at a time like this was a stupid thing to do. It will only make things worse than they already are.'*

*'How?' he asked.*

*'Harry I haven't spoken directly to him for nearly seven years! He surely hates me after everything that happened,' she said, her frustration becoming apparent.*

*'Hermione, trust me when I say that he is your best chance of catching the bastards who are doing this to you and who put Michael into St. Mungo's,' the dark-haired man said firmly. 'And he may well be the one who will be able to help you the most with figuring out what happened to Michael and help you to find a cure.'*

*Hermione frowned and went silent. She knew what Harry was saying was true, but she couldn't help but feel conflicted. Two years before she had married Michael, she had been in a clandestine relationship with Severus Snape. She had started seeing him shortly after graduating from Hogwarts, and they had managed to keep it low-key so that nobody except for Albus, Minerva, Harry and Luna had known about it. It had been going extremely well between the two of them until Hermione had admitted to him that she was in love with him.*

*She had wanted to hear the words back. She had desperately wanted to know that he felt the same for her. But he had not said a word. He had simply carried on as usual, and every time she had thought he was going to repeat the words back to her, and he did not, was another time she felt her heart break. She had desperately wanted to marry him and have a family with him. But he had remained silent and closed off and her hope was crushed and buried with his silence. That had been when she had broken things off with him, and she hadn't spoken to him since.*

*'I'll have to owl him, then,' she said, blowing out a breath of air. 'But he's not going to like it, and he'll probably just burn the letter anyway.'*

*'You might be surprised,' Harry said mysteriously.*

--

Hermione had sent a letter to Severus later that afternoon and spent the whole night until she had gone to bed fretting over it. She had assumed that he had burned her letter the moment her owl, Lena, had delivered it. So, when she heard the tapping on her window at around midnight, she had been totally shocked to find that his owl was waiting for her to open it and let him in. Needless to say, she happily fed the dear, affectionate thing and sat him in her study with Lena for the rest of the night. He deserved a rest after the long journey.

The letter had been very brief just like Severus had always been. He had simply told her to come to Hogwarts on Friday afternoon to discuss her problem. So there she was, trudging through the rain, feeling miserable and cold, not to mention pissed off at the fact that she even had problems in the first place that she needed his help with. To be honest, she still felt a twinge of hurt whenever she thought about him, which was not exactly conducive to a working relationship.

She paused for a moment, looking up ahead to see that the castle was still quite a distance away and almost groaned until she saw a vague figure walking towards her in the rain. It was like a tall, dark shadow that kept getting taller, and before she knew it, Severus Snape was standing right in front of her in all his black-clad glory. He was wearing only his frock coat with his long black winter coat over the top instead of his teaching robes and had his customary scowl set in place. He produced an umbrella and pressed it into her hands quickly.

*'I cast a charm on it to keep you dry and warm,' he said shortly. 'Hurry and follow me; it's far too cold to dally.'*

Hermione followed obediently, mentally reminding herself that she was in his territory now and that she was the one looking for favours. Although, she had to admit that his reception was as icy and devoid of emotion as she had expected it to be. She had hardly imagined he would take her into his arms and kiss her senseless before declaring his undying love for her. Snorting mentally at that unlikely image, she hurried to keep up with him, and soon enough they reached the castle.

*'We'll talk in my office, and both Minerva and Albus asked me to extend an invitation to dinner to you,' he said as they walked briskly past a few students milling about the Great Hall.*

*'Very well,' she said softly, making a note that those were the two words she had chosen to utter to him for the first time in far too long.*

They descended into the depths of the dungeons, going straight into his office after he had un-warded it. Hermione noted that the wards had not changed at all since the week that she had left him. She found this rather odd, considering he used to change them once a fortnight to not change the wards at all for seven years was an unusually long length of time for him. Well, it was for the Severus that she had come to know and love. This Severus, while appearing to be very much the same man, might have been a different one from the man she had fallen for. It was, after all, seven years later.

'Have a seat,' he told her, indicating the chair across from his own at his large oak desk. It was the oak desk that she had picked for him the day they had gone shopping in Hogsmeade for one. 'I believe you wanted to discuss something with me?' he asked once he was seated on the other side of the desk.

She nodded. 'As I said in the letter I have come up against a spot of trouble with the papers, my divorce, and someone who is trying to destroy everything I have been working for in the last few years,' she said quickly. 'Harry can't help because he is an Auror and his job is on the line, and everyone else I looked at was nowhere near qualified enough to take on my task.'

'And you thought that I would be better suited to such a thing?' he drawled, that damn eyebrow of his arching up in a way that made her feel a little flustered.

'Actually, Harry was the one who suggested you first,' she said quietly. 'I hadn't thought of it. I assumed you would be too busy or reluctant to have any part of it.'

'It is true that I can be rather busy - but as the school term before the Christmas break is drawing near to its end, I find that there is a little more free time available,' he said simply, hoping that she would pick up on what he meant from there. 'Marking for student end-of-term exams will not begin until the first week of the break, as you may recall.'

Hermione felt his last comment sink into her with all the pain that a double-edged sword would cause. She recalled very well, of course. There was once a time that she would help him with the marking of those exams, and then there were the other times when she would be attempting to coax him away from his marking and tempt him into more pleasurable activities in his bedroom. She missed those times with him a lot. She bit her lip, casting away those thoughts quickly.

It was the last thing she needed lingering in her head for him to see if he decided to slip in for a look around.

'Does that mean you are willing to assist me with my media problems?' she asked slowly.

'I suppose it does,' he replied quietly, letting his eyes glance over at the clock on his mantle. It was twenty minutes until dinner by then. 'Taking leave from St. Mungo's might be a suggested course of action if you want this to go faster. I can get you access to the Hogwarts Library for you to research the curse that your former husband is suffering under, and my assistance to you will be limited to afternoons, nights that I am not on patrol and weekends.'

'Do you know what has caused him to become the way he has?' she asked him curiously, wondering how extensive his knowledge of dark spells was.

He shook his head. 'Not yet. The very little knowledge I do have consists of the few snippets of truth in the drivel that has been splashed across the newspapers for the last few weeks,' he answered automatically. 'You really have managed to cause quite a fuss, Ms Granger.'

Hermione scowled at that. 'It's not as though you've never been on the front page of a newspaper before,' she said in her most curt and businesslike tone.

'True. However, you fail to remember that I was on the cover for something far more nefarious than what you are being accused of,' he retorted, unable to keep the snark out of his tone.

Hermione crossed her arms and stood, a deep frown forming. 'You're still a prick, I see,' she snapped, walking to the door to leave. 'I'll go up to the Great Hall early.'

And with that, she walked out and let the door slam on the way.

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A/N - Another chapter down. So what do you think? Please **review!!!**

## Darkness

### *Chapter 5 of 17*

After her messy divorce, Hermione Granger finds that someone is trying to destroy her reputation. She seeks out the help of Severus Snape to help her find out who it is. Will their past relationship affect how they work together?

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A big hug of thanks to Sequana for beta-ing this chapter for me.

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### Chapter 5: Darkness

St. Mungo's had been rather put out when Hermione had applied for her long-service leave. They were going to have a hard time filling in her position for six months with someone anywhere near as competent as she was. However, despite their reluctance to let her go for that long, they agreed that she had been working there for a significant time without having taken any holidays prior to the one she was requesting, and therefore deserved a break. Hermione had used the stress that she had been suffering from as a result of the newspaper articles and non-direct attacks on her as another plausible excuse for taking leave.

She had been on leave for just over a week by this point and had Apparated to Hogwarts to do some research no less than five times during that period. Not only was she sick of going back and forth between the school and her home, she was also sick of the mail that the general public continued to bombard her with. She received the owls even at Hogwarts and had been sent as many letters that contained hexes as she had Howlers. Each and every single one was another embarrassment.

Madam Pince, for her part, had been very sympathetic to Hermione and, as she had always admired the former Head Girl, had readily agreed to grant her access to the Library whenever she needed it. Hermione, in return, took care of the Library when the librarian went on a break or had to go away for the day. That day, Madam Pince had to go on a trip overseas to visit a relative of hers, so Hermione was seated at the front desk doing her research while simultaneously maintaining order.

'Ms Granger?' asked a voice from before her at the desk.



Hermione looked up to see that a student was standing there waiting for her. It was a small, rather skinny and awkward-looking girl with wire-rimmed glasses and mousy hair tied in plaits. 'How can I help you?' she replied.

'Oh, my friends and I were wondering if you would sign these for us,' she murmured softly, pushing a stack of newspaper clippings towards her.

Hermione instantly went on guard, thinking that it had to be some sort of practical joke, but as soon as she took a better look, she saw that the articles were, in fact, from back after the end of the Final Battle. In the pictures, she was still eighteen years old and smiling cheerfully, standing between her two best friends in most of them. She couldn't help but to grin at the young girls then, and signed their articles quickly, until she came to the very last one. It was a photo of the entire Order. She was standing in the background slightly, and right behind her was Severus, who had a blank expression on his face.

Nobody knew it, but the only reason why Hermione had been smiling for that photo in particular was because he had been discreetly rubbing one of his hands over her back to encourage her. He had whispered for her to smile for him, and she had, brighter than she ever had before. Little did anyone know either, that in all of the photos where she could be found smiling, it was because she could always see Severus watching her and waiting for her to finish and go home with him.

She felt tears well up in her eyes at the thought, but quickly blinked them away and swallowed, signing the last article and sending the girls on their way. She closed the doors and locked them for lunchtime, not caring that she would be depriving the know-it-alls of the school of their lunch domain. They could all use a walk around the castle anyway. She closed her eyes and rubbed her temples, wondering why thinking about Severus was affecting her so. She had moved on from him years ago – surely it was supposed to have stopped hurting by now.

Sighing heavily, she stood from her seat and left the library, heading down to the Great Hall to get something to eat. Some food would likely make her feel better, and this way she had a chance to catch up with Minerva and Albus. She had been so busy confining herself to the Library that she hardly saw anyone save for Madam Pince, Severus, and the occasional student. On arriving, she walked to the staff table and went immediately to her former Head of House and the Headmaster.

'Hermione, I am so glad you decided to join us!' Minerva exclaimed cheerfully. 'I was worried that you wouldn't be coming down for lunch again today.'

Hermione smiled at the older woman. 'I wouldn't miss it for the world,' she said, causing the Deputy Headmistress to beam at her. 'Irma is away, so I was taking care of the library for her. I just thought I would take a short break while the students are all down here eating before heading back up.'

'Hermione, you are not obliged to stay in the library at all times while you are relieving Irma of her duties,' Albus said softly, reaching out and patting one of her hands. 'Now, take a seat and have something to eat. There is no need for rushing.'

She obeyed without question, knowing that arguing with Albus was as pointless as, or even more so than, arguing with Severus himself. Taking the empty chair beside Minerva where Irma Pince usually sat, she helped herself to some sandwiches and pumpkin juice and began to eat contentedly. Five minutes into lunch, the staff door opened, and Hermione saw Severus walk in. His voluminous robes brushed against her back slightly as he strode past, which caused her to sit up straighter in her seat. Being around him again was frightening and disconcerting.

'So, Hermione. I have not had a chance to ask you what has brought you to Hogwarts,' Minerva said, her voice lilting and just loud enough for Severus to hear.

Hermione resisted the urge to groan at Minerva's obvious question. The old cat just wanted to hear her say it. 'Well, as you know very well, there has been a lot of negative press about me all over the papers in recent times, and it has been causing rather a lot of grief for me and the people around me,' she said slowly. 'This has also resulted in the incapacitation of my ex-husband and has thus resulted in my coming here. I asked Professor Snape to assist me in the task of discovering my tormentors and in finding a cure for Michael.'

That being said, she returned to the task of eating her food, aware of the three pairs of eyes gazing at her. Severus' gaze was felt worse than the other two. She could feel his eyes burning a hole in the side of her head. He must despise her so. But really – the only one he could blame for the failure of their relationship was himself. It was his fault for letting her walk out the door. It was his fault for not following her and asking her to reconsider. But she knew that Severus would never see it that way. He had a way of twisting the story around in his mind and warping it to mean something different.

What Hermione did not know, however, was just how wrong she was.

Severus sat stiffly in his seat, staring down at his plate, occasionally casting glances in Hermione's direction, not feeling even so much as an ounce of hatred for her. His chest ached from their close proximity, and he felt the defensive ice creep into his eyes, trying to protect himself from being found out. How pathetic she would think he was if she ever found out just how much he was still in love with her? Clenching his fist around his goblet, he felt a slight give before the force of his grip shattered it. He stared down at the blood beginning to dribble down his wrist, soaking the white sleeve of his shirt that peaked from his black frockcoat, which was also wet, undoubtedly with his own blood.

He looked around him sharply and saw that more than the staff were looking at him and that the students nearest to the staff table had also heard and seen what he had done to the glass. Growling in the back of his throat, he stood up abruptly, releasing the remnants of the goblet that were not imbedded in his flesh. He pushed his chair back, sweeping out of the hall through the staff door. Severus felt himself grow warm with embarrassment at losing control of himself that way – especially with some of his own students witnessing it.

He went to the hospital wing where, luckily, Poppy Pomfrey had decided to dine that lunch hour. 'Poppy, I am in need of your assistance,' he said abruptly, bursting into her office.

She jumped out of her chair when she had heard his voice barking at her. 'Oh, Severus, what on earth have you done to yourself now?' Poppy fussed in a motherly way, tugging him to sit on her office chair and unbuttoning the cuffs of his shirt and coat to gain better access to his wound.

'I broke a goblet at lunch,' he explained meekly, not bothering to make any excuses. Poppy had known him since he was eleven years old and had healed him more times than he could count or remember. She had been like a mother to him – especially since his fourth year when his own mother had passed away from a Muggle disease called tetanus. 'I figured you would do a better job than I would.'

'Well, at least you had enough sense to come up here to see me,' she huffed, setting to work on carefully removing the glass with a spell. 'How on earth did you manage to break the goblet?'

'I lost control of myself,' he said quietly, the both of them silently acknowledging his restrained power. He was physically and magically more powerful than most, and often had to hold back in order for people or objects to remain whole. 'I just held the glass too tightly when I was distracted with other thoughts.'

Poppy clucked her tongue. 'You, my dear boy, have to learn how to multitask,' she told him seriously. 'We can't have you off with the faeries and in the meantime destroying more of the castle.'

He frowned at her reminder of all the walls he had blasted holes through and the doors he had blown off the hinges throughout the castle. Albus personally did not mind so long as he fixed the damage afterwards, but it still scared the hell out of people when it happened. Hermione, however, in their time together, had never once shown even so much as a hint of fear of his strength and powers. This, in part, was because Hermione Granger was powerful in her own right, and one of the most remarkable students to have ever passed through the halls of Hogwarts.

He watched as the last of the glass was spelled out of his hand and then allowed Poppy to wash and heal it seamlessly, leaving no trace of a scar to be seen. She was always a professional when it came to her field of work. He could not have done anywhere near as good a job. He sighed and stood from the chair, letting his healed hand rest on Poppy's shoulder, giving it somewhat of an affectionate squeeze.

'Thank you, Poppy,' he said, bestowing a small, uneasy smile on her.

She smiled back at him warmly, pleased to see that this dark, troubled young man still had enough in him to do so. 'Tell me, Severus, what it is that troubles you so?' she asked kindly, reaching out and embracing him in a motherly way.

'Don't let it worry you,' Severus told her quietly, locking his emotions away once more and standing up rigidly. 'I will deal with it on my own.'

The nurse shook her head. 'It is not good to bottle things up, Severus. You need to talk to people,' she informed him, sounding very much like Albus did.

He nodded and walked out of her office, moving towards the doors to leave the hospital wing. On reaching the doors, he ran into someone and was about to snarl at them, but felt the words catch in his throat when he stepped back and saw that it was Hermione. She had an expression on her face that he could not read. He found reading her now more difficult than it had been in the past. This Hermione was definitely a woman.

'Are you alright?' she asked, sounding a little breathless.

'I don't believe that is any of your business, Ms Granger,' he said coldly, stepping to the side and brushing past her, chest aching painfully as he did.

Hermione spun around and watched him leave, gaping and feeling the tears well up in her eyes. She felt a light pressure on her elbow and looked to see Poppy standing beside her.

'Don't let it concern you, dear. He's just being himself,' she said gently.

Hermione shook her head. 'I have to work with him and I don't know what to do,' she said softly, a single tear making the crooked journey down one of her cheeks.

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A/N Another chapter down, and more to come soon! Please don't forget to review!

## Dilemma

*Chapter 6 of 17*

After her messy divorce, Hermione Granger finds that someone is trying to destroy her reputation. She seeks out the help of Severus Snape to help her find out who it is. Will their past relationship affect how they work together?

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### Chapter 6: Dilemma

The clock in the hallway downstairs struck one in the afternoon, sounding all the way up the stairs and into the library. Hermione sighed at this and began piling her notes into her briefcase, snapping it shut with the ease of practice and walking with it down the stairs. On reaching the coat hooks in the hall, she grabbed her black robes and shrugged into them, buttoning them at the top and then Apparating away. She reappeared at the Hogwarts gates where a light shower of rain was falling. Her sigh was heavy as she started the trek back up to the castle.

Even though she was sick of travelling back and forth, she found that Severus' help so far had been invaluable. He had become important to her research with the potion to cure Michael and had even managed to contact an old colleague of his who dealt with the Ministry to assist them in finding leads for the other search. Wrapping her arms tighter around her body, she walked onwards, the castle looming closer as she did. On reaching the doors, she entered and headed straight for the Dungeons.

She knocked on the door to Severus' office. It was quiet, and the halls were empty due to the fact that it was both Saturday and a Hogsmeade weekend. Hermione heard a muffled voice beckon her inside, and she opened the door, slipping inside to find Severus sitting at the desk, head bent down as he marked the essay in front of him. He looked up briefly when she cleared her throat to gain his attention and gestured for her to sit down before looking back at the essay and marking a red cross on it.

'Albus and Minerva asked me to suggest you take a room here,' he said, not bothering to look up at her as he spoke. 'There are a few empty chambers on the fourth and fifth floor that can be cleaned and furnished should you decide to stay.'

'Oh,' she exclaimed softly, feeling a little awkward. She was about to nervously clasp her hands in her lap when she realized that he was looking at her. 'Well, I suppose I will have to head up to see Albus about that some time today.'

'Yes,' he said curtly. 'I apologise, but I have only a few essays left. I should be finished in about half an hour or so, and then I will be free to assist you. I have a few interesting ideas for the search for your tormentor.'

Hermione's interest was peaked by that. 'What ideas do you have?' she asked.

'If you have been sent any direct mail from the person, it could be helpful when used with the correct tracking spells,' he murmured as he marked another red cross on the essay. 'If the parchment has picked up anything in its initial vicinity, like a seed or something similar, it is possible that we will be able to track it back to the area it is from.'

Hermione felt a smile lift the corners of her mouth. She was intelligent but Severus was on a whole different level of intelligence than most. His brain went faster than that of anyone else she knew not even Albus Dumbledore would have come up with such a plan so quickly. As soon as the smile formed, however, it was gone again. The last thing she needed was for him to see that she wasn't over him; she knew for certain by that point that she had never truly gotten over the man.

She swallowed and nodded silently, standing from the chair. 'That is a good idea,' she said, holding back the thanks she wanted to give him for his ingenuity. 'I'll j-just go up and see Albus about those rooms.'

As she walked through the door, Severus sighed out a deep, shaky breath. One of his hands went into his hair while the other covered his eyes as he sat back in the chair, tilting his head backwards. Being in the same room as her was maddening and delicious all at the same time. His heart felt like it was about to beat out of his chest and throw itself in her lap as a sacrifice. His screwed his eyes together even tighter, willing the images of her face out of his head.

Thumping his closed fist back onto his desk, he opened his eyes and stared down at the essays before him. They weren't going to get finished with him just sitting there, so he picked up his quill and got back to work, pleased to have something to distract him from his thoughts. He was finished in a little over half an hour and left his office to go in search of Hermione, wondering what had become of her during the time since she had left his office. He went up to Albus' office and knocked on the door.

'Come in, Severus, my boy,' Albus called.

Severus rolled his eyes, pushed the door open and walked in to see Minerva, Poppy and Hermione sitting in the chairs before Albus' desk with the old man himself seated on the other side. Grumbling, he entered the office and pulled the door closed behind him, taking the spare seat beside Hermione the only seat that was left. It just figured that it would be the only place for him to sit.

'Has it been decided as to whether or not Ms Granger will be staying in the castle or not?' he asked, looking around at all of them.

'Hermione has agreed to stay in the spare set of quarters on the fourth floor for the duration of your research,' Albus answered for the young woman, who simply nodded curtly. 'She will be bringing her things over when she returns to us tomorrow.'

'Very well,' Severus murmured quietly before turning to Hermione to address her. 'Are you still agreeable to discovering if this tracking spell might work?'

Hermione nodded, and after bidding goodbye to the three older people in the room, she left the office with Snape and walked down the hall to the nearest staircase. On reaching his office once more, she opened her briefcase and pulled out a stack of letters that had not been burned. She tossed them in front of him on the desk and sat down in the chair across from him. He picked up the stack and untied the yarn around it, opening up some of the letters and running his wand over them.

'There are some grass seeds here, and we should be able to cast the charm over them to enable us to Apparate to the location from which they came,' he murmured, using a pair of tweezers to pluck a couple of the seeds from the letter and place them on the desk in front of him.

'Well, I suppose we could get that done with this afternoon and just hope that, somehow, wherever it takes us will lead us to the people we're tracking,' she said, poking idly at the seeds with her wand.

Severus picked his wand up and spelled a sheet of parchment to turn into an envelope, dropping the seeds inside before standing and walking around the desk. 'Right, then let's get a move on,' he said gruffly, offering her a hand to haul her out of the seat. Once she was on her feet, he released the hand and turned his back on her to walk towards the door. 'We can take the dungeon exit and Apparate from the edge of the forest.'

Hermione felt her anger flare slightly, watching his back as he strode out of his office. He was just so bloody arrogant, and it drove her crazy. It was just another thing to add to the list of reasons for her not to like him. However, her heart was treacherous, and she still found herself drawn to him in a way that she could not logically explain. This lack of reason was something that was so foreign to her, considering that she was a woman who had been born and raised to think logically. Perhaps that was how she knew that she was in love with him because she couldn't explain it.

Dutifully, she followed him out the door, closing and warding it behind her. She knew those wards like she knew her own. He walked briskly ahead of her, forcing her to lengthen her stride in order to keep up with him. Luckily for her, she was not such a short person herself and her legs were long enough that she didn't need to struggle to maintain a fast pace. When they reached the end of the hall, they walked through yet another warded door and, once that door shut behind her, were plunged into darkness. This was one of the strange halls in the castle one that could not be lit by either magical or Muggle means.

'Take my hand, and I will lead the way,' he said, pushing his hand against her and accidentally brushing her stomach. 'The hall cannot be lit I assume you understand why.'

Hermione nodded, then realised he wouldn't have seen. 'Of course, sir,' she said, sounding sarcastic. Severus smirked, knowing that his sarcasm must have rubbed off on her at some point. She had never been that sarcastic as his student.

He grunted softly in reply and walked ahead confidently. He knew the hall like he knew his own chambers. It had been the exit he had needed to use to Apparate from the castle in order to attend Death Eater meetings as a spy. They walked in silence, and Severus revelled in the feel of her smaller, slender hand clasped within his own. It thrilled him beyond imagining, being able to touch her at all.

'We are nearly there,' he informed in a gentle tone that caused her stomach to do a turn.

She hated it when he threw her off-balance that way. 'Have you ever considered tapping into the magic in the stones of the castle and altering them so this hall can be lit?' she asked quietly, as though being in darkness signified the need to whisper.

'I don't have a need to use this hallway much these days,' he murmured, releasing her hand and putting both of his on the bolt of the door in front of him.

With a sturdy tug, it came free and opened to the overcast afternoon. They walked down a narrow pathway that led to the edge of the forest and walked in. If anyone had been looking out the window, it was unlikely that they would see what was happening. Once hidden by the foliage, he pulled the envelope with the seeds out of his pocket and drew his wand from its place tucked beneath his sleeve.

'*Positus Locus*,' he murmured, touching his wand to the seeds before grabbing her around the waist without warning her and Apparating them while the seeds were still glowing gold.

They reappeared in a vast grass field, the sky darkened by clouds and the long grass being blown about wildly by the wind. Hermione was still startled and trembled a little from being so taken by surprise when Severus had pulled her to him. He could feel her shaking slightly, but knew she was alright when she shrugged her arm out of his grip and began to look around. Snape decided that it was safe to do so himself and turned around. He immediately found his attention diverted back to her and the direction she was looking in at Hermione's sharp intake of air.

There was an old, rickety-looking shack that sat at the light crest of a hill with an apparent cliff nearby. The ocean was obviously at the bottom of the cliff, as the wild waves could be heard crashing against the rocks. Hermione drew her wand and began a cautious approach towards it with Severus walking right beside her, his wand also drawn. The shack didn't look particularly dangerous, but appearances were often a deceiving thing.

'Doesn't really look like the kind of place people would inhabit, does it?' she asked Severus, looking to him from the corner of her eye.

'Sometimes places such as these are the ones that people who are plotting things that are not exactly legal go to,' he murmured, looking back at her, and for the first time in a long time, their eyes actually met and held.

'Did you ever?' she asked softly, afraid of prying.

'Yes, I did,' he said curtly, his armour reasserting itself. He hated to be constantly reminded of the kind of man he had once been. Inwardly, however, he knew that it would always be a small part of him at least.

Hermione heard the tone of his voice change and pushed aside the feeling of hurt before walking up to the nearest window. She peered in and saw that it was empty. Growling softly in frustration, she walked to the front door and pushed it open easily before striding over to the table and picking up a letter with her name on it. She turned back to Severus, who stood in the doorway, and showed him the letter.

Someone was playing a very serious game with her.

# Dreamless

## Chapter 7 of 17

After her messy divorce, Hermione Granger finds that someone is trying to destroy her reputation. She seeks out the help of Severus Snape to help her find out who it is. Will their past relationship affect how they work together?

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Many thanks to Sequana for the beta of this chapter.

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### Chapter 7: Dreamless

The dream had started off quite normally, depicting a scene and some people, all of them pontificating on the weather and conversing. It was only towards the end of it, just before she woke up, panting and sweating, that Hermione had seen an image of Severus lying dead at her feet, his lifeless eyes staring up at her. Over the last few days, she had been having a similar dream every night. She was tired because she was afraid to sleep for fear of having the nightmare once more. Groaning, she hauled herself from her bed, still trembling slightly as she made her way towards the bathroom to wash her face. The stone floor was freezing, and she hurriedly Summoned her slippers and stuffed her feet in them before rushing off to the bathroom.

She turned on the tap and splashed some water up onto her face before grabbing a washer and patting her face dry. She stared at her reflection, taking note of the dark circles beneath her eyes along with a slight thinness of her face. The stress she had been put under lately was getting to her. Sighing heavily, she left the bathroom, grabbing her thick, white bathrobe on the way and pulling it over the top of her flannel pyjamas. She then went to her sitting room and tossed some Floo powder into the fireplace. Stepping in, she called out for Severus Snape's office.

If she wasn't going to get any sleep, then the very least she could do was use the time productively and check up on the experimental potions they had brewing in his lab in the dungeons. One of the resulting potions was bound to be a cure for Michael's comatose state. Then, as soon as he was awake, Hermione would be able to question him about the people who had actually cursed him. She hoped, however, to discover the identities of her tormentors before having to resort to that.

Standing back from the last cauldron lined up on the bench, she removed the stasis on it and cast a charm to ignite a flame beneath it, setting it to simmer. Satisfied that everything was in order, she moved herself to one of the side benches and sat down on a stool there, Summoning the Potions journal she shared with Snape and a stack of parchments to her. The parchments in question happened to be all of the letters she had accumulated from her tormentors. It had been over a month since the first one had arrived by owl post to her, and there had been several more since then, including the one that she had found in the shack up in the Scottish Highlands.

*Hermione Granger,*

*No doubt you are wondering why I have decided to leave you a note. My only answer to you is this may this letter torment you for as long as it can, as a reminder to you that you are not as intelligent as everyone believes you to be. It appears that you were simply too slow this time and likely will continue to be. Without the help of Snape, you would never have found this.*

*Don't take this the wrong way, Granger just be aware that there are those that can outwit you still. Keep up the search although I doubt it will do you any good.*

'Does that letter bother you?' a silky voice asked from just over her shoulder.

She spun around on the shiny seat of the stool and saw that Severus was standing there, wearing trousers and a white linen shirt that was partially unbuttoned at the top. His arms were crossed over his chest, and he looked just as he always had during the days when they had still been together. He was so dashing and handsome to her that way, and her fingers itched to trace a line down his throat before pressing her palm to his chest beneath his shirt. The move used to make him shiver with arousal.

'How could it not bother me?' she asked meekly, running a nervous hand through her curls. 'We were just so close...'

He nodded simply. 'It bothers me also that they managed to get away from that place before we arrived,' he said, plucking the letter from her hand. 'But reading that letter over and over is unlikely to make you feel any better.'

She nodded. 'I know it only makes it worse, but I can't help but think that there is some truth to what they wrote. I would never have thought to go there at all had it not been for your help.'

'Don't be ridiculous,' he snapped, picking up the journal and flicking through it idly as he addressed her without looking at her once more. 'The magical theory was simply something I stumbled upon accidentally anyone could have figured it out. It was a simple matter of deductive reasoning.'

'There is nothing simple about that,' she muttered, looking across at the potions, listening to the soft bubbling sounds of their simmering.

Snape remained silent, knowing that argument would be useless. Hermione, when her mind was set, was someone rather stubborn to come up against. But he loved her just the way she was. She looked so vulnerable sitting there on the stool, seeming downcast and low about herself. He felt a bubble of anger surge through him at the thought of her sadness. He would make the people who were doing this to her pay. He sighed heavily and picked up the stack of letters, placing them back on a shelf out of her sight for the time being. The last thing anyone needed was her to sulk all night and get very little of their important work done.

'What are your plans for tomorrow?' she asked him suddenly as he was stirring and checking the temperature of the first potion.

'I will be making the potions to restock them for Poppy and the hospital wing,' he answered, cleaning and then poking the stirring rod into the next potion and casting the charm on it to read the temperature. 'Why do you ask?'

'I was going to take a break in the afternoon and go into Hogsmeade for a drink I was just wondering if you would accompany me or something,' she answered, looking a little sheepish at her request.

Severus felt his stomach do a flip, but he controlled his expression to remain as impassive as ever. 'I... might have some time free tomorrow afternoon,' he said a little

stiffly. 'It all depends on whether I get the potions for Poppy done on time. Perhaps I could get some more work done on these potions as well,' he added, gesturing around.

Hermione sighed and nodded. 'Okay, well, perhaps I can help you with the potions for Poppy in the morning, and we can go out together after that,' she said with an imploring smile.

He nodded. 'Perhaps.'

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Hermione carefully measured the last of the potion into a vial before pushing a stopper into it and setting it carefully in one of the labelled boxes for the hospital wing. That done, she closed and stacked the boxes before picking them all up and going into Severus' office to Floo up to Poppy. She tossed a little Floo powder into the fireplace with one hand, balanced carefully, and after stepping in, she called out for Poppy's office. Stepping out, she found that the nurse wasn't there, so she left the boxes on her desk and then Flooed back to Severus' office.

'I delivered the potions to Poppy!' she called out as she walked back into the private lab to where Severus was cleaning up for the day and putting a stasis charm on all their potions.

'Very well; I am nearly finished here,' he answered, casting the unclean boards and knives to the sink, where they began washing with a flick of his wand. 'Are you ready to leave from here?'

Hermione nodded, holding up her thick, black winter coat. The snow had softly layered the ground a week earlier, and since then, more snowfall had made the layer of it thicker. She had gloves and a scarf in her pockets for the walk. He nodded curtly and finished, ducking into his quarters briefly to change from his robes into his own winter coat and grab his black gloves and dark grey scarf. Hermione smiled. She had given him that scarf several years ago. She was pleased to see that he still wore it.

'Ready to leave?' she asked.

He nodded. 'Certainly lead the way,' he replied, gesturing for her to go first.

Hermione walked through the door first, and they ascended to the Entrance Hall, leaving through the front doors and exiting the castle. They had to walk briskly side-by-side, simply because it was too cold to dawdle and linger in the freezing snow. With only a week and a half before Christmas, Hermione knew she was going to have to make the most of the time she could spend with him before the holidays. He would be going into exam mode after that weekend and would be occupied with marking and various other assignments as well.

'Severus?' she asked, testing out his name aloud for the first time in a long while, looking over to him as she did.

He looked back at her, a little shocked at hearing her say his name. She had been thawing towards him in the past few weeks, he had noticed, but to hear her say his name was music to his ears. 'Yes, Hermione?' he answered in kind, figuring it was okay to say her name if she could speak his.

'We haven't talked about what happened seven years ago yet,' she said softly, staring at the ground as she walked. 'And I just wanted to say that I didn't mean for it to end so badly or for us to dislike and stop talking to each other.'

'I don't dislike you,' he stated blandly, chancing a glance in her direction. 'It was difficult for me to watch you leave as you did. I thought it prudent to keep away from you for both our sakes.'

'I didn't think you cared,' she said, feeling a prickle of tears building in her eyes. 'It's why I left, you know. Because I thought you were only in the relationship to sleep with me or something...'

'And now?' he asked quietly. 'Do you still think the same thing now as you did then?'

Hermione shook her head. 'I hardly know what to think, Severus,' she said, choking a little on her tears as they walked. The wind chilled her face all the more. 'You never said a word before or after I made the decision to leave. I never knew what you thought or felt most of the time. I just wish you had been a little more open with me.'

Severus hesitated, realizing that if he spoke, he would be revealing more of himself to her than he had to anyone other than Poppy or Dumbledore. 'I... I was very upset when you left me, Hermione; this I will admit,' he said softly, staring straight ahead as he spoke. 'I had never felt anything strongly for anyone before you,' he continued. 'After you left I found that I could not feel anything for anyone else because I never stopped caring for you.'

Hermione looked at him in surprise. 'Even now?' she asked.

He nodded simply, looking over and meeting her eyes. 'Even now,' he confirmed, pulling a handkerchief from his pocket and handing it over to her.

Hermione knew that what he had said to her that afternoon was very difficult for him to admit to her after so long. So she would accept it for the time being and safeguard her love for him until the moment when they would need it the most. Dabbing at her cheeks and eyes with the handkerchief, she then charmed it clean wandlessly and moved to hand it back to the owner. He shook his head and pressed it back towards her, closing her hand around it.

'Keep it,' he murmured. 'I have others.'

Hermione nodded, slipping it into her pocket before boldly moving closer to his side and looping one of her arms around his. He looked down at her, slightly startled, but he didn't remove her arm and even crooked his own a little to make it more comfortable for them as they walked. Hermione smiled, knowing that they had made some serious progress. They walked through the gates then, intent on getting to the pub as quickly as possible, when Severus heard a male voice from behind them.

'About time you got here, Mudblood,' said the man before Severus' world went black.

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A/N So what do you think? Please leave a review!

## Drained

*Chapter 8 of 17*

After her messy divorce, Hermione Granger finds that someone is trying to destroy her reputation. She seeks out the

help of Severus Snape to help her find out who it is. Will their past relationship affect how they work together?

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Many hugs of thanks must go to Sequana for beta-ing this chapter for me.

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## Chapter 8: Drained

White was the first thing that he saw when he came to. It was always the same thing he saw each time he awoke after blacking out. Severus groaned softly, realizing that he was, in fact, in the hospital wing. He pushed himself up into a sitting position, noting that a privacy curtain had been drawn around his bed so that he would remain undisturbed as usual. He wondered for a moment if he should call for Poppy but thought better of it. She would likely rush over, make the biggest fuss of him and wave her silly wand about before stuffing, in his opinion, unnecessary potions and the like down his throat.

That was the last thing he needed when he was feeling so tired.

His body, while not being overly affected, was feeling sore and strained. It was as though he had been strapped to a Muggle medieval torture device and had his body stretched from his shoulders down to his feet. Tentatively, he swung his legs over the side of the bed and carefully lowered himself to his feet to test if he was capable of standing on his own. His knees buckled slightly on his first attempt, and he found himself grabbing for the bed and the nearby trolley for support. Eventually though, his legs found the strength and became used to the standing position, so he let go.

He smirked, pleased with his own progress, little though this achievement was. And then a thought struck him. What on earth was he doing in the hospital wing to begin with? Feeling more than a little dazed at the oddness of his situation, he slowly took steps towards the curtain to seek out Poppy. Almost too late, he realized he was wearing a pair of his black silk pajamas, and he grabbed for his thick black bathrobe that was nearby and threw it on, stuffing his feet into slippers.

'Poppy!' he called, walking around the curtained-off area and making his way down the infirmary towards her office.

A moment later, he saw Poppy Pomfrey stick her head out from her office before her whole body emerged and she bustled towards him. 'Severus! How long have you been awake?' she demanded in a rush. 'Why did you not call me? And what on earth are you doing out of bed in your condition?'

He almost smiled at her mothering. 'I am quite well enough to walk, Poppy, as you can see,' he stated blandly. 'Now, would you mind telling me exactly what happened and why it is that I am here?'

Poppy gasped softly, covering her mouth before reaching her hand out and taking one of his. 'Come with me to my office,' she said simply, tugging him in that general direction. 'I am afraid we will have to bring Albus in to explain a few things to you.'

Severus allowed himself to be pushed into her office chair, as his body was feeling weak still, and watched idly as Poppy Flooed Albus, and soon the old man had joined them in the office to talk. Albus conjured up two extra chairs for both himself and Poppy, and then they seated themselves across from him.

'What on earth is the meaning of all this, Albus?' he demanded tiredly.

Albus hesitated, opening his mouth and then closing it again. 'I am unsure how to explain this to you, Severus,' he said softly, looking at the younger, dark-haired wizard seriously. 'The simple truth of the matter, however, is that you left the castle on Saturday afternoon with Hermione, and after that, the two of you were not seen for a long while. Filius came back up to the castle looking frantic at around six in the evening with you levitated alongside him. You were very badly hurt. It appeared that you had muscle cramping hexes applied all over your body, which explains the soreness, and you had a cut above your left eyebrow and bruises.'

Severus nodded mutely. Well, it certainly explained what had happened to him, but it did not reveal at all who had committed the crime in question. 'What of Hermione?' he asked, fear bubbling up in his chest at the thought of harm coming to her.

'Filius did not find Hermione with you,' Albus answered, and on seeing the younger man's eyes blaze, he sought to calm him. 'We searched the entire area for two hours after you were found and even tried to follow the magical trail that your attacker left behind, but it was useless. In the end, we found Hermione unconscious and bleeding back in front of the gates after three hours of searching.'

'We brought her back and healed her,' Poppy said before Severus could speak. 'Her body is fine, but I dosed her up well with Dreamless Sleep so that she could rest after her ordeal.'

Severus nodded stiffly. He had failed her. She had been taken away from him and injured, and he had not been able to save her. He was a fool. 'And are you certain that it is, in fact, Hermione that is out there? Not just a Polyjuiced fake?' he asked with a voice that was roughened by emotion.

'A Polyjuice Potion would have worn off a long time ago,' Poppy said, reaching a hand over and patting his nearest hand gently. 'But even so, Albus and I both ran exams to ensure that she is indeed Hermione, and we are certain that she is.'

He heaved a sigh of relief, feeling tired enough to pass out in the chair. 'I have a feeling that a memory of mine has been erased, for I can remember nothing beyond blacking out at the gates now,' he said softly. 'It feels as though something is missing.'

Albus nodded. 'For now, we will get you back to bed and give you some Dreamless Sleep also,' he said softly, helping Poppy to coax him out of the chair. 'We will deal with the memory situation when you are back to one hundred percent, Severus. Hopefully the next time you wake up, Hermione will have woken from her sleep and may be able to provide us with more details.'

Severus nodded and allowed them to lead him back to the bed. He felt ill, tired, and so angry with himself. If he had had enough energy to do normal daily things, he might have hung his head in shame, but he would not for fear of being unable to lift his head again afterwards. He slumped down onto the bed, and he felt his legs being lifted up and covers drawn over him as his head hit the pillow behind him. He vaguely recalled swallowing and choking a little on what must have been the Dreamless Sleep Potion before he dozed off.

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Light filtered through the hospital wing, casting a white glow on the beds and their occupants. One in particular was bothered by the brightness of the light and immediately began to stir from sleep. Blinking rapidly, Hermione woke, her arms instantly stretching up above her. She opened her eyes fully and stared above her at a white ceiling before looking from side to side and seeing that there was a curtain drawn around her bed. She sat up abruptly, realizing that she was not in her bedroom but in the hospital wing at Hogwarts.

She felt a little disconcerted for a moment before swinging her legs over the side of the bed and standing up. Her body didn't feel too bad, and apart from a slight ache around her left hip area, she was fine. She puzzled over what could have brought her there and sighed when nothing came to her. Stuffing her cold feet into slippers that were beside her bed, she walked past the curtain and felt someone running into her. Pulling back, she saw that it was Poppy Pomfrey.

'Oh, Poppy good morning, I suppose,' she said with a small smile. 'I'm having a bit of trouble remembering why I am here instead of in my rooms, so I was wondering if you could lend me the use of a Remembrall.'

Poppy's eyes widened further in surprise. 'Hermione, my dear, are you feeling ill? Is there any leftover tiredness?' she asked almost frantically.

'Well, my hip is a little sore, but other than that, I just really need a Remembrall so I can sort out my jumbled thoughts,' she answered insistently, positive that the answer to all of her questions rested with the small, round, magical object.

'Very well, if you are sure...' Poppy said softly, leading Hermione in the direction of her office.

On arriving there, the nurse opened a drawer and pulled out an intricately designed glowing glass ball, passing it directly to the questioning hands of Hermione. Poppy stood back to observe and watched as the young witch paced, rolled the ball around between her hands and muttered to herself. After about twenty minutes of the same, the young woman stopped dead in her tracks and spun around to look at Poppy with wide, horrified brown eyes.

'What day is it? Is Severus safe?' she demanded, her voice taking on a higher pitch than usual.

'It is Monday, and he is safe and asleep in the last bed down the aisle,' Poppy told her calmly. 'I dosed him with Dreamless Sleep after he woke up a little frantic at around midnight last night. He was very worried about you.'

'He was worried about me?' she asked faintly. 'I was so worried about him how he was knocked out was awful, and what they did to him... He must have been injured terribly. And it was my fault... If only I'd stayed away...'

'There was nothing you could have done to prevent it, Hermione dear,' Poppy soothed, hugging her close and rubbing her back. 'Can you... do you know who did this to you both?'

Hermione sobbed softly then and shook her head. 'They blindfolded me as soon as the man Apparated me to some dark house,' she said as tears began to flow down her cheeks. She felt so useless again. It had been a long time since she had felt weak and defenceless, since her first year at Hogwarts, to be exact. 'He was wearing Death Eater robes and a mask when he stunned me and hit Severus with a c-curse I didn't recognize. I was so foolish...'

'Hush, now,' Poppy soothed, rubbing her back comfortingly. 'You are no fool, Hermione Granger, so stop chastising yourself. Severus has been doing it enough for the both of you in all the years since you parted.'

Hermione nodded but continued to cry and take comfort from Poppy, who continued to offer it. They had come so close to dying, and she had been so scared. The man had tied her down in a chair blindfolded and hardly spoken a word. Then a woman, with a voice she did not recognize, taunted her for a while before reading all of the letters that had ever been sent to her by them out loud, followed by utter silence for two hours. After that, she had felt them harvesting and tugging at her hair before she was sent back to the Hogwarts gates, where she had passed out cold.

'I want to s-see Severus,' she choked out, sniffing a bit and pulling back from Poppy so that she could wipe her face with her flannel pyjama sleeves.

'Of course, dear,' Poppy said tenderly, leading Hermione out of her office, walking with her down to the end and parting the curtains for her to enter Severus' enclosed area. 'But if you feel at all tired, go back and lay down.'

Hermione nodded in understanding. She pulled a chair over manually to Severus' side and sat down before taking his hand in her own. His skin was cool to the touch, and she lovingly traced the veins on the back of that hand. He was pale, to be sure, and he had a couple of bruises visible on his neck, but he otherwise simply looked like himself in his sleep. The lines of age always seemed to disappear when he was sleeping peacefully. She missed waking up to that face.

'I love you, Severus,' she murmured softly, bringing his hand to her lips and kissing his knuckles gently. 'We won't fail a second time...'

She turned her head a little and looked out the window that was beside his bed, an advantage of getting the end bed. The sky was white and pale grey from the clouds, and a fresh snow was falling yet again. No doubt the students would be outside that afternoon frolicking. Hermione shook her head with a small smile, looking back at the man she had loved for nearly half a lifetime. She was going to have a happy ending after all of the problems were sorted.

'Hermione...' Severus mumbled, and she looked up at his face to see if he had actually woken up.

She smiled softly at him. He was still asleep, but his mouth was curved up in a slight smile too.

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A/N Please review! Tell me what you think!

## Decorations

### *Chapter 9 of 17*

After her messy divorce, Hermione Granger finds that someone is trying to destroy her reputation. She seeks out the help of Severus Snape to help her find out who it is. Will their past relationship affect how they work together?

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### Chapter 9: Decorations

The school was quiet and mostly empty due to the fact that the Christmas break had already begun. It was two days before Christmas, but even with most students at home and some of the professors visiting family, the castle was decorated at its garish best thanks to the efforts of Albus Dumbledore. All of the midyear exams had been completed and marked a short few days earlier, and the holidays had begun a mere two days before. Since then, Hermione had taken to forgoing robes around the castle, and she sat in the library quite a lot on her own as Irma Pince had gone to visit her family for the break also.

Since the day she had woken after being abducted briefly, Hermione had become rather a lot quieter and less sure of herself. Since she and Severus had parted years before, she had spent a great deal of time trying to toughen herself up to guard against being hurt again, and she was afraid she had grown rather cold. She had been so

confident. But now she felt as though her whole life was slowly falling to bits in front of her very eyes. How could she have been so easily fooled and abducted that way? Had her training and experience from the war not taught her anything?

She sighed heavily. Apparently, she had not learnt enough.

'Hermione?' asked a soft female voice from somewhere around the other side of the bookshelf. 'Dear, are you in here?'

She stood from her seat and walked around the stacks, meeting Minerva, who had also been moving to check where Hermione had been. 'What can I do for you, Minerva?' she asked softly with a weak smile.

'We were all wondering if you were going to come down and join us for lunch in the Hall, dearest,' she said in a motherly tone. 'You weren't at breakfast this morning, and I rather suspect you didn't have any. Nor have you been at lunch any of the other days since the holidays began.'

'I've been taking lunch in my rooms,' she answered but conceded to follow the older woman to the Great Hall anyway. Pacifism was the key at Hogwarts when it came to the people who cared about her. 'But I will come down with you today, seeing as you went to all the effort to come and find me.'

Minerva nodded and smiled warmly. 'We managed to coax Severus from the dungeons today as well,' she said, her smile becoming wry. 'He has been very busy working on the potion for your former husband all morning.'

Hermione felt her heart flutter at the mention of Severus. He would be at lunch. She was pleased. One of the main reasons she hadn't wanted to take lunch in the Hall was because he rarely did, and she wanted badly to see him. He hadn't come out of his dungeons for the last couple of days, and she had been worried that he would not want company, so she had left him alone. She intended to follow him back down to see the potions when lunch was over. She really had missed him very badly. They had spent a lot of pleasant time together before the incident on their way to Hogsmeade.

On entering the Great Hall, Hermione had to squint a little against the brightness of it. Albus really had outdone himself. She looked up to the High Table and found a few empty seats along it, noticing there was one right between Severus and Rolanda Hooch. Despite the fact that she and the Quidditch instructor had barely spoken to each other in the past, she was willing to sit beside her so long as she had the pleasure of sitting beside the man she loved. Reaching the table, she immediately pulled out the chair beside him and sat.

'Good afternoon, Severus,' she said, turning her head to the side and smiling at him tenderly.

He turned to look at her, and she could see the warmth creep into his cold, black eyes as he smiled back briefly. 'Good afternoon to you, as well,' he replied, surprising them both by reaching out to her under the table and taking hold of one of her warm little hands in his.

'You've been busy downstairs, I hear,' Hermione commented, returning the slight pressure of his hand squeezing hers. 'I would like to come down after lunch to take a look at what you have been working on.'

'You may feel free to come down at any time to check on the progress with the potions, Hermione,' he murmured, rubbing his thumb over the back of her hand gently before withdrawing his hand and turning to look at the food before him.

It was roast. He really hated the pot roast at Hogwarts. Wrinkling his face slightly, he stabbed at a potato and cut it into smaller pieces before eating it. Hermione let out a small laugh from beside him. She remembered this habit well. He would eat all of his vegetables on the plate, avoiding the meat like the plague, and then later he would whine about how awful it was and how the elves should stop serving pot roast for any meals in the castle at all. He really was one of the most peculiar and interesting men she had ever had the good fortune to meet.

'You're laughing at me,' he said, scowling at his plate.

Hermione giggled again, reaching a hand over to pat his as she did. 'Oh, Severus, it's just that everything you do reminds me so much of... well, it reminds me of back when we were...'

'I understand,' he said, cutting her off.

He didn't need for her to finish that sentence. It was obvious enough what she had been going to say to him. She was thinking back to the time when they had still been a couple. He, too, had to admit that he was thinking about it more and more these days than he had before she had come back into his life. He relished the idea of them picking up where they had left off. He had been feeling a lot more lately that she cared for him in some capacity, though as what he did not know. He wanted it, however, because he still loved her every bit as much as he ever had.

He knew what he had done wrong now, and he intended to correct the mistake he had made the last time. Though he had not told her that he loved her yet, she did know that he cared for her, and it would have to suffice until he worked up the courage to tell her the exact depth of his emotions. To put it simply, he was afraid of the rejection that he might have to face if she did not reciprocate his love for her. But he supposed it was just going to have to be one of the things he faced eventually in his life.

Lunch continued quietly, neither Hermione nor Severus noticing that Minerva, Albus, and Poppy had been observing their behaviour the entire time they had been eating. Poppy found herself pleased at the progress between the two. She had done very little meddling in this case, as she felt that the two of them would be able to figure things out for themselves, but Albus, as always, stuck his nose in a fair amount. Hermione living in quarters at the castle was a prime example of his meddling. Poppy smiled and shook her head, watching contentedly as Severus pulled the chair out for Hermione and offered his arm to her as they stood to leave the Hall.

Yes, the pair would do just fine on their own.

Hermione, meanwhile, exited the Hall on Severus' arm, grateful for the extra warmth being close to him was providing and pleased at being free to touch some part of him, even just an arm. He walked silently beside her, and it was only once in the privacy of his own lab that he withdrew his arm from her. He immediately went around, removing the stasis on all of the potions and lighting flames beneath the cauldrons once more. It was a tedious business, potion making.

'This third potion looks promising,' she said as she looked in at the pearlescent liquid simmering in the cauldron while looking over the notes for it also.

'Indeed; I thought so too, although I do not want to discontinue any of the others in case this one somehow changes course and becomes useless to us,' he murmured, sticking his stirring rod into the mixture and giving it five exact stirs.

'Oh, yes, that would be a waste,' she said, staring at the liquid. It was an odd shade that had her entranced. Somehow, she had the feeling that this was the potion that would wake Michael up.

'Let's leave the potions for now,' he suggested suddenly, startling her from her wayward thoughts. 'I feel cold and could use a cuppa. I'll order a tray for my chambers. Could you possibly cast a stasis over everything again?'

'Certainly,' she said with a small smile and nodded just before he turned and went to the door that led to his chambers.

He left the door open for her, and she quickly cast a stasis over each cauldron individually and extinguished all of the flames before walking through the open door and closing it behind her. She heard and felt the wards snapping back into place and smiled before continuing through a hallway until she reached his sitting room. She saw him standing back up from his place crouched before the fireplace, where he had ordered the tea tray for them, brushing imaginary soot from his clothes.

He had already shed his robes and was dressed in his frockcoat and trousers with the white linen of his shirt poking out from his sleeves and at his high-necked collar. It was a look that suited his usual nature. She, however, had once been rather privy to the other side of him: the side that wore green silk shirts, went barefoot occasionally,



and slept in bed wearing only silk sleep pants. She longed to be able to see that side of him again. She felt that they were becoming closer, though she was still very unsure of her position as far as he was concerned.

'Cream and two sugars, correct?' he asked, snapping her out of her fantasy world and back to reality.

She nodded mutely with a small smile. He remembered how she took her tea, bless him. But of course he would. He was Severus Snape. A wizard of no mean strength and a man unlike any she had ever encountered. He appeared at her side and steered her over to the lounge, pushing her gently to sit before pressing a cup and saucer with her tea in it into her hands. She looked up and bestowed a grateful smile on him, and he nodded at her. She watched then as he went to the old antique chest by the wall nearest them and pulled a throw from it.

'It's cold, and the last thing you want right now is to fall ill,' he murmured softly, opening it for her and draping it over her lap before taking a seat of his own in the armchair beside the lounge.

'Thank you, Severus,' she said quietly. 'You are being very kind this afternoon is there something bad that you have to tell me about?'

He snorted at that in laughter. 'Hardly, Hermione,' he said with a half-smile. 'Is this a tactic that you believe me to use?'

She grinned shamelessly at that. Certainly, she believed it was because he had used the same tactic in the past. 'Of course not, Severus,' she said with a laugh, which was countered by a small, almost playful, scowl.

They sat and talked about the potions for a while before that topic branched off into another discussion about the *Potions Monthly* magazine in comparison to *Ars Alchemica*, which they both agreed was the far superior journal, and they chatted idly together just like old times. By late afternoon, they were both still in his sitting room, except Severus had eventually moved to join her on his lounge at her urging, and they had ended up reading together there. It was already dark out, and the fire was the only source of light in the room.

Severus sat up after a little while, still reading, while Hermione had fallen asleep with her head on his shoulder, his long arm resting on the back of the lounge behind her. He turned his head a fraction and looked at her head resting comfortably at the crook of his shoulder, cradled between it and his neck. Her warm breath washed over his skin in a caress that he enjoyed quite a lot. Smoothing back some stray curls, he pressed his lips to her forehead in a tender kiss.

'How I love you, Hermione Granger,' he said quietly before resuming the reading of his copy of *Ars Alchemica*.

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A/N So readers, what do you think? Leave me a review and let me know!

## Desire

### Chapter 10 of 17

After her messy divorce, Hermione Granger finds that someone is trying to destroy her reputation. She seeks out the help of Severus Snape to help her find out who it is. Will their past relationship affect how they work together?

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

Many thanks to Sequana, who continues to be a fantastic beta.

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### Chapter 10: Desire

Christmas day arrived all too quickly as the two days before seemed to speed by without pausing for anyone. The castle was even more festive than ever, and Albus had the students all hyped up for the grand feast planned for that evening for all whom remained at the castle. Harry was going to be at the dinner with Luna, as Hermione had found out just the day before. Apparently, Albus had gone behind her back and invited them to join in the celebration. When Severus had heard the news from her, he had frowned and pouted for an hour until Hermione had hugged him and told him to behave.

He had savoured every last moment of that hug as though it would be their last.

Severus had been rather surprised at how easy her affection was. She never hesitated to touch him as others did, and over the last two days, since the afternoon that she had fallen asleep on him, she seemed to almost cling to him like he was some sort of lifeline. Not that he was complaining. He liked it very much. He often found himself wondering what she would think if he were to cling back just as forcefully. He snorted inwardly. She would likely think that someone had taken Polyjuice Potion and packed him off somewhere before taking his place.

'Severus? Hey, are you with me?' Hermione asked from beyond his musings, waving a hand in front of his face.

He started and looked over at her. She was dressed in a ruby sweater and ivory blouse that morning with comfortable dark-wash jeans to go with it. Her lovely brown curls were tamed back in a loose braid, and to him, she looked radiant. Most would consider her attire plain, but it suited her just fine. They were sitting together on his lounge chair in front of the fire, just as they had been all morning, and had forgone lunch in the Great Hall in favour of sitting and eating sandwiches in his rooms.

'I apologise,' he said sheepishly. 'I was lost in thought.'

She smiled, resting a hand on his arm lightly. 'Good thoughts, I hope,' she murmured sweetly, gifting him with one of her loveliest grins.

He looked back at her from beneath his thick, black lashes and smiled faintly. 'Only good thoughts,' he answered, giving her a meaningful look, which caused her to blush a light pink hue.

'No, really what were you thinking about?' she asked a little shyly, shuffling slightly closer to him on the lounge and resting the hand that had been on his arm on his thigh instead.

He covered her hand with his. 'I'm planning to leave the castle for a few days just after Christmas and will only return after New Year's,' he answered. Of course, it was not exactly everything he had been thinking about, but he could hardly tell her that. 'I had planned on telling you earlier...'

'Oh,' she said softly, her hand twitching beneath his slightly.

'You would be very welcome to join me,' he added at her downcast look. 'I could use some good company for the few days that I have to be away checking that Prince Manor is still in full working condition.'

Hermione's eyes lit up then at the prospect. She had not been with him to Prince Manor since the Christmas holidays that had passed before their relationship had ended. It was a lovely estate, covered in thick snow as most of the rest of the Scottish highlands, and had a large, warm hunting lodge off in the surrounding forests that they had spent one or two cosy nights in. She blushed in remembrance of it. They had so many good times together to look back on that she hardly could even think about all of the arguments and silences that they had also endured.

'You know, that sounds like a great idea,' she said with a small smile. 'I think we both need a break away from this castle and all of the work we have been doing over the past couple of months.'

She turned her hand over on his thigh so that their palms were touching, and he took his cue from there and gently laced his fingers with her own. They communicated this way, the words on the tips of their tongues unnecessary. Nothing needed to be said between them for both to realize that they were not simply colleagues, or acquaintances, or friends. Holding his hand was the sweetest feeling Hermione had been fortunate enough to experience in a long time. He was the only man she had ever been with that gave her a sense of security.

Perhaps Harry hadn't been barmy when he had suggested for her to go to Severus. It might just have been that he knew somehow that Hermione had really needed Severus. It made a lot more sense now than it had before. She had never considered the possibility of their lives together resuming as though hardly any time had passed at all, even though it had been such a long time. But she also knew that despite their ease with one another, there was a lot they would eventually have to confront. She sighed heavily and pushed the unhappy thought away. It was Christmas. There was no room for a sad person in a cheerful castle.

She snuggled up to Severus' side then, resting her head on his shoulder purposefully, and was surprised when he shifted and stretched that arm behind her, wrapping it around her and pulling her closer so that instead she rested within the crook of his arm and shoulder comfortably and her head was on his chest. She smiled and closed her eyes, drifting off to sleep to the sound of his breathing and the regular rise and fall of his chest. Severus, meanwhile, remained awake, staring at the fireplace and shifting Hermione a little so that she was pressed closer. He was so badly in love in a way that he had never thought he ever would be.

'My love,' he murmured, pressing a kiss to the top of her head.

She squirmed a little in sleep but soon stilled once more. Pleased, Severus closed his eyes and let the deep, even sounds of her breathing lull him to sleep as well. Some time later, he stirred and looked sleepily up at the clock on the mantle. It read that it was already half past five. It was only after looking at the time that he realized he was lying on his back on the lounge, and he first saw, then felt, the slight weight of Hermione sprawled on top of him, her head still on his chest and her curls tickling his chin as she breathed. He smiled and stroked a hand through her hair gently, coaxing her to wakefulness.

'Love, come on, we have to get up,' he murmured, giving her shoulder a light squeeze. 'It's nearly time to go to the Great Hall for dinner...'

She mumbled and stirred gradually, which he found endearing, and ever so slowly, she stretched and rubbed her eyes before opening them. She sat up suddenly and turned her head around to look at him in bewilderment. She opened her mouth to say something but closed it again almost immediately after. He smiled at her, and she blushed and smiled back, leaning over to kiss his cheek gently before pulling back and gazing at him with such affection in her eyes.

'We have about half an hour to be ready for dinner, I'm afraid,' he murmured apologetically.

She nodded understandingly and pushed off the lounge, standing and smoothing her sweater back down. 'I'll just nip up to my rooms and change, and I'll be right back down,' she told him. 'Would you mind if I walked up with you?'

He shook his head no. 'I'll see you back here in about twenty minutes,' he murmured quietly. 'There is no need for you to rush all that much. I will likely take a quick shower before dressing.'

She nodded and grabbed some Floo powder before disappearing from his rooms back to her own, leaving him still sitting on the lounge. Sighing heavily, and with an uncomfortable tenting in his trousers, Severus stood and walked back to his bathroom and stripped out of his clothes. He waved a hand at the faucets to turn on his shower, adjusted the temperature slightly when he found it to be too cold and stepped under the spray of the water. He preferred to be warm. Rubbing the bar of soap over himself, his thoughts drifted back to Hermione and how she had looked when she had kissed him on the cheek earlier.

The memory of the touch of her lips against his skin was more than enough to jumpstart his flagging arousal. He had already been half hard before she had left the rooms, and with the continued thought of her, his erection was full and hard ready for some stimulation. He reached down with his slick hand experimentally and circled the base, squeezing himself a little and rubbing upwards towards the tip. He groaned loudly at that, pleasure shooting up his spine. Unable to deny himself the satisfaction, he began stroking in earnest, rubbing his other hand over his chest and peaked nipples, all the while thinking of Hermione, her body, and all of the times they had shared together.

He came soon after that, shouting her name and spilling onto the floor of the shower before slumping against the wall from exhaustion and watching his spending as it washed down the drain. Another lot of potential future Snapes wasted on his temporary fulfilment. He sighed and finished off his shower by washing and rinsing his hair before he turned off the flow of water and dried himself with a towel as he walked back into his bedroom. He pulled on black shorts followed by his usual trousers and white linen shirt, buttoned all the way up. He forewent his frockcoat in favour of wearing a formal waistcoat instead and even donned his formal robes.

Damn Albus and his fanciful nonsense about wearing dress robes for the damnable feast. Severus looked just the same no matter what robes he sported. Shaking his head, he pulled a comb through his wet hair and returned to the bathroom to clean his teeth before heading back out to the sitting room to wait for Hermione. Two minutes later she arrived looking a vision in her cream- and wine-coloured dress robes. They were in two sections as the fashion for most women's robes had become, and her hair was back in a loose knot that was a little damp. Apparently, she had showered also.

'You look lovely,' he told her, holding out a hand to her.

She accepted his hand and linked her arm around his firmly before the two of them headed out of his rooms. At the door, she stopped him. 'You look very handsome tonight too, Severus,' she murmured, cupping his cheek tenderly with a hand and rubbing her thumb over the bone.

He lightly kissed her palm before she drew it away. They both flushed pink during that exchange and, instead of sharing more words, began the trek up to the hall. On entering, they found that the staff table was no longer there and neither were the long student tables. In their place were large round tables, big enough to seat a dozen people at a time, covered in white tablecloths and miniature Christmas trees that sparkled like the rest of the hall. Hermione immediately spotted Harry and Luna and released his arm, looking up at him and smiling before hurrying off to greet her friends.

'Harry, Luna! I am so glad you're here!' she exclaimed, practically flying into the open arms of her best friend's embrace.

'It's good to see you looking a lot better, Hermione,' Harry said, patting her cheek lightly and smiling back at her with his bright green eyes shining. The last time he had seen her, she had still been unconscious after her abduction. He had been a member of her search party.

'I've never been better,' she told him, turning to look over her shoulder at Severus, who was caught up in a conversation with Rolanda Hooch. Hermione's eyes met his, and they exchanged the briefest of smiles before each turned back to the people they were speaking with.

Harry grinned at the exchange. 'Ah. And how is old Severus doing?' he asked with a mischievous grin, for which he received a punch to the arm on either side by both

Hermione and Luna.

'Don't you start that, Mr. Squiffy,' Luna said, poking his arm hard. 'Hermione doesn't have to talk about anything until she's comfortable.'

Hermione grinned at Luna in appreciation. 'It's fine, Luna,' she soothed. 'To be honest, I don't even know exactly what is going on for the moment, but I am happy being around him, and it seems to me that the feeling is mutual.'

'Good,' Harry said before offering an arm to either witch to lead them to a table.

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A/N Please review :)

# Daydreams

*Chapter 11 of 17*

After her messy divorce, Hermione Granger finds that someone is trying to destroy her reputation. She seeks out the help of Severus Snape to help her find out who it is. Will their past relationship affect how they work together?

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Many thanks and hugs to Sequana for the beta of this chapter.

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## Chapter 11: Daydreams

The grounds were still and quiet as the couple trudged through the cold of the early morning, intent on reaching the gates. Their luggage was all shrunken and residing in the man's pocket, and their gloved hands were joined and entwined between them. Their unspoken, but mutual, affection allowed them small moments such as these. Christmas had passed just two days before, and Severus had told Hermione later that night, as he saw her to the door of her chambers, that he would be leaving on the twenty-seventh. She had been thrilled to receive the invitation to go with him, of course, and had spent a fair amount of the day before trying to figure out what to pack.

As they walked along the snow-covered path, Hermione's thoughts were constantly drifting back to Christmas night and the moment she and Severus had shared in the doorway to his rooms before they had headed up to the Great Hall. His lips on her palm was the sweetest caress she had felt in a long time. She had seen him flush and found that she was irresistibly drawn to him. She had no idea how she could have possibly left him just on an emotional impulse that way all those years ago. She had been chastising herself for weeks. Surely if she had wanted to know that badly if he loved her, she could have asked.

She shook the thoughts from her head. It was too late for regrets. They had a future ahead of them for sharing, she could tell. Looking to her left, she saw that Severus appeared also to be rather deep in thought as they ambled along the path. He was frowning slightly, and his lips were pressed tightly together in a thin line as though he were angry. She gave his hand a light squeeze to attract his attention, and he started a little before looking at her and giving her a small smile to reassure her.

'What's on your mind, Severus?' she asked, gazing straight back at his face.

'Nothing of importance,' he murmured in reply, sounding a little unconvincing as far as Hermione was concerned. 'Nothing that you need worry about, pet,' he added with a grin, releasing her hand and instead wrapping his arm around her shoulders, pulling her tighter to his side.

Hermione decided to drop it for the time being, but it was far from being forgotten. She snuggled into his side and smiled in contentment. 'I always loved it when you called me that,' she informed him softly.

'When I called you "pet"?' he asked, looking down at her in surprise.

She nodded against his shoulder. 'We were good together weren't we?' she asked, her voice sounding wistful even to her own ears. She almost wanted to take the words back until he stopped on the path and turned her so that they were facing each other, his hands on both her shoulders.

He pressed his forehead against hers, breathing in the scent of her hair and the freezing cold air deeply. 'I should never have let you walk away like I did all those years ago,' he admitted a little sheepishly. 'I could have come after you and asked you to stay, but I was so upset, it was all I could do to get up every day and sulk around the castle, taking out my anger on the students as usual.'

'It doesn't matter anymore,' she replied with a forgiving smile as she pulled back a little bit from him.

Wrapping his arm around her shoulders again, he indicated they continue, and they walked briskly along together until they reached the gates. On stepping through them, they were immediately on their guard, prepared for any sort of repeat of their attack. When he was sure the coast was clear, he wrapped both his arms tightly around her and Disapparated. They reappeared together just inside a clean, well-lit hall, almost as grand as the Entrance Hall of Hogwarts with a huge crystal chandelier hanging from the ornate plaster ceiling.

'Welcome home,' he murmured into her ear, releasing her and looking down at her with such fondness in his eyes.

'It's good to be home,' she replied, her smile beatific.

She looked around at the familiar surroundings that she remembered despite the length of time since her last visit. It had always been her favourite time of the year, when Severus would take her with him to the manor. Smiling broadly and throwing all caution to the wind, she turned to face him and flung her arms around his neck, pressing her mouth to his insistently. He tasted of the coffee he had drunk that morning and a little minty like his toothpaste. He stiffened at first, shocked to the core at her actions. But soon he relaxed and wrapped his arms around her waist, holding her tight to him and parting his lips beneath hers, allowing her seeking tongue to dip into his mouth.

The kiss lasted for as long as they could possibly stand until they needed to breathe. They broke apart, panting, their foreheads pressed together. He stared deeply into her eyes and could see the spark in them that he knew so well. It was her way of wordlessly expressing her affection for him. 'I don't suppose you would mind foregoing the tour of the house in favour of stepping upstairs for a while, would you?' he asked, his breathing laboured.

Hermione grinned. 'You know that I know this place almost as well as you do,' she replied with a flushed face. 'I have been waiting long enough to be alone with you...'

He nodded in agreement and then scooped her up into his arms, Apparating them straight to his bedroom. He had not ever shared a bedroom in the manor with anyone before or after Hermione she had been the only one for him. He placed her on her feet at the end of the bed and immediately shrugged out of his long winter coat, tossing it aside and starting on the long row of buttons on his frockcoat. Taking his cue, Hermione started to undress as well, hardly believing that what she had been craving for months was finally going to happen. Her coat and sweater were easily and efficiently disposed of, and she was working on the buttons of her blouse as he started on his white shirt.

Severus was only halfway through his shirt buttons when he glanced over to Hermione and saw that she was topless and was wriggling out of her trousers, kicking her shoes to the side. His breath caught in his throat at the sight of her in the black, lacy knickers and bra. She looked up when she felt him stare at her and was tempted to wrap her arms around herself self-consciously. Her arms made the motion, but he walked forward and stopped her, placing a large, warm hand on her palm and rubbing her smooth skin.

She was not unlike the woman he used to make love to on a regular basis, although she was taller than she had been then, and her body was firmer and tighter like she had taken to running or exercising. Gone was the softness of her youth she was very much a woman now, and he loved it. Her breasts were small and firm-looking trapped within her bra. Most men might not like that, but he found the effect to be rather irresistible. He brushed his thumb lightly over where her nipple was peaked beneath the lace cup, tightening it further.

'Beautiful,' he murmured, leaning down and capturing her lips with his swiftly only to pull back sharply and tug his shirt over his head and off.

He released the buttons and zipper of his fly with the ease of practice and had his trousers, shoes, and socks all kicked off to the side with his other clothes, leaving him in just his black, cotton shorts. They were on even ground. Hermione shyly stepped towards him, reaching a hand out and pressing her palm to his breastbone gently. He allowed her to touch him unimpeded, aware that she was a little nervous. It had been a long time, after all, since they had been together in this way, and even he was a little uncertain of what she liked or disliked now. He wrapped strong, sinewy arms around her, drawing her near-naked form to his and hugging her tightly, stroking a comforting hand up and down the small of her back.

'We don't have to do this now, pet,' he murmured, kissing the top of her head, her curls tickling the end of his nose slightly.

'I know,' she answered softly. 'But I want us to be together just like we always used to be. I have missed being with you so much...'

'The missing is over now for both of us,' he told her, pulling back. As he did, he released the clasp of her bra from the back and lowered the straps down her arms before removing it completely from her. 'You are still the most desirable woman I have ever had the good fortune to know.'

Her rosy nipples stood proud and peaked against the soft, pale skin of her breast. The colour of them had deepened only slightly, but he found them all the more ravishing for the starkness of the contrast. He touched one with the tip of his index finger, feeling the hard bud tighten further still. She was as sensitive as ever. Almost reverently, Severus dropped his hand and abruptly hoisted her into his arms, depositing her on the large master bed. She squeaked initially but relaxed in his arms and squirmed her way to the centre of the bed as he helped to relieve her of her lacy knickers. She opened her arms in invitation to join her.

He pushed his underwear off then and scrambled onto the bed and into her waiting arms, claiming her mouth in one of the fiercest kisses she had ever received. His mouth was scorching, as were the fingers that were travelling over her breasts, kneading, circling, and plucking until she felt like she was on cloud nine. That was until his hand crept further down and his long fingers stroked her slick opening below. His thumb remained on the bundle of nerves at the top while two long, dexterous fingers slowly stroked in and out of her warm, wet sheath. She was already tight around his fingers. Heaven forbid that he think of how tight she would be around his manhood.

Hermione, meanwhile, was a moaning, writhing, panting mess under his ministrations to her above and below. By this point, his tongue was lapping at a nipple while his erection rubbed against her thigh as he thrust ever so slightly. Hermione reached down and wrapped her fingers confidently around the tip, diverting his concentration from his task. He gasped and swore as she began to caress him in time to his own strokes until her walls trembled and she shattered into orgasm. Her chest heaved and her eyes closed as he pressed tiny kisses all over her face.

He moved so his shaft was between her parted legs, the tip rubbing against her as he prepared to enter. He leaned in and kissed her possessively. 'I don't want to be a rebound from your husband,' he whispered softly.

'I never loved Michael the way I've always loved you, Severus,' she whispered back, brushing her lips against his. 'You're the only one for me...'

'And you are the only woman for me,' he replied before thrusting into her quickly, drawing a long groan of pleasure from him and a moan from Hermione. 'I love you, Hermione Jane.'

Hermione smiled, shifting her hips as an invitation for him to move. He chuckled at her enthusiasm and set a slow, deep pace, savouring the feeling of being within her. Their pace continued at the same speed until Hermione found that she could hold out no longer, and her walls began to tremble around his hardened shaft. Hermione pulled him in deeper and urged him to go faster, pinching and rolling her own nipples while one of his thumbs rubbed her clit and his other hand stopped him from collapsing on her.

Severus could feel both his and Hermione's approaching releases and groaned, chanting her name over and over again in his mind. Her walls finally trembled and clenched his cock like the warmest, tightest, wettest glove of all. He found that holding back would have been fruitless, so he sped up until he came, shouting her name and spilling his seed deep within her. He had strength enough to collapse to the side of her and spoon up behind her, waving a hand to draw the covers over them before resting his head on the pillow.

He sighed tiredly then, closing his eyes. 'My beautiful pet,' he murmured, kissing her neck lightly.

She chuckled softly, wriggling her lean bum against him to get comfortable, and fell asleep shortly after, the arms of her lover wrapped tightly around her. Severus smiled at the cat-like behaviour, sighing softly. He fell asleep then, listening to the sounds of her deep, even breathing. The only thought in his mind as he drifted into another world was the happiness he felt from the knowledge of her returned affections.

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A/N And now my little brazen story has turned into a longer R-rated one. Please leave a review!!!

## Deception

*Chapter 12 of 17*

After her messy divorce, Hermione Granger finds that someone is trying to destroy her reputation. She seeks out the

help of Severus Snape to help her find out who it is. Will their past relationship affect how they work together?

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Many hugs of thanks go to Sequana for being such a brilliant beta.

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## Chapter 12: Deception

Light poured through the partially opened curtains of the bedroom, causing one of the occupants of the bed to begin to stir from their sleep. Grumbling softly under his breath, Severus stretched a little and rubbed the sleep from his eyes with his fist before peeking an eye open and examining his surroundings hazily. Opening his other eye as well, he rolled over and was faced with the sight of the trim form of his lover, lying on her back with one arm thrown over her head and the other resting on her flat stomach. The white Egyptian cotton bed sheet only draped over her from the hips down, and one of her long, toned legs was positioned in such a way that the sheet did not fully cover it.

A sly smile broke out over his face as he moved further towards her, eyeing her fair breasts and their dusky nipples with hunger. He simply couldn't get enough of his witch now that she was back in his life. He moved his head over her and puffed hot air on a nipple before touching the tip of his tongue to it. It hardened, and she moaned; even in her sleep, she was responsive. Grinning wickedly, he enveloped as much of her small breast with his mouth and tongue as he could and began to lave and suck, nipping every now and then.

With a moan, his younger counterpart began to wake, and her eyes flickered open to look straight at him. The smile she gifted him with was breathtaking, and he released her nipple from his mouth with a wet sound and moved up to kiss her. She welcomed the kiss without hesitation, meeting his tongue with her own and joining the morning dance and struggle for control. When his back met the mattress, he knew that she would be guiding the activities that morning, and he submitted with delight.

An hour later, as the pair of them were dressing after a quick run through the shower, Hermione swore. 'Oh, fuck!' she exclaimed from the bedroom.

Severus came strolling out of the bathroom, towelling his wet hair and wearing only his black slacks with his customary white linen shirt unbuttoned and open. 'Now, what has caused my pet to use language like that?' he asked conversationally, looking over to the window where a delivery owl was taking off from the windowsill.

'Look at this,' she said, her frown deep and anger evident in her tone as she held out the morning paper to him.

He accepted the paper from her, concern etched into his features. He smoothed out the front page, and on the cover was a picture of Hermione, or rather someone who looked exactly like Hermione, with a wand drawn, wearing Death Eater robes, and surrounded by a bodyguard of two other Death Eaters. The sidekicks were obviously men and wore masks to conceal their faces, but the disturbing part was that the Hermione on the front page of the paper did not seem inclined to disguise herself. The headline for the day read, "Has Granger Gone Mad?" in bold print. The article that accompanied it reported that Hermione had attacked civilians who had been out doing some late shopping in Diagon Alley just the night before.

'But this is...,' he began softly, stopping and shaking his head. 'Well, at least we know what their intentions for your hair were.'

Hermione nodded and crossed her arms, still frowning. 'I'm going back to Hogwarts. I need to see Albus about this it is getting way out of hand, and I don't think I can go without his help any longer,' she said, frustration edging her tone.

'I'll come with you,' he said, waving a hand to Summon their cases and casting another spell to pack their belongings into them.

Hermione sighed heavily and shook her head, sinking onto the bed and looking at her hands that were twisting in her lap. 'All of those innocent people were hurt,' she said, tears burning her eyes. It was getting far too serious. 'I should have guessed that they'd be using my hair for Polyjuice.'

Severus sank down beside her and wrapped a comforting arm around her. 'You couldn't have known, sprite,' he soothed gently. 'And even if you had, it was hardly as if they were going to change plans because of it. This is all just rather unfortunate, and we will get to the bottom of this and fix it I promise you that.'

With a sob, she threw her arms around his neck, burying her face in his shirt and crying from the frustration and sadness of it all. Severus held and soothed her, rubbing her back and shoulders and murmuring to her under his breath. He had a feeling about the identity of the woman who was using the Polyjuice on herself, and if he was right, he had an idea of what they could do to put her, and the string of his former colleagues, away for as long as they remained alive.

'Come now, love,' he whispered gently into her ear. 'We'll go back to Hogwarts and see Albus I have an idea that just might work.'

She nodded and pulled back slowly, looking up at his face with tears in her eyes and skin pink and wet from crying. He gently wiped her face and nose with a handkerchief and kissed her forehead before standing and holding out a hand for her. Walking them out into the sitting room, he tossed some Floo powder into the fireplace, and they walked into the green flames together. Calling out their destination, they were sucked into the Floo Network and soon found themselves in Albus Dumbledore's office fireplace, and they stepped out, dusting themselves off.

'Albus, we need to speak with you,' Severus said quickly, sounding a little frantic as he pulled Hermione alongside him towards the Headmaster, who was seated at his desk.

Albus nodded. 'I was wondering when the two of you would be coming to see me,' he said with a look between the pair of them and a twinkle in his eyes.

Severus managed to contain his snort. Of course Albus Dumbledore would already know that they had resolved everything between them. He hated that damned twinkle in those silly, blue eyes. Frowning, he pulled out a seat for Hermione, waiting until she was fully seated before taking the chair beside her. She looked over at him, her eyes blazing with anger. This problem was beginning to get very serious, and there was only so much that could be done through legal channels.

'We need to get to the bottom of this very soon, Albus,' he said, addressing the Headmaster seriously. 'It has now come to innocent civilians being harmed all for someone's petty revenge for only Merlin knows what.'

Albus stroked his beard and nodded. 'Yes, I agree, my boy,' he said softly, his eyes unfocussed in thought. 'There was an incident a little over a year ago I was informed by Kingsley when it was thought that a small band of Death Eaters managed to escape Azkaban.'

'Why was the Order not informed of this then?' Severus demanded before Hermione could even open her mouth to speak.

'Because it was soon after reported that the prisoners had been recaptured and had all received the Kiss and their bodies been moved back to the cells in Azkaban,' Albus answered quietly. 'This always struck me as a somewhat odd situation and it was not until just recently that I began to question whether this was the case.'

'What do you mean by that, Headmaster?' Hermione asked, speaking for the first time since her arrival.

'I mean, dear girl, that I have recently come to suspect that the escaped Death Eaters did not actually make it back to prison. And also that they have somehow switched with someone else in order to pass off as themselves,' Albus answered. 'And so, the men you see flanking the image of yourself on the front page I would suspect to be those men that were never recaptured.'

'Were you ever told the names of these men?' Hermione asked, shifting forwards in her seat in anticipation, hoping for a positive reply.

Albus smiled and nodded. 'I was,' he answered softly. 'They were Evan Rosier, Walden McNair, and Amycus Carrow all of whom were said to have received the Kiss.'

'I know all of those men,' she said quietly. 'They were the ones who captured me temporarily during the final battle and tried to...'

She fell silent then, and Severus slipped a hand onto her knee in support. They all knew what she was trying to say. They were the three Death Eaters that had tried to rape her and had broken the fingers of her left hand. Somehow, she knew that they had been the ones to capture her again that day outside of the gates. They had beaten her and taken a hair from her. She felt heat build up behind her eyes and blinked a few times to clear the tears of anger. She would not cry because of them. It was what they wanted, after all for her to be upset by all of it. Well, Hermione Granger would not be giving them the satisfaction.

Severus sighed from beside her then, and she reached down and grasped the hand on her knee. She owed this man her life. 'Well, then we have a pretty good lead now, and all that we shall have to do is somehow find a way to confiscate a few items that belong to these men,' she said, sounding more confident than she felt.

'And what do you propose to do with them?' Albus asked curiously.

'We'll use a tracking spell on their belongings,' Severus answered for her, his eyes lighting up a little at the brilliance of his witch. 'Just modify the spell that we already have to track larger forms, and living ones at that.'

'That sounds like a brilliant plan, my boy,' the older wizard said with a twinkle in his blue eyes again. 'I shall be available to assist you in any way that you may need. Don't hesitate to ask.'

'We won't,' Hermione replied for the two of them, standing from her seat and releasing her lover's hand. 'I think we should leave and get to the bottom of this as soon as possible.'

Severus stood and nodded, and after saying a brief thanks to Albus, the pair of them Flooed to his chambers in the castle. They went immediately to his workroom and began writing out a plan of attack with Severus acting as a scribe for Hermione as she went off on a tangent. An angry and upset Hermione Granger was not someone to mess with, and he felt as though he would just be getting in her way if he tried to interrupt while she was rambling. She drew a final breath and slumped into a seat after twenty minutes of pacing and bouncing ideas, looking tired.

He saw this and stood, moving to her side and cupping her cheek tenderly. 'Love, you are exhausted, and I hate to see you this way,' he said, taking one of her hands and kissing the back of it. 'How about you go and sleep for a little while, and I will take care of all the details concerning the personal items we will need?'

She nodded wordlessly and allowed him to lead her back out of the workroom and into his bedroom on the other side of his chambers. He helped remove her shoes and jumper, pulling the covers over her once she was settled on the bed. Pressing a loving kiss to her forehead, he left the room quietly after extinguishing the lights and drawing the curtains and went back through his workroom to his office where he would Floo Kingsley Shacklebolt.

Sighing, he sat in the armchair in front of the fireplace and rubbed his eyes. This whole ordeal was becoming a lot more complicated by the day. He Summoned the Floo powder over to him and tossed some into the grate before calling for Kingsley at the Ministry, hoping that the man would not be too busy. Thankfully, the darker, older man's face appeared in the fire not too long after, looking serious.

'How can I help you, Severus?' he asked, his voice heavy with weariness.

'I need to ask you a favour,' Severus answered carefully. 'There are a number of personal items that once belonged to Death Eaters that the Ministry is holding. I would like to get my hands on them today.'

'I think I know what you are talking about,' Kingsley said. 'I will do my best for you, but can I ask what this is for?'

'I will need them in order to clear Hermione Granger's name and track certain people who have been causing her a great deal of trouble,' he answered.

Kingsley nodded and disappeared from the fire, leaving Severus alone to contemplate his next move. Whatever it was, he would have to act fast.

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A/N Sorry for the delay! Hope you enjoyed, and please leave a review!

## Dangerous

*Chapter 13 of 17*

After her messy divorce, Hermione Granger finds that someone is trying to destroy her reputation. She seeks out the help of Severus Snape to help her find out who it is. Will their past relationship affect how they work together?

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A big hug of thanks must go to Sequana for the beta of this.

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Chapter 13: Dangerous

The clouds swirled high in the night sky outside, and it looked as though a great downpour of rain was headed for the area. The village was small, and there were only a few little lanes that were scattered with a few old houses. Most of these were empty, and the few that had occupants were the homes of the elderly, who went nowhere and had their meals delivered to them by the charities and younger people of the next town on. That town was over half an hour away by car.

However, despite all this, the last house at the end of the lane had recently become the home of four decidedly younger people, who looked to be middle-aged. They left neither their house nor the small yard surrounded by a fence, and they had not once reached out to greet their elderly neighbours. Because of this, they were left alone, and it was assumed that they wanted to be left as such. The elderly inhabitants would never have guessed that in that house at the end of the longest lane lived three convicted criminals and their sought-after leader.

Little were they to know that their newest neighbours possessed strange magical powers that enabled them to eat without shopping. Little did they know that, with two

simple words, these people could have killed them if they so desired. It wouldn't have mattered to the villagers though they had lived their lives and were dying slowly in their houses, too tired and worn to even venture beyond their own walls.

"Do ye think they wonder what we're doin' 'ere?" McNair asked of the other two in the room with him.

'I think they're too bloody old to be bothered with a lot of new people who moved into this decrepit village out of nowhere,' Carrow said nastily, pulling a sour face. 'I don't see why we have to live in this swill while the bitch upstairs gets the best room in the house. We should be living better than this.'

'You'll keep that foolish tongue of yours in your head if you're smart, Amycus,' Rosier warned coolly. 'Don't underestimate the woman.'

Amycus turned over on his mattress and grumbled under his breath. No matter what he thought, Rosier was the one in charge of them, and despite everything, he had always trusted the older man to make smart decisions. A loud snore in the room alerted the two that were awake to the fact that McNair had fallen asleep. Walden McNair was true to his Scottish heritage with his Goliath-like stature, booming voice and epic snore.

'Did you ever think that breaking out was a stupid idea?' Amycus asked the other man in a hushed voice.

'Go to sleep, Carrow, before you think yourself into a stupor,' Rosier replied gruffly, rolling over on his thin mattress.

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'I think I almost have it,' Severus murmured under his breath.

Hermione looked up from her lot of calculations, her quill tucked in the hair twisted at the back of her neck. 'What do you mean?' she asked in confusion. She had been concentrating on her work so much that she had hardly been paying any attention to him at all that day.

'I think I have almost finished creating the tracking incantation that we can fuse with the Portkey charm to get us straight to Rosier,' Severus answered, holding up the lock of the man's hair pinched between two of his gloved fingers.

'That's you are brilliant!' Hermione exclaimed, sliding off her stool and immediately throwing her arms around his neck, pressing her mouth to his for a quick kiss. 'So how on Earth did you manage it?'

Severus cleared his throat softly. 'Well, with living things naturally being more complex than inanimate objects, the spells are obviously much more difficult to create,' he said, pulling down the first sheet of parchment from his desk excitedly. 'Instead of tracking Rosier, we are going to turn his hair into a Portkey that leads straight back to the source from which it came essentially, we will be returning this missing piece of him back to where it originally belonged.'

'You know, that actually sounds exactly like it would work,' she said in a mystified tone, looking at him in amazement. 'Honestly, I don't know how I could have ever left you,' she added, hugging him tightly and pressing kisses all over his face.

He chuckled softly. 'I was an arse it was quite understandable,' he said honestly, kissing her on the lips and embracing her warmly.

'We should go and let Albus know,' she told him excitedly.

'I think we should try and test this first before we get our hopes up too much,' he said in a calming tone, reaching across the table and taking a pair of small scissors. 'Will you let me cut a small lock of your hair?'

'Are you going to test it yourself?' she asked, hesitating momentarily as he snipped a piece from the longest layer. 'What if it doesn't work and you end up splinching or worse?'

He clicked his tongue impatiently. 'Hush. We will have no negative nonsense from you now,' he scolded lightly. 'You will go into the other room, and I will attempt to use the Portkey from a short distance to begin with.'

'Alright,' she agreed reluctantly, walking into the other room and sitting down in Severus' armchair before the fire.

Less than a minute later, there was a quiet rustling sound, and sure enough, Severus stood before her, whole and healthy. She grinned and jumped up, throwing herself into his arms and kissing him until they were both too breathless to continue. He dropped the lock of her hair onto the coffee table along with his wand and grasped the back of her legs, hoisting her up his body and encouraging her wordlessly to wrap her legs around him. She did as she was bid, and he strode with her into his bedroom, depositing her on the bed, and with a wave of his hand, they were both nude. He joined her quickly.

Two hours later, sated and showered, the pair tested the Portkey charm again, this time with Hermione waiting in the North Tower while Severus was in the dungeons. It worked yet again, so they headed down to Albus' office to inform him, although Severus was quite certain that the Headmaster already knew. There was very little that the old man wasn't aware of within the walls of the castle. They ascended the spiralling staircase with haste and were in the Headmaster's office shortly after.

'Albus, I'm sure you already know, but nevertheless, I thought to inform you of Hermione's and my success with a charm to take us to her tormentors,' Severus told him crisply, quickly demonstrating the charm and Portkey to him with Hermione's lock of hair once more.

'I am very glad to hear it,' Albus said cheerfully. 'I think that it may soon be time for us to approach them, but I do not by any means want yourself or Hermione going on your own to them.'

'Severus would never,' Hermione said matter-of-factly, even as her lover rolled his eyes as if to say he could take them all on his own. 'I think we should get Tonks, Harry, and Remus to help with this.'

'I agree with this,' Dumbledore said with a serious nod. 'I shall send an owl to everyone and let them know in the morning and we shall all meet here tomorrow night at seven to plan and discuss what must be done once we have captured them.'

Severus stood and extended a hand to Hermione. 'Come, we shall need to get some rest before tomorrow it is going to be a very long day,' he said, hoisting her up from the chair and walking hand-in-hand with her to the fireplace. 'Goodnight, Albus. We shall see you in the morning.'

'Rest well, my children,' he told them both.

With a nod and a smile, Hermione allowed Severus to Floo them back to his rooms for the night. They were both tired, and Severus had exhausted himself to his wits end with the casting of the charms and all the time he had spent working on them over the past few days. In his bedroom, they got undressed down to their undergarments and slid beneath the freshly made covers, snuggling in the middle and falling asleep shortly afterwards. The day to come would be long indeed.

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'Wake up, you miserable lumps,' the woman said, using the point of her shoe to nudge the ribs of the nearest man.

'Fuck off, will ye,' grumbled McNair hoarsely, waving his arm lazily in the direction of the woman and rolling back over with the intention to sleep more.

She pressed thinly her lips together and frowned. They really were rather useless when it came down to it, but she found that she was rather more intimidating to others if she walked around with large, thuggish bodyguards. The only one who was of any worth was Rosier, and he was a bit of a fool, falling for her charms the way he had and doing everything she had ever asked of him. It mattered little, though. They would all become even more useless to her soon, and she would have to kill them even Rosier.

'The boys are tired of this rundown, old house, Ma'am,' Evan said, walking back into the room where his comrades slept after visiting the bathroom. 'I think we should relocate somewhere cleaner, perhaps there are plenty of places that are better than this where we can still remain inconspicuous to the public.'

'I'll consider it,' she said sharply, looking down at McNair in disgust. 'For now, we'll stay here, and you had better whip these two into reasonable shape. There is no room for slobes or over-opinionated rebels here.'

'Yes, Ma'am,' Rosier ground out as she turned on her heel and left the room, retreating to her own room up the stairs.

He watched her walk out, admiring her surprisingly nice behind in her tight business skirt as she did so before turning back around to look at the other two men in the room. His eyes immediately met Amycus Carrow's, and he was taken aback to find that the younger man was actually giving him a suspicious look. With a frown, he dropped into an old armchair and prepared for the questioning to begin.

'You're not sleeping with her, are you?' Amycus asked quietly.

'I'm not sure if you've noticed, but I've hardly been in a room alone with her long enough to do anything of the sort,' he replied gruffly.

'But you want to fuck her, and that's why you are doing all this,' the younger wizard accused. 'That's what this is all about. You're bloody smitten with the bitch! What promises has she made to you?'

Evan snarled at him angrily. 'She has made no promises, and I am not in this because of some misplaced lust,' he growled. 'Surely even you would fuck her if given half the chance, considering how long it has been since we've had any half-decent arse.'

Amycus rolled his eyes. 'Whatever you say, Evan,' he replied, disbelief flavouring his tone. 'Just don't forget to share her when the time for payment comes around.'

The older wizard snorted. 'If that time ever comes,' he said.

McNair emitted a loud snore at this point, and the conversation ended. Amycus got up from where he was sitting and went to the dirty, makeshift kitchen to find something to eat while Rosier remained seated. It was going to be a long next few days, that much was certain.

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A/N My apologies for the long breaks between chapters. I hope to bring this to a close in the near future. Please review!

## Diffusion

### *Chapter 14 of 17*

After her messy divorce, Hermione Granger finds that someone is trying to destroy her reputation. She seeks out the help of Severus Snape to help her find out who it is. Will their past relationship affect how they work together?

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Hugs of thanks go to Sequana for the beta of this chapter!

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### Chapter 14: Diffusion

Grimmauld Place was once more being inhabited by the Order of the Phoenix. Harry and Kingsley had spread news of the problems that Hermione had been experiencing with her tormentors amongst her friends, and soon everyone wanted a piece of the action. It was fortunate that this was the case, as she and Severus still had much to do as far as the cure for her ex-husband went. Their progress had slowed until it finally came to a halt, and the need to act on her stalkers was becoming increasingly important. Two more attacks on people had been reported, although this time, it seemed that Albus had been able to keep a lid on the press about the identity of the attackers.

It seemed her Polyjuiced counterpart was a little more daring than any of them had ever expected her to be. And with the Death Eater sidekicks she had hanging around, nobody was really willing to go into a potential battle unprepared. Dark magic was dangerous, and Severus' body was littered with the scars to prove it. Only he truly knew exactly what their kind was like: brutal and uncaring of the consequences.

'This has to be contained tonight,' Mad-eye Moody growled, pounding his fist against the kitchen table.

Arthur Weasley stood and paced from one side of the kitchen to the other. 'We need to be careful and rational about this, Alastor,' he said in a measured tone. 'We can't let matters get out of hand, or the next thing we know, we'll have rogue Death Eaters running around everywhere.'

'Arthur's right, Moody. You might be familiar with the Death Eaters of old, but these are not the same,' Severus agreed calmly. 'The ones we were fighting for the twenty years of war we endured before the final battle were bloodthirsty and immoral, yes, but they were not nearly as vicious and non-discriminate as this new, renegade troupe that we now face. We would do well to proceed only after we have a clear strategy.'

Hermione shifted uncomfortably on the bench beside him. He turned to look at her and saw that there was only anger, weariness, and fear in her eyes. His heart went out to her, and he gently slipped his fingers between hers, locking their hands together. He wanted to give her comfort so she could weather this out and leave it behind her relatively unscathed. And they would. He just needed to be strong because she couldn't always be strong for herself.

The amount of stress caused by the knowledge that she had people stalking her and trying to sully her name was almost too much for her. She had been so strong up until that point, and it was finally beginning to tell that she was going to crack. She had yet to cry or have a tantrum or yell about any of it. Severus was extremely impressed at the amount of self-control she displayed in the face of it. She wasn't letting them beat her, and he was going to ensure that she remained that fervent for the time being.

'We need a strategy,' Harry finally piped up. 'Professor Snape obviously knows what this lot is like the best, and I know a thing or two about strategy and the like. I think that anyone who believes they can contribute something useful to the infiltration strategy should come up to the study with us now.'

'Quite,' Severus drawled, standing from his seat. 'Hermione will also be included in this. It is her name and life that is being threatened, after all.'



'I don't think the girl really needs to be involved,' Moody muttered just loudly enough for Hermione to hear from where she still sat.

'Now listen here, Mad-Eye,' Hermione said, breaking her silence. 'I don't appreciate being referred to as "girl", and furthermore, I believe that I deserve a little more respect than to have you muttering about me under your breath, grumbling about this whole ordeal like I've really put you out. If you are not interested in working as a team and being agreeable to everyone, then I would rather you took your grumpy, old arse back home.'

Severus almost smiled broadly at that. He was so proud of her in that moment for sticking up for herself and telling Moody off. Not many people, even within the closely-knit Order, would ever dream of going up against Mad-Eye either verbally or magically. It was really something that she was able to hold her own, and Severus loved her all the more for it. Hermione Granger was a force to be reckoned with.

'Now,' Hermione continued, having commanded the attention of the room with her bold dressing-down of Moody, 'I believe that there will be two teams, each consisting of five people. One team will infiltrate; the other will remain on guard outside the dwelling or building that they are inside. The orders are to Stun, not kill, on contact. After this, binding is the next on the agenda. I want every single one of them alive for questioning. This is not a game.'

'Well said, Hermione,' Albus said, finally making his appearance from the stairs leading up to the rest of the house.

'Albus, surely you can see...' Moody began before Albus waved him off.

'Alastor, you know as well as I that Hermione is more than capable of defending herself,' he said calmly. 'And as the brightest witch of her generation, I think it is safe to say that her plan is one that was well thought out, don't you?'

'I still don't like it,' he grumbled.

'Like it or not, Moody, this is the way it is going to be,' Severus said crisply then, putting a hand on Hermione's shoulder and giving it a gentle, supportive squeeze. 'Go on, Hermione tell us the rest of your plan.'

She nodded and stood, smiling slightly at him. 'I think that splitting into two teams of five should be enough. There are four of them, but we shouldn't underestimate them at all,' she said evenly. 'Now, anyone who thinks they would like to be involved should go up to the parlour and wait while Severus and I explain to the others how they can help.'

There were a few mutterings and murmurs as the chairs scraped and people either moved closer to Hermione or went up the stairs to the parlour. Severus then instructed those remaining to go to the library and find everything they could on potion bind spells, and then he and Hermione joined the rest in the room at the top of the stairs. Most of the Weasley boys were there, along with Minerva, Kingsley Shacklebolt, Harry, Albus, Tonks, Remus, and Moody. Despite having had the riot act read to him, it seemed the ex-Auror still had a bloodlust for Death Eaters and wanted a part of the action.

Hermione surveyed the company silently. These were her friends and colleagues her family. They only wanted the best for her, and in her time of need, they were all laying their lives on the line to lend a helping hand. She smiled inwardly and steeled herself, preparing to lay down the plan. Arthur entered the room then and sat down beside Kingsley, looking at her intently.

'So, there are plenty of us here, and now we might be able to work in larger groups,' she said softly, counting out thirteen including herself and Severus. 'As I mentioned earlier, I believe one group should be infiltrating the building while the others remain outside as backup and to make sure nobody gets away should one of them escape.'

'What if there are more than just the four of them?' Alastor piped up from his position near the window.

'We have considered that, of course,' Severus cut in before the old wizard could say any more. 'But we dismissed that idea. These Death Eaters and the woman travelling with them would not be likely to trust anyone enough to allow them into their circle. They seem to be a fairly tight-knit group.'

'In any case, Alastor, Severus knows what he is talking about, and it would do you well to have some faith in other people,' Albus said before his friend could speak again and cause a fight to break out.

Moody closed his mouth and huffed like a spoiled child. Hermione took this as her cue to continue. 'Right, well, I think we should just divide into two groups of those who will want to join myself and Severus inside and those who want to remain on the outside perimeters of the building,' she said crisply.

She felt Severus' hand on her shoulder then and turned around to look at him. He was giving her a hard look that she didn't like very much. 'What is it?' she demanded, trying to shrug his hand off.

'I thought we both agreed the other night that you wouldn't be going inside and would lead the team outside,' he whispered to her, his voice edged with nervousness that was uncommon for him.

Hermione frowned deeply at this and grabbed his elbow, yanking him towards the room behind her while everyone looked on in confusion. She poked her head back around the door and smiled. 'We'll be back in just a moment feel free to make two groups,' she told them before rounding back on Severus outside the room.

'I'm going to go inside, Severus,' she told him, poking a finger into his chest. 'The other night, we discussed the issue as I remember, but we never came to a proper decision or rather, you were too stubborn to hear anything other than what you wanted.'

'I don't want you to come to any harm, Hermione. Surely you understand my need to see you untouched?' he tried to reason in the quietest voice he could manage while they were out in the hall where anyone could hear them. 'I only just have you in my life again, and I don't think I could stand to see you go out of it another time.'

'Oh, Severus,' she said softly, her words whispering over his lips as she leaned against him and pressed her mouth lightly to his. 'I'm not going anywhere, and you know that I can take care of myself. I've been doing it for years, after all.'

'Hermione, love, look at me,' he told her, staring straight into her eyes. 'I had never thought that I would ever meet anyone who I would care for more than myself, yet here you are. I don't want to ask you to saddle yourself with me for life, but I want you to know that you are my life you have been ever since that day you walked into the Great Hall fresh from summer holidays in your seventh year. I love you more than you could ever imagine, and I wish you would join the group outside.'

Hermione felt tears welling up in her eyes at his confession. She felt her love for him overwhelm her, and she clung to him, sobbing into his shirt. 'I'll join the group outside,' she whispered. 'But if I so much as hear even the slightest hint that you are injured or that something is going wrong inside, I will not stay out.'

'Thank you, my love,' he said, kissing her forehead with infinite tenderness and holding her close. It was not a total victory, but at least his mind could rest a little.

She dabbed at her face with a handkerchief that he presented to her, and together the pair returned to the parlour. Everyone sat up and looked between them attentively. 'I will be leading the outside team, and Severus shall go inside,' she informed them all calmly.

Nodding, she took a seat and allowed Severus to inform them of the inside strategy and plan. It was with wary minds that the whole group decided it would be best to strike after midnight that very night to give them both the cover of darkness by any Muggles and the element of surprise. Everyone dispersed from the room to get a few hours of sleep before they would leave for the location via the tracking spell.

Hermione and Severus retreated back to Hogwarts along with Minerva and Albus and went straight to his chambers, collapsing together on his bed in an exhausted tangle. He slung an arm over her waist and dragged her body up against his in the middle of the bed, pressing desperate kisses against her neck. Hermione allowed him the comfort he was seeking from her wordlessly and turned to face and kiss him.

Their clothes were shed, and soon all that could be heard in the room was a mixture of their impassioned shouts and heavy breaths.

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A/N Not long to go now. I apologise for the wait, but hopefully it will have been worth it! Please review!

# Determination

## Chapter 15 of 17

After her messy divorce, Hermione Granger finds that someone is trying to destroy her reputation. She seeks out the help of Severus Snape to help her find out who it is. Will their past relationship affect how they work together?

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

Many thanks go to my lovely beta Sequana!

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### Chapter 15: Determination

The house was eerily silent, save for the scuttle of various rodents and bugs across the floor and the low rumble of a grown man's snore. Evan Rosier glanced at his watch and closed his eyes when he saw that it was nearing two in the morning. He would need some sleep before the sun rose, and they would have to shift location. The few belongings that the troupe had were packed into a trunk that was shrunken down and resided in the pocket of his robes.

He propped his feet on the coffee table in front of him and let his mind drift. He was on the very edge of sleep when he heard footsteps on the stairs. Figuring it was probably the woman, he lifted his feet off the table and stood, preparing to go and greet her in the hall instead of having her waking up the boys. He groaned as his brain alerted him to the sharp pain in his back. He wasn't young enough to be spending endless nights sleeping in an armchair.

'Ma'am, is that you?' he asked in a hoarse whisper.

He shook his head at the lack of response and blinked, staring up the stairs and beginning to climb. He swore that he had heard someone on the stairs. He reached the top and knocked on the door to her room. He received no answer, so he shrugged and turned the handle, barely peeking inside and catching a glimpse of her naked back. She slept nude. He was surprised. For a woman like her in a houseful of men, he would have thought she would be wearing a lot more to bed. Retreating from her room, he closed the door quietly and turned to head back down the stairs, but he didn't manage so much as a single step before he saw the pale face of one Severus Snape. His world went black.

Severus cast a binding spell on Rosier and took him to the room down the hall, depositing his body roughly onto the floor. The wards on the house had been shabby to say the very least. On arriving at the small estate in the village, the feeble wards had activated only long enough to stop his group from following him directly inside the dwelling. From the outside, he and Hermione had quickly disabled them, and his team, consisting of Moody, Kingsley, Harry, Tonks, and the Weasley twins, had gone inside the house through both the front and back entrances.

He stared at a second door in front of him contemplating whether or not he wanted to go into the room at that moment. Shaking his head, he locked and warded the door instead and went back down the stairs silently to check on how the others were handling the two idiots in the sitting room. He arrived there, only to find that Kingsley and Tonks were out cold on the floor, Moody and Harry were being held in one corner by bindings that were unfamiliar to him, and both the Weasley twins were kneeling on the ground before the two Death Eaters, who had wands pointed at the twin's throats.

'Don't come any closer, Snape,' Carrow said, glaring at the older wizard defiantly. 'You have sunk low, traitor, cavorting with filthy Mudbloods and their disgusting sympathizers.'

'We don't intend on letting any of you live this night,' McNair drawled, his voice thick with his accent. 'But Snape you shall watch them die first.'

Severus opened his mouth to speak but snapped it shut again when he saw the faint glimmer of a Disillusionment Charm near the corner where Harry and Moody were bound. He knew that it was Hermione and Remus the moment a second glimmer caught his eye over at Tonks and Kingsley. The two Death Eaters may have thought that they had gotten the better of them, but Severus had known that Hermione would not have stayed outside as she had promised, stubborn witch.

'Oh, I wouldn't count on that,' Severus sneered, allowing a slow smirk to creep onto his face as he saw Kingsley and Tonks stir to life quietly. 'Actually, I would bet that the two of you are going to be bound and gagged in less than five minutes time.'

'Why, you insolent..!' began Carrow, raising his wand from one of the twins to point it at Severus.

But before he could even so much as utter a curse, his wand silently flew out of his hand, and Severus caught it deftly while McNair's wand also left his hand and flew to the back of the room, only to be caught by the Disillusioned Hermione. With a casual flick of his wand, Severus had both the Death Eaters bound and gagged and propped against the nearest wall with the Weasley boys standing guard over them. Now all that was left was the bitch upstairs, who apparently hadn't heard any of the commotion. Severus thought she would have to be one hell of a deep sleeper.

'Right, I will go upstairs with Kingsley and Potter and retrieve the two up there,' he instructed in a low voice. 'Evan Rosier is bound in the far room down the hall and may still be knocked out. I will grab the woman, and then we can all be on our way.'

By this point, Albus and Minerva were walking through the front door with worried expressions just as Severus and the other two men began the climb up the stairs. Albus followed on the end of the line, eager to be involved in the capture of the final person and simply smiled benignly when Severus raised an eyebrow at him. Shaking his head in faint disgust, Severus removed the wards from the door and turned the handle, fully expecting the woman to still be asleep but not letting down his guard for a second.

'Bastard!' shrieked Rita Skeeter, flying at him from out of nowhere, her wand in her hand and her hair a mess, wearing a skimpy-looking silk dressing gown.

Severus tried to sidestep her attack but moved just a little too slowly because her shoulder and arm made full contact and knocked him off balance, sending him flying backwards, his head hitting the wall. The last thing he saw before everything went black was Albus' worried face, and the last thing he heard was the shrill screaming of Skeeter as people rushed past to grab a hold of her before she could get away.

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Pain was all he could feel. The light in the room had become too bright for him to sleep any longer regardless of the fact that his eyes were still shut. The thought of how much pain he would be in when he finally did open his eyes made him cringe inwardly. The last thing he could remember was Rita Skeeter flying at him like a crazed banshee, her shrill voice ringing in his ears. He moaned softly as he tried to move, his muscles aching with the effort. He felt as though he had been trampled by a herd of hippogriffs.

Finally, he came to the conclusion that he might as well open his eyes and find out exactly what had happened. It had all seemed so anticlimactic before he had gone back up the stairs to get the woman and Rosier. He wondered if everyone had managed to round the four of them up without trouble. Sighing, he opened one eye cautiously, the light leaving a slight burning sensation from lack of using his sight, before he bravely opened the other eye and stared at the familiar ceiling of the Hogwarts hospital wing.

Turning his head to his right, he was surprised to find Hermione curled up in an armchair beside his bed, her eyes closed and curls falling across her face, which was turned towards him. She was so pretty, and the morning sun shining on her made her look angelic and sweet. He smiled even though the effort to do so hurt him. He flexed the fingers of the hand nearest her and then reached out his arm, brushing the hair out of her eyes and tucking it behind her ear.

She stirred, and her eyes flickered open, fixing on his before a smile lit her face, and she jumped out of the chair and was on him with hugs and gentle kisses all over his face. The tender soreness made him wince, but he embraced her in return and accepted her enthusiastic affection easily.

'Oh, Severus!' she exclaimed with a small sob. 'I was so worried about you! You flew all the way down the stairs... And it all happened so quickly!'

He chuckled, his voice husky from lack of use. 'So that's why I feel as though I was trampled by a herd of hippogriffs,' he said with a smirk. 'I suppose I broke a few bones and such?'

'You broke about eight ribs, broke your left arm in three places, dislocated a shoulder, and got a big bump on the back of your head,' she told him, her forehead wrinkling with worry. 'It was as if we were all stuck in slow motion and you were the only one moving at a regular speed.'

'Please tell me that you got all of them,' he said, rubbing his eyes with his left hand, as his other was currently being held tight by both Hermione's hands. 'If I went through all of that, you lot should have at least made sure that you got them all.'

Hermione nodded. 'Skeeter attempted to make another escape through the upstairs window, but Minerva was at her side and yanked her back inside by her hair,' she recounted with a laugh. 'The other three were already bound and gagged, all thanks to you.'

'I would have paid to see Minerva yank that vile woman's hair,' Severus replied with a chuckle, laying his head back and looking up into Hermione's eyes.

She beamed back at him, her eyes shining with her love for him. 'So we did an interrogation while you've were out cold and found out some very interesting things about Rita Skeeter that would curl even your hair,' she told him casually.

He looked at her curiously, using his arms to slowly push himself into a sitting position propped against the pillows. Hermione helped him with this, and Severus accepted her touch, grateful for the assistance. She leaned in and pressed a gentle kiss to his lips, brushing her knuckles down the side of his face. Severus smiled and captured her hand in one of his, bringing it to his mouth to kiss her palm.

'Now, tell me all about it,' he said, changing topic, causing Hermione to choke back a laugh.

'Very well,' she answered with a sigh. 'It seems that Skeeter couldn't get over her grudge with me for alerting the Ministry to her status as an unlicensed Animagus and her subsequent dismissal from the *Daily Prophet*. In addition to this, before the final battle, she became a Death Eater and was using the other blockheads as hired muscle. She also has a scarab tattoo on her bum.'

Severus snorted. 'Well, that is something,' he said, voice dripping with sarcasm. 'And you are sure she was not just upset that you trapped her in a jar in her Animagus form?'

Hermione slapped his non-injured shoulder playfully and grinned. 'I'm quite certain that was one of the reasons for it but certainly not the sole one,' she answered with a delicate sniff. 'In any case, they've all been shipped off to Azkaban by Kingsley and are now to look forward to a life behind bars.'

'And what about your reputation, Hermione?' he asked. 'What about the papers?'

'Albus spoke at a press conference at the Ministry this morning,' she answered. 'People no longer fear for their lives or sanity, and I am free of all suspicion.'

'That's wonderful news,' he said softly.

'I will have to resume my post at St. Mungo's at the start of next week, though,' she said, looking a little down at the prospect. 'I love my job, really I do, but I don't like the idea of being so far away from you when you are still going to be healing.'

Severus smiled at her then. He had been worried that she was going to say that it was over and it had just been their close proximity that had made her delusional. 'I will miss you being around all of the time as well,' he told her, making her smile. 'And there is also the issue of your ex-husband lying comatose...'

Hermione smiled. 'While we were all busy storming the house and you were getting beaten up,' she began teasingly, 'Molly and the others were able to find a very interesting spell that does exactly what we needed and will bind the base potion, the revival potion, and the dark-matter lifting potion all at once.'

'I only imagine it could have been the exact cure to the toxin he ingested,' Severus said with a sigh.

Hermione nodded. 'Exactly,' she replied. 'Pity we didn't look there earlier.'

'How long have I been here?' he asked suddenly.

Hermione smiled. 'Three days.'

His eyes widened. 'What?'

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A/N Nearly done! Please review!

# Dinner

## Chapter 16 of 17

After her messy divorce, Hermione Granger finds that someone is trying to destroy her reputation. She seeks out the help of Severus Snape to help her find out who it is. Will their past relationship affect how they work together?

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A thousand hugs of gratitude must go to Sequana for beta-ing this chapter for me!

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### Chapter 16: Dinner

The halls of St. Mungo's were silent that day. A week beforehand, the place had been alive with people such as reporters attempting to get inside the private room for the scoop. For nearly six months, the hospital had been the residence of a very silent Michael Williamson, Healer Hermione Granger's former husband. That in itself had been enough to bring the reporters panting after a front page story. Thankfully, that time was past for all of them, and Hermione had returned to working at St. Mungo's for the last two weeks, at which time Michael was released into the care of his family in Yorkshire.

Finding the cure for Michael had been a relatively easy task after the capture of Rita Skeeter and her Death Eater thugs. Hermione and Severus got the name of the potion he had been poisoned with out of Rosier, who was all too eager to spill the beans on Skeeter after she had betrayed them and broken her promises to him. Hermione had been welcomed back to St. Mungo's with open arms and even given a raise in pay along with her name being cleared from all of the papers by none other than Albus Dumbledore himself.

The only thing that wasn't exactly as Hermione wanted was that, because of her work hours, she didn't get to see Severus as much as she would have liked. In actual fact, she was so busy at the hospital, and he was so busy back at Hogwarts, that there was barely any time for them to spend together at all now that they had decided to have a second go at a relationship with each other. It frustrated her, especially on weekdays when she was alone in her house, reading a book on her own in the study, trying not to think of how much she missed him.

'Healer Granger?' asked a soft voice from just behind her.

Hermione blinked, realizing that she was standing still in the doorway of one of the patient's rooms, leaning against the doorframe idly. She turned around and saw that it was her apprentice, Sophia, looking at her in confusion. Hermione smiled at the younger witch and shook her head, pushing away from the door and walking back down the hall towards her office, Sophia close on her heels. They arrived there and entered, Hermione heading straight to her desk and grabbing her briefcase, piling in the things she would need to have with her over the weekend.

'I'm sorry about that, Sophie,' she said, speaking for the first time since they had entered the room. 'I've been a little distracted of late.'

'It's alright,' the young witch replied. Her hair was now an icy shade of blonde with a layer of dark purple underneath. 'You must have a lot on your mind.'

Hermione smiled, and she looked as though she had been enchanted. 'The problem is I don't think that it is exactly conducive to work at all' she said with a dry chuckle.

Sophia smiled. 'You look like a woman in love, Healer Granger,' she said pointedly, grinning at her master.

'Am I that transparent?' Hermione asked benignly.

'Only if you know what you're looking for,' Sophia answered with a proud look. 'I'm really happy for you. You've had a terrible ordeal the last few months, and it's nice to see that sparkly look about you. I've been your apprentice for nearly three years now, and I never once saw you sparkle while you were married to Mr. Williamson.'

'I was very miserable in a bad way,' Hermione admitted. 'I don't know what I ever saw in that man, to be perfectly honest. I was always much happier with Severus before we fell apart from each other.'

'And now you get to pick up where you left off with the man that you were supposed to be with,' the younger witch pointed out. 'I know he was a right nasty git of a professor, but he is a good man, and you will be happy together.'

Hermione grinned, pleased beyond words that her apprentice, who was in many ways much like a younger sister to her, approved of her relationship with their former professor. It wasn't as though she even felt that she needed people to approve. Many had known before of their past relationship. She was just shocked at the number of her friends who had actually bet on how long it would take for them to get back together. Of course, none other than Albus Dumbledore could be held responsible for the circulation of that wager.

'So, Healer Glick tells me that you were fabulous while I was on leave,' Hermione said, changing the subject to something that would distract her from thoughts of her lover.

They talked for about twenty minutes, catching up on what Hermione had missed out on while she had been away and signing off on all of the journals and questionnaires that Sophia had completed towards her apprenticeship. She had a few months left of her training before she became an intern, and Hermione was fairly certain that the younger witch wanted to remain in her department for the time being. With that settled, Hermione sent Sophia home for the day and went to do her last rounds before Healer Glick took over for the night shift.

Hermione had that weekend off and planned to spend it at Hogwarts with Severus. He had a lovely dinner planned for them that night in his chambers, and they were going to be heading to Prince Manor for some private catch-up time together on the Saturday morning. Feeling excited, she raced through her final duties for the evening, ensuring that all her patients had been given their prescribed medical treatment before signing off and leaving Glick responsible for the wing that night.

Apparating away with her briefcase, she arrived at the gates of Hogwarts still dressed in her Healer's robes and began the long journey to the castle. It was a nice walk, and the breeze was gentle. Spring had begun not so long ago and had brought with it green grass, flowers, and the gentle Highland zephyr. The sky was still partially red from the sunset, even though it was already past seven o'clock in the evening. She sighed, stopping to admire the way the light was reflecting off the surface of the lake from where she stood on the path to the school. It was beautiful.

She walked on, arriving at the castle and walking inside to find that the Great Hall was only just beginning to empty of students and staff alike. She assumed dinner was only just starting to come to a close and made her way down towards the dungeons, figuring Severus would either be in his quarters already or would arrive soon. If it was

the latter, she had no problems with waiting for him. He had promised her quite the lovely meal.

'*Belladonna*,' she told the portrait guarding his rooms, and it swung forwards to admit her.

She walked in and shrugged out of her robes, hanging them on the coat hooks beside his door. She was just about to take a seat in one of his armchairs when she felt a pair of strong, warm arms wrap around her middle and a pointed nose nuzzle the flesh of her neck, inhaling her scent. She smiled, turning in his embrace and throwing her own arms around his neck, drawing his head down for a kiss.

'I've missed you so much!' she exclaimed when she finally pulled away for a breath.

He nodded in agreement. 'I would prefer we do not go a fortnight before seeing each other again in the future,' he murmured, kissing the end of her nose and resting his forehead against hers.

Hermione pulled back out of his arms to see that he was not wearing his usual teaching attire and was instead dressed simply in his black trousers and white, high-collared shirt, the top buttons undone and sleeves rolled to his elbows. He looked as handsome as sin, and all she wanted to do, aside from satisfy the hunger in her stomach, was to rip his clothes off and make love to him.

'You look very handsome,' she told him, making him chuckle at her.

'And you, my sweet, are under some serious delusions if that is all you have to say about me this evening,' he replied, kissing her cheek swiftly and heading in the direction of his kitchen. 'I made you a wonderful dinner this evening, pet.'

Hermione grinned and followed closely behind him. 'And what have you made for me this evening, master chef?' she inquired curiously, breathing in the delicious scent of lemongrass and sandalwood that hit her nose on entering his domain.

'For starters, we shall indulge in oysters on the half shell with lemon and salt with a side salad,' he began, walking about his kitchen with the ease of familiarity despite not having to cook for himself at Hogwarts. 'For the main course, we shall be having roasted quail with truffles and a herb and garlic sauce, and for dessert, rich dark chocolate mousse as I know how much you love chocolate.'

'Mmmm, it sounds divine,' she murmured provocatively, glancing up at him from under her lashes in a deliberate fashion.

Severus simply couldn't help himself. He leaned over and gave her a lush kiss, only pulling back when her lips were sufficiently plumped from his attentions. 'You, my pet, are a dangerous thing to have around,' he growled huskily. 'That seductive look of yours is deadly.'

She grinned triumphantly. 'Well, I've had such a long week, and I've missed you so much,' she said with a small pout.

Severus sighed heavily. 'I have missed you also, love,' he admitted, turning back to the stove to stir his sauce while maintaining a neutral expression. He didn't want to appear weak by any means, but he knew that Hermione was his major weakness. 'We will have plenty of time over the summer to see each other, though, and we can still see each other every weekend. I will make sure of it.'

Hermione came up behind him, hugging him from behind and resting her cheek on his back. 'The summer holidays are two and a half months away,' she murmured against him. 'But I suppose it is all we can do for now.'

Severus turned to face her, capturing her chin in his strong hand, tilting her face to see his. 'We will do what we must to see each other as often as we are able to until then,' he murmured, kissing her lips briefly. 'I know it is hard to be apart, especially as our relationship is all rather new again, but there is nothing to be afraid of, pet. I love you, and I will be here for you, no matter what.'

Hermione nodded, tears glistening in her eyes from his touching confession. He always knew just the right thing to say to soothe her nerves. Truth be told, she had been feeling a little insecure about all of those things. So soon after being in a marriage that had been totally unfulfilling, she was a little nervous about everything involved in relationships. But she knew she needn't have any worries about her Severus. He was the only man that she had ever loved with her whole heart, and he had more than proven his devotion to her in more than one way.

'You're good to me, Severus,' she murmured before kissing him soundly and pulling away. 'Did you need me to do anything?'

Severus smiled. 'You can choose the wine if you like,' he said, gesturing to the other side of the kitchen where there was a wine rack filled with various vintages and colours. 'There are a few nice bottles of red that would go well with the main course. You can choose which one you prefer.'

Hermione nodded and headed over, perusing her options before finally settling on a nice bottle of Sauvignon Blanc and taking it into the dining room with her, settling it in the ice bucket that Severus had thought to provide them with next to his immaculately dressed table. There was a single, blood-red rose resting on one of the plates, and a few candles placed along the centre of the table filled the room with a very romantic atmosphere. She appreciated all the effort he had gone to tonight and intended to be very thorough in thanking him for it later.

'Ready for dinner?' he asked from behind her.

Hermione turned to him and smiled. 'Definitely,' she answered.

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A/N - There is one chapter left after this one. Please review!

## Documents

### *Chapter 17 of 17*

After her messy divorce, Hermione Granger finds that someone is trying to destroy her reputation. She seeks out the help of Severus Snape to help her find out who it is. Will their past relationship affect how they work together?

Many hugs and kisses must be sent out to Sequana for her support and for beta-ing this story for me! I would also like to thank each and every person who reviewed. I really appreciated all of them.

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## Chapter 17: Documents

*Five months later...*

Hermione stood and stared at herself for a long moment in the mirror. She looked bright and cheerful, despite the earliness of the hour that morning. Certainly she was tired, but she couldn't help but feel content with her lot in life. She shook her head, washed her hands in the bathroom basin, washed her face and dried it with a towel and then headed back to the bedroom. On arriving in the doorway, she stood for a moment to admire the tall, pale, lightly-muscled man lying on the bed, the bedding draped over him but not quite covering his chest. He looked just like a statue of a Roman god.

She grinned when she saw him turn over to face her. His dark eyes were open, and she could see his faint smile in the light from the bathroom. He held a hand out to her, beckoning her back to their bed, and she switched off the light before happily complying. She snuggled up against him for warmth, sliding her cold feet between his warm ones, making him jump a little.

'Your feet are freezing, woman!' he exclaimed even as he cuddled her closer to him with his arms, allowing her to absorb his warmth.

'You'll make me warm again in no time, love,' she replied, kissing his chin and nuzzling her face into his neck to inhale his masculine scent.

Hermione just loved to cuddle with Severus at night. They had married a few short weeks ago in a small ceremony on the Hogwarts grounds beside the lake. Albus, of course, had officiated, and Arthur had attended as the representative from the Ministry. After that, it was just all of their close friends and the Order. Hermione had asked Sophia to be one of her witnesses along with Harry and Luna while Minerva and Remus Lupin had witnessed on Severus' behalf. Their wedding party had all signed the marriage documents and congratulated Hermione and Severus with gifts.

It had been sweet and romantic, and Hermione had worn a simple, ivory summer dress with white jasmine in her loose hair. Severus had only been in black trousers and a white linen shirt, the sleeves rolled up and the neck buttons undone. She was sure it was the most casual anyone other than her had ever seen him. Everyone had agreed that the simplicity of it all was beautiful. Afterwards, the newlyweds had set off on their honeymoon: a trip to Southeast Asia, where the two of them explored the sites and beaches and Severus even got a little tanned. That, however, did not last long, as on their return to Scotland, he became pale once more.

Severus had proposed to her on the first day of the summer holidays after taking her out to a fancy restaurant in Wizzarding London and dropping onto bended knee in between dinner and dessert without a care in the world for his dignity. Hermione had been so blown away by the fact that he would do something like that for her that she forgot to answer immediately and sat in shock until one of the other patrons in the restaurant had shown him pity and yelled out for her to 'answer to the poor bastard.' She, of course, got up from her seat and threw herself at him, kissing him in front of everyone and saying yes repeatedly in between kisses.

For their wedding gift, Albus had given them a house that was located on the very edge of Hogsmeade. It was a nice walking distance from Hogwarts and a little less than two minutes outside of the township itself. Severus had been reluctant to accept such a big gift, but afterwards the pair was delighted and pleased to have somewhere of their own without having to live in the castle. Hermione sold her house in London and moved all of her belongings into their new home.

They had paid a visit to Prince Manor the week before, spending a little time there to ensure the place was being well cared for and to select one of the elves to accompany them back to Hogsmeade. The Snapes were quite content indeed.

'I love you,' Hermione told him, wriggling up against him firmly.

Severus bit back the moan that threatened to escape his lips. His wife aroused him so easily. 'I love you too... Oh, Merlin, my pet,' he murmured, gasping when she reached down a hand to stroke his cotton-covered member.

'Take off your pants, Severus,' she urged, tugging lightly at the front of his shorts. 'You feel like you are in need of a little attention.'

He chuckled at her interest, complying eagerly with her bossy request. If he was going to be pleased by his own beautiful, nimble, young wife, then who was he to complain about a little bossiness? Besides, there were some days when he was the one demanding that she strip naked. He helped her out of his white shirt that she had taken to wearing to sleep, tossing it over the side of the bed once the buttons had been undone. Hermione pushed up onto her knees, lifting a leg over him so that she straddled his stomach, her wet arousal marking his tight lower belly.

Not waiting for an invitation, Severus reached a hand up to cup her small breast, kneading lightly and rubbing his palm against her nipple, sending a spark of pleasure straight to the apex of her thighs. His other hand lazily found its way to her mound, and after cupping it, he stroked the slick flesh and wriggled a finger up into her cavern. He pumped it in and out a bit, establishing her readiness for him. Lifting her by the hips a little, he settled her over his erection and jerked up as he pressed her down, encasing him in one swift movement.

'Oh, gods,' she groaned softly, feeling him stretch her in the way that she liked so much. 'Oh, please move!'

Severus thrust up into her sharply. 'Oh, I'll move alright,' he growled, helping to shift her up and down while he thrust up at the same time.

They established a steady rhythm, grinding, thrusting, moving, panting and sweating while moaning their love and pleasure. Every time they came together was just as good as the time before, and sometimes, it felt even better. Severus felt sure that Hermione's taut little body was made for him, for she was tight around him always, and he filled her and rubbed that spot within her every time without fail. Their movements sped up as they neared their climaxes, and Severus flipped them over so that he was on top, thrusting in and out of her and pressing her down into the mattress as hard as his thrusts allowed him to without injuring her. Hermione liked it every way they did it.

'Oh... fuck coming!' Severus muttered under his breath, sucking at the side of her neck and biting gently.

'Me too, love,' she managed to reply, her inner muscles clamping down on him as he came just a moment later.

His thrusts slowed and then stopped as she milked the last of his seed from him, both of them panting and sweating, trembling from the intensity of their mutual orgasm. He pulled out from her and slumped down tiredly alongside her, pulling her close and tucking her against his body with one arm while he wandlessly cast cleansing charms over both of them, removing the sweat and come. He pulled the covers back over them then, closing his eyes and sighing in contentment.

'That, was fan-fucking-tastic, love,' he said with a soft chuckle, kissing the top of her head tenderly.

Hermione giggled a little in response. 'I've always told you I always have the best ideas,' she murmured, kissing his chin again and cuddling close to him.

Summer had come and gone, and now it was the autumn season, the clouds in the sky were dark one more, and the air was chilly in the Scottish Highlands. The new school year would resume in about two weeks time, and Severus had yet to prepare for his classes. He had been so carried away with Hermione and their wedded bliss that he had overlooked the fact that he had a few alterations to make in this curriculum. He liked to change them every year so that the students from the year before couldn't help the new ones too much, leaving them to get on by their own merit.

'I'm going to have to go to Hogwarts in the morning, I think, love,' he told her sleepily, stroking her silky curls tenderly.

'Hmmm?' she murmured in query. 'Oh, you have class plans to organize and meetings with Albus and the other professors then?'

'Afraid so, love,' he replied, sighing softly. 'But you have to work the day shift tomorrow, so I won't exactly be missed too much.'

Hermione chuckled sleepily. 'Don't be silly,' she chided. 'Work or not, you will always be missed when you aren't right here in my arms. Even if it is just because I have to go to work.'

'Love you,' he mumbled in response, drifting off to sleep at her side, clinging to her smaller frame with his long, hard, warm body.

Hermione smiled, listening to the sounds of Severus' breathing even out. He was so beautiful in sleep; it was damn near heartbreaking. A lock of his raven-black hair fell across his eyes, obscuring her view of her husband's long, thick eyelashes that fluttered on his cheekbones as he slept. Sometimes when he leant over her to kiss her, his eyelashes would brush gentle butterfly kisses over her face. She loved them almost as much as real kisses.

Sighing, she rolled over, snuggling her backside against his front and pressing against him as his arms instinctively came around her, and she closed her eyes, falling asleep almost straight away. Not so far away, however, at Hogwarts, a wizened old wizard and a shorter, rather ruffled witch sat in a round office, thinking about the couple down in Hogsmeade fondly.

'Poppy, my dear, I believe I have won our bet,' Albus announced with finality, a bright twinkle in his damnable blue eyes.

Poppy Pomfrey sat up straight in her chair and frowned a little. 'You totally manipulated and used the aid of others to win this bet, Albus,' she said with a huff. 'That is hardly fair play, and I don't see why I should have to come through with the payment.'

Albus chuckled softly. 'A mere technicality,' he said, waving it off and popping a sherbet lemon in his mouth, offering the bowl to her.

She declined with a shake of her head. 'Albus, you old meddler, you used young Mr. Potter to urge Hermione to go to Severus for help. I know you did, you old fool. I saw the letter you wrote to him before you posted it,' Poppy said curtly, taking a sip of her tea. 'And I know very well that you were pushing the two of them together the whole time that she was at the castle.'

'Poppy, if the two did not have feelings for one another still, no amount of pushing them would have convinced them to come back together again,' Albus reasoned gently, patting her hand tenderly as he spoke. 'Last year, I bet you that by the time the beginning of the next school year came around, Severus and Hermione would be married and well on their way to making a family of their own. Now, I have come through with all of those things...'

'What do you mean? What family of their own do they have to show for?' Poppy demanded, her eyes widening.

'Poppy, you are the finest mediwitch I know,' he said smoothly. 'Surely you can see for yourself the way that Hermione's face has been glowing this past month. The magics in the castle tell me that she is with child, but I would have known with or without them.'

Poppy's eyes widened even further. 'Oh, Albus!' she exclaimed softly. 'Do you think they know?'

Albus Dumbledore smiled at the woman across from him, his lover and partner for many years, and stood up from his chair, sweeping around the desk and holding out his hand to her. 'Not yet, but they undoubtedly will soon,' he answered, escorting her to the entrance to their chambers. 'Time for bed now, I think. Don't you?'

Poppy could only nod.

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Terminus

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A/N Well, there you have it! As promised, I will explain the reason for Hermione choosing the white wine over the red. Although Severus did suggest a red, he then continued on to say 'take your pick' essentially. She chose a white because they are better served cold, whereas a Cabernet Sauvignon is better served warm. I hope my explanation was satisfactory. Please review and let me know what you thought of the story!